

Helping secure a brighter future for our children

A blueprint for school business leadership practice



Foreword

I am very pleased to write this foreword for ISBL's Blueprint for school business leadership practice.

The nation's education system continues in a period of significant change and evolution. The Academies Act 2010 with the opportunity for state-maintained schools to convert to academy status has been taken on by the significant majority of secondary schools but only a minority of primary schools and also with significant regional variations. Further development is anticipated in the coming years.

School business leaders, working in both maintained schools and academies, have an increasingly important and valuable role to play. The development of new structures, collaboration, and support systems working together in families of schools creates increased demands and opportunities.

As Chair of ISBL Trustees, I see the contribution of all involved in education – governance, teaching and learning, senior leadership, and school business leadership – working closely together, providing support and challenge to secure the brightest possible future for our children. They deserve this from us.

The ISBL Blueprint lays out the Institute's vision, the critical task of optimising school resource management and our ambition for school business professionals as world-class leaders through ISBL's professional standards, personal development programmes and ethical leadership.



Stephen Lester

Chair of Trustees

Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL)

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1. Introduction

The business leadership profession is operating in a highly politicised environment, a mixed economy of provision and significant ongoing change as our system continues to evolve.

ISBL is not advocating in favour of a particular education delivery model; however, there is mounting evidence that groups of schools working together are operationally more resilient, enjoy the benefits of economies of scale and are better placed to develop progression opportunities for their staff.^{1 2 3}

The most important consideration in the deployment of school business professionals and business leadership more broadly is the extent to which the management of resources is optimised to improve the life chances of children.

We also cannot ignore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our education system. As society emerges from the grip of this deadly virus, things will inevitably be different. We will need to invest heavily and for a prolonged period in recovery. The ongoing role of technology and the value of remote learning will be heavily debated, and the way we design and configure schools for the future may well change.

At the time of writing (March 2021), the Conservative Party still has the largest ruling majority since the mid-80s, and despite the disruption caused by the pandemic, it is likely it will forge ahead with its education policy reform plans.

With this backdrop, whilst we will need to ensure agility and inclusivity with our approach to supporting the many versions of school business leadership practice, we cannot ignore the complexity of the challenges ahead.

- We need to be unapologetic about the expectations we set of the profession.
- We need to ensure employers understand what strong business leadership looks like (ideally using professional standards as the reference point).
- We need to ensure qualifications are fit for purpose and well understood by the entire sector.
- We need to invest in the ongoing development of this critical workforce.
- We need to develop the capacity and imagination to respond to unexpected crises.

This blueprint sets out the important considerations to ensure the ongoing development of a critical workforce with the capacity, skills and capabilities to support a range of education organisational structures.



Stephen Morales
Chief Executive Officer

Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL)

1 National Association of School Business Management; Optimus Education; OEE Consulting, 2016

2 Muijs & Sampson, 2021

3 Tuckett, 2021

1.1 The continuous cycle of sector-led self-improvement



Figure 1: ISBL sector-led self-improvement cycle

ISBL's role within the education sector

Professional bodies are important in any sector for a number of reasons: members enjoy the associated status, they improve their opportunities and chances of career progression, they tie into a network of fellow professionals, they have access to information on education sector developments, and their understanding of the key issues facing our system is kept fresh and current.

Professional bodies in any sector have a crucial role to play in making sure their members can seize opportunities but also squarely confront challenges.

It is important to point out that the role of a professional body, whilst complementary, is very different to the role of a representative body.

Professional bodies are dedicated to the advancement of the knowledge and practice of professions through developing, supporting, regulating and promoting professional standards for technical and ethical competence.

Representative bodies or unions, on the other hand, are associations of workers in a trade, group of trades, or profession, formed to protect and further the workers' rights and interests.

Both are important but perform very different functions.

It is important to point out that, unlike in other sectors, ISBL is the only dedicated School Business Leadership professional body.

The increased profile of the school business professional and its critical role in school operations management and strategic resource-planning is now undisputed. With this new high profile comes greater opportunity, but this also means greater scrutiny and direct accountability.

Despite a sometimes-popular perception, professional bodies are the exact opposite of elitist or exclusive; they help remove the glass ceiling on opportunity for all. Access to opportunity and a commitment to ongoing self-improvement irrespective of one's starting point are at the core of their existence.

