

Making a real difference to local education

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Lynne Heath
Principal
Manchester Communication Academy

BT is lead partner in the brand new Manchester Communication Academy, which has put BT corporate values at its core

Focusing on growth

The Manchester Communication Academy serves the district of Harpurhey, a socially and economically deprived area of North Manchester. Having opened its doors in September 2010 to Year 7, the Academy will eventually provide full-time education for 1,320 high school students.

The facility is one of seven new Manchester academies; each linked to a future growth sector of the city's economy such as finance and business, health, and communication. Sponsors support each academy, although Manchester has taken a slightly different approach from certain other local authorities.

Lynne Heath, Principal of Manchester Communication Academy, explains: “Rather than looking for private sector financial sponsorship, Manchester has funded the build itself. Our partners are providing expertise and resources to assist during planning and construction phases; continuing into day-to-day operations. With communication our primary specialism it was fitting that BT should step forward as lead partner.”

There are two other partners in the venture: Manchester City Council and The Manchester College. BT chairs the governing body.

In at the ground level

BT was involved in the project before even so much as a brick was laid. BT Programme Director, Susan Webster, was assigned to the task from the start. “The aim was for BT to provide expertise and resource fitting its own corporate objectives and assuring a sustainable future for the Academy,” she says, “working at all times with the Department for Education.”

During the feasibility stage Susan Webster, working with the BT Corporate Responsibility team, took a leading role in drafting the Academy's vision and blueprint, and assisting with the appointment of the Principal. Moving beyond the feasibility stage into implementation, BT assisted with every aspect of the project including design and build, marketing and branding, recruitment, school organisation and policies, working closely with Department for Education (DfE) consultants, architects and contractors at a detailed level.

Although BT provides telephony services for the Academy, it chose not to bid for the in-building communications infrastructure in order to avoid a conflict of interest. Susan Webster confirms: “Although BT didn't install the infrastructure it was naturally involved in the specification. The whole building is wireless so staff and students can connect to the internet almost anywhere, which creates a very flexible learning environment.”



An Academy student focuses her new skills on the future

Case study

The Manchester Communication Academy

“The value that BT brings is immense. I’m confident that with BT’s help the Academy will play a key role in developing the future labour force and the employability of young people as well as adults in the region. This will contribute to the Manchester local economy as well as growth in the northwest and nationally.”

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Encouraging vital communication skills

As well as teaching the national curriculum, the Manchester Communication Academy has the flexibility to offer project-based and thematic learning. Lynne Heath notes: “We have a faculty called Language and Communication, which promotes competence around personal communication skills for young people, including presentation skills and interview skills.”

BT is passionate about promoting the role that communication and collaboration skills play in people’s lives. The Academy embodies that commitment. The aim is for students to acquire key skills that will enable them to fulfil their potential and compete effectively for jobs. To support the communication agenda, teachers are provided with resources from the BT Learning and Skills Programme, BT Heritage and Connected Earth museums.

Offices worldwide

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There are also other strong alignments with BT. Lynne Heath adds: “We enjoy a common understanding and shared focus on corporate and social responsibility, particularly with regard to the community aspects of the project. Together we are seeking to support the wider needs of the local community in a sustainable way.”

In that respect the Academy aims to be a hub for local community activities by providing access to learning, recreational, sporting, and social facilities during evenings, weekends, and school holidays.

Bringing BT values to life

Helping to shape the Academy in other areas the academy has, for example, adopted BT’s company values. To bring them to life, it’s developing its own competences and behaviours for staff and students. It has also adopted the BT performance management system for teachers. This features a strong emphasis on self-analysis, peer review, and evidence-based competence assessments.

Lynne Heath says: “BT’s involvement opens up wider opportunities for us, as well as access to its resources. For example, BT has already put us in touch with other large organisations like Intel and Cisco. Such networking opportunities will be very influential for us going forward.” In fact,

the engagement with Intel has led to a link with the Bloodhound project – designed to develop and inspire young people towards a career in engineering and technology – for which Intel is a sponsor.

With the Academy now open for business, Susan Webster is shifting her focus from operations to governance. “BT is committed to helping the local community for the long term,” she says. “Our aim is to remain true to the BT values and our hope is that through our community partnership programme we will be seen as an exemplar nationally and internationally.”

Shaping the future

Although still in its infancy the Manchester Communication Academy has already made a big impact. It is offering a stimulating and engaging learning environment, specialising in communication and ICT, operating within economically sustainable and socially inclusive parameters.

Lynne Heath sums up: “The value that BT brings is immense. I’m confident that with BT’s help the Academy will play a key role in developing the future labour force and the employability of young people as well as adults in the region. This will contribute to the Manchester local economy as well as growth in the northwest and nationally.”

BT in the education sector

As well as activities such as sponsorship of the Manchester Communication Academy, the BT Corporate Responsibility programme is active in all other aspects of the education sector. Notably, BT has developed the Personal Skills Journey and Moving On, working with educational specialists. These comprehensive sets of learning modules for teachers and pupils covers topics such as effective communications, team working, CV preparation, job applications, interview techniques and leadership. Its resources are available completely free of charge from the BT Learning and Skills website at www.bt.com/freeresources

Another example of BT support for young people is the BT IT Ambassadors programme. Staffed by BT volunteers this provides ‘ask an expert’ and mentor support for individuals and groups of students around a range of IT and business curriculum-related activities. It is delivered via a moderated webmail platform.

BT works at local level too. For example, it has been working with Education Business Partnerships (EBP), to support work-related learning, by providing the vital link between education and business. In conjunction with Barnet EBP, BT has developed a mock interview process for students. This involves BT apprentice technicians in assisting with programme execution. BT is also working at a local level with its Big Voice programme to encourage young people to share their experiences about diversity and inclusion and help improve their local community.

