

Starting a PTA

Starting a PTA is a very good way to bring together parents, teachers and others to raise money, to support the school and make a difference for the children. It provides an opportunity for everyone to work together towards a common goal and is open to all parents and teachers even if they only have a small amount of time available to get involved.

Usually, a PTA is formed to fundraise for the benefit of the pupils at the school. Another important role for a PTA is as a way for parents to become more involved with their children's school. Working in partnership with the school, a PTA can help to develop strong links between home and school.

Type of association

The type of home school association you choose will depend on who you want to include in your membership. Members of a Parents' Association (PA) are parents, carers and guardians of pupils currently attending the school. In a Parent Teacher Association (PTA), members include all parents, carers and guardians plus teaching and non-teaching staff at the school. Membership of a Friends' Association includes all the above plus any other person(s) wishing to offer support, e.g. past pupils, grandparents and members of the local community or parish (as deemed appropriate by the committee).

Whatever type of association you decide to form, your school will benefit from the additional funds it will raise and the increased opportunity for parents to be more involved in school life.

PTA activity varies from school to school and may include: -

- raising funds to help the school provide extra resources for the pupils
- running social events for parents and children; providing an opportunity for people to meet and get to know each other and have fun
- providing support for school trips and outings and other special events
- running before or after-school clubs
- organising meetings to inform parents about education issues, especially when changes are taking place

The wider the range of activities the more chances you have of getting people involved.

Getting Started

Step 1 – informal discussions

Start by canvassing parents to see what level of support exists and try to enlist a few who will commit themselves to forming a PTA. It is also important to work with the headteacher and seek their views as their support is vital. Emphasise the benefits of having a PTA and focus on particular goals that will appeal to the parents and staff at your school. It may be useful to suggest starting with a specific fundraising target, for example, raising funds for new sports equipment, computers, playground equipment, extra-curricular clubs and so forth. Making a success of a one-off fundraising project will increase confidence and help to get a PTA started. It is also important to emphasise how the children will benefit from the equipment purchased, as most people will give their time to enhance the experience their children have at school.

Stage 2 – a steering group

Once you have identified some initial support, the next step is to set up an informal steering group to move forward the process of starting a PTA. The steering group will need to think about the following:-

- the type of association e.g. PTA, PA, Friends

- the first open/ general meeting of the intended membership
- adopting a constitution
- registering as a charity
- criminal record checks for PTA committee members and volunteers

Ideally, the steering group will comprise of parents, the headteacher, a teacher and perhaps a governor so you can discuss ideas about the purpose of the PTA and your objectives as you plan for the first open/general meeting. If the headteacher is not involved at this stage remember to keep them informed of progress as you do need their support.

You may wish to choose an acting secretary, treasurer and chair from those in the steering group. These are all informal roles at this stage but will enable you to move forward with setting up your PTA.

Step 3 – a constitution

Your PTA will need a constitution. This is a document which establishes the fundamental rules by which the PTA is governed and describes: -

- the aims of the PTA and its powers
- its membership
- the size of the committee and how members are elected
- the need for an annual general meeting and independent examination of the accounts

PTA-UK member associations in England and Wales can request a copy of the PTA-UK Model Constitution, approved by the Charity Commission, which also allows PTAs to apply for fast track charity registration.

There is also a Model Constitution for PTAs in Northern Ireland. PTAs seeking charitable recognition will find that this constitution is accepted by HMRC (HM Revenue & Customs) Charities Division.

Both model constitutions reflect current good practice and have been adopted by many thousands of successful PTAs, throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland. A constitution will help the PTA by giving everyone involved an understanding of the parameters within which the PTA will work and clearly defining the aims of the association.

Step 4 – planning the first open/general meeting

You need to hold an open meeting for all the intended ordinary members of your association (see type of association above) to formally establish and launch the PTA. (Open meetings are more commonly referred to as general meetings). This is a very important event for the school, so try and make it as interesting as possible. Send a letter to the intended membership (in the case of a PTA this would be the parents, carers and guardians of the pupils currently at the school plus teaching and non-teaching staff) inviting them to the open meeting to formally establish and launch the association and emphasis the benefits, of parental involvement, for the pupils at the school.

Ask the headteacher to give a short talk about what they hope the PTA will achieve. Endorsement and encouragement from the headteacher will encourage parents to get involved.

Publicise this meeting as widely as possible and remember to include the local community, particularly if you are establishing a Friends group. Recommended good practice is to give parents 21 days written notice that a general meeting will be held. In addition to a letter, place a notice on the school notice board, or create a PTA notice board, as a way of promoting the PTA launch.

At the general meeting, don't be too disappointed if only a few parents turn up. Even if you do not get as much initial support as you expected, don't give up. People are often reluctant to be involved in something new. If you and a few others are committed to the idea you will find that involvement will increase once your fundraising and social activities commence and parents can clearly see the benefit of having and supporting a PTA.



This PTA information sheet aims to provide clear advice but should only be considered as a general guide. Further information sheets are available from www.pta.org.uk For more specific advice please contact info@pta.org.uk or 0845 850 5460. Parent Teacher Associations UK, a registered charity no 1072833, a company limited by guarantee and registered in England no 3680271.

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Step 5 – the general meeting

At the first general meeting there are items of business that you will need to cover and minutes will need to be taken, to record all the actions and decisions taken. Agenda items to include are: -

1. welcome
2. adoption of the constitution
3. election of the Officers (chair, treasurer and secretary) and Ordinary Committee Members (those who will be actively involved but who do not have a specific role)
4. bank signatories
5. date of first committee meeting

Welcome: this should be given by the acting chair. Use this as an opportunity to: -

- set the scene
- to explain the aims of the PTA
- details of the first fundraising event (if this has already been decided) and what the PTA is fundraising for

Ask the headteacher to add a few words of support and to explain the difference having a PTA will make to the school.

