EDUCATION EXECUTIVE

ISSUE 163

Supporting business and financial
excellence in schools and academies
September 2021

How to become an effective networker

Learning to thrive in professional networking situations

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Contents

On the cover

Networking is often highlighted as being hugely beneficial in the school business management world –but mingling doesn't come easily to everyone.

Editor's comment

Yet another summer has flown by, and the new academic year has started again; where does the time go?! I hope you managed to enjoy some well-earned time off at some point over the summer holidays, allowing you to hit the ground running, refreshed and ready for when pupils return again. After two of the most challenging academic years in living memory, I think we are all hoping the 2021/22 year throws fewer hurdles in our direction - but, no-one is more experienced at delivering miracles and coming up with solutions to problems than the SBM. Whatever this academic year may bring, I know you will all continue to thrive in the face of adversity and not let your never-ending to-do list defeat you.

We kick off by looking at the issue of sexual harassment in schools, and follow with the latest SEN statistics from the DfE. Kier Glover tells us what it was like starting a new role as an SBM just before the pandemic began, and his hopes for this month, and Samantha Fuell, another SBM who started her first role during the pandemic, shares her experience of being thrown in at the deep end.

After being kept apart for so long, we take a timely look at how to become an effective networker now that things are opening up again, and Val Andrew gives her advice on how CPD can be achieved in the new normal. Talking of the new normal, the WORKING SBM discusses how, after the chaos of the last two years, back to school looks very different this year.

As always, we have our experts on hand to give you top-notch advice; Helen Burge discusses how you can put sustainability front and centre of your procurement process, Simon Hepburn explains how you can bring your community back together again and Sue Edwards tells us how to keep SBM groups functioning during the pandemic and beyond – and we go on to explore how you can join, or even create, your own SBP network.

We consider how flexible working could look in your school, how you can assess your school's ICT needs and how digital learning is changing the role of the teacher. We wrap the issue up with our fun LIVE IT section and Maggie Duncan takes 60 SECONDS to talk to us about what the best colour of a unicorn really is.

We'd love to hear any suggestions you have for the magazine. If you'd like to get involved with *EdExec*, or if you'd like us to cover a certain topic, please do let us know. Contact *eleanor@intelligentmedia.co.uk* or tweet *@edexec* with ideas, opinions or success stories.

ELEANOR POTTER
EDITOR

We want to hear from you!

Is your school doing something wonderful? Do you have an opinion or experience you'd like to share? A story suggestion? Or some advice you'd like to share with your peers? Get in touch – email *eleanor@intelligentmedia.co.uk*

intelligent media

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Contributors

The education sector can be difficult to navigate at times, and those in school business management play a pivotal role in steering schools to success. Tasked with everything from finance and procurement, to HR and admin, you keep the education cogs turning.

Education Executive addresses the most pressing matters faced by SBMs, offering meaningful insights and practical advice – essentially, all you need to run your school. Our contributors, drawn from the *Education Executive* team and sector innovators and experts, offer invaluable business insights from both the sidelines and front line.

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NEWS

The latest news and views from the world of education

Extra cash for Scottish schools to fund free music tuition

Scottish councils are to be given an extra £7m to fund free music tuition for pupils in the coming school year. Schools in some council areas already give pupils individual instrument tuition for free, but others have introduced fees due to budget shortages. The Scottish government has now agreed a one-year deal with council umbrella body Cosla to waive charges to parents. Cash will also be provided to pay for core materials for classes like home economics and drama trips to theatres.

Scottish education secretary Shirley-Anne Somerville said the chance for young people to have the best start in life "should never be limited by a child's ability to pay". Some councils had introduced three-figure charges for individual music tuition in recent years due to budget shortages - and the number of pupils taking lessons dropped as a result. Holyrood's education committee called for fees to be scrapped across Scotland after hearing from young people during an inquiry into the topic. The Scottish government has committed £7m for the 2021-22 school year to waive charges, following a manifesto commitment from the SNP in the campaign for May's election.

