

## EDUCATION

# Building a lasting relationship

Powergen has developed a free educational resource for use in UK primary schools. The Changing Climates programme encourages teachers to introduce core curriculum topics to their pupils in an innovative way, and has helped the company to build a national brand and motivate its staff



Powergen likes to keep a close eye on the weather. It's one of the factors it has to take into account when deciding how much power is needed to meet consumer demand. The company, which has 3.4 million electricity, gas and telephone customers in the UK, has also taken up the theme through its sponsorship of national broadcaster ITV's weather bulletins – so when it was looking for a suitable topic for a community involvement project, the weather seemed a natural choice.

But it was also important that the programme fitted with the company's other community involvement work, which is particularly strong in the field of education, especially science, technology and the environment.

The result was Changing Climates, an innovative educational programme which encourages children in UK primary schools to study the climate using a weather station provided by the company to measure rainfall, hours of sunshine, humidity, air pressure and other data. Since its introduction in

1997, around 31,500 pupils at 1000 primary schools have been involved in Changing Climates. All of the schools are near Powergen sites, and many are in areas designated by the government as needing special help: in the current academic year, 41 of the 152 schools taking part fell into this category.

Changing Climates has also led to more volunteering by Powergen staff, some of whom visit the schools to work with pupils and help train the teachers at the company's sites on how they can use the weather station in the classroom to improve numeracy, literacy and IT skills, and for weather projects in other lessons, including art and music. Each site has a Changing Climates coordinator to make sure the programme runs smoothly.

'It's been very well received by teachers,' says Caroline Anslow, Powergen's social affairs manager. 'We consulted with teachers and educationalists beforehand, and the University of Warwick's Centre for Education and Industry prepared the resource pack, so we've been able to create a programme

■ children at more than 1000 UK primary schools have been involved in Changing Climates, an educational resource used by teachers in subjects across the whole curriculum

that's not prescriptive and that gives teachers the freedom to tailor classroom activities to the needs of their school and pupils.'

Changing Climates has brought clear benefits to the schools involved, and in the process built up a store of goodwill from teachers, parents and pupils, as evidenced by letters and testimonials. Anslow says: 'We feel the most successful CSR programmes are those directly relevant to the organization's business objectives, and this is a case in point.'

'The aim is to build lasting relationships with our neighbours so that they recognize Powergen will act in a responsible way. This has undoubtedly had a positive impact on the children and teachers who've taken part, but it's also brought wider benefits to our company and our stakeholders.'

**the most successful CSR activity is directly relevant to an organization's business objectives**

Powergen says that whenever possible it encourages partnerships between Powergen sites and participating schools to continue beyond the year of initial engagement, and that employee volunteering plays a part in that process. According to

Anslow, this will benefit the company by enabling its staff to develop interpersonal and leadership skills and improve their job satisfaction levels.

Powergen is keen to explore the benefits of volunteering and its long-term experience with Changing Climates will certainly help in this direction. The hope is that it will give some pointers as to how an expanded volunteering programme might work in the future.

Changing Climates has benefited the company in other ways. It has enabled Powergen to develop links with the government through its regular consultation on how the scheme fits in to the curriculum, and to introduce itself to a new generation of children living near its sites who may one day become employees. The programme does not set out directly to attract new customers, but forms part of the company's general marketing activity by raising awareness of its brand.

Above all, Changing Climates is proving to all those involved that there is great value in the partnership approach.

'We've found that by working together as a team we can give something of great value to the teachers and the children,' says Anslow. 'Working with so many different partners, including the government's Excellence in Cities Education Action Zones and Education Business Partnerships, helps to broaden our horizons and gives the teachers the opportunity to be innovative with the material we supply.'

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## the company

Powergen is a UK-based electricity generator, retailer and distribution company that also trades electricity, gas and oil in continental European markets and owns LG&E Energy in the US. It employs almost 12,000 people and posted pre-tax profits of £464million in 2001 on a turnover of £5.7billion. It:

- has encouraged the development of reading and writing skills in Coventry in conjunction with the city's libraries, running a storytelling cafe and various storytelling sessions
- runs the Powergen Environment Fund, which supports environmental projects within 15 miles (24km) of its power stations, call centres and offices
- was judged one of the best overall social and environmental performers in a 2002 analysis of 19 international electricity and gas supply companies by the German ratings agency oekem
- has produced an environmental report since the early 1990s
- has invested more than £14m in energy efficiency schemes since 1994.

**the background** Four and five-year-old children in the UK are now regularly tested on their reading, writing and numeracy skills. The results are used to measure each child's progress through school.

■ the popularity of Changing Climates among pupils has allowed the company to build lasting relationships in the local communities where it operates



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## comment POWERGEN

As can be seen from this example of its community involvement work, Powergen's interest in CSR activity involving children remains strong. Despite a national profile gained from its sponsorship of ITV weather forecasts, the company has opted for a local approach by selecting schools in need of help near its own facilities. The company is open about its belief that successful CSR has to link with business objectives. This case study supports Powergen's contention that it is a responsible company which takes CSR seriously.

The outstanding features are:

- The programme focuses on children
- Improving the skills of employees is seen as a benefit of CSR
- The initiative helps support teachers to develop innovative learning methods.

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