"The role that professional bodies play within social mobility is complex. Their role to set standards, by its very nature, inhibits access to the unqualified. But their role to promote education, career choices and to widen membership routes both opens up and propels the careers of all."

(Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB), 2015)

2. ISBL's mission, vision and values

2.1 Our mission

ISBL is the only dedicated professional body for school business practitioners. ISBL is committed to the continuous improvement and leadership development of practitioners. We act to ensure the suitability, sufficiency and sustainability of the school business profession, and we advocate for its enhanced status.

2.2 Our vision

To see school business professionals having the greatest possible positive impact on our education system at every level.

2.3 Our values

Integrity	We operate according to a code of practice demanding the highest ethical standards, and we set expectations of ourselves and our members commensurate with those expected of other highly respected professions
Inclusivity	We strive to provide services and development opportunities for all education professionals involved in school business activity
Impartiality	We have no political leaning or bias
Insight	We speak from a position of authority, which is based on a well-founded understanding of resource management in education

2.4 Our focus areas

Our four focus areas and associated aims are as follows:

Professional competency and sector assurance

- **develop** appropriately qualified, skilled and experienced practitioners
- **encourage** all practitioners to be well informed and fully engaged
- **enable** our members to stand up to scrutiny, be highly accountable and work within a strict code of conduct

Professional recognition

- **promote** the role amongst all key stakeholder groups
- **champion** school business professionals (SBPs) as credible and highly effective senior education leaders
- **facilitate** professional growth and career opportunity

Professional development

- **oversee** a portfolio of high-quality qualifications linked to ISBL professional standards
- **curate** courses, training and academic programmes of study that help improve practice
- **deliver** high-quality and relevant events, conferences and workshops, both virtual and face to face

Professional voice (conduit between policy and practice)

- **review** relevant education policy, sector guidance and legislation
- **consult** with key stakeholders (including government) and practitioners on the implications of new policy, guidance and legislation
- **advise** key stakeholders (including government) on the both the impact and implementation of new policy, guidance and legislation

3. System considerations

3.1 Effective resource management at the heart of what we do

The role of a school business leader is to support the operational needs of educational establishments in a generalist, specialist or executive capacity. Evidence tells us the quality of leadership is directly linked to outcomes for children.⁴ Effective SBPs lead from the front in ensuring the optimal use of available resources and rigorous safeguarding of assets through diligent processes and efficient systems.

This aligns with the seven characteristics of efficient schools and trusts identified by recent Department for Education (DfE) research:

- 01 Has a **strong governing body and leadership team** that challenges spending
- 02 Deploys the workforce effectively, with a focus on **developing high-quality teachers**
- 03 Uses evidence to determine the **right mix of teaching and education support** staff
- 04 Has a **skilled school business professional** who takes on a leadership role
- 05 Good use of **financial benchmarking information** to inform spending decisions
- 06 Part of a **school cluster** to share expertise, experience and data, and access economies of scale when making shared purchases
- 07 **Manages down back-office and running costs** through better procurement

This is also at the heart of the Education and Skills Funding Agency's areas of interest:

The right structures

This includes clarity about roles, including members being 'eyes on, hands off'. A good skills mix, mindful about concentrations of power, and establishing a scheme of delegation.

Relationships

For example effective management of conflicts of interest, maintaining a register of interests and buying at cost from related parties.

Money and oversight

This includes how the budget is integrated to curriculum/wider business plan. What does the internal checking of systems and controls look like?

Robust decision-making

What does the decision-making process look like where, for example, deciding upon executive remuneration?

3.2 Strategic financial planning and integrated curriculum and financial planning (ICFP)

We firmly believe that embedding a robust approach to integrating financial planning with curriculum design is fundamental to a school's or trust's sustainability and success. ICFP is a well-rehearsed concept that supports schools' financial and resource management planning and ensures it is directly linked to curriculum delivery aims and outcomes.

ICFP also helps assist schools and trusts in taking a holistic approach to resource management. It aims to quantify any areas of inefficiency within a school, diagnose the causes and then enable informed and collaborative decision-making.