Government 'unprepared' for COVID challenges

A report by the public accounts committee states that the DfE struggled to react to events in a timely and effective way in England. It says the failure to set standards for in-school and remote learning meant children 'had very unequal experiences' during the pandemic. In response, the DfE says it 'acted swiftly', and provided extensive support. The report says that, despite being involved in a cross-government exercise in 2016 on dealing with a 'flu pandemic, the DfE was 'unprepared' for the challenges of COVID-19. It suggests there should be a thorough exercise to learn lessons from its early response.
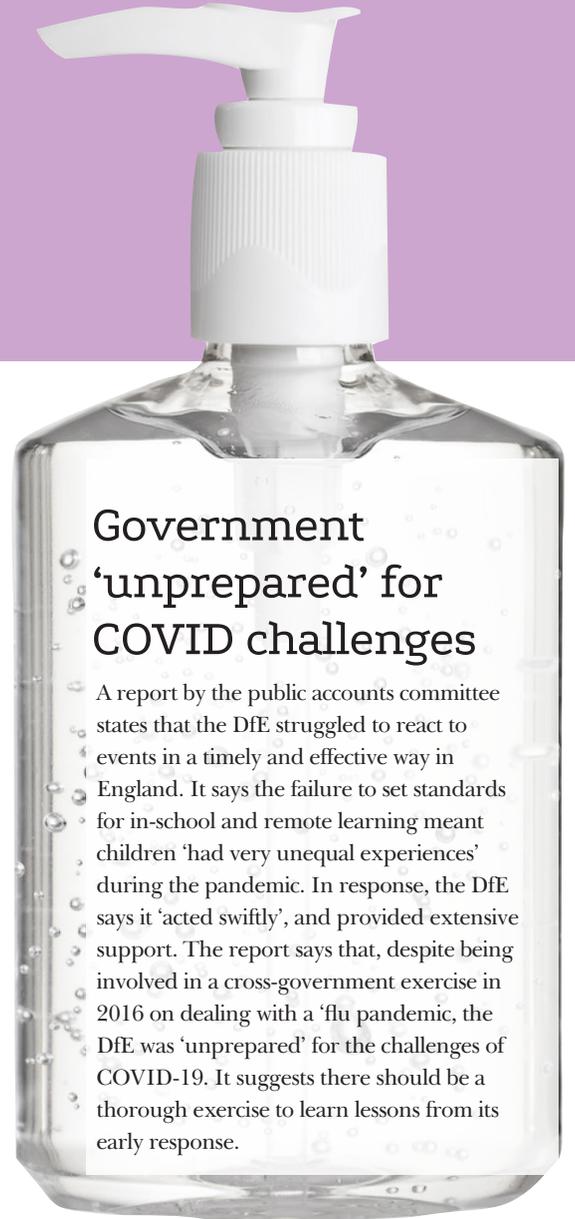
@MandyLeu: So. Work texts and messages at 9pm during the school holidays. My fault for being too available and replying? Or am I right in being a little ticked off??? Do SBLs really ever get a break??? **@sbltwitter**

Everton Free School appoints new principal

A school created by Everton Football Club to deliver alternative educational opportunities – has appointed Steven Baker as its new principal. The appointment comes as Richard Cronin retires from his post as principal after nine years of service at Everton Free School - six of these as principal. Currently the executive headteacher of two outstanding schools in Merseyside, Steven has been in education for more than15 years, the majority of which has been working with children with social, emotional and mental health difficulties.

Everton in the Community created history in September 2012 when it was the first Football Club Community scheme in the country to be awarded funding by the government to open a free school - a ground-breaking initiative for young people across Merseyside.

Now, in his new role at Everton Free School, Steven is looking forward to bringing in his breadth of experience in mental health and wellbeing, helping to enhance the lives of students as they build their futures.

"Everton Free School really stood out from the crowd for me – the work the school does to tailor education to offer alternative opportunities. and hone in on mental health support. is incredible," Steven said. "I'm thrilled to be part of the team now and am looking forward to involving both the club and Everton in the community to help make Everton Free School the very best school it can be."

