

# A game changer in development and fundraising

Conducting strategic alumni research at Harrow School

A case study

# Background

The Harrow Association (HA) and the Harrow Development Trust (HDT) are both well-established and highly successful, independent functions at Harrow School. Both are commonly referred to as exemplars of high performance and best practice in the UK independent education sector.

The HA is considered by many to be one of the most sophisticated school alumni associations in the UK. It manages the vital relationships with the Old Harrovians (OHs) and runs a highly acclaimed programme of events, services and communications that engages and supports a large and diverse alumni community.

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Fundraising is a critical element of the Harrow strategy and has been phenomenally successful; since 2000 the HDT has raised IRO £120m and is now focusing on a new £100m campaign.

Both functions are recognised as industry leaders in development. And like all good leaders they are not complacent; they constantly strive for improvement and they believe in the power of research to support future strategies and plans.

In 2022 Harrow School will celebrate the 450th anniversary of its foundation. Recognising this important milestone, the School, under the leadership of Head Master, Alastair Land, the HA and the HDT together identified a desire to engage the OHs to seek their views on a range of issues. The output would help to shape future strategic direction, inform decisions relating to alumni relations and fundraising and stimulate levels of interest and support for the 450th anniversary.

The Philanthropy Team from RSAcademics was engaged to undertake in-depth quantitative and qualitative research and analysis of the OH community to identify new intelligence and recommend courses of action to optimise future activities. Offering expertise in schools' development and a powerful and proven alumni research methodology which had been deployed in other leading HMC schools, RSAcademics was the ideal partner to help Harrow create an integrated, strategic development roadmap to strengthen alumni relations and ensure fundraising goals are met.

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# Approach and response

At the heart of the research was an online survey created from the highly successful RSAcademics survey methodology. The Harrow version was bespoke, explored the key issues that Harrow had identified and reflected the tone of voice and messaging of the School. The Harrow team opted to work closely with RSAcademics in the design and communication process to help create an experience that accurately and fully represented the Harrow brand. The Chairman of Governors introduced the survey to Harrow alumni, and the Head Master and other governors were involved in the presentation of its findings.

The survey was structured to take the respondents on a 'hearts and minds' journey with a mix of 'quick fire' questions, questions that presented new information and asked for comments, and free form questions that offered the opportunity for the respondent to write as much or as little as they pleased.

Most of the survey was anonymous which encouraged honesty and objectivity in responses. Two questions, however, explored areas of alumni support and requested the identity of the respondent so that the School could follow up with them. The survey was designed to be an enjoyable experience and an effective engagement activity; on average, it took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Unprecedented at Harrow in terms of scope and approach, the survey generated an excellent 22% response rate, with all age groups and Houses proportionally represented. Over a third of the respondents offered support to the HA and/or HDT and provided their contact details.

# Deliverables

- 50000+ comments: analysed by development and research experts to identify key themes
- 150 slides of in-depth analysis
- 60 page written report
- 3 strategic presentations to senior leadership team over life of project

# Analysis and interpretation

Applying in-depth knowledge of Harrow, philanthropy and development in many other schools, the RSAcademics team was able to look beneath the surface of the findings to provide tactical and strategic recommendations to inform and steer the Harrow development plans. Comparing some statistics with what would be expected from similar schools provided a realistic reading of potential areas for change and improvement.

*“The survey and analysis enabled us to take an enhanced view of our strategic approach from differing standpoints. RSAcademics were able to read between the lines and understand the issues and dynamics in play. We are delighted with new directions, possibilities and approaches that have been revealed.”*

*Douglas Collins  
CEO of the Harrow  
Development Trust*

## What we heard... about the school

- Overwhelmingly positive memories of time at school
- Great pride in being an OH
- Strong support for the School's stated purpose
- Views of the School's current priorities
- Reflections on time at School
- Issues and preferences by decade and by House

## about alumni relations

- How Harrow prepared OHs for life after School
- Helpful comments about communications, events and ways to engage with the School
- What OHs value /what is relevant to OHs
- The importance of the OH Network
- OH views about the work of the Harrow Association and the Harrow Development Trust
- How OHs want to be involved with the School

## about strategic direction

- Suggested areas of focus for the School, such as level of fees, diversity, maintaining tradition and culture
- What fundraising causes alumni might be prepared support and how (including propensity for legacy giving)
- Why some OHs do not give to Harrow
- Donor attitudes towards stewardship
- Ideas for the 450th anniversary celebrations
- Feedback from recent leavers (under 25s) about preparation for university

# Return on investment

In addition to the intelligence, analysis, engagement and goodwill generated by the survey, there are three areas of gain that could directly translate to financial benefit:

- 1 Clear direction and plans – strategic and tactical**

Having clear direction and plans ensures optimisation of resources and maximised returns.
- 2 Greater engagement and goodwill across the OH base**

An increasingly engaged alumni community boosts the Harrow brand, the level of support for the current pupils (e.g. careers advice, work experience) and support for admissions and future fundraising.
- 3 Identified support and donors**

Identification of donors – some of which are existing donors and some are potential new donors. While it is not possible to provide the value of these contacts in terms of future income, a conservative estimate of possible donations or legacies clearly exceeds the cost of the survey many times over.