⁴ Day, et al., 2009

3.3 School Resource Management Advisers (SRMA)

ISBL has lobbied the Government for several years to extend National Leaders of Education status to the SBP community using a comparable and appropriate designation. The School Resource Management Adviser (SRMA) initiative has afforded school business leaders the opportunity to share their skills and experience to support other schools and trusts and operate as trusted and valued system leaders.

As highly skilled practitioners, SRMAs have provided impartial, expert business support to schools and academy trusts. This support has included advice on how to make best use of both revenue and capital resources, how to deploy staff and leaders most effectively, how the right organisational structures can make a significant difference to a school's or trust's performance, and support in developing robust governance arrangements.

By working closely with the Department for Education, it remains an ISBL ambition to see senior school business leaders operating as system leaders afforded a formal designation that mirrors National Leaders of Education and Governance.

3.4 Financial assurance

Financial assurance for maintained schools is overseen by local authorities (LAs). Academy trusts, however, are independent charitable companies, also classified by the Office for National Statistics as central government public sector bodies. While academies are responsible for their own financial management, they are subject to public standards of accountability. The Department for Education, rather than the Charity Commission, is the principal regulator of academies and is responsible for overseeing their compliance with the financial accountability framework and with charity law.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) oversees the arrangements that provide Parliament with assurance that academies operate to high standards of propriety and regularity.

ISBL believes it is important to maintain a reasonable balance between academy trusts' independence and the obligation to properly account for public money. We also believe that the level of rigour being applied to academies should extend to all LA-maintained schools. Accountability arrangements should be proportionate and consistent across the entire state-funded sector.

We understand the complex and often overwhelming nature of the financial assurance framework, but we believe it is a necessary assurance and control system.

We continue to work closely with government agencies including DfE and ESFA to ensure the right balance between appropriate levels of accountability and unnecessary administrative burdens.

Our work extends to Better Financial Reporting, Automation, the Accounts Direction, Chart of Accounts, SORP, the Academies Financial Handbook and Whole of Government Accounts.

We continue to develop our range of resources and tools that will help the sector navigate its way through this important area of financial governance and compliance.

3.5 Funding

ISBL recognises that the distribution, efficient use and effective deployment of public funds is fundamental to securing a world-class education system. We understand the moral and ethical responsibility school business professionals have in safeguarding and appropriate deployment of resources.

ISBL supports policy developments that will ensure: all schools, colleges and nurseries are sufficiently, and sustainably, funded to ensure delivery of a high-quality education to every learner; and that funding for additional needs will be adequate to cover costs without depleting other sources of revenue.

Fit-for-purpose funding arrangements should provide the following:

- Adequate funding for all schools by removing the differentials that persist between local authorities
- Meet the costs, in full, of special educational needs and disability (SEND)/high needs provision through dedicated funding
- An adequate post-16 per-pupil funding rate
- A long-term strategy to determine and protect education revenue funding
- A long-term strategy to determine and protect education capital funding to ensure a fit-for-purpose school estate
- Independent statistical analysis relating to school funding
- Adequate investment in the development of the education workforce

4. Our ambition for the school business leadership profession

4.1 A world-class workforce

ISBL aims to provide ongoing support in the development of the school business leadership professional community demonstrating a calibre of practice that is the envy of other progressive global education systems. We aim to exemplify best practice, be at the leading edge of innovation and help develop an unrivalled talent pipeline.

We aim to ensure schools and trusts across our system have access to a highly competent and appropriately qualified workforce.

4.2 Increasing the profile of school business professionals (SBPs) and the importance of joined-up leadership

The education leadership community comprises many diverse and indeed sometimes unique roles. For many years, education leadership was viewed only through the prism of pedagogy.⁵ Education policy reforms over the last two decades have seen the emergence of a new group of leaders, not with an instructional background but with experience in finance, estates, HR, IT, risk management and compliance. The Academies Act in 2010 further accelerated the prominence of this new cadre of leaders and catapulted many school business professionals into senior executive roles.

