

Barriers to joined-up leadership in the English education system

April 2022

Stephen Morales



Acknowledgements

Thanks to the following research participants for their time and their important insights. I would like to acknowledge the following groups and individuals for their support in producing this research.

- Association of School and College Leaders
- Chartered College of Teaching
- Confederation of School Trusts
- NAHT
- National Governance Association
- Nick Brook
- Leora Cruddas CBE
- Emma Knights OBE
- Dame Alison Peacock
- Natalie Perera
- Professor Toby Salt
- Jonathan Simons
- Trevor Summerson
- Paul Whiteman

Abstract

As a sector leader, I have been observing and consulting on education reforms since 2013. I have seen little substantial change in attitudes and interactions across the leadership triangle. In fact, evidence in this paper suggests that recent reforms have led not only to tensions across the pillars of leadership (Morales, *The Leadership Triangle*, 2014) but also within each of these groups, as headteachers concede power to chief executives, business managers report into chief financial officers/chief operating officers, and local governing bodies have increasingly less influence as trust boards assume full responsibility for strategic planning as the ultimately accountable body.

Collaboration and joined-up leadership at a system level are also patchy. Central to recent education reforms is a greater emphasis on schools becoming more autonomous and taking responsibility for their own improvement. However, there is also an expectation that schools should turn to each other for support. This is difficult for some schools as the English education system remains a mixed-economy marketplace where schools continue to compete over pupils, funding and resources – leading to what Armstrong & Ainscow (2018, p. 4) describe as an “unusual cocktail of collaboration and competition”.

The sector continues to pay lip service to joined-up leadership, but vested interests, self-preservation and anxieties related to a loss of power or influence appear to be supporting entrenched behaviours. Perhaps we need to consider how we might reassure education leaders that it is perfectly acceptable not to have all the answers for every area of a school's operations and that embracing a diverse professional workforce with a range of skills and backgrounds is indeed a very positive thing.

At this point, I would like to offer a brief anecdote. During the summer of 2017, I was invited to present at an education festival where CEOs, headteachers, governors and school business leaders would be convening for a two-day celebration of education practice. After a night in a local hotel, I made my way to the festival registration area, and I was then escorted to my speaker area. Whilst the idea was novel, I was staggered to learn that, as the resident business leadership expert, I would be presenting in a wigwam pitched on a field adjacent to the event, whilst my pedagogically focused counterparts would deliver their presentations in a conference hall. This experience exemplifies the problem. Whilst the invitation to speak at a national education event was welcome, my slot positioned in a tent on a field and hence the perceived value to the event demonstrates the ground that needs bridging before school business leaders can claim professional parity.

Armstrong (2016) suggests there may be work to do to raise the profile of the school business profession as a viable first career. A clearer understanding of the diversity of responsibility and scope of the school business professional's role might help those from teaching backgrounds better understand the value of this cadre of leaders with a finance and operations focus.

On the other hand, we need to accept that often the credentials of school business professionals (SBPs) do not match those of teacher colleagues. The ISBL workforce survey 2020 shows that, due to several factors, the majority of school SBPs are not qualified beyond NVQ level 5 (Armstrong, Creaby, & Wood, *ISBL School Business Professional Workforce Survey Report*, 2020). This remains a challenge for those SBPs calling for professional parity with their pedagogical colleagues who are required to achieve a minimum of at least a postgraduate-level qualification. Armstrong (2016) points to frustration and anxiety amongst SBPs that their qualifications might be rendered inadequate or redundant in a rapidly changing education system.

Professional competency and effectiveness are a combination of experience and qualifications. One without the other is meaningless. This paper seeks to encourage education leaders to recognise their own limitations and embrace the unique talents of colleagues who may have different strengths, skills and knowledge. This applies equally to those leaders from a business background and those whose careers have developed in the classroom.

Contents

1	Introduction	5
2	Literature review	6
2.1	A new approach to education policy	6
2.2	The beginnings of a fragmented system	6
2.3	The Academies Act and further fragmentation	7
2.4	High-stakes accountability – the price of autonomy	8
2.5	Defining leadership – the difference between leading a function and leading an organisation	8
2.6	What we know about our system – established hierarchies	9
2.7	International comparisons	9
3	Research methodology	10
3.1	Research paradigms	10
3.2	Participants	10
3.3	Materials	10
3.4	Approach	10
3.5	Procedure	11
3.6	Data collection	12
3.7	Conducting the fieldwork	12
3.8	Semi-structured interviews	12
3.9	Surveys	12
3.10	Literature and research sources	12
4	Analysis of findings	13
4.1	Qualitative survey	13
4.2	Quantitative survey findings	14
4.3	The semi-structured interviews	16
5	Synthesis of findings and literature	19
6	Conclusion	20
7	References	22

Section 1: Introduction

Successful organisations recognise the value of a range of both technical and leadership capabilities. Syed (2019) talks about the imperative to ensure cognitive diversity amongst key strategic leadership groups to ensure organisational effectiveness, growth and ultimately success. Despite the well-documented evidence in support of embracing the unique talent and knowledge available through leadership teams made up of professionals from diverse backgrounds, the education sector and indeed our health service (The NHS Confederation, 2007) appear to have struggled with this concept. There is evidence that some pedagogical leaders have demonstrated a continued reluctance to accept school administrators as strategic leaders (Armstrong, 2016; Marchant, 2018; Starr, 2012; Southworth, 2010). Indeed, a similar pattern of behaviour in the relationship between NHS clinicians and administrators was evident as healthcare provision has continued to evolve over the last three decades.

This research project aims to explore the underlying reasons for any professional protectionism or scepticism about the strategic value “out-of-sector” or “non-teaching” leaders can offer schools and trusts across our education system.

The research aims to understand the extent to which historic policy reforms have led to the creation of professional/ leadership hierarchies. The research will also explore the origins and evolution of leadership roles within our system including the headteacher, the trust chief executive, the school business manager, the chief finance officer, new executive specialists, and the role of governors and trustees. The changing role of local authorities over recent decades will also be considered, including the extent to which increased local autonomy has pushed access to technical competency from local authorities directly on to schools (Greany & Higham, 2018; Southworth, 2010).

The study will also consider the extent to which professionals from different backgrounds encounter communication barriers created by technical language, perceived priorities, and even management style.

Finally, this study aims to explore the extent to which our system might benefit from greater clarity over the expectations we place on our leaders and that any inclusion in strategic conversations should be based not on false historic hierarchies (a kind of pecking order) or false autonomy but on the demonstrable impact a leader (pedagogical or not) can have on a school or trust. Training, qualifications, experience, accountability, impact evaluation and incentives will form part of the series of considerations.

Chapter 2 reflects on the evolution of our education system since Margaret Thatcher took office in the 1970s and the extent to which numerous education policy reforms have helped shape leadership hierarchies. Additionally, this chapter undertakes a review of limited literature related to the relationships and interdependencies of leadership groups including headteachers, those discharging governance functions and those with primary responsibility for business and operational matters.

Chapter 3 covers research methods: the research paradigms, the approach to triangulation and validation, the scale of the research and the size of participant samples.

Chapter 4 is the analysis of the findings.

Chapter 5 is a synthesis of findings and existing knowledge.

Chapter 6 draws conclusions from the findings and offers a series of recommendations.

Section 2: Literature review

This investigation suggests a paucity of research literature on the relationship between the three pillars of education leadership, these being pedagogy, business, and governance. Looking beyond the English education system, the NHS Confederation conducted a comparable study on the relationship between clinicians and senior administrators in 2007. Additionally, there is some international research that we can draw on cited in this paper.

