

**COMPANY OF EDUCATORS
DISCUSSION EVENING
SHOULD THE COMPANY OF EDUCATORS BE INVOLVED IN ACADEMIES?**

On November 17 2009 the Company held an evening discussion meeting on the subject of Academies and whether the Company might be involved. The event was held in the offices of Eversheds and thanks were given to Freeman Glynne Stanfield for organising the venue. Peter Briggs, the Chair of Education Committee, chaired the evening which was attended by 22 Freemen and guests.

The event had three parts: a general introduction into Academies and the role of sponsors given by Glynne Stanfield with subsequent discussion; a discussion on whether the Company should be involved in Academies in some way; and a discussion on what the Company might do in the future in more general terms. The meeting was conducted under Chatham House Rules.

Academies have been developed by the current government as a means of offering schools outside the traditional Local Education Authority (LEA) control. Typically academies have been created from schools that have been failing in some way. At the start some independent schools that were failing financially became academies but the focus now is just on the public sector. Most schools which have become academies have been secondary schools but there is provision for primary schools to be included. It appears that the Academies programme will continue under either political party after the General Election in 2010. Trust schools are also outside the LEA control but these are created from successful schools.

The legal status of an Academy is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. Three groups are involved in the creation of an Academy: the existing school and most of the staff with the exception of the head will transfer to the Academy as will the buildings; the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF); and the sponsor or sponsors. The process to establish an Academy is well set out by the DCSF who have a central role in the project management.

Sponsors have come from a variety of sources: including businesses, livery companies, universities, education service providers and individuals. There is usually a lead sponsor with co-sponsors in many cases. The role of the co-sponsor is less onerous than that of the lead sponsor. Initially sponsors had to put up money for the new Academy but this requirement has been dropped this autumn. The majority of the governors are appointed by the sponsors for each Academy. The sponsors bring a clear philosophy to the new Academy about how this will be a different school than in the past. Originally the sponsors could decide on the curriculum to be followed and the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) sponsored an Academy based on their opening minds curriculum, as an example. However, new Academies are now required to follow the National Curriculum.

In the discussion on whether the Company of Educators should be involved with an Academy e.g. as a sponsor the following points were made:

- In advance of this meeting there had been three main types of views, which could be summarised as 'Yes', 'Never' and 'Maybe in the future'.
- A sponsor needs to bring a clear philosophy to an Academy and it is not clear what philosophy the Company would bring.
- The Company of Educators should maintain a wide brief across all sectors of education and not get involved in one sector in particular.
- Other livery companies are involved with academies but their core activity is not education. As the company whose core activity is education we should not have hands on in involvement.
- It would be wrong to be involved as not all our members as educators might support academies.
- There is a danger that we might be setting up in competition with some of our members.
- We should look to see a way in which we might be involved but not with the direct operational aspect.
- We might look to see if ways could be developed to help Academy students outside of their time in the Academy.
- We might be able to provide a debating forum on issues concerned with Academies. For instance big chains of Academies are being created with some sponsors involved in several of them so a forum outside these chains could be helpful.
- Livery Schools Link is a core part of the Company's work and in linking other livery companies with schools we must engage with all types of schools.
- We might wish to help other livery companies who are thinking of getting involved by having a position on Academies.
- We are available to give advice and assistance.

It was clear that there was a strong feeling among many of those present that it would be inappropriate for the Company to sponsor an Academy. This led to a further discussion about the general role that the Company should aim to develop in future. This discussion covered points such as:

- The Company of Educators was formed to be a forum concerned with the core activity of professionalism of teachers and trainers.
- We provide a good place to come to discuss different aspects of education.
- We should not align ourselves with any decision based on the discussions.
- We should not attempt to have a Company policy developed from our debates.
- We must not be driven by political agendas.
- We might publish our seminars but with a clear account of pros and cons and only when the discussion has a clear outcome should we publish firm conclusions.
- We might aim to have an annual lecture given by the Secretary of State for Education with a wide audience of people interested in education.
- We need to be clear to all Freemen and future members what we are about, what we might usefully do and how they might be involved.

- Our aim is to celebrate the profession of educators.

Peter Briggs drew the evening to a close with thanks to all present who had contributed. The discussions had developed beyond the question of involvement with academies and there were many interesting points which the Education Committee would pass on in their report to the next meeting of the Court.