However, whilst some school business leaders have enjoyed new-found status and influence, for many, particularly those operating outside the academy sector, recognition and inclusion as a senior leader remains a challenge.⁶ ISBL will continue to campaign for **all** [suitably qualified and experienced⁷] school business professionals to form part of the senior leadership team at either a local or a trust level. This is not to downplay pedagogy but rather to ensure all leaders, including SBPs, are fully sighted on the key drivers for resource allocation and staff deployment. This is part of our ongoing commitment to promoting joined-up leadership across our education system, where pedagogy, business and governance work seamlessly together.



Figure 2: The three pillars of school leadership

Embedding SBP professional standards⁸ into the consciousness of head teachers, CEOs, trustees and governors will help ensure schools and trusts recognise the value of joined-up leadership, the importance of having the right people at the table and the need to deliver high levels of competency across the pillars of pedagogy, governance and business.

⁵ Morales, 2020

⁶ Armstrong & Rayner, 2020

⁷ According to context and complexity

⁸ Institute of School Business Leadership, 2018

4.3 Ensuring access and opportunity for all

There are many versions of school business leadership, some supporting a local context, some operating across a trust and some specialising in a technical discipline. All are critical to our system. There are circa 11,000 practitioners operating across the system⁹ at very different levels with different qualifications and a mix of experience¹⁰. It is therefore important that the portfolio of qualifications available to the SBP community responds to these diverse needs. At an executive leadership level, ISBL will continue to lobby for reforms to the national professional qualifications (NPQ) framework to ensure sufficient focus on technical and strategic finance (including procurement), risk management, human resource management, infrastructure and estates management.

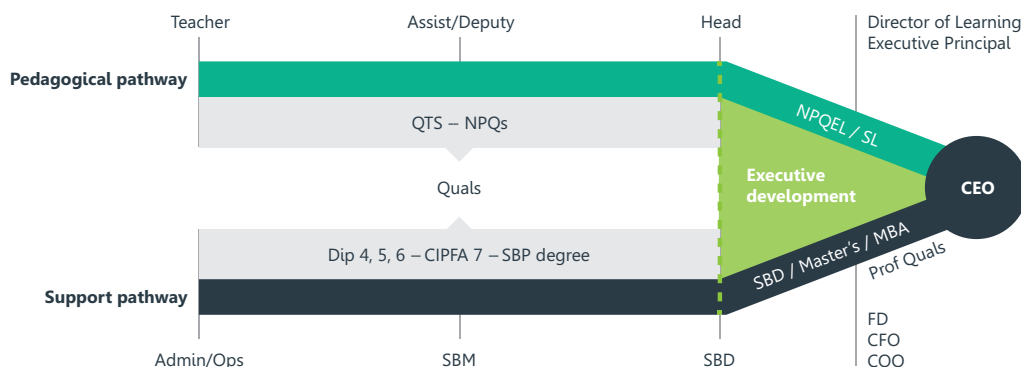


Figure 3: Existing leadership pathways in England's education system

4.4 Engaging with our professional community

Since lockdown measures were introduced in March 2020, ISBL has been hosting a regular virtual meeting with representatives from over 60 SBP regional groups. This regular meeting has allowed the regions to share experiences on the ground; ISBL to provide ESFA, DfE and policy updates; regional chairs to share concerns raised by their members; and ISBL in turn to take these concerns back to officials and ministers.

Regional group chairs have expressed a keen interest in more formal arrangements that would help facilitate ongoing dialogue across the regions and ensure a more consistent approach/better access to professional development opportunities, along with the development of a single coherent narrative (voice) for SBP practice and a clear route into government.

Focus areas

Regional groups have agreed to coalesce around possible solutions to the key challenges facing the profession:

- Access to continuing professional development (CPD)
- Increasing engagement
- Representation (professional voice)
- Workload
- Succession
- Diversity

Access to CPD is varied due to a number of factors including available funding, relevant programmes and content, support from senior leaders, and the time commitment. With very few funded pathways, apprenticeships are an attractive alternative; however, access to the levy is not always straightforward or well understood.

ISBL enjoys a seat on many relevant DfE consultation panels. These groups include the School and Academy Funding Group (SAFG), Efficiency SAFG, the Academies Finance and Assurance Steering Group, Good estate management for schools (GEMs), the ESFA Financial Reporting Programme Board (FRPB) and the Advisory Group on Governance (AGOG). There is no impediment to regional group representatives actively participating in these groups, and we will do more to encourage this.