@SBMinGlosCC: What forms & declarations do you get your staff to fill out annually? I'm trying to get everything boxed off on the first #InsetDay of the new academic year? We are going electronic for all forms this year as well - small steps forward!! #sbltwitter

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MPs call for national register of home-educated children

A committee of MPs is calling for a national register of home-educated children in England, saying there is an 'unacceptable level of opaqueness' surrounding the issue. The commons education committee says it is important to 'get a grip' on the number in home education. It says more data must be collected to ensure all children educated out of school get a suitable education – but home educators say this will increase families' lack of trust in the system.

The MPs' report - *Strengthening Home Education* - says the government does not collect national figures for how many children are electively home-educated, and parents do not have to register the fact with councils. Committee chair, Conservative MP Robert Halfon, said it was "frankly astonishing" that the government was only able to make a "best guess" over the standard of education children schooled at home were receiving.

According to research by the *BBC*, published earlier this month, the number of children registered for home education in the UK rose by 75% in the first eight months of the current school year. It found more than 40,000 pupils were formally taken out of school in the UK between September 2020 and April 2021, compared with an average of 23,000 over the previous two years.

Walsall primary school wins 'landmark ruling' over academy order

A primary school has won what its headteacher has called a 'landmark ruling' at the High Court over attempts to force it to become an academy. Yew Tree Primary in Walsall was rated 'inadequate' by Ofsted inspectors in 2019 and the education secretary said it must become an academy in order to improve. The school challenged the order but the DfE refused to revoke it. A high court judge called the decision "irrational" and quashed the ruling. Governors at Yew Tree said a follow-up Ofsted inspection in October 2019 improved the inadequate rating to 'requires improvement'. Headteacher Jamie Barry said the school had made further improvements and he believes they would have been rated as 'good' in 2020 if inspections had not been suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, the education secretary, Gavin Williamson, refused to revoke the order as the court heard he did not believe the improvements met a definition of being an 'exceptional circumstance'. The judge disagreed and ordered the decision quashed.

@CherylSBM: Been in Jamaica for almost a week and have not engaged with my work emails at all. Result! #BrainBreak #SBLTwitter #SBM

Sexual harrassment: an epidemic in schools

The *Everyone's Invited* revelations, and Ofsted's review of sexual harassment and abuse in schools, has brought the issue of how harassment is dealt with in our schools under the microscope

Following the testimonies from *Everyone's Invited*, which named almost 3,000 schools, more than 1,500 UK teachers replied to a questionnaire from BBC Radio 4's *File on Four* and teachers' union the NASUWT; the survey asked how they felt their schools dealt with incidents of sexual harassment.

More than half said they did not think adequate procedures were in place in their schools to deal with abuse. Of the teachers surveyed, almost a third said they had witnessed peer-on-peer sexual harassment or abuse, and almost one-in-10 said they saw it on a weekly basis. As a result, Ofsted has published an updated education inspection handbook, clarifying how inspectors will assess the way schools and colleges confront sexual harassment, abuse and violence among children and young people.

The update follows Ofsted's recent review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges, which found that sexual harassment has become 'normalised' for children and young people. The report recommended that school and college leaders should develop a culture where all kinds of sexual harassment are recognised and addressed, including sanctions when appropriate.

INSPECTIONS

The changes to the handbook will take effect when routine inspection resumes in September. Schools and college leaders will be expected to assume that sexual harassment, online sexual abuse and sexual violence are happening in and around their schools, even when there are no specific reports, and to have put in place a whole-school approach to address them.

Inspectors will also consider how schools and colleges handle allegations and incidents of sexual abuse between children and young people when they occur. Inspectors will look at the preventative measures schools and colleges have put in place to guard against sexual harassment and abuse, including behaviour policies, pastoral support and the relationships, sex and health education curriculum.

Ofsted will also expect schools and colleges to be alert to factors that increase children's potential vulnerability to sexual abuse, and to understand and address the barriers that could prevent a child or young person from reporting an incident. Where schools and colleges do have not adequate processes in place, it is likely that safeguarding will be considered ineffective; this can, in turn, impact on

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More than half of teachers said they did not think adequate procedures were in place

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inspectors' 'leadership and management' judgement, and the overall grade is likely to be 'inadequate'.

