



Positively impacting society through employee community engagement

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Increasing numbers of companies are recognising and responding to their business needs as well as to the needs of society. They are becoming more aware of how their business impacts society and how they engage with the communities in which they operate.

At Business in the Community (BITC), a business-led charity with a growing membership of 850 companies, we stand for responsible business and firmly believe that, as a powerful network of companies and organisations, we can make a big difference in our societies, for people and the planet.



One of the most effective ways in which we advise, support and challenge companies to make a positive difference in society is through 'employee community engagement'. Employee community engagement occurs when a company encourages its employees or workforce to engage (support and connect) with the community in which it operates in order to tackle a specific social or environmental issue. This can be achieved through a number of ways and includes the broad concepts of employee volunteering and corporate volunteering.

Employee community engagement includes a number of activities. One of the most common examples is mentoring a group of young people in a school in order to improve

their confidence and school attendance. A similar idea is training the staff of a non-governmental organisation (NGO) on how to improve their IT skills so that the organisation can operate more effectively and efficiently. Employees could further support the NGO by raising funds in order to make them more sustainable and achieve long-term results. And finally, a very effective way in which employees can engage within the community is by offering pro-bono services. This is where a professional firm gives a community group or charity professional advice free of charge, such as a legal firm giving free legal advice.



Why do companies engage in the community?

There is a growing understanding of the benefits of employee community engagement not only for the community but also for the company and its employees. We often refer to this as the 'business case' and it is the reason why companies should act more responsibly and take part in this sort of activity.

Not only do the companies benefit but the employees have much to gain from volunteering. They can develop both personal and professional skills such as greater self-confidence, improved communication skills and specific management skills which can help with their career progression and development.

For example, research conducted by Community Service Volunteers (CSV) in March 2009 looked at the impact in the workplace of 261 people who had volunteered from 2000 to 2009. Some 89% believed their employment prospects had improved as a result.

In order to increase the presence of employee community engagement throughout Europe and beyond, BITC has three key employee volunteering initiatives: Give & Gain Day, ENGAGE Key Cities and the European Employee Volunteering Awards.

Give & Gain Day mobilises employees to volunteer their expertise and time during work hours to support communities that are in the greatest need. This year, in celebration of the European Year of Volunteering 2011, BITC has linked up with partners of its CSR360 Global Partner Network (CSR360 GPN) to offer Give & Gain Day activities internationally in 11 countries.

Give & Gain Day has proven to be a successful mechanism to encourage new employees and new companies to try volunteering for the first time. In June 2010, 62% of employees that volunteered were new to volunteering during work time, 42% of whom were new to volunteering altogether. Almost all of the volunteers said that they would be interested in volunteering through their company again, with 99% reporting a desire to take part in Give & Gain Day 2011.

ENGAGE Key Cities brings together community partners and companies in 20 locations internationally to work in collaboration on employee community engagement projects. It was created in 2002 by the International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF) and BITC and is a model that has proven its worth.

Each project is designed and funded locally by groups of 5 to 15 multinational and local companies in order to address some of the key social issues in that community. The involved companies include some of BITC's own members such as Allen & Overy, Alliance Boots, APCO, Aviva, British American Tobacco, CITI, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, Glaxo Smith Kline, IBM, KPMG, Linklaters and TATA Consultancy Services. By working together, they are able to pool available resources, creating a sustainable project with increased impact.



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BITC and 22 partner organisations also organised the **European Employee Volunteering Awards** that recognised companies' employee volunteering programmes from across Europe. The aim was to raise the awareness of volunteering during the European Year of Volunteering 2011 and to inspire more companies to increase their activities.

The applications were judged in the following five categories: Large Company, Small Company, Newcomer, Innovation and Public Authorities. The following case study of the winner of the Newcomer Category shows how companies can direct their employees' time and skills to improve the employability skills of young people.

