

Guidelines for working with commercial organisations

Prepared by Jo Lewis, External Relations & Development Officer with Sian O'Shea, Honorary Chairman and Caroline Bovey, Chair Elect.

Approved by BDA Council November 2017

1 Introduction

Working with commercial organisations is important to The British Dietetic Association (BDA). These initiatives are of benefit to the BDA in the following ways:

- Raising the profile of the BDA and the membership
- Influencing the availability, development and promotion of appropriate choices for health and wellbeing
- Diversifying income for the BDA to provide better support for members

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. 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. In late 2016, BDA Council commissioned a survey of dietitians to capture attitudes to commercial initiatives and the results were published in May 2017. Therefore this update also includes key themes from the profession.

3 Statement of Conduct

This document is informed by five Standards:

- 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.
- The *Code of Conduct for the Interaction between Healthcare Professionals, Patient and Carer Organisations and Industry in regard to Products used in Paediatric Nutrition* (under development).

4 Ethos for working with commercial partners

At the start of any initiative, the BDA's core ethos must be considered before any practical questions of risk and opportunity are considered:

The BDA believes in the right of all to enjoy healthy, nutritious and sustainable food and lifestyles. We achieve this by developing and supporting activities that help children to have a healthy start to life and enable adults of all ages to maximise their health throughout life.

Our commercial work is with the medical nutrition industry, mainstream food and drink manufacturers, retailers, trade associations, food interest groups and technology companies. We work with organisations who want to create better products and services for health and wellbeing. We also work with organisations with a 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:

- Scientific validity and professional appropriateness
- The wider-picture: the social and socio-political context
- Ethical soundness and sustainability issues
- The compatibility of organisational values
- The compatibility of brand values

5 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 initiatives between the BDA and commercial companies

- Proposals will be considered by the BDA External Affairs Team using the BDA *Toolkit for Working with Commercial Companies*.
- Decisions consider the audience for the initiative, the policy context, risk and opportunity for the BDA to meet its objectives.
- 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 *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.
- 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 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 customer should be managed solely by the BDA.

BDA Groups and Branches are not required to notify the BDA External Affairs 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 External Affairs 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 External Relations & Development Officer. A model for this is included in the BDA Group & Branch handbook.

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.

6 Conclusion

A wide range of options exist for the BDA to work with commercial companies. Such initiatives can mutually support the objectives of the BDA and of the client where shared aims exist. This is a positive way for the BDA to promote its goals, its aspirations and those of its members.

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 info@bda.uk.com.