

Richard May is Office Managing Partner in Sheffield for the global law firm DLA Piper. For the past 8 years, the company has sponsored the overall winners' prize, which has included visits to Dubai, Berlin, Rome and Hong Kong.

'Even with constrained budgets, we do get involved with large-scale initiatives involving the likes of UNICEF. But decisions are made at a local level and we have 280 people in our Sheffield office who live in the City and whose children go to local schools: They may even have gone to Sheffield's schools, colleges and universities themselves. So, a large element of our involvement has nothing to do with PR or direct benefit for the organisation and is more about doing something that people feel good about and helping young people in the City where our organisation started.'

'It tallies well with what DLA Piper is about. We're an international law firm but we are also one of the biggest law firms in Sheffield. We want to put something back into the region. We can add the international touch for young people that might otherwise not have had the chance to go to some interesting places where they can both have fun and learn something about business.'

'We are mindful of the fact that people should be given opportunities outside the school curriculum to work as teams, which is critical in business, and to do presentations, which they have done better each year I have been on the judging panel. For me it is the employability skills that are important – particularly confidence – because our biggest call for bringing people into our firm is through the universities of Sheffield.'

'We want to do some things that maintain our links with the local businesses and the wider community. Funding approval is easier if the investment is seen to have some sort of business focus. The international connection is easier for us to do because of our network, which gets the young people excited. Sheffield City Council also remains one of our large clients, so it does us no harm to be seen to be working on things like this.'



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'I find it fascinating and uplifting to be on the judging panel. It gives a bit of joy in the day to see young people come in who are clearly nervous and have worked hard on something over a period of time and they want to tell you about it. Some of the job roles are amusing and there have been some funny business ideas that might not have gone too much further. Although the day may cost my organisation in terms of my uncharged time, I actually think it's time well spent. I want to see interesting ideas and interesting teams getting through and be given the right level of encouragement.'

'The rationale for other organisations supporting BiG Challenge depends on what their business is about. Some may want to provide advice, rather than direct funding. There is a really good product that comes out of this programme, which includes young people coming back 2-3 years in a row, getting better every time. You are helping to get people ready for work.'

'All businesses tend to moan about the lack of skills and this is one way of getting involved to redress that. For businesses that are bothered about what other people see and think, it is never a bad thing for Sheffield City Council and other stakeholders to see that you are involved in a highly prized local initiative. And a lot of the parents of the young people will find out about your business, particularly those who turn up at the awards ceremony. It is good to be involved with something that does not make intense demands on the organisation and is relatively low cost. BiG Challenge is one of those opportunities that stands out a bit.'