We remain committed to engaging with groups representing all three pillars of the leadership triangle – business, pedagogy and governance – and at every level from the local school context to central teams and trust boards. As set out in section 4.2, we remain strong advocates of the power of joined-up leadership.

⁹ Department for Education, 2018
¹⁰ Armstrong, Creaby, & Wood, 2020

4.5 Developing a succession pipeline

The ISBL workforce survey¹¹ provides evidence of an ageing workforce, with many practitioners approaching retirement age. ISBL aims to support the development of a succession pipeline through a number of activities:

- Identifying and nurturing talent within local networks, schools and trusts
- Supporting aspiring school business leaders via short-term work placements
- Assisting established and developing SBPs through the development of a national mentoring programme
- Creating clear internal career pathways
- Being more vocal about the SBP role within school settings and at external events
- Making sure governors, trustees and head teachers are sighted on professional standards and the value of effective resource management

ISBL aims to mobilise a team of SBP advocates using willing practitioners from the regions and other known networks including Fellows, the ISBL Advisory Panel, the SRMA community and the DfE Schools Commercial Team network.

We will continue to develop our approach to SBP engagement (beyond our membership) through the following channels:

- Discussion forums
- Social media
- Podcasts
- Webinars
- Round-table events
- National events
- Trade press publications and the media

4.6 Research

Research will continue to be an integrated part of ISBL's proposition. We will continue to conduct our own discrete research and surveys and commission large-scale studies as appropriate. We will build on our existing portfolio of research that includes:

- Leading School Business: Professional Growth and Confidence in Changing Times (Dr Fiona Creaby, November 2018)
- The Negotiation of Professional Identity (Dr Paul Armstrong, October 2016)
- Guidance for Improving School Financial Outcomes (OEE Consulting, May 2016)
- School Business Professional Workforce Survey (ISBL, 2020)
- Exploring Ethnicity: School Business Leadership (Dr Fiona Creaby, 2020)
- Management in Education – School Business Leadership Special Issue (April 2021)
- Barriers to Joined-up Leadership (Stephen Morales, ongoing)

We invest in research to inform action, gather evidence to support strategy and policy direction, and contribute to developing knowledge in our practice.

- It's a tool for building knowledge and facilitating ongoing learning and improvement.
- It's a means to better understand issues and increase awareness.
- It helps build evidence-based arguments.
- It's a means to identify, assess and optimise opportunities for improvement.
- It promotes engagement in relevant literature and data, supports meaningful analysis, and encourages the sharing of information and findings.

At a micro/operational level, research helps solve problems

Problem-solving can be broken down into a number of separate components, each of which requires information and analysis:

- identification of problems
- diagnosis of causes
- identification of potential solutions
- decision for action
- monitoring and evaluation of action and outcomes

¹¹ Armstrong, Creaby, & Wood, 2020

At macro or policy level, it serves one or more of the following functions:

- provides baseline data and a picture of how things are
- helps us understand why things are the way they are
- helps us predict how the system might change under alternative scenarios (modelling)
- helps us monitor and evaluate of the impact of changes

Our research efforts have tackled both macro and micro issues. Whilst we will continue to explore structural and system-level issues, we also encourage our community to share their own practice and innovation. Practitioner-led investigations will lead to a deeper understanding of school business leadership and build an all-important and much-needed knowledge base.

4.7 The value of international collaboration

We believe in looking beyond the local context. An effective self-improving system or system leadership group should be able to demonstrate a genuine curiosity to explore how things are done not only locally, but regionally, nationally and indeed internationally. By strengthening our relationship with other international jurisdictions and through ISBL's work in Europe, the Middle East, Australia and North America, we have been exposed to innovative alternative approaches to school business and have been able to reflect on our own practice. We have learned from those operating in well-established systems and have been able to advise those with fledgling SBL communities.

4.8 Industry-standard quality mark

SchoolMark has been created as an accreditation framework designed to support a drive to improve the quality of leadership across the sector, thereby increasing the quality of the education that is offered to children, through greater efficiency of resources and increasing the academic return on investment. It provides signposting and utilisation of key financial planning tools provided by DfE/ESFA and provides recognition for those schools/academies that are performing to best practice.



