

Level 5 ILM Diploma for School Business Leaders

Jo Tillin, School Business Manager, Toddington St George Church of England School

Jo chose to study the Level 5 Diploma for School Business Leaders. She successfully completed the course in 2021.

Jo has worked as the School Business Manager at Toddington St George since 2014. This is a lower school in Bedfordshire with children from Nursery to Year 4 which became an academy in 2013.

Before joining the world of education Jo worked as an accountant in industry, most recently at easyJet for 10 years.



What made you choose to do the L5 ILM Diploma?

As a CIMA qualified accountant and with a business-related degree I felt that I wanted to know more about how to apply these skills in Education. I started my SBM role in 2014 and took the Level 3 course in School Business administration in 2015 so I wanted to build on that with the experience I had built up over a few years. I was also conscious that more and more senior leadership roles were looking for higher level qualifications.

How did you go about getting approval from your line manager to do the programme?

My headteacher was very supportive of my CPD. When I showed her the course and that we could get funding from the local group of schools she was more than happy for me to go ahead.

How did you manage to balance a full-time job and studying?

I am employed 25 hours Term Time Only (TTO), so we changed my working pattern so that I stopped working on Thursdays and these became my time for studying while my children were at school. This helped but there were obviously times at weekends and in school holidays where I had to catch up due to busy times at work. Luckily, my family were supportive and understood when I needed time to study. Working TTO helped as I had a bit more time during the holidays to catchup. Planning the units out helped break it down into chunks that were a bit more manageable too.

What was the most challenging part of the L5 ILM Diploma?

I found it quite difficult working on my own without peers to discuss the topics with. This is one of the downsides of distance learning and I would have preferred a more hybrid approach with some online tutorials or lectures. Luckily, I had a friendly cohort, and we organised an unofficial group to provide support to each other and I found this really helped.

What has been the most rewarding aspect of the L5 ILM Diploma?

It has given me a more strategic understanding of education and schools which has given me more confidence particularly when working alongside other senior leaders in the school.

What would you say to anyone who is considering the L5 ILM Diploma?

Make sure you have support - either from a senior leader in your school, other school business leaders in your area or that peer-to-peer support is part of the training course.

How has the L5 ILM Diploma developed you as a professional?

It has highlighted all the different elements of the school business professional role and areas where you can get advice and help. It has given me confidence to participate in decision making that I wouldn't have been involved in before.

What are the on-the-job benefits of doing the L5 ILM Diploma?

It has helped me to review processes and working practices to replace them with best practice and to bring my organisation with me.

“Don't undervalue your CPD. Professional, well-trained SBLs in schools facilitate the best education for children and ensure maximum impact and value for them. Without the core, backbone of the school (which is often the business/office/premises team) even the best teachers and support staff can't be supported to provide the best for the pupils so don't undervalue yourselves or the tools that you need to move forward.”