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Department
for Education

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Networks are part of a wider programme helping schools to be more efficient. For more information on our investment and cost-saving strategy, see [schools financial health and efficiency](#) and [schools' buying strategy](#).

1. Joining an existing network

There are currently around 130 school business professional networks across the UK.

We can put you in touch with an established network so you can ask questions directly and benefit from the support of other network leaders.

To see if there's a network near you, email the DfE Schools Commercial team at schools.commercial@education.gov.uk

2. Creating a new network

You can create your own network if there isn't one near you. We're keen to support new networks and you can contact the DfE School Commercial team at schools.commercial@education.gov.uk for help and information.

3. Structuring your new network

It's best to form a working party or committee to start your network. This doesn't need to be on a formal basis initially, but it should be a small group of people with a common vision and sense of purpose to share the workload.

As your network grows you may want to create a constitution and elect committee members. Whatever structure you choose, it needs to suit the size of your network and be able to develop according to your network's needs.

Some groups charge a membership fee to cover the cost of room hire or meeting refreshments. If your network is small, this may not be necessary. You can also negotiate free access to meeting spaces.

If you do charge a membership fee, you'll need to ensure finances are organised appropriately and establish a committee with appropriate signatories.

4. Who to invite

The most successful networks have an inclusive approach to membership. Often they'll start with a few people, but will expand over time.

By inviting other professionals from diverse organisations such as primary, secondary, academies and maintained schools, faith schools and so on, you can have more effective sharing of best practice and ideas.

Building a broad membership will ensure:

- the network is sustainable
- the workload is shared
- there will be new ideas
- shared best practice

Being inclusive, flexible and adaptable is key to attracting and retaining members to your network.

5. Getting the most out of your network

The most successful networks combine face-to-face meetings, emails, online forums, and direct contact with individual colleagues. You can also meet using telephone conferencing tools such as Skype.

One major benefit of networks is the opportunity for members to develop their skills and knowledge. You could use your network meetings to provide training, sharing the cost among members.

5.1 Setting up a meeting

You need to think about the length and frequency of meetings. Short meetings provide a good focus for debate and will not take up members' time excessively. Full-day meetings that happen less frequently work well if members have long travelling times and can't attend as often.

5.2 Selecting a chairperson and setting up an agenda

Asking someone to chair the meeting will help keep discussion on track. Circulating an agenda in good time allows members to know what to expect, attend meetings most interesting to them, and prepare accordingly.

If your network has diverse organisations, you may have challenges in developing an agenda that's relevant to everyone. You can overcome this by having:

- collective meeting sessions involving all members
- sessions where members are grouped to focus on matters specific to their situation and needs

Successful networks will often arrange collective sessions before holding focused sessions in one network meeting.

5.3 Inviting others to present

It's good to invite other organisations to deliver presentations, but make sure there's time to discuss local issues - these are usually the most beneficial for members and will often identify topics for future meetings.

6. Promoting your network

There are many ways you can promote your network. Word of mouth can be very effective and your members will have contacts in organisations such as unions, schools forum, local authorities, headteacher associations and governor groups.

You can help other professionals find and join your network by registering with:

- the DfE Schools Commercial team. Register by sending an email to schools.commercial@education.gov.uk
- the Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL). Register by contacting them at the [ISBL website](#).

7. Ensuring transparency

You must ensure that any commercial relationships that your network has (for example, sponsorship, speakers, and so on) are transparent.

All purchasing decisions in schools must be on merit and clearly adhere to local purchasing policies.

Network members should not be under any obligation to purchase from specific suppliers.

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