Figure 4: Pillars of the SchoolMark quality assurance framework

It has been developed as a response to a need to deepen the links and understanding between operational efficacy and the impact on student outcomes. Initially, the focus is on financial resource efficiency, given the priorities of the Department for Education, and it combines in its simplest form a set standard that we look to accredit against and support through development of a bespoke roadmap to get there. It is based around the three tenets of competency, resource optimisation and assurance as shown here.

5. Professional development and career pathways

5.1 The improvement journey

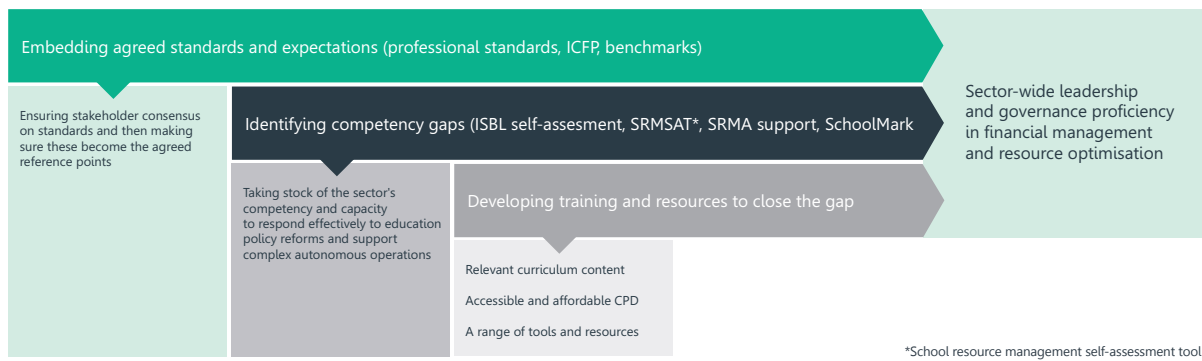


Figure 5: The school business leadership improvement journey

5.2 SBP Professional Standards

In 2015, ISBL launched Professional Standards for the school leadership profession. This followed a period of extensive consultation that led to full endorsement by key sector bodies and the Department for Education.

The standards set out a clear blueprint for effective school and trust business leadership.

They impose no limits or ceilings on professional growth but continue to recognise that SBPs may be at different stages in their professional journey.

As we know, there are many versions of the school business professional; some operating as generalist, some as specialist and indeed now a number of practitioners operating at a senior executive level. These are all accommodated within the ISBL Professional Standards.

Many SBPs are working across multiple establishments and in some cases multiple regions as the emergence of central teams, particularly in trusts, becomes more commonplace.

Professional standards provide the compass with which to navigate a career journey, by setting clear expectations across a range of technical disciplines along a professional growth curve. As well as technical competence, our professional standards cover the requisite behaviours necessary to operate as an effective school business leader.

Professional standards have also been designed to assist employers to support performance management and to develop their teams; and indeed, those responsible for governance may want to use the standards to help frame appropriate challenge and positive critique.

Development through the tiers is subject to the individual's appetite for career progression, increased responsibility and a commitment to professional development.

Tier	Role type	Qualification level
Tier 1	Entrants to the profession and those in administrative roles	Those studying and/or not yet qualified to Level 4 in a school business qualification
Tier 2	Generalist in single-site schools or specialists operating at a local school level	Qualified at Level 4 and maintaining sector knowledge
Tier 3	Generalist or specialist in a school or trust overseeing a team/teams	Qualified at Level 4 or above and actively maintaining and gaining sector knowledge
Tier 4	Senior leader/executive with strategic focus	Qualified at Level 6 or above and actively engaged in developing practice and system leadership

5.3 Underpinning qualifications

We will:

- ensure that, where possible, national SBP qualifications are mapped to and underpinned by the professional standards
- monitor and review existing SBP qualifications to ensure their continued relevance to the sector
- work with training providers, higher education institutions and other stakeholders to help them interpret the various elements of the professional standards and embed them into curriculum content.

5.4 Qualifications and courses

Our education system has changed immeasurably since the early versions of the school business professional emerged, previously referred to as bursars or business managers. The suite of qualifications developed by the National College in the early 2000s was developed at a time when schools were still enjoying significant local authority support in the areas of finance, HR and procurement.