During the mid-2000s, when the Labour government established the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), numerous studies were commissioned into the merits of schools having access to an effective school business manager. This government-sponsored research made repeated references to the value of a school business manager to headteachers and other senior leaders in schools (Southworth, 2010). In 2014, NCTL developed guidance on governance in multi-academy trusts, but there was little reference to the interconnected nature of the three pillars of leadership and, in particular, no mention of the school business leader (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2014).

There has not been a significant study into the role of the school business manager for well over a decade.

In order to be included in the literature review, sources had to contain information that was relevant to the guiding research questions: school leader relations; joined-up leadership; senior leadership team interactions; working with governors; effective governance, school and trust structures. In addition to empirical literature, selected theoretical papers and think pieces were included to provide context where relevant.

In order to better understand why particular leadership hierarchies have emerged and how this has informed the relationship across the leadership triangle of pedagogy, business and governance (Morales, 2014), it is perhaps worth first understanding the recent history of the English education system and the extent to which autonomy and accountability are varied and have shifted over time.

2.1 A new approach to education policy

Two doctrines began to emerge as the Conservative Party began to gain strength in the mid-1970s: on the one hand, an emphasis on the free economy, often referred to as the neo-liberals, and those on the other hand who attached more importance to a strong state, the so-called neo-conservatives (Chitty, 1989).

Thatcher's education policies were a combination of the two (Gillard, 2018). The imposition of the National Curriculum could be seen as an example of neo-conservatism, while giving parents the right to choose schools and allowing schools to opt out of local authority control were manifestations of neo-liberalism.

The 1984 Green Paper argued that every maintained school should have a "life of its own" within the system of maintained schools and that this could best be achieved by providing governing bodies with key responsibilities with significant independence from the local authority. In essence, this was laying the foundation for the local management of schools.

Shortly before the 1987 elections, Thatcher made a significant statement in the Daily Mail (Chitty, 1989, p. 196):

"...When we've spent all that money per pupil, and with more teachers, there is still so much wrong, so we are going to do something determined about it ... There is going to be a revolution in the running of the schools."

The Education Reform Act 1988 is possibly the most significant education act in recent history and laid the foundations for more radical reforms in the future.

Prior to 1988, schools had had limited control of expenditure, with autonomy over small items such as books and some consumables, but all other financial matters, including the employment of staff and the maintenance of buildings, were under the control of the local authority. In this environment, financial technical mastery was not necessary at a local school level.

The 1988 Act offered governing bodies control of the entire budget. These new delegated powers became known as the Local Management of Schools (Education Reform Act 1988).

Following the 1988 Act, school budgets would be determined on the basis of a formula linked to the number and year group of pupils in a particular school. Additionally, responsibility for the appointment and dismissal of staff would be transferred from the local authority to governing bodies. With this increased direct responsibility for the management of school budgets and complex HR issues, a different skill set was clearly required within local leadership structures, and it was at this point that we began to see the emergence of the bursars in the state sector (O'Sullivan, Thody, & Wood, 1999).

2.2 The beginnings of a fragmented system

The Conservative Government moved quickly to encourage schools to opt out of local authority. The Grant Maintained Schools Trust was launched, offering schools a "New Choice in Education".

Whilst this policy was framed as offering local schools more freedom, the reality was more likely to have been a policy driven by the Government of the day's distrust of local authorities (Ledger, 2018).

Inducements to persuade schools to become grant-maintained included substantial additional funding and the freedom to select a proportion of their pupils on the basis of ability or aptitude.

Other than the Education (Schools) Act 1992, which established Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education), there was little change in education policy until Tony Blair was elected and New Labour came into power in May 1997 with the powerful mantra of education, education, education.

City Academies, state schools operating outside local education authority control with autonomy in budget control and curriculum, became prominent as “academisation” took hold during the subsequent Blair, Brown, Cameron and May administrations, and ambitions for an expansion of the programme continue today under Johnson’s leadership.

New Labour’s education policy included a commitment to tackling teacher and headteacher workload. The school workforce remodelling agenda in 2003 focused on reducing administrative burdens on pedagogical staff, and as part of this initiative, the then Secretary of State Estelle Morris commissioned the National College for Teaching and Leadership to develop a school business management development programme. This was the start of what would later be referred to as “a quiet revolution” (Southworth, 2010). By 2009, 9000 school business leaders would be trained by the National College for Teaching and Leadership.

There is undoubtedly evidence emerging that formal collaborative structures provide a series of benefits to schools including improved efficiency through economies of scale, less duplication of effort, cross-fertilisation of knowledge and practice, and leadership depth and resilience (Kreston Reeves, 2020). But there are also counterarguments that highlight some of the flaws in a government academy programme that has been running for 11 years (Armstrong, Brown, & Chapman, 2020; Greany & Higham, 2018). Not all the freedoms promised have been realised, the level of scrutiny and accountability for school leaders is immense, and the correlation between improved pupil outcomes and academisation is still not clear.

2.3 The Academies Act and further fragmentation

Since the Thatcher era, the English education system has become increasingly fragmented, and over the last 20 years, successive governments have made intensive efforts to improve the performance of the English education system through a range of delivery models including grant-maintained, community schools, type one academies, standalone converter academies, and multi-academy trusts. Competition between schools is seen to be one of the keys to “driving up standards”, whilst further diluting local authorities’ control and influence over provision (Whitty, 2009).

“ Until 2002, the degree of financial delegation to schools was steadily extended, thus enabling schools to manage their resources more efficiently... This culminated in the loss of local authority discretion with the introduction of a centrally determined Dedicated Schools Grant.”
(Levačić, 2008, p. ii)

Michael Gove’s radical policy reforms (Academies Act 2010) further reduced the local education authorities’ role in providing education services and essentially created two distinct approaches to education provision through the maintained and academy systems. One could argue that dioceses and foundation schools represent a third approach. With such a fragmented system and a mixed approach to hierarchies and consequently accountability, it is perhaps unsurprising that leaders have become confused about their remits and responsibilities.

Brexit and then the COVID pandemic have dominated the political discourse in recent years, and we saw little by way of ambitious reforms during Williamson’s tenure as the Education Secretary of State. We have witnessed the Government’s ambitions to convert every school into an academy (Department for Education, 2016) stall in recent years. However, at the time of writing, the Government recently published a new White Paper. In this document, the new secretary of State Nadhim Zahawi sets out his vision for our education system and sets 2030 as the target for the realisation of these ambitions, including all schools being part of an effective academy trust (HM Government, 2022).

The Government’s austerity measures remained consistent up to the 2019 general election. The underfunding of many local education authorities has meant that highly technical functions have shifted from local authority support and services to local management (technical finance, human resources, procurement, health and safety, estates). This is the case in both maintained and academy settings.

“Cuts to funding from central government have led to a 17% fall in councils’ spending on local public services since 2009–10 – equal to 23% or nearly £300 per person.”
(Harris, Hodge, & Phillips, 2019, p. 6)

Schools and trusts have a variable capacity to manage these functions. The Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL)’s study with school leaders and governing bodies has revealed huge disparities in schools’ and trusts’ capacity and competency to respond to the complex technical challenges presented by an autonomous system. ISBL has conducted numerous surveys with small sample groups including headteachers, governors and school business professionals. ISBL uses a capacity audit tool, first developed in 2014, to assess the strengths and vulnerabilities of leadership groups within schools and trusts against ISBL’s own professional standards, including the areas of finance; human resource management; procurement; infrastructure and premises management; and leading support services. Almost without exception, there is recognition amongst participants that without access to a competent SBP, their institutions would be very exposed.