Adoption of the constitution: the constitution needs to be formally adopted. This is done by a majority vote from a simple show of hands.

Election of Officers and ordinary committee members: you can decide how many Officers your association will have; good practice recommends three - chair, secretary and treasurer plus a number of ordinary committee members. Remember, for future general meetings to be quorate (i.e. for decisions made at the meeting to be valid), you will need to have twice the number of committee members present, so this may be a factor in determining the size of your committee.

It may help to have a few notes about the role of each of the officers so that people understand what is involved. Encourage parents to join the committee by offering to support them with advice and by explaining the time commitment you are looking for.

Potential candidates will need to be nominated, either before the meeting or at the event. The election is then a show of hands or, if more than one person has been put forward, a secret ballot. Ordinary committee members can also be voted onto the committee in this way.

This is also a good time to ask for additional PTA volunteers, to assist with events throughout the year. This may be attractive to supporters who do not want to be an active committee member or who feel they only have a limited amount of time. Remember that people are more likely to volunteer if they can see what they are committing themselves too.

You may, for example, have a parent who works in catering who would be prepared to help with a summer barbeque. Another parent might be able to ask for donated items for raffles at your events, even if they can't attend meetings. Find out what people are comfortable doing and it is much easier to build your list of helpers.

Seating arrangements for your first open/general meeting can either be formal, arranged in theatre style rows, or informal in a large circle. Circle style seating has the advantage that it is easy for everyone to see each other and establish who everyone is; which is important if people are not familiar with one another. This style also encourages discussion.

Bank signatories: Your banking arrangements need to be formalised. At the meeting you will need to agree on three or four people who will have the responsibility of being bank signatories. Two signatures are required on all PTA cheques; good practice recommends that these are from a choice of three or four named people.

The bank will need to see the minutes of the meeting stating the names of the nominated signatories. There will be forms to sign for specimen signatures. Visit the bank in advance of the meeting and ask for the relevant forms and information about their procedures.

Date of the first meeting: Remember to set a date for the first committee meeting.

Step 6 – finance

PTAs need some money for running costs and it is important to think about how the funds of the PTA are going to be looked after and how decisions will be made about spending any money which is raised. It is a good idea to ask the head for a wish list so your fundraising matches the school requirements.

The PTA should set up its own bank account. Most banks and building societies offer a charge-free charity or treasurer account specifically for small voluntary organisations like PTAs. Some people may be reluctant to become involved if they think they will be out of pocket so it is best to be open about the finances and make sure that any expenses, e.g. stamps, are paid out of PTA funds.

Step 7 – safeguarding children

Child Protection is a very important issue for all PTAs, of which the use of Criminal Record Bureau checks (England and Wales) and Criminal Record Checks (Northern Ireland) should be a part. Child Protection should be an on-going consideration for all PTAs, discussed at committee meetings and as part of the planning for events. Your PTA should seek the advice of the school on what it recommends and what policies they operate.

Points to remember

Starting a PTA can feel a bit daunting but although it requires commitment and hard work, running a PTA gives a lot of fun and satisfaction.

The following suggestions may help you to encourage parents to get involved in the PTA and in school life: -

- try to use personal contact and personally addressed letters of invitation
- have a designated person to greet people as they arrive at meetings. Established members should always introduce themselves to new members
- try to include as many people as possible in any decision-making. Allow time at meetings for new or more reserved parents to have their say, or have a simple show of hands. Remember that some people find the school environment intimidating
- make it possible for parents who can not give up regular time for meetings to be involved as and when they can
- never turn away any offers of help from parents and try to make use of all their talents and skills
- always make sure that people are thanked personally, for any special effort they have made, and that their help is valued
- not all parents will be able to attend meetings but are willing to give some time; it is often a case of trying to identify what each individual has to offer
- plan activities that will include all families, including fathers and single parents. Crèche facilities or a baby sitting circle would be a great help for some

Points to try

- always have a PTA slot at induction events held for new parents prior to their children starting at the school. Tell them what the PTA does and provide written information for parents to take away

- approach the Parent Governors at your school to establish a link between the PTA and the Governing body
- use the school newsletter to keep parents informed about PTA activities or create your own PTA newsletter
- always let parents know what the funds raised have been spent on
- have a PTA notice board and keep it updated
- try to have informal seating – a circle rather than rows of chairs
- let parents know how they can help the PTA and who they should contact with offers of help
- include the PTA in special celebratory assemblies and other appropriate school activities
- include PTA activities and meetings on the school calendar

Further information

For further guidance and support on starting a PTA contact the PTA-UK Adviser for your local area or call the PTA-UK Advice Line on 0845 850 5460.

PTA-UK Information sheets

- Charity banking
- Charity registration – England and Wales
- Charity registration – Northern Ireland
- Committee roles and responsibilities
- Committee roles – chair
- Committee roles – secretary
- Committee roles - treasurer
- Communications – an introduction
- Communications – newsletters
- Getting people involved
- Good practice – committee meetings
- Good practice – general meetings
- Good practice – managing PTA funds
- PTA-UK model constitution – information
- PTA-UK adviser team
- Parental involvement – getting started
- Volunteer Checks – latest update

PTA-UK resources

- PTA-UK model constitution – England and Wales (November 2011)
- PTA-UK model constitution – Northern Ireland
- Parents' questionnaire template

Useful contacts

- Charity Commission – the regulator for charities in England and Wales
www.charity-commission.gov.uk / 0845 300 0218
- HMRC Charities
www.hmrc.gov.uk/charities / 0845 302 0203

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