

# Old Schools, NEW IDEAS

Innovative approaches to fundraising are creating more opportunities and bursary places for students, finds *Victoria Lambert*

This country's centuries-old tradition of philanthropy has led to the potential provision of a world-class education for even the most disadvantaged child. From schools set up by enlightened individuals to those established by churches and even kings, there has always been a desire to see opportunities extended to as many young people as possible.

But in the current era, when there are so many pressures on individual finances as well as the burden of additional taxes, how do these schools keep finding ways to renew the foundations and endowments that allow them to offer the bursaries and scholarships that are needed?

The answers lie in remarkable work by the schools themselves as well as schemes that encourage the widest support from friends, family and the wider community. And for lots of beneficiaries of bursaries, the intention to give back to their school starts almost as soon as they leave.

At Christ's Hospital School, Sussex, established in 1552 and the UK's largest bursary charity with £25m of support provided each year, that prompt to give back is offered on the final day. The head recites The Charge to leavers, which reads: 'I charge you never to forget the great benefits that you have received in this place, and in time to come, according to your means, to do all that you can to enable others to enjoy the same advantage. And remember that you carry with you, wherever you go, the good name of Christ's Hospital.'

Hugo Middlemas, director of development at Christ's Hospital, explains that for many alumni, The Charge acts as a catalyst for their giving back to



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Croquet at Stonyhurst; students at Christ's Hospital; head of St Peter's, Jeremy Walker, speaking to donors

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society and the school throughout their lives. 'Christ's Hospital alumni are highly focused on making the world a better place,' says Middlemas. 'Forty-three percent volunteer each month – double the UK average – while 10 percent go on to establish a charity.'

'Historically, parents have not been asked to donate to Christ's Hospital's work, since nearly 80 percent are in receipt of means-tested bursaries. This position changed in 2015 – parents now receive all fundraising communications and have been very supportive.'

But the pool that the school can draw from is wider than just family. 'As the leading school delivering upward social mobility in the UK, Christ's Hospital has a wide range of philanthropic partnerships with organisations and non-affiliated individuals,' Middlemas says. 'These include City livery companies, businesses, and foundations and other charities in the UK and internationally. Each partnership focuses on supporting individual students at Christ's Hospital, with some having been in existence for hundreds of years.'

Former pupils are also a huge part of the fundraising community of St Peter's School, York, says headmaster Jeremy Walker. Established in 627AD, the school has been in existence for almost 1,400 years and is the fourth oldest in the world.

'We are fortunate to have a very supportive community who donate their time and money helping to diversify and improve the school for future generations,' says Walker. 'We also have a number of incredibly generous gifts left to us in wills from former



**ABOVE:** Rugby's head master, Gareth Parker-Jones, walking with students at the school  
**BELOW:** Pupils at Christ's Hospital School

opportunities, while their examples of lives lived with competence, conscience, compassion and commitment inspire the next generation.'

More targeted approaches can be powerful; in November 2023, a year-long scholarship appeal was launched in partnership with the Lord Mayor of London to mark the 350th anniversary of the Royal Mathematical School at Christ's Hospital. With a focus on individuals and organisations in the City of London, the appeal set out to raise £250,000 to endow one scholarship in perpetuity. By the end of the year, some £800,000 had been committed, endowing three scholarships in perpetuity and establishing a wide range of new partnerships – including a maths outreach programme for students across the UK, and bespoke degree apprenticeships.

Rugby School, one of the very few schools where none of the money spent on bursaries comes from fee income, runs annual Giving Day fundraisers for its bursary programmes. These events have successfully raised awareness of the Arnold Foundation – not only from individuals, but syndicates. 'I am particularly moved by the generosity of the earliest Arnold Foundation students,' says Parker-Jones, 'who not only contribute to the foundation themselves but who support our fundraising activities all over the world.'

In March 2022, St Peter's School launched its Keys for Life campaign, which aims to give life-changing bursaries to pupils who would otherwise be unable to afford a St Peter's education. The school increased its bursaries from 35 in 2022 to 47 in 2024, and has raised a total of £2m over these two years. 'The campaign aims to continue to build as we approach our



**ABOVE:** A Stonyhurst student in the school's library  
**BELOW:** St Peter's pupils shared stories on behalf of bursary recipients at the school's donor party

pupils, as well as large one-off donations to support causes close to the hearts of our Old Peterites.'

But a new century means new demands for funds, and new ideas on how to raise them. Christ's Hospital is highly reliant on historic donations that have enabled a sizable endowment to be built, says Hugo Middlemas. 'Unfortunately, the endowment today covers less than 50 percent of the school's costs, and so needs to be grown significantly to maintain and develop Christ's Hospital's unique mission. The school's ambition is to build its new fundraising income further, with a particular focus on endowment gifts.'

The Arnold Foundation – one of the principal ways means-tested bursaries are offered by Rugby School, which was founded in 1567 as a free grammar school for local boys – is also the subject of renewed focus, says head master Gareth Parker-Jones. 'Thanks to the bequest of our founder, Lawrence Sheriff, we have more than 60 day students in means-tested places. We would like to make 40 places available to Arnold Foundation students in perpetuity.'

That same process is well underway at Stonyhurst College in Lancashire. While the school was established in 1593, its Stonyhurst Foundation was created only five years ago and has already raised more than £18m for bursaries. The school's intention is to grow the Stonyhurst Endowment by £30m by 2030, reducing the cost of education for families and widening access.

International growth, led by Stonyhurst International School Penang, is also developing new income streams to reinvest in the college. And alumni matter here, too. 'Through the Stonyhurst Association and the Stonyhurst Foundation,' says headmaster John Browne, 'alumni contribute as donors, mentors, ambassadors and advocates across the global Jesuit network.'

'Their generosity sustains bursaries, capital projects and pupil





ABOVE: Stonyhurst pupils in the school library

BELOW: Rugby pupils at the annual Rugby Giving Day

1,400-year anniversary, offering as many means-tested bursaries as we can,' explains Jeremy Walker.

For any school looking to extend bursary provision, ensuring good governance and financial stability is particularly important. At St Peter's, generating revenue through diversified streams ensures inclusivity and long-term security. Walker says that the school is 'ahead of the curve in creating economic stability' through prudent financial planning, diversifying income through lettings and international opportunities, and investment in its campus. 'Our strategic plan sees us move to a two-school model by 2027,' he explains, 'which will make the most of our facilities and allow for significant investment in our larger year groups, such as building a new sixth-form centre.'

Stonyhurst, and its bursary provision, is inspired by its establishment as a Jesuit school. John Browne explains: 'The purpose of a three to 18 Jesuit education is, in the words of St Ignatius, to "set the world on fire" – to prepare young people for lives of purpose, justice and leadership.'

'As the oldest continuously operating Jesuit school in the world, we recognise both the privilege and responsibility of that position. In a time of challenge and change, this means planning for long-term sustainability and deepening the culture of innovation that characterises all Jesuit schools globally.'

But no school can afford to rest on its laurels – and especially not now, says Gareth Parker-Jones. 'Welcoming children from all sorts of backgrounds who are going to recognise – and seize – the opportunities at Rugby ensures that the school is a tolerant and respectful community in which to live and work, for all our students and staff. It makes teaching and learning a much richer intellectual and cultural experience.'

He adds: 'This is particularly important at a time when parts of the Labour government appear determined to caricature independent schools as being preserves of a narrow elite, and when there is proof that its introduction of VAT on school fees is making independent education less attainable.'

'Rugby has a long and proud tradition of being accessible to talented children, regardless of their background. We are remaining true to our mission and charitable objectives by seeking to continue that tradition.' ■