In 2012, the Place Group conducted a time and motion study with a sample of primary school headteachers considering academisation. The findings (Place Group, 2012) revealed that some headteachers were spending up to 70% of their time on non-pedagogical-related activity, in part due to budgetary pressures making it difficult to gain access to a school business professional and, with a squeeze on local government finances, limited local authority capacity to offer administrative support.

Since additional autonomy was afforded to schools following the introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS) in 1989, headteachers have increasingly shouldered the responsibility not only for teaching and learning but organisational and operational oversight. Whilst headteachers are undoubtedly skilled leaders of pedagogy, they have in many cases not had significant exposure to the broader considerations required to lead and manage complex organisations. There is very little literature or indeed data related to headteachers' or multi-academy trust (MAT) chief executives' financial competency or exposure to formal training. However, a report commissioned by the National Governance Association (Fellows, 2016) suggests there are clear expectations of executive heads that include a working knowledge of resource management, human resources and organisational dynamics. This is understandably challenging for many headteachers who will have typically qualified with a particular subject bias, undertaken postgraduate certificate (PGC) and newly qualified teacher (NQT) programmes and then perhaps gone on to develop as senior leaders through national professional qualification (NPQ) pathways. It is not, however, typical that a headteacher has enjoyed access to in-depth training related to business or financial disciplines. As revealed in the time and motion study (Place Group, 2012), headteachers are not only spending disproportionate amounts of time away from their pedagogical area of expertise, but they are also dedicating precious time to undertaking activity for which they are arguably not appropriately skilled or qualified.

Where significant local authority support is available, this is less of a problem, but in an environment where local councils are struggling to find the capacity to support their schools, education leaders are often left very exposed.

Why then are some headteachers reluctant to bring non-pedagogical business leaders in to work alongside them in a strategic capacity?

2.4 High-stakes accountability – the price of autonomy

Some schools are enjoying additional freedoms as a consequence of converting to academies. However, this is not without increased scrutiny through a more robust accountability framework. Additionally, whilst some trust leaders may feel they benefit from increased autonomy, many headteachers from the individual schools within the trust may feel they now have less freedom than they did under local authority control (Greany & Higham, 2018). This has led to new hierarchies being formed across MAT structures as the central teams emerge with limited local management arrangements remaining.

Now not only is there a potential disconnect and lack of trust between pedagogical leaders, governors and business professionals, but this tension is also playing out between the local senior leadership team and the trust's executive team.

Additionally, the emergence of specialists occupying executive roles in MAT structures (finance directors, chief operating officers, directors of human resources) has driven a wedge between the traditional school business managers, typically with a more generalist and administrative background, and this new breed of non-pedagogical leader.

2.5 Defining leadership – the difference between leading a function and leading an organisation

Morales (2016) talks about three flavours of school business professional (SBP) leadership: the generalist, the specialist and the executive. The autonomy and strategic influence enjoyed by each of these groups clearly differ. Indeed, perhaps one of the unintended consequences of MAT executive central teams is that not only are non-pedagogical leaders now enjoying parity with pedagogical colleagues, but indeed in some cases, they occupy more senior positions within the organisation's structure.

This new dynamic has arguably created further disquiet between educationalists and their senior administrative colleagues.

Our National Health Service (NHS) has a long history of leadership tensions as hospital trusts have tried to wrestle administrative and operational decision-making away from clinicians and consultants (The NHS Confederation, 2007). Trained medical professionals have been vocal in their scepticism about how unqualified "outsiders" are best placed to make strategic decisions related to medical provision or facilities. Educationalists arguably share this scepticism about non-pedagogical professionals' ability to lead in an education context.

However, as the NHS Confederation paper shows, significant progress has been made, and there now appears to be a recognition amongst senior clinicians that highly qualified administrators can bring critical experience and unique skills to the running of healthcare operations.

It appears that some of the leadership tensions apparent in the NHS are now evident in the English education system, often born out of a misunderstanding about what is meant by leadership. This is further compounded by a mixed economy of provision (described in the first chapter of this report), emerging leadership structures, varying levels of autonomy and accountability, and unprecedented levels of change, particularly over the last decade.

So, who should ultimately lead? Is it one person or a group? Syed (2019) talks about the dangers associated with "groupthink" and why we should be encouraging more cognitive diversity. He suggests that if leaders with similar backgrounds and similar training come together to find new solutions, they will fall short. Leadership teams made up of professionals from diverse professional backgrounds and open to new thinking are far more likely to succeed.

2.6 What we know about our system – established hierarchies

The management of schools in England was for decades seen as the responsibility of the headteacher. Even following the 1988 Education Act, the new autonomy given to some schools would be overseen by the headteacher with technical administrative functions delegated to a bursar or senior finance staff.

Southworth (2010) talks about a quiet revolution where the emergence of a new, highly skilled education workforce with skills in business and finance would be essential to support headteachers managing more autonomous institutions. The National College for Teaching and Leadership developed an early strapline as part of its campaign to recruit more school business leaders that suggested that a good school business manager would save up to 30% of a headteacher's time. However, this strapline failed to address the skills gap across many senior and executive heads and suggested that time, not competency, was the problem.

As schools and particularly multi-academy trusts have enjoyed increasing levels of autonomy, and as the accountability and assurance regimes have become more stringent, the executive leadership across our education system needs to adapt and evolve. Leaders with specialist backgrounds and executive experience beyond education are commonplace. This phenomenon may be daunting for the more traditional pedagogical leaders, who may now feel overlooked or on occasions undermined.

Are pedagogical leaders ready to accept professional parity with their non-teaching colleagues, or is the new leadership dynamic perhaps driving a deeper wedge between the two groups?

Indeed, there is some emerging evidence that, in order to minimise the influence of non-pedagogical leaders, headteachers are in some cases showing a reluctance to include school business leaders in some strategic conversations by denying them full access to senior leadership team meetings. This view was corroborated during the semi-structured interviews conducted in support of this research project. According to the ISBL workforce survey (Armstrong, Creaby, & Wood, 2020), 10% of SBPs surveyed are never invited to attend senior leadership team meetings, and many only on occasion.

“Leadership opportunities for SBMs [school business managers] are curtailed by cultural constraints in that the role of headteachers has been and continues to be conflated with that of leadership. Hence, there is an expectation that a headteacher will always be ‘in charge’ rather than a non-teaching colleague, even though the skills required to run a school in today's environment veer more towards business management than pedagogy.”
(Marchant, 2018, p. 3)

2.7 International comparisons

These leadership tensions are not unique to the English system. In a study of administrator-teacher relationships conducted in Vancouver, Rai talks about “the reciprocal nature of interpersonal relationships, mutual contribution, and collaboration of those involved in relationships” (Rai, 2018, p. 3).

Rai (ibid) talks about the factors to ensure strong administrator-teacher relationships, the suggestion being that an absence of any of these elements will lead to unwelcome tensions. The factors include:

- Mutual trust
- Finding the right leadership style
- Communication is key
- Recognise and celebrate where collaboration has been effective
- Understanding each other's value sets
- Empower each other where possible

Marzano (2013) offers a US perspective on leadership within a school district context. A district operation is perhaps comparable to a small local authority or large multi-academy trust with central teams presiding over pedagogy, governance and business operations.

