

**Why are alumni so important to fund-raising? The most significant sums of money given to universities come from wealthy individuals and, almost invariably, these individuals are alumni.**

Decisions about corporate giving – and other forms of corporate support to universities – can also be strongly influenced by alumni who hold key positions within companies, so maintaining good relations is a strategy that can pay off.

The mass of alumni do not fall into either category, but that does not mean they should be neglected: although they may only be able to make small contributions during their lifetime, if enough of them do so, very useful sums of money can be raised.

The American experience is that the best way to get bigger gifts is to persuade alumni to start giving when they are young

and to encourage their giving to grow as they become more prosperous. Ivy League experience has shown that if an alumnus gives \$1 million (£643,000), there has usually been a history of regular giving to that institution. British universities are starting to report similar experiences anecdotally. While only a handful of donors will reach those heights of giving, many could nonetheless afford substantial legacies – and with average legacies to charities in the UK approaching £20,000, this is an important area for growth.

One mistake often made in UK university development offices – when compared with the US and some universities in continental Europe – is to focus exclusively on individual giving. A typical US office will have some corporate fund-raisers. Even without such staff, there are synergies that can be gained from close coordination between development offices

focused on individuals and trusts, and corporate, commercial or grants offices, which focus mainly on contract income. Businesses that have close contractual relationships with universities are more likely to provide softer and more strategic support to universities, especially if they really value a university's strength in a particular field. This is often how professorial chairs come to be funded by companies. Alumni who are in positions of influence in such companies may be more inclined to direct funds and contracts to their own alma mater than to other universities. Sadly, the silo structures of most UK research intensive universities do not encourage the kind of cooperation that is needed to benefit from these potential synergies.

Many would say that the best way to cultivate donors is to involve them in the university and to give them something to do other than just being a donor. There are

numerous ways for alumni to provide volunteer help. These include opportunities for them to serve on advisory committees, to mentor and provide internships for students, to give visiting lectures, to encourage student applications, and to offer careers advice.

I recently attended a Council for Advancement and Support of Education meeting of senior marketing and development professionals in Birmingham. The most important message to take away from the event was the importance of alumni for a whole range of external services: development, alumni relations, contract research, overseas student recruitment, careers, public relations and lobbying.

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