Since the introduction of the Academies Act 2010 and the subsequent associated reduction in local authority capacity, the management of schools and trusts has become increasingly more complex and heavily reliant on internal technical expertise.

In response to greater complexity, higher levels of scrutiny and more direct accountability, ISBL has developed a portfolio of tailored programmes and courses by collaborating with a range of providers. This CPD portfolio is overseen by a national qualifications board and is designed to meet the diverse needs of an SBP workforce evolving and maturing alongside significant education reforms.

SBPs and their employers may find deciding on the most appropriate professional development pathway both challenging and confusing. Course/programme content, the cost, and the time investment are all important considerations. Additionally, employers want reassurance that CPD programmes demonstrate improvements in practice, and already-busy SBPs will only want to commit time to study where it supports their career ambitions and provides relevant new knowledge.

ISBL's Professional Development Guidance¹² sets out a wealth of training opportunities. The range of courses is designed to support the specific requirements of those pursuing an SBP generalist, specialist or executive career. Undertaking a self-assessment against the ISBL Professional Standards will help you identify your training and development needs and decide on appropriate programmes of study.

We continue to ensure that there are national qualifications mapped to the ISBL Professional Standards available to SBPs.

We will continue the work of the School Business Professional Training and Development Board to work with key stakeholders to ensure that we have oversight of the national qualification landscape.

We will identify a range of progression and succession pathways that meet the needs of the many versions of a school business professional.

We will continue to provide advice and guidance to our members on:

- Training opportunities
- Career development
- National qualifications

We will improve the accessibility of professional development information on the ISBL website so SBPs can find and use the information they need.

We will provide a range of training opportunities, from short courses to full programmes, mapped to the six disciplines of the ISBL Professional Standards.

Our professional development provision and advice will be evidence-based, responding to demand and sector needs.

We will continue to provide high-quality, efficiently run training events delivered by expert trainers.

We will continue and increase the engagement and input that ISBL members have in the way we develop, test and refine new training content.

¹² Institute of School Business Leadership, 2021

5.5 Clear career pathways and membership

Mapping qualifications, experience and accountability to roles

There has been long-standing discourse related to the school business profession's status, career opportunity and remuneration. The Institute does not seek to prescribe or mandate particular role descriptions or titles, nor are we imposing salary scales on the sector. However, given our insight and standing as the only dedicated professional body, we believe it is reasonable to offer evidence-based suggestions related to roles, qualifications and experience, accountability, and ultimately, pay.

Our iterative thinking on career profession and remuneration is designed to provide practitioners and the sector with reasonable expectations (using broad ranges) related to job roles, associated remuneration and progression. This can be found in the qualifications and training section of our website.

Professional body membership

We have designed a membership proposition that accommodates the broad church of practice from entry level to executive leadership. Membership provides practitioners with the status and recognition they deserve but equally provides education stakeholders (parents, governors, teachers and policymakers) with confidence that this cadre of professionals have been assessed against professional standards and our rigorous criteria for each of the membership tiers.

We offer seven distinct membership categories across the SBP practice spectrum with specific eligibility criteria:

- Affiliate – non-practitioners or those without sector-specific qualifications seeking to start a career as a school business professional
- Student – entry-level practitioners who possess a relevant NVQ level 2 professional qualification
- Associate – those practitioners who possess a relevant NVQ level 3 professional qualification
- Full – for those practitioners who form part of their school's/trust's senior leadership team and possess a relevant NVQ level 4 professional qualification
- Fellow – for those practitioners who possess a qualification at or above level 6 and can provide tangible evidence of system leadership activity
- Corporate – for organisations wishing to keep abreast of developments across the school business leadership landscape
- Companion – the highest tier of ISBL membership, only attainable by invitation from ISBL's board of trustees, offered to individuals who have made a significant contribution to the evolution of the school business profession or have increased the breadth of relevant research and knowledge

5.6 Fellowship

Fellowship of the Institute is designed to recognise exemplary practice and offers this group of senior education leaders the opportunity to engage meaningfully in system leadership and to make contributions to practice innovation and research.