“District leadership, school leadership, and teacher actions are all working parts in a complex system of interacting influences that positively affect student achievement — if they function in harmony. In a misaligned system, even if individual initiatives within schools, districts, and classrooms are well executed, they tend to cancel one another out.”
(Marzano, 2013, p. 82)

Stratford (2012) points out that often headship requires skills in management and capacities in leadership not necessarily furnished via typical academic pathways.

Recently published documents by the two largest education leadership unions, the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and NAHT, talk about the imperative for the Government to invest in the school business profession and ensure that they are fully integrated members of the senior leadership structure (Association of School and College Leaders, 2021; NAHT – The School Leaders' Union, 2022). This would appear to align with Marzano's thinking.

Section 3: Research methodology

In establishing an appropriate approach to this research study, consideration has been given to the following:

- Time and resources available
- Access to the necessary data
- The extent to which the study is able to address the issues that underpin the research
- That the approach is rigorous, coherent and consistent
- That the approach will produce reliable and valid data
- That the approach will conform with ethical research standards (Denscombe, 1998)

3.1 Research paradigms

Positivism

Positivism is based on the assumption that there are patterns and regularities, causes and consequences in the social world as well as the natural world.

Positivism adheres to the view that only factual knowledge gained through observation, including measurement, is valid. Study and investigation are limited to data collection and interpretation in an objective way.

Interpretivism

The interpretivist paradigm believes that reality is complex and that a single issue can be interpreted in many different ways. In studying a problem or an issue, this research technique helps us understand how people interpret and interact within their social environment.

This research study uses historical facts, existing knowledge, and new data to establish a set of evidence-based findings and for these reasons has an element of positivism.

However, some of the conclusions and recommendations will be of an interpretive nature, in particular the analysis of qualitative responses and participant contributions.

3.2 Participants

The sample includes 234 school business professionals (SBPs), 32 headteachers, nine governors/trustees and seven sector leaders representing NAHT, the Association of School and College Leaders, the Chartered College of Teaching, the National Governance Association, the Education Policy Institute, Public First, and the former National College for School Leadership. All participants operate in the English state education system. Participants were recruited via email invitation using the Institute of School Business Leadership networks with full consideration for the General Data Protection Regulation. The diverse sample included school business professionals from each school type within our system including community schools, academy trusts and diocesan schools.

A total of 282 individuals participated in this research.

Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Chester's board before approaching participants. The study was advertised through emails sent via the Institute of School Business Leadership to all relevant stakeholder groups including members, regional groups, and national representative bodies. Participants were self-selected.

3.3 Materials

The primary outcome measures the cause of any barriers to a joined-up approach to leadership in education and the extent to which pedagogy, governance and business functions operate in silos. The secondary outcome measures sector perception of the SBP as a fully accepted and integrated member of leadership structures in schools and trusts.

3.4 Approach

Quantitative surveys and qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with SBPs, headteachers, governors, and education representative bodies. The quantitative surveys used a standardised questionnaire to measure perceptions related to the relationship between each of the pillars of education leadership (pedagogy, business, and governance) across a sample of education professionals (275) from both maintained and academy settings. The qualitative interviews used a standardised questionnaire approach to probe further into sector perceptions using a smaller sample of leaders from the key education sector representative bodies.

SBPs as integrated members of the senior leadership team (SLT)

A similar approach was deployed to assess the perceived level of SBP integration on the SLT in both schools and trusts.

3.5 Procedure

Following a pilot phase for both the survey questionnaire and interviews, where the reliability and interpretability of responses were tested, further potential participants were invited to participate in an online survey using SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com). The survey consisted of multiple-choice questions regarding context, role, seniority, strategic participation, inclusion in key meetings and investment in continuing professional development. A smaller sample was then invited to participate in a face-to-face interview.

For this correlational study, the aim was to assess the primary hypothesis of the existence of barriers to a more inclusive and integrated approach to school leadership.

In designing the questionnaire, care has been taken to create valid and reliable (Denscombe, 1998) questions that address the research objectives, by placing them in a useful order and selecting an appropriate method for administration.

Each of the research instruments used is designed to ensure:

- **Reliability:** how consistently the method measures something, in terms of internal consistency or test-retest reliability
- **Validity:** how precisely the method measures something, in terms of construct or criterion validity

In defining a representative sample population, school leaders have been invited to participate from all school types, phases and regions. All relevant education sector bodies were invited to participate. The approach has been both consistent and uniform.

The two primary sources of data collection included:

- **Qualitative semi-structured interviews** to obtain data expressed in words and analysed through interpretations and categorizations.

The semi-structured interviews were designed to ensure consistency in the themes being covered, but some flexibility to probe further was necessary and appropriate.

- **Quantitative researcher-administered questionnaires** to obtain data expressed in numbers and graphs, analysed through statistical methods.

Questionnaires, conducted via SurveyMonkey, were used to help ensure easy access and administration for respondents, to ensure representative reach, to facilitate the highest possible response rate, and to ensure consistency and comparability of data.

All qualitative questionnaire participants were advised that the survey would take a maximum of 30 minutes and that responses would remain anonymous.

Participants involved in the quantitative interviews were offered the option of anonymity and full control for the removal or redacting of statements.

In order to ensure robust scrutiny of the data, the following strategies were employed:

- Procedures for identifying and removing outliers
- Data transformations to normalise distribution, i.e. bell curve
- Compensation strategies for overcoming missing values, i.e. incomplete questionnaires
- Comparison tests

3.6 Data collection

As qualitative and quantitative questionnaires were the primary data-gathering instruments for the research, a semi-structured interview was designed to assist with a deeper understanding of key themes and latitude to probe and seek further clarification where appropriate. A qualitative survey was developed to ensure perspectives from a larger sample.

3.7 Conducting the fieldwork

All fieldwork involved either interviews or survey questions with various categories of respondents from participating school leaders and governors/trustees.

3.8 Semi-structured interviews

The choice of semi-structured rather than structured interviews was employed to provide some flexibility when engaging with a range of participants whilst ensuring consistency with the themes to provide data collection comparability. The interviews were recorded to secure an accurate account of the conversations. Every recording was given a unique file name and stored in a secure digital archive.

3.9 Surveys

A survey comprising 30 questions was used to ensure the views of a larger representative sample could be collated, analysed, and used to help triangulate and validate other findings.

3.10 Literature and research sources

This was important to supplement as well as to compensate for the limitations of other methods. Literature and research evidence acts as a method to cross-validate information gathered from interviews and questionnaires.

Sources were searched from Google, Google Academics, National College for Teaching and Leadership archives, Department for Education publications, and the University of Chester library. This included:

- Relevant existing literature
- Empirical research
- Theoretical papers
- Policy papers

Section 4: Analysis of findings

The principal sources of data collection include a qualitative survey with a series of multiple-choice questions exploring perceptions across a range of school leaders including school business professionals (SBPs), headteachers, and governors/trustees from a mixture of settings, phases and geographic locations; and then a series of semi-structured one-hour interviews with representative body leaders aimed at a deeper dive into the root cause of existing perceptions.

4.1 Qualitative survey

The survey was circulated across trust, headteacher, SBP and governor networks. Although the SBP community is much smaller than other education leader/governor communities, SBPs responded in much greater numbers (82%). We must therefore recognise both the participant bias within this research and the extent to which the subject of joined-up leadership matters to SBPs.

It should be noted that for the purposes of this research, a headteacher and a CEO role are interchangeable. Whilst there are several outliers in the system, the majority of CEOs come from a headteacher background. The research recognises that this is likely to change over time.