TACKLING THE ISSUE

"The findings from our recent review have revealed just how commonplace sexual harassment has become in schools and colleges," said Sean Harford, Ofsted national education director. "So, even when there are no specific reports, schools and colleges must assume that it is taking place, and plan to address it accordingly. Our updated handbooks are clear about how we will assess the approach schools and colleges have taken to tackle these issues head-on.

"We will expect schools and colleges to have created a culture where sexual abuse and harassment are not acceptable - and never tolerated - where pupils are supported to report any concerns about harmful sexual behaviour and can feel confident they will be taken seriously." ∎

Resourcefully leading change

This year's ISBL national conference is set to see an explosion of professional discussion as we gather to share experiences and collectively consider the inevitable and significant change set to come post-pandemic

With the pandemic having sent a shockwave through the world, we are still feeling the aftershocks as everyone recalibrates to the new normal and welcomes and adapts to the significant and progressive change that has occurred across our working practice.

School business professionals (SBPs) have been the architects of solutions throughout the crisis, leading the developments required to see the agile switch from face-to-face learning delivery to remote and hybrid solutions, ensuring education as a front-line service has remained open, while growing and adapting throughout the pandemic.

LOOKING AHEAD
This year's conference will provide the opportunity for school business leaders to look ahead at what the future of education requires and offer a necessary pause for colleagues to reflect on their strategic priorities.

Much has changed as we emerge into the new academic year and consider our strategic planning and the effective use of school resources to ensure the best possible outcomes for the pupils we serve.

A SAFE ENVIRONMENT
To access the full programme and the complete list of workshops, visit *www.isbl.org.uk/ National-Conference*.

Having now successfully delivered two live, in-person test events over the summer, in Taunton and Portsmouth, we are confident that we can deliver high-quality content in a safe and engaging environment, and feedback from delegates at these events confirms this. ∎

Book your place

Visit www.isbl.co.uk for full details of our conferences and events. The event will provide virtual or physical attendance to suit your needs.

ISBL
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"So nice to get out of my hutch and meet others and have healthy debate and discussion on moving the sector forward. The landscape for education has shifted again, and we need informed managers and leaders to help the sector transition to where it needs to be – ISBL is helping enormously to facilitate this."
Denise Gommo, Huish Academy Trust

SPOTLIGHT ON
SEN STATISTICS

We take a look at the latest data on special educational needs (SEN)
published by the Department for Education

Percentage of pupils with an EHC plan or SEN support, all schools, 2015/16 and 2020/21

● EHC plans/Statements of SEN (percent) (England)
● SEN support (percent) (England)
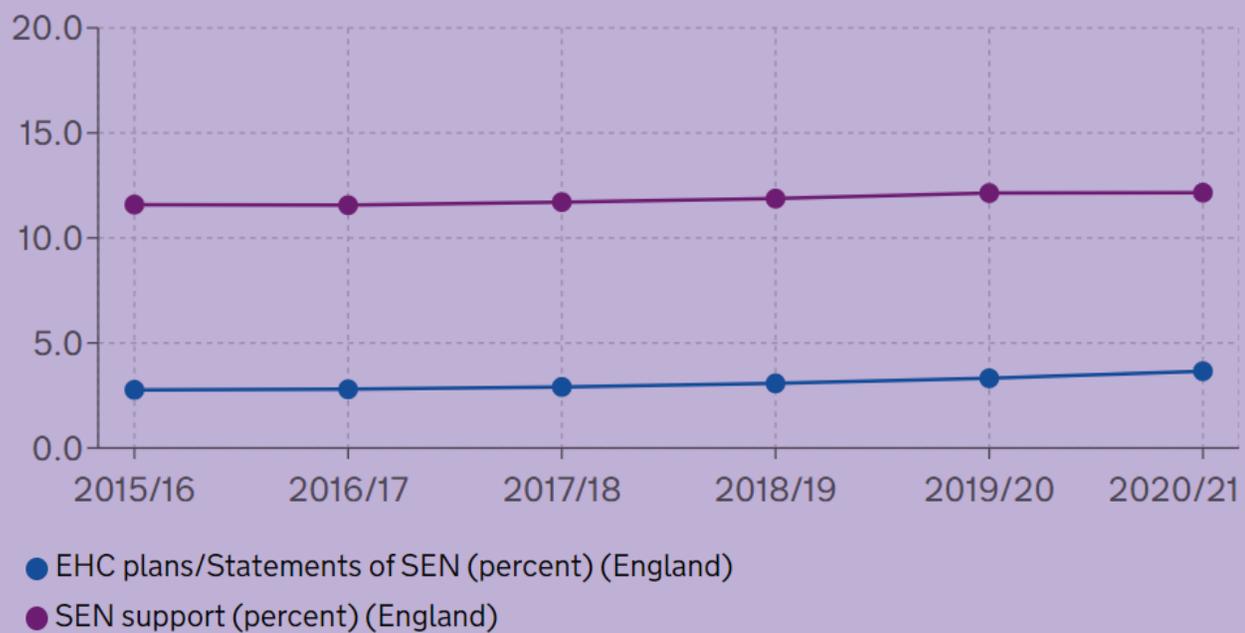
Percentage of pupils with an EHC plan or SEN support by gender, 2015/16 and 2020/21

