

**COMPANY of EDUCATORS  
DISCUSSION EVENING NOVEMBER 17 2011  
BUSINESS ETHICS IN EDUCATION**

A group of Freeman and friends met at the University of Notre Dame for a discussion evening on business ethics in education. The event was led by Philippa Foster Back, the Director of the Institute of Business Ethics (IBE) and chaired by the Upper Warden, Martin Cross.

The evening started with an introduction to the IBE and its work. The vision of the IBE is to lead the dissemination of knowledge and good practice in business ethics. It gives practical advice and training to encourage high standards of business behaviour based on ethical values.

The IBE was founded in October 1986 at the time of 'Big Bang' in the City when there was concern that the opening up of the City to a range of different firms might lead to a drop in the traditional values. The first 14 years were quite quiet with part time staff only but in 2000 the first full time director was appointed. In 2011 there are 10 staff of whom 6 are full time. The teaching of business ethics used to be done by osmosis and observation of what went on but there is now a recognition that this need to be made more explicit with all the global changes in the business world.

The IBE is a registered charity supported by subscriptions from businesses, professional bodies, some academic subscribers and about 100 individuals. The corporate subscribers include about one third of the FTSE 100 companies. About 40% of subscribers are based outside the UK. There are links with bodies with similar aims worldwide.

The IBE has 7 main activities which form the basis of its work. The staff team apply their own practical business experience of the issues that organisations face. The activities are:

- Offering practical and confidential advice on ethical issues, policy, implementation, support systems and codes of ethics. A current hot topic is the use of social media.
- Delivering training in business ethics for board members, staff and employees
- Undertaking research and surveys into good practice and ethical business conduct
- Publishing practical reports to help identify solutions to business dilemmas
- Providing a neutral forum for debating current issues and meetings to facilitate the sharing of good practice. About 25-30 events are held each year.
- Supporting business education in the delivery of business ethics in the curriculum.
- Offering the media and others informed opinion on current issues and good practice.

Other major accomplishments and contributions by the IBE include:

- An e-learning course on business ethics (available in multi languages)
- Co-organise an annual European Business Ethics Forum

- Launching a new charter mark in conjunction with the Chartered Institute for Securities and Investments – Investing in Integrity
- Participating in the Lord Mayor’s Initiative on rebuilding trust in the City
- Partnering with the Institute for Global Ethics on an initiative exploring business ethics in business education
- An annual student essay award, which until 2012 has been based on the theme ‘Ethics, business and sport’ in collaboration with the CIPC (Pierre de Coubertin Committee), part of the Olympic movement.

Full details about the work of the IBE can be found on their website: [www.ibe.org.uk](http://www.ibe.org.uk). The various publications are listed and some are available as free down loads.

In 2005 the IBE published ‘Managing Ethical Issues in Higher Education (HE)’ and every HE institution was sent a copy to encourage them to think about a code of ethics for the institution. It is not just about the curriculum but about the institution itself. The code of ethics in an organisation should reflect the way the organisation wishes to do business and conduct itself and this is true of education organisations as well. In the discussion it was suggested that a similar guide for schools would be useful given that so many schools are now independent of other bodies such as a local authority. The IBE is getting an increasing number of enquiries from schools but there are resource constraints. In particular the IBE would need a partner to take this forward.

It is also important that business ethics is considered as part of the training of school leaders and also their governing bodies. One suggestion was that the National College of School Leadership might be an appropriate partner.

Several professional bodies are working with the IBE in developing their training for their members. This is then backed up with revised discipline processes for members who are in breach of the codes of practice. This is seen as particularly important for professions in direct contact with the public. The teaching profession is not ahead in its thinking in this area and the abolition of the General Teaching Council of England is planned. However, there is to be a new body in April 2012, The Teaching Agency, which is the new executive agency responsible for teacher regulation and ensuring the supply of high quality teachers and training from April 2012.

It was agreed that codes of practice are most effective when they are principles based rather than rules based. Pressures on individuals can be enormous to act unethically with a lot of drivers to do the wrong thing. There are also global differences on what is accepted behaviour. Good training and support is needed so that ‘people do the right thing even when no one is looking’.

Another area of discussion was the curriculum. There is still a tendency for business ethics to be taught as an add-on subject but it is probably more effective when it is integrated as a cross-curricular theme. This is now happening more in MBA education and in some professional body education. The IBE has to date done little directly with schools. It is important that children learn to think about moral and ethical issues from an early age.