Table 1: Make-up of SBP participants

School Business Professional Generalist, maintained primary	23.50%
School Business Professional Generalist, maintained secondary	7.69%
School Business Professional Generalist, single-academy trust (SAT)	12.82%
School Business Professional Generalist, multi-academy trust (MAT)	14.10%
School Business Professional Specialist, maintained primary	2.99%
School Business Professional Specialist, maintained secondary	3.42%
School Business Professional Specialist, single-academy trust (SAT)	0.85%
School Business Professional Specialist, multi-academy trust (MAT)	8.12%
Executive Trust Leader – member of central team (FD, COO, CFO)	26.50%

Interestingly, the highest number of respondents came from the two extremes of the SBP community, primary maintained generalists (23.5%) and MAT executive leaders (26.5%).

Table 2: Make-up of headteacher/CEO participants

Headteacher, maintained primary	6.25%
Headteacher, maintained secondary	6.25%
Headteacher/Principal, single-academy trust (SAT)	6.25%
Headteacher/Principal, multi-academy trust (MAT)	25.00%
CEO, single-academy trust (SAT)	0.00%
CEO, multi-academy trust (MAT)	56.25%

MAT headteachers and CEOs demonstrated the highest levels of engagement in this survey. Community school leaders showed some hesitancy.

Table 3: Make-up of trustee/governor participants

Governor – primary	22.22%
Governor – secondary	0.00%
Trustee – single-academy trust (SAT)	11.11%
Trustee – multi-academy trust (MAT)	66.67%

Again, MAT trustees demonstrated, by some margin, the highest levels of participation in the research; however, an encouraging 22% of primary governors also participated.

4.2 Quantitative survey findings

4.2.1 School business professional responses

The vast majority of respondents have been practising SBPs for more than five years. Only two per cent are new to the profession.

Whilst the majority of the SBPs surveyed (70%) come from out of the sector, a healthy 30% are home-grown.

More than half of the respondents state that they are paid less than their assistant head colleagues.

If qualifications are to be used as a proxy for equal pay, then this data suggests a mismatch between pedagogical and non-pedagogical leadership remuneration. More than 70% of the SBPs surveyed claim to have a qualification to at least NVQ level 6 (degree or greater), yet more than 50% are being paid less than their teacher (senior leadership team) counterparts.

More than half of the SBPs surveyed suggest that they have not spent time explaining their role to senior leadership team (SLT) colleagues or governors. This suggests that SLT and governor interpretation of the role must come from somewhere other than the postholder. Despite this, the majority of governors and trustees responding to the survey suggest they have a very good understanding of the SBP role (see 4.4.3).

This is at odds with the SBP respondents who in 70% of cases suggest other school staff and governors do not understand the skills, knowledge and experience SBPs bring to school operations.

Only 13% of the survey participants felt that other colleagues (including the SLT) in schools or trusts understand the professional development journey of an SBP.

Only 32% of respondents believe SLT colleagues recognise and understand SBP qualifications. A much greater number (56%) believe headteachers have a better understanding, but this still leaves 44% who have less confidence in their headteacher's understanding. The results for governors and trustees were similar to those of SLT colleagues, with 40% of respondents saying they believe their governors do recognise their qualifications.

Only 31% of respondents suggested they never feel technically out of their depth.

70% of practitioners still look to their local authorities or external providers for help and support in areas that typically form part of the SBP role. Only 19% never do.

Most SBPs believe headteachers and CEOs would not seek external support in the areas of finance, HR or estates before first consulting with them. This view is consistent with headteacher/CEO and trustee/governor responses to the survey.

81% of the SBPs surveyed claim they are members of their senior leadership team. However, 19% claim they are not.

In terms of the number of SLT meetings attended by SBPs, only 60% attend all meetings, with nearly 30% attending fewer than 50% of the meetings.

The principal reason for not attending an SLT meeting was not being invited (73%). This suggests that attendance cannot be taken for granted and requires an invitation. This is not consistent with other SLT colleagues who would assume automatic attendance.

15% of SBP respondents claim they have never led an agenda item at SLT, and 65% only sometimes. Only 55% always attend full board meetings, and 22% never attend full board meetings.

However, more than 80% do always attend finance and audit subcommittee meetings, yet still 11% never do. 75% claim they lead on finance-related discussions.

In most cases, curriculum design discussions tend to include the majority of the SLT, but in 33% of cases, this excludes the SBP.

34% of SBPs feel intimately involved in strategic planning, 37% feel they offer perspectives based on their unique knowledge, but over 25% feel disengaged from strategic planning conversations. Only 10% of the respondents believe that pedagogical colleagues fully understand their role. A greater number (40%) believe their role is well understood by governors/trustees, with a further 50% partially understanding the role.

The majority (81%) of the SBPs surveyed suggest that their performance objectives are set by the head or CEO.

Again, most performance review conversations are conducted with the head or CEO. There is perhaps a mismatch between the number of heads who preside over the SBP performance and objective-setting process but are not always perceived to fully understand the role (see earlier survey responses).

Over 65% of the respondents believe that performance objectives are driven by the priorities in the school improvement plan, with other reference points such as regulatory compliance, financial performance and professional standards being of a secondary order of priority.

55% of the respondents feel they are fully integrated members of the senior management structure. However, this means 45% do not feel they are fully integrated senior leaders.

80% of those surveyed see themselves as professionals; however, 20% still do not. Fewer (60%) feel they are part of a recognised profession with 40% believing they are not part of a unique recognised profession.

When SBPs were asked if those outside of their (professional) community recognised school business leadership as a unique profession, 89% said no.

4.2.2 Headteacher responses

75% of the headteachers believe their SBP possesses a relevant level 6 (degree-level) qualification. Over 20% stated that their SBP does not.

Most headteachers and CEOs (88%) claim to understand the unique skills their SBP possesses.

However, only 55% of the headteachers and CEOs surveyed believe other staff in their organisation understand the skills and experience offered by their SBP.

Headteachers are less confident about their staff's understanding of the typical SBP professional development journey and trajectory. This includes SLT colleagues who will at least have leadership parity with their SBP and often hold more senior positions; in some cases, they may even be their line manager.

Only 19% of headteachers and CEOs claim they would never look beyond their SBP for support in the areas of finance, HR, estates, and procurement, with 25% suggesting they often do. But 83% suggest they would at least first consult with their SBP.

Over 80% of the headteachers and CEOs surveyed claim that their SBP is expected to attend all SLT meetings.

There was an even mix of responses to the question of what justifies non-attendance including "instructed not to attend", "agenda not relevant" or "SBP workload".

Fewer than 40% said their SBPs led SLT meeting agenda items.

65% of the headteachers surveyed claim they always ask their SBP to participate in full board meetings. This means over 30% don't always invite their SBP to attend.

A much larger number (88%) always expect their SBP to participate in finance and audit committee meetings.

Most (79%) agree that SBPs lead finance-related discussions. However, over 10% of the headteachers surveyed claim they lead on these discussions.

60% of respondents suggest that curriculum design discussions include participation by their SBP. The majority of the remaining respondents exclude their SBP.

Most headteachers (75%) believe their SBP is heavily involved in the school's or trust's strategic planning process.

Only 62% of headteachers believe the SBP role is well understood by pedagogical colleagues. However, 80% of headteachers believe trustees and governors understand the role.

85% of headteachers claim they set performance objectives for their SBP, with a similar number (81%) suggesting they lead on the SBP performance review process.

