

TRUST TALK

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Interview with BWT's Chairman of the Board

Mr Richard Morrison sees many parallels between his role as the Chairman of our Board of Directors and his job as Business Performance Director of multi-national Associated British Foods. Both require strategic planning and a forensic attention to detail and each relies on the effectiveness of its people, stringent financial management, sustainable operating models and a rigorous focus on successful outcomes.

He joined the Brooke Weston Trust in 2012 when four additional schools boosted our organisation. He has become Chairman of the Board, providing support and challenge as a 'critical friend' to the organisation and our CEO.

Here's a brief interview outlining his role, his view of the organisation and the plans for the future ...



Background:

Associated British Foods is diverse and international but it operates with a high degree of devolved responsibility and accountability. At the group centre, in my role, I have to be aware of what's happening and progress across the organisation. I have been surprised at the number of times the challenges, opportunities and imperatives for action are very similar across Associated British Foods and the Brooke Weston Trust. I try to apply learnings and experiences from business at the Trust, but it can work both ways. Sometimes I can take things I have learned from the education environment back into my business role.

The role of Chair:

Being a Chair is not "doing", it is making sure that things are being done, plus a bit of coaching, counselling and supporting. I have been impressed at the quality and dedication I have seen in our staff across the Trust. We don't get everything right but broadly, we have good people with the right intent doing the right things.

As Chair you have got to be prepared to have difficult, challenging conversations. It is not helpful to dance around the unspoken, it is not helpful to be subtle and indirect. I try to be objective, honest and timely. We all share a common goal here and that is always worth reminding each other of when challenges arise. We aim to ensure the best outcomes for our staff and for our students.

I was asked, while preparing this piece, if I found being Chairman of the Board at Brooke Weston Trust daunting. I refer to this in my final thoughts (overleaf) but, for me, it is less daunting than I originally imagined. When you have good leaders and sound plans it becomes easier. Add to that good processes and a diligent, methodical approach to all we do and it means my role can focus on the real governance challenges and supporting the leadership team to be the best they can be.

Finally, but importantly, as the Chair, my role becomes much more straightforward with the support and commitment that we

are privileged to have from our Sponsors and Board. I suspect that most people do not see just how much they all do on a voluntary basis to support the Trust. With all these elements in place, the role becomes much more manageable. We have a top class team here.

Trust aspirations:

The clear message from the Sponsors and Board who, with Dr Campbell, set our strategy, is that we aim to make a difference to young people's lives where that difference most needs to be made. We build schools into great schools then we want to keep them great. The Trust has clearly achieved that at a number of our schools, while it is work in progress elsewhere. At the same time, it is crucial that our good and outstanding schools continue operate at that high level. Our challenge is to use that strength to give other schools the aspiration, tools and impetus to replicate their success. Ultimately, we hope that that will lead to improved life chances and prospects

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for all of our students. Standing back from the pressures and stress of doing this everyday, I do hope that each of our people see the great impact their own work has. We aspire to be better tomorrow than we were yesterday, better next year than we were last.

Our students:

For me, the most important qualities we can instil in our children is curiosity, a hunger to be better and a confidence to challenge the norm while behaving in the right way. We should aim to develop young adults who are confident, balanced and fair, who have a good ethical grounding with the skills, drive and ambition to make our world a better place.

Our schools:

We want our schools to have their own pride and independence but also share with each other for the common good. We should be better off by being together. We should work relentlessly to ensure that we have no more cost or bureaucracy burden than we need to. That will ensure we maximise our financial and time investment in education.

Regarding the Trust's future plans and potential growth, clearly we have designed a structure which is fit for the organisation as it is today including our current developments. It is not yet clear what the right level of further expansion is. Much depends on the context. In each area, we must address our own challenges first. We must then evaluate what our current structure can support and work towards that.

