



Changing the game at St Mary's Calne

Conducting strategic alumnae research

A case study

Background

Many girls' school alumnae associations struggle to have the same impact as their boys' or co-educational counterparts. This case study looks at how an alumnae association commissioned in-depth research to ensure they had a relevant and impactful offering for old girls as well as insight into how to increase potential support for the school.

St Mary's Calne, a girls' boarding and day school for 360 girls aged 11-18 years, will celebrate its 150th anniversary in 2023.

Recognising this milestone, the Calne Girls' Association (CGA) working with the School development team wished to explore ways to further engage Calne Girls (alumnae) with the CGA, the School and the Calne Foundation Trust (CFT).

Alumnae relations activities were deemed to be strong, but there was a feeling that 'something is missing'. This was partly evidenced by lower than expected levels of historical philanthropic support from Calne Girls and a sense that overall levels of engagement with Calne Girls could be higher.

There was, therefore, a desire to seek the views of alumnae on a range of issues to:

- steer the future strategic direction for development activities
- identify next steps relating to alumnae relations and fundraising
- determine the level of interest and support for the 150th anniversary

*Debra Price
Head of
Philanthropy
RS Academics*

"The Calne Girls' Association presents an excellent role model for those alumni associations wanting to be innovative, strategic and forward-looking. Through this research initiative, we see an alumnae association taking the lead by investing in a strategic project not only to strengthen its offering but also to synthesise its objectives with those of the School. This is how a modern alumni/ae association should be working."

Approach and response

At the heart of the research was an online survey created from the highly successful RSAcademics survey methodology. The St Mary's Calne version was bespoke, explored the key issues that the school had identified and reflected the tone of voice and messaging of the School.

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.

The project duration was 3 months. Launched at the start of the first pandemic lockdown, the survey achieved an excellent response rate of 21% and identified potential donors who are ready to explore making gifts to the School.

Deliverables

- 1200+ comments: analysed by development and research experts to identify key themes
- 100 slides of in-depth analysis
- 50 page written report
- 2 strategic presentations to senior leadership team over life of project

*Cari Depla
Director of
Development and
CEO of the Calne
Foundation Trust*

“The RSAcademics approach was professional, supportive and insightful. The process provided a great opportunity to engage with Calne Girls and to show our respect for their views; an excellent way to deepen alumnae relations. As a result we have recruited new CGA committee members and careers volunteers. From a fundraising perspective, we knew that ‘something was missing’ and the research has helped us to look beneath the surface and get a better understanding of what that was. A number of donors and legators have already come forward with gifts and pledges.”

“Sometimes we need a ‘new lens’ to help us see opportunities and this has been the case here. The survey and analysis have enabled us to take a different view, challenge assumptions and adopt a more strategic approach. A deeper understanding of the views and attitudes of our alumnae helps us to make decisions and have confidence that they reflect Calne Girls’ interests and values.”

*Cate Bell
Chair of the Calne
Girls’ Association*

Findings

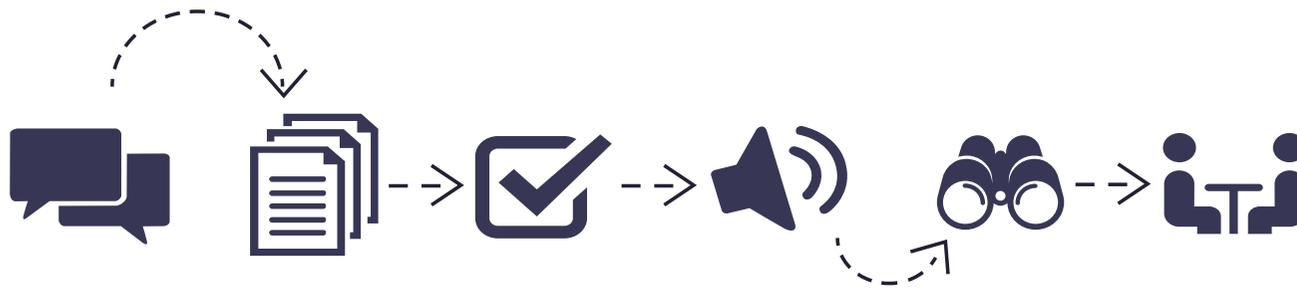
Some of the questions that were answered by the research:

- What are alumnae perceptions of the School today?
- How many alumnae sent their daughters to the School?
- Are the School's important messages getting through to Calne Girls?
- Do messages and content match areas of Calne Girl interest?
- Do Calne Girls understand fundraising and its importance?
- What are the best ways to engage – what are the main areas of interest?
- What might strengthen interest in legacies?
- Who are the alumnae who might be interested in donating, either now or in the future?
- How can St Mary's Calne become a higher philanthropic priority for current and potential donors?
- What can the CGA, the CFT and School do for the Calne Girls to ensure lifelong relationships with the School?
- What do alumnae want that they cannot provide themselves via friendship groups?
- What activities would be of relevance to different sub-groups of alumnae?

Outcomes

The survey and resulting analysis helped the CGA, the CFT and the School to consider:

- The strategic importance of alumnae to a school in respect of role models, advocacy, support for admissions and fundraising.
- The support that the School can provide to the alumnae, the CGA and the CFT.
- How to shape the fundraising campaign to celebrate the 150th anniversary, engage as many members of the community in different ways and maximise advocacy and fundraising support.



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