On the question of a reference point for setting SBP objectives, the response is very varied. Answers included the school improvement plan, compliance with regulatory obligations, and school/trust financial performance. Interestingly, national professional standards did not rank highly.

92% of headteachers believe their SBP is a fully integrated member of the SLT.

A similar number (92%) see their SBP as a credible professional, but only 40% think people outside the profession have the same view.

4.2.3 Governor/trustee responses

79% of trustees/governors are confident their SBP is qualified to level 6 in a relevant qualification. Nearly 90% state they clearly understand the unique skills their SBP possesses.

However, only 55% believe other staff in their school or trust understand the skills SBPs possess. Similarly, only 45% are confident other staff including SLT understand SBPs' professional development pathways.

65% of trustees/governors say they often or sometimes look to external providers for support with finance, HR, estates management or procurement, but almost never without first consulting with their SBP.

Almost 90% would expect the regular attendance of their SBP at full board meetings and the same for audit and finance subcommittee meetings. However, only 22% suggest that their SBP leads finance-related discussions at these meetings.

There was a very mixed response, possibly some confusion, as to who is involved in curriculum design discussions. Only in some cases is the SBP involved (32%). However, 67% of trustees/governors claim their SBP is intimately involved in strategic planning.

Only 55% believe the SBP's role is understood by pedagogical colleagues, yet nearly 80% of trustees/governors claim to understand the SBP's role very well.

100% of those surveyed claim the SBP's performance objectives are set by the CEO or headteacher, and all agree the performance review is also conducted by the CEO or headteacher.

On the question of a reference point used for developing the SBP's objectives, the response was again very mixed. The school improvement plan ranked highest (89%), followed by regulatory obligations (79%) and then financial performance (68%).

67% feel their SBP is a fully integrated member of the senior management structure.

79% see the SBP role as a professional, similar to a teacher, doctor, lawyer or accountant. However, 68% are not convinced those outside the sector have the same view.

Whilst 79% see the SBP role as a unique profession, most are not convinced that those outside the sector do.

The responses from the three groups surveyed, covering the three pillars of leadership (pedagogy, business, and governance) suggest some inconsistency related to how the SBP role is perceived, what the role entails, the skills and training required to fulfil the role, and levels of engagement at a strategic level.

Pedagogical leaders and those responsible for governance appear to have a more optimistic view of role recognition, strategic engagement, and inclusion in executive-level planning. SBP practitioners themselves are less convinced they are regarded as equals with other senior leader colleagues; they are less confident about their role in key meetings and do not always believe other senior colleagues are clear about the unique skills and experience they offer their school or trust. There is also little evidence that heads and governors are investing time in helping their institutions understand the critical nature of the work undertaken by SBPs. There is also little to suggest that heads/CEOs and governors/trustees themselves have a clear understanding of the intricacies of SBP functions. There was no mention of SBP professional standards as a reference point for performance management or target-setting and no clear indication that SBP activity was fully explained to governors and trustees.

4.3 The semi-structured interviews

Those interviewed were Nick Brook, Deputy General Secretary, NAHT; Leora Cruddas CBE, CEO, Confederation of School Trusts; Emma Knights OBE, CEO, National Governance Association; Dame Alison Peacock, CEO, Chartered College of Teaching; Natalie Perera, CEO, Education Policy Institute; Professor Toby Salt, former Deputy CEO, National College for School Leadership; Jonathan Simons, Partner and Head of the Education Practice, Public First; and Trevor Summerson, former Programme Director, National College for School Leadership.

The similarity in the responses from each of the respondents was revealing in its own way. Most felt that context was an important factor in responding to the questions. There was consensus regarding the perception of school business professionals operating in smaller single settings as opposed to their counterparts in larger schools or trusts, with influence, professional recognition and status being greater in the larger institutions and greater again in multi-site

contexts. There was also recognition of the breadth of practice and the emergence of new, more specialist roles.

The majority of participants agreed that the school business professional role remained misunderstood, and whilst those closest to the functions of the SBP (headteacher, CEO, relevant governors/trustees) might have a better understanding of the role, many across a school and trust structure remained largely unclear of the SBP responsibilities and levels of accountability.

There appeared to be agreement that in defining the school business professional, we need to take care not to use a blanket term to cover the many diverse versions of the role. There was also recognition that an SBP operating in a one-form-entry maintained primary school performs a very different role to that of a chief operating officer in a multi-academy trust. Furthermore, an SBP in a small primary school operating within a trust would likely have further-diluted influence and autonomy and subsequently be less accountable.

Accountability, influence and professional autonomy are seen to be intrinsically linked. In addition, qualifications and career experience should map to accountability, influence, autonomy, and, in turn, remuneration. Having a seat at the top table for strategic discussions is perceived to be determined by the above. There was also recognition that there are fewer SBPs operating at very senior executive levels than those operating as middle-tier managers within trusts or in standalone settings.

Nick Brook said:

“Some headteachers might find it hard to justify the salary of a highly qualified and therefore highly paid SBP, particularly during a time when there is such a squeeze on school budgets.”

There was unanimity regarding the value of a high-calibre SBP and indeed a view that schools and trusts cannot operate effectively without one.

Dame Alison Peacock said:

“Things have changed immeasurably during the last 10 years, and whilst some teachers don’t fully understand the role of the school business manager, almost all headteachers recognise their importance in today’s system.”

There was also consensus with the view that SBPs should be integral in strategic conversation and planning, the caveat being that in trust environments, those performing local business support functions should not expect to participate in executive-level strategy.

Professor Toby Salt said:

“There is no doubt that headteachers have relied on and value the support offered by effective SBPs, but I do recognise the variability in terms of their strategic role. This has been increasingly the case as the MAT landscape has evolved.”

However, almost all of the interview participants agreed that this is currently not the reality on the ground and that, for a variety of reasons, SBPs are often excluded from key meetings. The perceived reasons ranged from professional snobbery, feeling technically vulnerable or exposed, fearing a loss of control, or in some cases, naivety regarding the value of SBP inclusion.

Leora Cruddas said:

“Whilst I accept that in smaller setting SBPs may not always be included in strategic conversations, in established, well-run MATs, the CFO is always one of the most influential and respected members of the executive team.”

On the question of continuing professional development, interviewees expressed a mixture of views. None of the respondents disagreed that ongoing professional development was important; however, the level of investment for some came down to the return on that investment, the needs of the school or the trust being paramount. There was an acceptance that schools and trusts need to improve their approach to training needs analysis and that it is easy to gravitate to investing in the areas that headteachers and some CEOs better understand, i.e. pedagogy.

The reference points for assessing the training needs of non-pedagogical leaders remain unclear, and this is evident when looking at the qualifications and skills distribution across the SBP workforce. ISBL’s 2020 workforce survey (Armstrong, Creaby, & Wood, 2020) showed that only five per cent of SBPs hold a qualification above NVQ level 6.

All agreed that proper investment in developing a pipeline of high-performing SBPs was crucial for our system, particularly if the reform trajectory is to continue, the view being that there is no current pipeline of high-performing, highly skilled and qualified practitioners available to schools and trusts.

Trevor Summerson said:

“The culture and attitude towards SBP professional development have changed little amongst education leaders over recent years. Although schools value their SBPs, they do not typically prioritise their CPD and very rarely think about succession planning or capacity building in the areas of finance and resource management.”

Some pointed out that in order to address any skills gap in the area of school business leadership, headteachers, other senior colleagues, and trustees and governors also need greater awareness and training in the areas of finance, human resources, procurement, and premises management.