Debra Price  
RSAcademics

*We were delighted to work with Harrow on this groundbreaking project, the scale and scope of which enabled us to deliver value in so many ways: tactical opportunities, deep analysis and interpretation, strategic direction, decision support and lists of identified potential supporters. Working with Harrow has been a great pleasure and we have been delighted to go on this journey with them.*

Perena Shryane  
Director of the  
Harrow Association

*The OH engagement survey provided a great opportunity for the HA to engage with the OH community, to acknowledge that their views and requirements are fundamental to the work that we do and therefore to deepen our alumni relations. We are particularly grateful to the 591 OHs who offered their support in various ways from careers advice and mentoring to assisting with our events programme and supporting the HDT.*

# Recommendations

## Examples of strategic recommendations

### A Master Engagement Strategy for OHs to:

- ensure continuity, consistency and relevance of messages
- provide greater segmentation and targeting of communications and events which will lead to:
  - greater engagement, advocacy and support from the OH community
  - stronger promotion of the Harrow brand

### An integrated Development Plan to:

- inform the goals, targets, activities, timelines, budgets, resources, roles and responsibilities required to achieve the fundraising and alumni relations goals for the 450th anniversary and beyond
- enable closer collaboration across all areas of the School for fundraising and alumni relations
- provide a strategic development roadmap for the next 3-5 years

## Examples of tactical recommendations

Ideas to provide **stronger** alignment of some areas of OH interest with fundraising goals

Actions to further **increase** legacy support

New approaches to further **improve** stewardship

**New** areas of interest and locations for new OH events

Greater **investment** from the School in terms of subsidising OH events

Increased segmentation of OH activities to **increase** relevance to different OH groups

# What the respondents said

“Very good questionnaire. I feel like these are useful and Harrow always seems to take these sorts of things very seriously, which is good.”  
2011-2019

*Thank you for taking the time to get in touch and take on board my views.*  
1981-1990

*This was a good survey - suggest annual pulse surveys would be good*  
1991 -2000

*Great survey well done all*  
2001-2010

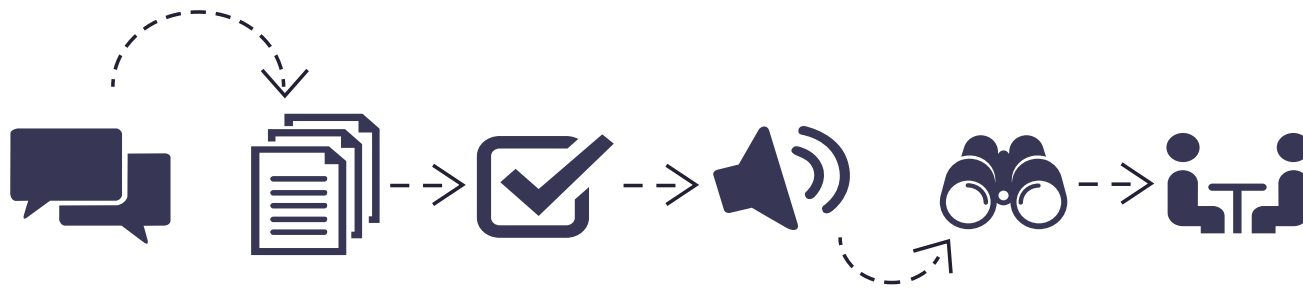
*I think it is good that you are doing this survey - thank you for asking these questions.*  
1971-1980

*An interesting set of questions that I was surprised and interested to be asked.*  
1971-1980

*I think the School and the Association are doing a good thing by compiling this survey.*  
1971-1980

*Thank you for this undertaking. It is a great effort.*  
1981-1990

*Great survey. Easy to complete. Meaningful questions relevant to the ongoing enterprise of Harrow. Stet Fortuna Domus.*  
1991-2000



Founded by Russell Speirs in 2002, RSAcademics has advised and supported over 700 schools.

Our services:

- Leadership appointments
- Strategy, marketing and research
- Governance and Compliance
- Leadership development, coaching and appraisals
- Philanthropy: fundraising and alumni relations
- School improvement reviews
- International strategy

Our approach is congenially collaborative, never generic, always expert and rigorous. Together we can help your school to find exceptional leaders, adopt best practice, overcome challenges and achieve its full potential as a happy, successful and growing community of learners and educators.



Discover how we can support your development, fundraising and alumni relations

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