		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
SEN Support	Boys (%)	65.2	65.3	65.2	64.9	64.6	64.2
	Girls (%)	34.8	34.7	34.8	35.1	35.4	35.8
Statement or EHC	Boys (%)	72.9	72.9	72.9	73.0	73.1	73.1
	Girls (%)	27.1	27.1	27.1	27.0	26.9	26.9

Number of pupils with an EHC plan or SEN support, by type of need, 2019/20 to 2020/21

	SEN Support		Statement or EHC	
	2019/20	2020/21	2019/20	2020/21
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	67,867	70,474	82,847	92,567
Hearing Impairment	17,173	17,067	6,027	6,148
Moderate Learning Difficulty	211,563	203,454	29,592	31,159
Multi-Sensory Impairment	2,647	2,808	965	1,021
Other Difficulty/Disability	45,932	44,592	7,069	7,841
Physical Disability	23,417	22,944	13,371	13,724
Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty	916	825	10,003	9,976
Severe Learning Difficulty	3,001	2,634	30,593	31,300
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	194,111	195,294	39,189	45,191
Specific Learning Difficulty	145,878	145,187	9,947	11,610
Speech, Language and Communications needs	236,960	245,232	42,589	49,530

Number of pupils with an EHC plan or SEN support, all schools, 2015/16 and 2020/21

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
EHC plans/Statements of SEN	236,806	242,184	253,679	271,165	294,758	325,618
SEN support	991,981	1,002,069	1,022,537	1,047,163	1,079,000	1,083,083
Headcount	8,559,540	8,669,080	8,735,098	8,819,289	8,890,345	8,911,887

GREY MATTER

School life in September

KIER GLOVER, school bursar at St John's CE Primary School, Keele, writes about what it was like starting a new role just before the pandemic began, and what he is looking forward to when students return in September

As I write in the school summer holidays, I wanted to share some of my thoughts and expectations on what school life will be like in September from both a school and a business point of view, when the new (and hopefully 'normal') academic year starts.

When I progressed from office administrator, and started my current role as a school bursar, in January 2020, I had some expectations as to what my job might involve. Such expectations were thrown into disarray two months later when a global pandemic completely engulfed school life as we have all come to know it.

Looking forward to September, even though COVID-19 has not gone away, we are hopefully about to commence the first 'normal' school year for two years. For me, there are so many special moments during the academic year; there are inevitably tough times but there are also amazing times each year. Since March 2020, we have missed so many of those amazing times we have all come to almost expect and enjoy each year as school staff and I hope that from September we can recommence such events that give the students and staff a real sense of belonging to their individual school again. This can sometimes just come from all being together, a simple right taken away from us all many times in the last year and a half.