Emma Knights pointed out that:

“running a school or trust effectively starts with good governance, and this can only happen where governors and trustees along with headteachers, CEOs and SBPs have a solid understanding of finance and resource management considerations.”

Natalie Perera said:

“We need to recognise that small maintained schools and multi-academy trusts will have different requirements from their school business professional. Influence and strategic engagement are therefore likely to be very varied across our system.”

Jonathan Simons said:

“It is perhaps unsurprising that there continues to be some confusion of leadership roles and responsibilities whilst the system remains only partially reformed.”

Section 5: Synthesis of findings and literature

“No longer is the business manager an invisible back-office employee who balances the books. The role is highly complex and accountable and the scope of the work wide-ranging and changeable. Education business managers are professionals holding knowledge, skills and ideas that increase organisational capacity, viability and provision and enable other educational leaders to focus on learning and teaching.”
(Starr, 2012, back cover)

Whilst Starr’s assertion is both welcome and encouraging, the feeling on the ground is often quite different. The survey data shows perception variability across the various leadership groups including pedagogy, business, and governance. Senior pedagogical leaders, trustees, and governors are more positive and confident regarding the extent to which all leaders, including SBPs, are considered as equals and fully integrated into strategic decision-making. Whilst most school business professionals see themselves as professionals, many remain unconvinced that others share this view. A high percentage of the SBPs surveyed also feel that leadership colleagues and indeed other school/trust stakeholders understand little about their role or its importance. Key sector leaders interviewed for this research project agree that there is variability in terms of the influence, recognition and understanding of the SBP role. There is consensus that the larger structures, particularly multi-academy trusts, have created senior executive SBP roles such as COO, CFO or FD and that, in these instances, the incumbent does enjoy significant strategic influence and professional recognition.

History tells us that since the mid-70s, when the Conservative Government took early steps to limit local authority control of education, there has been an increasing expectation on headteachers to shoulder the responsibility not only for teaching and learning but also for organisational and operational oversight.

Between 1989 and 2010, whilst headteachers were enjoying newfound autonomy over their schools’ finances, they were still heavily supported by their local authorities which continued to produce the formal accounts for schools under their care.

The promise of increased freedoms through the Academies Act 2010 and subsequent funding agreements then required headteachers to oversee and be fully accountable not only for education provision but also for technical functions including financial planning, accounting, HR, procurement and health and safety.

Headteachers accustomed to having responsibility for all areas of their school operations were now facing the daunting prospect of being under direct scrutiny for technical areas of their operations. The so-called superhero head was then faced with the choice of adopting a more distributive approach to leadership, outsourcing or trying to manage activities for which they have never been properly trained. Stratford (2012) suggests that it is becoming increasingly apparent that headship requires a broader range of leadership and management skills not necessarily provided via traditional pedagogical development pathways. The current National Professional Qualifications Framework (Department for Education, 2020) does little to address a lack of proficiency amongst education leaders in the areas of finance, procurement, HR and change management.

With an increase in complexity and greater scrutiny over non-teaching areas of school and trust operations, headteachers are having to adapt to an environment requiring them to relinquish some areas of responsibility, often to non-pedagogical colleagues. For some, this may feel like a loss of control. Some headteachers may indeed resist seeking the help they need or attempt to keep any help at arm’s length. Too often, governance arrangements are failing to address this headteacher reticence. Carter & McInerney (2020) suggest that trusts are often run by headteachers who have been successful in achieving good results in a single school setting but with little experience in leading complex multi-setting operations. In these circumstances, the governing body trusts the headteacher to lead multiple schools due to their track record and often fails to discharge its oversight, scrutiny and challenge functions.

Armstrong (2021) argues that despite the accumulated evidence that school business professionals alleviate significant workload (Southworth, 2010) from headteachers, it has raised questions about the extent to which education leaders are prepared to relinquish responsibility for the management of complex operational and financial functions.

It is important to point out that in our mixed-economy system, there are pockets where the relationship between the three pillars of leadership – pedagogy, business, and governance – is effective, mature and well established. This is particularly true in strong trusts and some federations. However, whilst the relationship here between executive leaders (CEO, COO, and FD) and the board of trustees might be joined-up and strong, often the same cannot be said of colleagues who work in the individual settings (Armstrong, Brown, & Chapman, 2020).

Section 6: Conclusion

Schools and trusts are complex operations requiring multifaceted teams. Historically, many of the more technical functions (pre-Academies Act 2010) and indeed financial stewardship (pre-Local Management of Schools 1989) were supported or undertaken by local education authorities. In these circumstances, headteachers along with senior teaching colleagues and a small administration team could lead their operations with confidence.

Things changed for some leaders when grant-maintained schools began to emerge and the new autonomy over finances meant that a more qualified cadre of administrators was required to plan, monitor and account for school funds, hence the birth of the bursar (later school business manager) in the state system.

However, during this time, headteachers were not seeking to relinquish any influence or responsibility; they were only just getting used to enjoying new freedoms. By 2010, headteachers were being offered even greater freedoms, possibly without fully understanding the new levels of scrutiny and direct accountability (Carter & McInerney, 2020; Greany & Higham, 2018). The Academies Act 2010 opened the floodgates for schools to exit local authority control. Many again made the move, lured by the prospect of extra cash (Local Authority Central Service Equivalent Grant) and new and unprecedented levels of freedom. However, often there was no personnel change and no proper consideration of the turbulence, workload or complexities for an organisation that would now become a company limited by guarantee, a charity and an arm's-length government body subject to the statutory requirements and accountability frameworks from each of these regulatory bodies.

Yet the data from this research tells us that 12 years since the Academies Act, there remains a high number of schools and trusts that don't properly engage in the role of the school's business leader, don't understand their professional development needs, don't use a reliable reference point to manage or assess performance, and don't include SBPs into important strategic conversations. As the Government's ambition remains to fully academise the English school system (HM Government, 2022), the demands and scrutiny on non-pedagogical areas of school and trust operations are only going to increase.

Additionally, in periods of extreme fiscal challenge (at the time of writing, pressures on the economy include COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, soaring energy prices and high inflation), the sector will be expected to make every penny count, and effective and optimal resource management will be crucial. The literature and evidence suggest headteachers will struggle to do this alone (Armstrong, 2021; Carter & McInerney, 2020; Southworth, 2010).

Rai (2018) sets out the ingredients for strong and effective senior administrator and pedagogical leader relationships, those being trust, communications, showcasing effective collaboration, understanding and sharing values, and empowering each other through mutual professional respect.

The evidence from this research study suggests that several key issues need to be tackled to ensure a properly joined-up approach to school and trust leadership. The following recommendations are designed to address these issues and provide workable solutions.

- A commitment by school and trust leaders (including governors and trustees) to invest in the ongoing professional development of their senior teams, with pedagogical professionals leaning into business and school business leaders leaning into pedagogy
- Government support to encourage a commitment to continuing professional development (CPD) from school and trust leaders, including setting clear expectations of employers and employees (professional standards), providing funding and bursaries, and ensuring equal access to CPD across the system
- A review of the national professional qualifications (NPQ) framework and existing leadership pathways to support the above
- Better overall awareness of complex roles that exist amongst the three leadership groups – pedagogy, governance, and business
- Appropriate representation on the senior leadership team including perspectives from both teaching and non-teaching staff, i.e. the right people around the table
- Acceptance that new levels of complexity require a more diverse workforce with a range of skills and expertise – we need to give headteachers permission not to feel they should own every aspect of school operations
- We need to reduce individual workload burdens by deploying talent to the right areas

The sector's thinking regarding structures is relatively well developed, but the detail that sits behind the roles that support the structure is very embryonic. In an environment where specialist functions are emerging across our system, we perhaps need to do more to understand the requirements of the role, recruit suitable candidates, and manage and monitor performance against well-defined and clearly understood standards of practice.

