

Guidelines for working with commercial organisations

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1 Introduction

Working with commercial organisations is important to The British Dietetic Association (BDA). Our 2024-2034 Strategic Plan - '20,000 Satisfied Members by 2034' - builds on the achievements made in the delivery of the previous strategic plan, and continues the themes of: workforce support and development, growing our community of members, ensuring we are visible and using our member expertise to have a positive influence, and continuously improving our services behind the scenes.

Our commercial initiatives support the delivery of our strategy in the following ways:

- Increasing our voice and visibility by being present in the commercial sector to lead, influence and partner on key dietetic issues within a variety of product and service areas (e.g. food and drink, medical nutrition, supplements, health and wellbeing etc)
- Through our partnerships, programmes and resources, the BDA will increase our capacity to influence public awareness of what dietitians do and how they can support behaviour changes towards a healthy diet for people and the planet.
- Provide a diverse income stream to support the wider business and deliver member benefits.

Whilst working with commercial organisations, we shall maintain our independence and professional integrity. This document is the framework for the BDA, with documented procedures covering range of commercial projects. The framework ensures transparency of governance and informs consistent decision making.

This framework can be used by the Association as a whole - including BDA Branches and Specialist Groups - and as an example of good practice by individual BDA members and dietetic departments.

2 Background

These guidelines were first published as the 'BDA Guidelines for Sponsorship and Collaborative Partnerships' in 2007 with updates at least every three years. They were then reviewed and re-published in 2022 as 'Guidelines for working with commercial organisations'. This version builds on the successes of the past years - and lessons learned - to support the continued commercial work of the BDA and its members. It also links to the policy on 'The BDA's commercial relationships with companies who manufacture breastmilk substitutes'

3 Statement of Conduct

This document is informed by six Standards and documents:

- The Health and Care Professions Council is the regulator for dietitians in the UK and sets out how they expect dietitians to behave in the HCPC Standards of conduct, performance and ethics (SCPE). There is additional Guidance on conduct and ethics for Students.
- The Sport and Exercise Nutrition register (SENr) is the voluntary register for those working autonomously as sport and exercise nutritionists. The SENr code of conduct sets out the principles of conduct, performance and ethics for registrants.
- The BDA Code of Professional Conduct sets out the high standards of behaviour required of BDA all members.
- The Bribery Act 2010 is also relevant. The Ministry of Justice sets out procedures which organisations can put into place to prevent persons associated with them from bribing. The BDA has a separate policy and procedures document which applies to all staff, directors and members acting on behalf of the organisation.
- Managing Potential Conflicts of Interest in A Baby Friendly Accredited Service, Unicef Baby Friendly Initiative, December 2018
- The 2024 ABPI Code of Practice which seeks to raise the high standards expected of pharmaceutical companies. Pharmaceutical companies must disclose any contractual services, donations, grants and sponsorship provided to healthcare professions and healthcare organisations (this includes the BDA and our members).

4 Principles for working with commercial partners

Our commercial work is with the medical nutrition industry, pharmaceutical companies, mainstream food and drink manufacturers, large charities, retailers, trade associations, food interest groups and technology companies.

The following principles will be applied in every commercial collaboration:

- The collaboration is intentional in that it contributes to the delivery of the BDA vision and strategy

- In the event that a collaboration is or includes a research activity, including market research, this follows best practice for research
- The BDA retains its independence on information on food, health, nutrition and dietetics
- The BDA will work with organisations who want to create better products and services for health and wellbeing, who have a demonstrable commitment to evidence-based nutrition communications which the public can use to inform their choices
- The corporate integrity of the BDA and our members' professional reputation will always be paramount.

Other considerations include:

- The wider-picture: reducing health inequalities and resolving food insecurity
- Ethical soundness and sustainability issues
- The compatibility of organisational values
- The compatibility of brand values and compliance with advertising standards

5. Promoting Equality, Diversity & Social Inclusion

The BDA and all commercial partners will support and promote the principles of inclusiveness and equality for all. As well as compliance with all government guidance and legislation, this will be achieved by:

- Paying particular attention to addressing those issues of multiple disadvantage that can be tackled more effectively by joint action through the partnership than by the individual partners acting alone.
- Active involvement of hard-to-reach and under-represented groups in the work of the initiative. Making clear provision in delivery plans setting out the ways in which the initiative will promote equality, diversity and inclusion through its work resulting in removing or minimising disadvantages experienced by people within the profession due to their protected characteristics (covered by the [Equality Act 2010](#))
- Development and regular review of the project plan with targets and performance indicators to ensure progress is made.