It would be fantastic for simple daily occasions, such as school assemblies, to return and for the whole school to come together rather than being stuck in rigid bubbles and seeing each other through the medium of an interactive whiteboard. The return of events such as Christmas and summer fairs will be such a welcome return to school communities throughout the country. I hope for the special times that parents enjoy - such as sports days and watching nativities - to take place again. I know that, when I think back to primary school, I remember the trips my class went on so I know the children and staff will be looking forward to the return of visiting a setting away from school to enhance their learning.

FACE-TO-FACE

From a personal point of view, I hope September brings the return of networking opportunities such as school business manager conferences held in person rather than on Microsoft Teams or Zoom. As I am still new into the role, I learn so much more by talking to people in a similar job role who I share the same problems with on a daily basis. Networking

> It would be fantastic for simple daily occasions to return and for the whole school to come together

opportunities are vital to me, and something I eagerly anticipate the return of. I think at times you could be forgiven for feeling slightly isolated with your problems in school business, and being able to put a face to a name can provide comfort during the stressful times we face!

I am also somewhat excited by the hope that training courses to develop my knowledge will be in person – I can't be the only one whose mind has started wandering about an hour and a half into a Microsoft Teams training course. I am also a huge fan of a coffee on a course, away from the school office, in peace!

In the 2021/2022 academic year I also hope that schools can see a reduced amount of expenditure on costs related to the pandemic. I have seen a rising amount of expenditure on a wide range of issues, and they always link back to the virus we have all been living with for the last 18 months! I look forward to spending school funds in areas that benefit the children, rather than the expenditure we have all inevitably spent on supply cover, extra PPE and problems such as staff isolating through no fault of their own.

I would like to wish all educational staff the best of luck for the new school year. We have all put in a heroic effort in the last 18 months, especially at times when announcements were made at the last minute, and I know that everyone will continue to be the superheroes that they are in the future. ∎

Thrown in at the deep end

We speak to SAMANTHA FUELL, school business manager at Priestlands School in Pennington, about her whirlwind year in which a global pandemic coincided with her starting her first ever SBM role

So, how did you come to work in the role of school business manager?
I think I'd done the corporate thing all my life and wanted to do something completely different; I'd always thought about becoming a school business manager. I was working at Centrica, and it was going through a massive restructure, when I saw a role advertised at this school, which is where my children went.

I wanted to do something where I could make a difference, which I was losing that in a big corporate bubble. So, I applied, managed to exit out of Centrica and then I joined here. I got the job in July 2019 but didn't actually start until the November. The previous business manager had been here 17 years, and she was retiring, so it was a good point to come and take over - so that's how I became the school business manager here.

What is your input into development and school improvement where you are now?
I think you bring a different look at things. I see my role as protecting the head from risk - so I cover everything from the budget, finance, managing the site team and health and safety. We've also got inhouse payroll and an inhouse canteen, so I literally have my hands in lots of different pies! We have to look at school with a business hat on - controlling costs, making sure you're delivering value for money - but also, as I said, protecting the school from risk.

How would you say you evaluate your success in your role?
If things tick along nicely, and there are no issues, that's your success. I do find your success also comes from comments from governors and your head, but it can be a lonely role because you are the only person that does it. If a teacher is stuck there's another teacher; if the head is out there's a deputy head or an assistant head - when the business manager is stuck, the business manager has to go off and find the answer. There's no-one else who can help you out.

Although it is a lonely role, you have a lot of people who rely on you. So, how do you motivate your team?
I find people are your biggest asset, so you have to get them on side. You have to take the time to understand what makes people tick, what their personal circumstances are, to understand how you work with them. I take a lot of time with my direct reports and I also spend a lot of time in the front office as well. It's about being approachable, fair and trustworthy - you treat people how you want to be treated yourself. So, if you don't ▶

value your people then you're on to a loser straightaway. That's where I think I'm good - the team side and the team aspect.

You said you are a people person, but how would you describe your leadership style?

I think firm but fair. When you lead you have to be supportive. There will be some decisions in life you agree with, and some that you don't; but, no matter what, you have to be the leader and toe the party line. School life can be very mechanical; you get through the year, then you have the summer break, then you get through the next year. However, the last year has shown us that you have to embrace change and take people with you; some people will come at different speeds, but you have to lead by example.