Recent research conducted by sector bodies including NAHT, ASCL and ISBL suggests a workforce retention crisis. Amongst the concerns are workload, a lack of professional development opportunities, professional recognition and pay.

The Hays recruitment and retention survey (2022) provides further evidence of disquiet across the education profession. The Hays report suggests a high demand for high-performing school business leaders but a lack of supply as perceived by employers. What is unclear are the reference points employers are using to determine the suitability of candidates.

Even if a short supply of highly qualified individuals is only a perception, it begs a number of important questions. Is the solution upskilling the existing workforce, do we need to be recruiting from outside the sector, or are the reference points employers are using misleading? The solution is likely to reside within a combination of these factors.

There is almost certainly an urgent need to develop targeted qualifications for both the existing community and new entrants to the profession.

Furthermore, the evidence suggests there is a very varied understanding of the functions that sit under the school business leadership umbrella. Finance, human resources, procurement, infrastructure, and risk management are all highly technical and complex functions in their own right.

Perhaps the priority is to improve awareness, to give key stakeholders visibility of nationally agreed professional standards and other important practice benchmarks, to signpost to existing relevant CPD programs and qualifications with a proven track record of effectiveness, and to encourage a better dialogue across the pillars of leadership: pedagogy, business, and governance.

Geoff Southworth's 2010 report "School business management: a quiet revolution" talks at length about the value of engaging across the pillars of leadership and the importance of school business leaders being key players in strategic conversations and planning. The report included a section developed by PricewaterhouseCoopers proposing a strategy for increasing the presence of SBPs in the school system. The report identified also identified a number of system-wide cultural barriers including headteachers and local authorities who do not fully understand the SBP role and the benefits it can deliver, headteachers who are reluctant to cede power and responsibility to non-teaching members of staff, local authorities that are resistant, especially if they are concerned about their own services to schools, and governing bodies that act as barriers to change, particularly related to formal collaboration.

Although this report was published before the Academies Act 2010, one could argue that much of what was said then still applies today and is consistent with the findings in this research.

Section 7: References

- Academies Act 2010. (2010). Retrieved from legislation.gov.uk: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/32/contents>
- Armstrong, P. (2016). *School Business Managers: The Negotiation of Professional Identity*. Coventry: National Association of School Business Management.
- Armstrong, P. (2021). School Business Leaders and Principal Time Use in England. In M. Lee, K. Pollock, & P. Tulowitzki, *How School Principals Use Their Time: Implications for School Improvement, Administration and Leadership*. Routledge.
- Armstrong, P., & Ainscow, M. (2018). School-to-school support within a competitive education system: views from the inside. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 614–633.
- Armstrong, P., Brown, C., & Chapman, C. J. (2020). School-to-school collaboration in England: A configurative review of the empirical evidence. *Review of Education*.
- Armstrong, P., Creaby, F., & Wood, L. (2020). *ISBL School Business Professional Workforce Survey Report*. Coventry: Institute of School Business Leadership.
- Association of School and College Leaders. (2021). *A Great Education for Every Child – The ASCL Blueprint for a Fairer Education System*.
- Carter, D., & McInerney, L. (2020). *Leading Academy Trusts: Why some fail, but most don't*. John Catt Educational Ltd.
- Chitty, C. (1989). *Towards A New Education System: The Victory Of The New Right?* London: Falmer Press.
- Denscombe, M. (1998). *The Good Research Guide: For Small-scale Social Research Projects*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Department for Education. (2016). *Educational Excellence Everywhere (White Paper)*. Department for Education.
- Department for Education. (2020, October 13). National professional qualifications frameworks: from autumn 2021. Retrieved from www.GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-professional-qualifications-frameworks-from-september-2021>
- Education (Schools) Act 1992. (1992). Retrieved from legislation.gov.uk: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/38/contents>
- Education Reform Act 1988. (1988). Retrieved from legislation.gov.uk: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/40/contents>
- Fellows, T. (2016). *What Makes a Headteacher 'Executive'? The Role and Responsibilities of Executive Headteachers in England*. Birmingham: National Governors' Association.
- Gillard, D. (2018). *Education in England: a history*. Retrieved from Education in England: the history of our schools: <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/history/>
- Greany, T., & Higham, R. (2018). *Analysing the 'self-improving school-led system' agenda in England and the implications for schools*. London: Institute of Education Press.
- Harris, T., Hodge, L., & Phillips, D. (2019). *English local government funding: trends and challenges in 2019 and beyond (summary)*. Institute for Fiscal Studies.
- Hays plc. (2022). *Skills shortages creating hiring and retention challenges*.
- HM Government. (2022). *Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child*. Department for Education.
- Kreston Reeves. (2020). *Academies Benchmark Report 2020*.
- Ledger, R. (2018). *Neoliberal Thought and Thatcherism – 'A Transition From Here to There?'*. London: Routledge.
- Levacic, R. (2008). Financing Schools: Evolving Patterns of Autonomy and Control. *BELMAS*, Volume: 36 issue: 2, 221-234.
- Marchant, J. (2018). *An exploration into the current opportunities and constraints for career progression into leadership roles for School Business Managers in England*. Henley University.
- Marzano, R. J. (2013, April). *Art and Science of Teaching / The Principal's Role in Hierarchical Evaluation*. *The Principalship*, pp. 82-83.
- Morales, S. (2014). *The Leadership Triangle*. The Voice.

- Morales, S. (2016). *Flavours of Leadership. The Voice*.
- NAHT – The School Leaders’ Union. (2022). *School business leadership in crisis?*
- National College for Teaching and Leadership. (2014). *Governance in multi-academy trusts*.
- O’Sullivan, F., Thody, A., & Wood, E. (1999). *From Bursar To School Business Manager: Re-engineering Leadership for Resource Management*. Harlow: Financial Times/ Prentice Hall.
- Place Group. (2012). *A time and motion study of primary headteachers*.
- Rai, J. K. (2018, April 11). *Exploring the Teacher-Administrator Relationship in Schools: A Workshop to Build and Sustain Relationships*. Retrieved from <https://viurrspace.ca/bitstream/handle/10613/6210/Rai.pdf>
- Southworth, G. (2010). *School business management: a quiet revolution*. National College for Teaching and Leadership.
- Starr, K. (2012). *Above and Beyond the Bottom Line: The Extraordinary Evolution of Education Business Management: The Extraordinary Evolution of the Education Business Manager*. ACER Press.
- Stratford, E. (2012). *A genuine career or impossible heroism? Experiencing the role of the Head of School: an Australian case study*. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 34:3, 225–238.
- Syed, M. (2019). *Rebel Ideas: The Power of Diverse Thinking*. London: John Murray Press.
- The NHS Confederation. (2007). *The challenges of leadership in the NHS*. London: The NHS Confederation.
- Whitty, G. (2009). *Marketization and Post-Marketization in Education*. In A. Hargreaves, A. Lieberman, M. Fullan, & D. Hopkins, *Second International Handbook of Educational Change* (pp. 405–413). Dordrecht: Springer.



Copyright © 2022 Stephen Morales.

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
University of Chester for the degree MA in Educational Leadership.

Published August 2022 by the Institute of School Business Leadership.