About Business in the Community

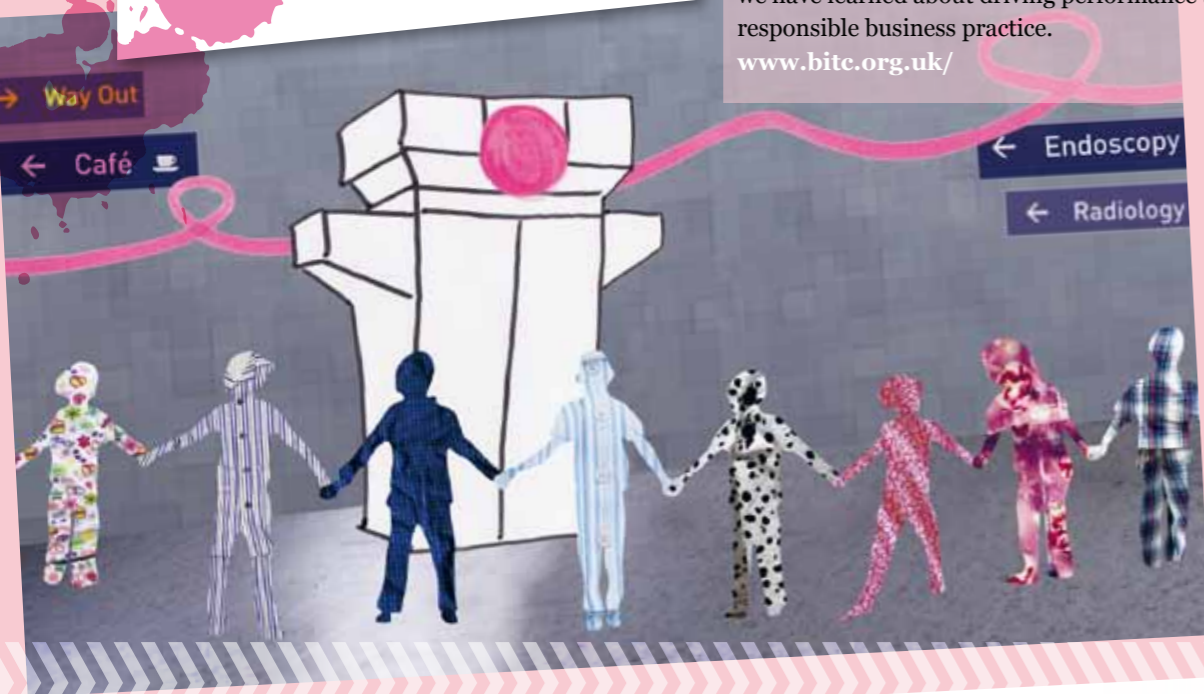
Business in the Community stands for responsible business.

We are a business-led organisation with a growing membership of 850 companies, from large multinational household names to small local businesses and public sector organisations.

We advise, support and challenge our members to create a sustainable future for people and the planet and to improve business performance.

Our members work with us to define what responsibility looks like in the workplace, marketplace, community and the environment – and we share what we have learned about driving performance through responsible business practice.

www.bitc.org.uk/



Further reading

Give & Gain Day 2011
www.bitc.org.uk/community/employee_volunteering/give_gain_day/give_gain_day_1.html

ENGAGE Key Cities
www.bitc.org.uk/global/engage_key_cities.html

The European Employee Volunteering Awards
www.bitc.org.uk/global/european_volunteering_awards/index.html



Winner of the Newcomer Category in the European Employee Volunteering Award

Company name: Abbott (Ireland)

Programme name: Abbott Science Programmes



In response to the worrying decline in young people's interest in science as a career in Ireland, Abbott Ireland launched two unique science programmes in 2009: Abbott Family Science and Operation Discovery. Abbott recognises that it is critical to reverse this trend and increase the number of students studying the sciences, both at secondary level and subsequently in science courses at university level, in order to increase students' employability in the science and engineering sectors.

Abbott Family Science brings together primary school students, parents, teachers and Abbott volunteers for a hands-on evening focused on basic science skills (observation, problem solving and teamwork) and building confidence as science learners. Disadvantaged schools or those without a dedicated science programme are targeted in order to reach students who otherwise might not have the opportunity to consider science as a career.

Operation Discovery brings secondary students and their teachers to Abbott sites to work directly with Abbott scientists. These scientists serve as role models to the students and facilitate authentic, hands-on activities in small groups that introduce students to some of the tools and procedures that Abbott employees use every day in their work.

In 13 months of running both programmes, 990 students, 487 parents and 60 teachers at 18 schools have participated across Ireland.

Students who participate in Operation Discovery say:

	Before	After
'I would enjoy studying science.'	41%	80%
'Working in science would be fun.'	39%	73%
'Working in a science laboratory would be fun.'	29%	68%
'Every citizen should understand science.'	45%	80%

As we have seen, there are many ways in which companies are making a positive difference in the areas in which they operate through enabling and supporting their employees to be active in their communities. Whilst it is very important to recognise the many achievements that the business world and their employees are having, we must keep the goal in mind and continue to encourage and inspire other businesses to step up to the challenge.