Our staff:

As a Trust, we must be alert to people's skills and where they are best deployed. One person might be a truly outstanding, highly talented teacher but not the greatest administrator, for example. Or someone may not be the best strategist, but could be a great inspirer and leader. Knowing people's strengths and applying them effectively is important.

I believe we have great people. If good people don't feel inspired however, whatever the organisation, then it is going to be a hard slog. I truly hope that our people do feel inspired to contribute to their maximum potential. In my experience, people get the most out of what they do at work each day if that is the case. I would feel really disappointed if any of our people ever thought 'I only do enough to get by'. I believe that the more you put into work and life the more you get out of it. If we are only inspiring our staff to do enough to 'get by' then our students will have a 'get by' education. If

we inspire our staff to be their best, that can not help but inspire our students.

People respect those who want to be the best so I hope that all of our teaching and support staff will help us deliver a culture of aspiration and ambition. It is infectious. I am struck by the huge impact our staff can have on young people's lives. The potential to contribute to our society by working in education is more than can be achieved in most areas of employment in industry or commerce.

Our challenges:

School improvement is still our biggest challenge and we are working hard on getting there. It is a long-term goal and therefore we all need perseverance, patience and resilience. We owe it to our students, and to the passionate,

professional people who work in our schools, to be as focussed and efficient as we can be. The Trust has already risen to that challenge and is delivering quality education in good environments.

When I first came into this role we had some financial projections that were difficult. Finance has been, and, I fear, will continue to be, an increasing challenge in education. We have had some tough decisions and situations, but we have aimed to balance those with the fact that we need to achieve the right outcomes. We have put strategies in place to help us live within our means, spend more where it can have impact and make us more efficient and effective overall. Some of that is not easy to do but I believe we will benefit in the long run.

Our successes:

I believe that the things that we can be most proud of are tackling tough challenges head-on and making progress on issues. I have been impressed by the progress made on behaviour, attendance and teaching standards in particular. I'm also proud of the broader life experiences we offer, be that music, sport or CCF etc. I am proud of the way we are managing our schools and working together to find ways to support both our own schools and also many others outside the Trust. I am proud of our culture of excellence and resilience. I am proud about what we have achieved so far in balancing education delivery and value for money and about what we can still deliver. As a Trust this is not about a collection of schools, rather about doing the best for our students, staff and communities.

A final reflection:

I compare my experiences at the Brooke Weston Trust with my business experience. In much of industry, you make a mistake and you can fix it in an hour or a week. My own background is in agriculture. There, you make a mistake and it can be 12 months before you have another chance. What has really made an impression on me here though is that if we don't get things as right at every stage, in the classroom and in the environment, then the impact is on a person's life. We might never get a chance to remedy that. We let a student down and it can have an impact for years. For me, that is the real daunting challenge. And it's not faced by me, but rather by each of our front line staff, be they teachers or support. I thank all of our people for their hard work and envy the value that you are able to add to young people's lives. You all have my sincere respect and admiration ■

Richard Morrison

Trust milestones

1991:

- Opening of Brooke Weston City Technology College by Prime Minister John Major.

2008:

- Brooke Weston City Technology College converts to academy status.
- Brooke Weston Partnership established.
- Corby Business Academy (formerly Corby Community College) opens.

2009:

- Kettering Science Academy opens as an all-through school.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown performs the official opening of Corby Business Academy.

2012:

- Corby Technical School opens.
- Thomas Clarkson Academy and Beanfield and Gretton Primary Schools join the Trust.

2013:

- Peckover and Oakley Vale Primary Schools join the Trust.

2014:

- Education Secretary Michael Gove visits Brooke Weston Academy.

2015:

- Prime Minister David Cameron and Education Secretary Nicky Morgan visit Corby Technical School.

2016:

- Kettering Science Academy is split into two age phases; Kettering Science Academy and Compass Primary Academy.

2017:

- Corby Technical School undergoes an expansion programme to double its size and offer Sixth Form provision.