6 Procedure for evaluating a proposal

a) Types of initiatives

The BDA undertakes a range of work with commercial organisations. Most of these fall into one of the below definitions:

- A **'partner'** or **'project partner'** is an organisation with whom the BDA collaborates on a particular initiative where some shared aims have been identified. This may or

may not be a financial arrangement, and could be an exclusive agreement or involve several organisations.

- A **'Corporate member'**: an organisation who works with the BDA more strategically and demonstrates support for the BDA and the profession via an annual membership package.
- A **'Consultancy and insights customer'** is a client who wishes to access expertise from the BDA office or our members, or to understand more about perceptions on a range of topics. This is often achieved via focus groups, surveys or dedicated consultancy.
- **'Sponsors'**: the BDA has a range of commercial sponsors - organisations who attend the BDA's events, advertise in 'Dietetics Today' or use the BDA's digital platforms.

b) Process for developing initiatives between the BDA and commercial companies

- Proposals will be considered by the BDA Partnerships Team using the *BDA Toolkit for Working with Commercial Companies and any additional policies such as The BDA's commercial relationships with companies who manufacture breastmilk substitutes*
- Decisions consider the audience for the initiative, the policy context, risk and opportunity for the BDA to meet its objectives (for example by reviewing customer and stakeholder views of the commercial partner, the scientific validity of the partner's existing communications and products, the involvement of dietitians, their employment practices, their long-term strategy). A risk matrix is used to determine decision making within the organisation.
- As well as this quality assessment, and equality impact assessment will be carried out.
- Industry corporate responsibility indexes and voluntary codes of practice are considered as part of this evaluation process. Examples of these include the British Specialist Nutrition Association Limited (BSNA) Code of Practice for the Medical Nutrition Industry, the ABPI code, the Access to Nutrition Index, Business in the Community corporate responsibility reports or FTSE4Good Index.
- The income from BDA initiatives with commercial organisations funds the activities and services we offer members. Where there is a direct association – for example sponsorship of an event, it will be acknowledged on supporting materials. Any excess income is directed into the central budgets and aggregated information is published on our website <https://www.bda.uk.com/news-campaigns/work-with-us/our-work-with-commercial-companies.html>
- Financial thresholds for the internal processing of commercial initiatives are in place.
- The final agreement with any commercial organisation is formally outlined in a written agreement with specific conditions, including permission to use the Association's name and logo time limitations.
- Lengthy or recurring initiatives, such as corporate membership, are reviewed and re-evaluated at set points.

Acceptance of an initiative by the BDA should never be mis-represented by the commercial organisation as an endorsement of their product or service. The BDA's name should never

be used in any separate promotion by organisations following support being agreed, without express prior permission being obtained from the BDA.

Initiatives which are determined not to be a good fit for the BDA should be managed sensitively. Sometimes by renegotiating the parameters of the initiative, it is possible to proceed.

If a commercial organisation does not act in our interests the BDA will first discuss this with them verbally, then in writing to identify any issues and associated risks. Risks may be financial, commercial, reputational or service-related and must be dealt with promptly and appropriately.

c) Process for developing initiatives between BDA Specialist Groups & Branches and commercial companies

Approaches to or from potential sponsors or project partners should only be negotiated by designated BDA members authorised to act on the BDA's behalf such as a meetings organiser for a Group or Branch. This document and the associated *Toolkit for Working with Commercial Companies* should be used. Corporate membership and consultancy / insights customers should be managed solely by the BDA.

BDA Groups and Branches are not required to notify the BDA Partnerships Team of any 'in-kind' donations from companies, such as the offer of meeting facilities. Such donations should be acknowledged in the Group or Branch Annual Report.

Groups and Branches should inform the BDA Partnerships Team of any low-value or non-financial endorsements or initiatives which may pose a reputational risk to the BDA. Specifically, initiatives with a value of over £1000 are required to be negotiated in partnership with the BDA's Partnerships Team. A model for this is included in the BDA Group & Branch handbook along with other information on governance and declarations of interest.

d) Quality Assurance

It is essential that the delivery of any services to external partners is of the highest quality. BDA members have a wide range of expertise and selecting the most suitable individual to assist with an initiative is critical. The BDA *Toolkit for Working with Commercial Companies* sets out a model for commissioning such work.

7 Conclusion

It is clear that we deliver the BDA's core purpose and vision through a number of relationships with other organisations and networks. These help us achieve our organisational business objectives, raise the profile of our membership and contribute to our overall funding, reach and impact.

We maintain the integrity of the Association and its members by using robust and transparent processes. BDA policy is always independent, irrespective of any financial contributions from commercial companies.

It is important that the BDA communicates regularly to its members on the work it does with commercial companies. We welcome feedback from members and other stakeholders to partnerships@bda.uk.com.