Fellows are the role models for our profession and beacons of practice excellence.

They provide an important talent pool ready to be deployed to support aspiring colleagues and schools and trusts that can benefit from their unique expertise and experience.

6. Ethical leadership and our code of practice

6.1 ISBL's commitment to ethical practice

We champion high performance in public service, translating our experience and insight into clear advice and practical solutions for the education sector and our own professional community. We fully subscribe to Nolan's Seven Principles of Public Life¹³.

- Selflessness
- Integrity
- Objectivity
- Accountability
- Openness
- Honesty
- Leadership

6.2 Why we believe ethical behaviour is so important

We are members of the Ethical Leadership Commission and fully supportive of the Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education.

The work of school business leaders needs to be trusted by society at large, education stakeholders and other school leaders.

It is expected to be free from personal bias, carried out competently and subject to appropriate scrutiny. It is the principal added value and critical role of the school business leadership profession that requires practice to be underpinned by professional standards, which reinforce high standards of rigour and competence.

Accepting you are bound by high standards of ethical behaviour is a powerful way of ensuring public confidence in your practice.

6.3 ISBL's ethical code

Integrity: this is about being truthful, straightforward and honest, dealing fairly with people and situations; it rules out making misleading or false statements, whether by omission or inclusion of information, either knowingly or without taking care to find out.

Objectivity: the avoidance of bias, whether for personal self-interest or because of pressure from another, and closely allied to independence. This includes a responsibility to escalate concerns in the event of identifying or observing irregularities.

Professional competence and due care: this is about acquiring and maintaining appropriate technical and other relevant skills and competence to perform your work, doing it thoroughly and correctly, on a timely basis, and ensuring that users of your output understand its context and limitations.

Confidentiality: information about organisations and people encountered in the course of your work should not be disclosed, inside or outside the work environment, to anyone who does not have a legal or professional right to it, and especially not to secure a personal advantage for anyone.

Professional behaviour: this is about complying with professional standards and statutory obligations and avoiding actions that might bring the profession into disrepute.

6.4 Our commitment to equality and diversity

We encourage aspiration, ambition and achievement, and we lead by example on equality and diversity.

Equality is surely about being valued for who and what we are. This helps us all thrive without being constrained or hampered by unfair obstacles or placing limitations on progression and growth due to stereotyping.

We also strive towards an SBP workforce that better reflects the community that it serves. Our 2019 workforce survey¹⁴ and 2020 diversity research¹⁵ continues to help inform our thinking, and we will build on this evidence base.

¹³ GOV.UK: The Seven Principles of Public Life, 1995

¹⁴ Armstrong, Creaby, & Wood, 2020

¹⁵ Creaby, 2020

We believe in three anchor points that ensure the ISBL proposition is as inclusive as possible.

Access

Being able to fully engage and participate in all ISBL activity with equal ease and dignity

Treatment

To feel a sense of belonging – a place where we fit in, are welcome and can express ourselves in our own way

Service

Feeling that training programmes, events and resources have been designed with us all in mind

We value diversity – it makes the Institute a more creative place to learn and interact

We celebrate the fact that our members and staff, our partners and supporters, are from different social and ethnic backgrounds, have different sexual orientations, participate in a variety of faiths and have a range of disabilities.

All the evidence suggests that:

- diverse teams make better decisions and produce richer experiences
- listening to different points of view improves how we do things
- valuing our differences, as well as the things we have in common, strengthens inclusion.

We will continue our work with key stakeholder groups on improving equity and diversity in education.

7. Conclusion

This document sets out the context within which we are operating. It describes some of the challenges and opportunities presented by a fragmented system. It also recognises the level of complexity now faced by school business professionals and the imperative to ensure the entire workforce has access to meaningful CPD. It is clear that schools and trusts are stronger and perform better where there is less of a siloed mentality and a joined-up approach to leadership where governance, business and pedagogy work seamlessly together. The blueprint does not seek to influence education reforms but rather sets out the developmental needs of a critical and emerging leadership community.

We recognise there are historic hierarchical constraints to professional growth, status and even pay. Although this is not our core function as an institute, we will continue to contribute to this important area of debate and provide evidence to stakeholder groups making the case to tackle such constraints.

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