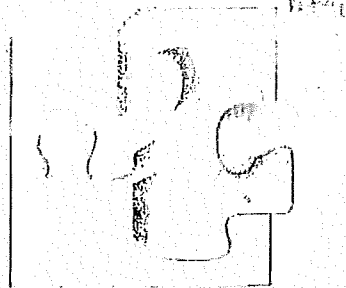


Business in the Community

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Our ref: RSOB/FAH

3rd April 1985

HRH The Prince of Wales
Buckingham Palace
London SW1



Your Royal Highness,

I am sorry it has taken me a while to follow up your conversation with Sir Charles Villiers about Business in the Community. If I may, I will begin with the background.

Business in the Community was launched at the end of 1981 after careful study of United States practice in trying to involve companies more fully in the life of the communities in which they operate. From the beginning it was conceived as a private sector led partnership including appropriate representation from Government, both central and local, from the trade unions, chambers of commerce, educational bodies and professional organisations. Founded and funded initially by a handful of companies under Sir Alastair Pilkington's leadership, it has grown rapidly and can now begin to claim to be the principal focus for industry and commerce's community involvement. Last Autumn it was amalgamated with the CBI Special Programmes Unit. This was a free standing employer based body formed to market the Youth Training Scheme to the employer community. This amalgamation, which was very widely welcomed, was seen as a step towards rationalising the large number of bodies which had sprung up with private sector leadership to ameliorate some of the effects of the recession.

Behind Business in the Community's formal aims (which I am enclosing) there are really 3 separate purposes:-

1. To encourage companies of all sizes to become more fully involved in the life of the communities in which they operate.

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- ii. To establish and foster locally based partnerships dedicated to improving the quality of life in local communities and to provide a mechanism for community involvement which companies can trust.
 - iii. To become an 'umbrella' organisation in order to minimise both the reality and the perception of duplication between private sector led initiatives in the community involvement field.

We are making progress on all 3 fronts. Membership of Business in the Community implies a strong commitment to community involvement and we now have more than 100 companies in membership with another 75 as members of our daughter organisation City of London Business in the Community. Nearly 3,000 companies are now supporting local partnerships in a meaningful way. Scottish Business in the Community is a separate but sister organisation started at virtually the same time and with identical aims under Sir Hector Laing's Chairmanship. Sir Hector is also a Deputy Chairman of BIC's Governing Council as well as a Board member.

The local partnerships themselves are also developing well. There are now 200 Enterprise Agencies in the country and I won't describe their activities here because I know that you have visited several of those nurtured by British Steel Industries and are familiar with their work. Suffice to say that they all start with a free advisory service to small business and many have expanded to provide other services including the provision of small scale workshop space, the management of training schemes and the provision of small scale "seed corn capital". Though the history of most Enterprise Agencies is very short (half of them are less than 2 year's old), we can demonstrate that they are beginning to make a worthwhile contribution to job creation.

We are also involved in a number of partnerships which have arisen from a different starting point. Often known as Community Action Programmes, these are groupings of senior businessmen and the local authority and other interests in an area, who are learning to look at ways in which local economies may be stimulated and the quality of life improved. In some areas we have managed to promote the amalgamation of Community Action Programmes and Enterprise Agencies. The Neath Development Partnership, for example, is an excellent demonstration of effective action between private and public sector sponsors.

As you know from first hand experience, persuading voluntary organisations to work closely together is not always easy! Our own amalgamation certainly gave a fillip to this and our Governing

Council decided, in principle, to invite Project Fullemploy, the Youth Enterprise Scheme, the Youth Business Initiative and Action Resource Centre to become members of Business in the Community. This is still under consideration by the Board who are anxious to avoid making other well managed voluntary organisations feel excluded. However, all these organisations and many others work closely with Business in the Community and relationships at a staff level work well. Wherever possible, we try to organise seminars/meetings in conjunction with them. Furthermore, as you know these 4 organisations are beginning to work closely with the Enterprise Agencies at local level.

Business in the Community was really set up to be a catalyst and so we are actively involved in setting up local initiatives, leaving the longer term management to members of the partnerships once they have been established. Our task is to encourage and persuade companies to be involved and to enable members of local communities who would not normally have combined, to come together with a common purpose. I suspect that the rapid growth in our work owes much to the fact that there is, behind so much public rhetoric, a real yearning for partnership and for breaking down the barriers which exist in so many corners of our society. We are entirely non party political and do not engage in public campaigning of any sort except in so far as we press for the development and funding of local partnerships. In practice our work has many facets. For example, we advise many voluntary organisations on their relationship with the business community and vice versa; we are attempting to develop links between industry and commerce on the one hand and the formal education system on the other; the follow up to the Windsor conference which you inspired will be within Business in the Community; we are involved in a number of initiatives designed to help young people find or create work at the end of the Youth Training Scheme and our Board is currently looking at proposals for us to involve the employer community in a whole range of MSC programmes.

Organisationally, we are a company limited by guarantee (members of BIC have a limited liability of £5 but the office of President carries no such liability) and are currently seeking charitable status. We are controlled by our Governing Council which is comprised of senior nominated individuals from each of our member organisations. You will see from the names that the partnership concept is strongly enshrined at this level. The Governing Council elects a Board of Directors which meets 4 times a year to direct the organisation. Some of its work is delegated to a powerful Executive Committee. We have a staff of just under 40 people, nearly all of whom are seconded to us. Our funding is by way of subscription. The employer members pay subscriptions on an annual basis with the largest companies paying £5,000 a year. In addition, many of them support specific projects which we develop, over and above this

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figure. We also receive a grant from the Department of Trade & Industry to help with training and publications and publicity for local Enterprise Agencies. In this context perhaps I should add that we would not see the office of President being involved in raising funds for BIC.

Lord Carr (who is Chairman both of our Governing Council and of the Board) and I, would welcome the opportunity to describe the organisation in more detail and to see if you would be prepared to become our first President. It would be easy to arrange things on similar lines to the Royal Jubilee and Princes Trusts, where you could involve yourself as heavily as you wished and your many other commitments permitted. But if you were to Chair at least one of our Board meetings a year, this would enable you to provide the leadership and inspiration which we would all welcome. We would ensure that the subjects to be discussed were particularly relevant to your involvement with our work. We could also arrange for you to visit local initiatives outside London, in the course of your other engagements, which would involve not only BIC but the many other organisations with which we are working.

BIC, and the ideas for which it stands, are developing well. However, we all feel that your known commitment to 'partnership' and encouragement for voluntary organisations to work together will find expression through Business in the Community and your leadership and inspiration could raise "the level of the game" immeasurably.

Finally, I enclose details of our general aims, including a list of members of the Board and Governing Council together with other supporting material.

Yours sincerely

Stephen O'Brien

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