If someone was looking at applying for a school business manager post, what would you say to them are the most important qualities they need to have to succeed in the role?

I think you have to be realistic - it is a big role, I've never had a role with such responsibility. I do wake up somethings in the middle of the night at four o'clock in the morning thinking, 'Oh no, I haven't done this', or 'I've got to do that'. I think you have to be organised; you have to be realistic that this is a job where you are never going to complete your to-do list; you need to be able to prioritise.

You also need to engage with people. I'm far more removed from students but, again, if I see something that's not the right behaviour, I can't walk past that - if there's a piece of rubbish I still have to pick it up. You have to be a leader and be pushed outside of your comfort zone.

You were in a corporate role before - how does this role differ from what you expected when you applied?

I always thought it was a big role but that didn't frighten me. When I worked at Centrica I worked in the management accounts team; I'd been out to India, I'd done a lot of things, so I knew I was quite a competent person - but had I run pay roll before? No, because there's a whole team that do that at Centrica. You'd see the auditors, but I hadn't run my own audit process with them. I think you have to have the view that there are some unknowns, and you will get there, you will find the answer; that's what I mean about pushing yourself out of your comfort zone.

Obviously, there is a lot around catch-up and the pandemic at the moment but, from your point of view, what would you say are the biggest challenges going into the next educational year?

I think finance is always one, though our school has been very good. We spend a lot of money on student welfare, so we have an in-school counsellor and stuff like that. Sadly, as much as we've all got more money per pupil this year coming up, the costs of running schools are going up.

The pandemic has had an impact on behaviour and student defiance, and that makes the normal way of doing things a lot harder. We are now seeing some of the things in the school creaking that probably weren't three years ago. There's also the pressure of Ofsted results and things like that.

I've got two Year 11s, who are well-behaved children. When I first joined, some of the things I was hearing at the senior leadership meetings about certain students - I was really shocked, and we're in a nice area here. I think what schools have to deal with would shock a lot of the public, to be honest. Most people think students come here just to learn but there's a whole plethora of things that we also have to do - behaviour, and trying to model – helping them to be the best they can be before they leave.

What project would you say you're most proud of overseeing since you started your role?

Managing a budget in COVID and coming out

We didn't rely on a local food bank; we did our own foodbank

families who had fallen under the radar. A team of people at school were delivering food boxes and our kitchen would make them up; it cost the school nothing because we got some from Waitrose and we had some sponsorship from a local charity. We literally provided food to families. We didn't rely on a local food bank; we did our own foodbank.

That's amazing - that's a massive project. When you said schools are more than just a place where children learn, I think the pandemic did really open more people's eyes to the fact it is the heart of the community. So, just to finish on an even more personal achievement, you recently achieved your Level 7 – tell us a bit more about that.

As I said, down in corporate management accountant world, I've been a qualified accountant for what feels like hundreds of years. I felt for me to do the best I could I needed to look at what I could do as a qualification. So, I had two months off when I left Centrica before I joined this role and I looked at ISBL and signed up for that because I felt that I needed to understand…because coming from corporate I didn't know what a GAG was; I didn't know the difference between pupil premium and free school meals. So, for me, I could come and learn.

During the pandemic you have one day a month college release, plus you have a certain number of modules that you get through on your own, which was great - but, again, I had such a busy year that got to the point where it had to be in - in July - and I'd only done half of it!!

It was literally every evening and weekend in July to meet this deadline, but I needed to have had that time - to have done the role for a year, near enough - or from January to July on my own to understand how I could put the theory into practice. It was a brilliant course; it was worth doing.

I submitted it and I got my pass.

Do I feel like I need to do another one? Not at the moment! I join webinars from the government and my auditors are really good at doing webinars so, this year, I'm focused on getting my knowledge up that way - but yeah, definitely it was worthwhile doing. ■

with a surplus was a good thing. When I first joined and we saw all the issues with COVID and lockdown…people couldn't get food – so I set up a school food bank here. People's jobs were being lost, but I was still getting paid, so I went to Tesco's and just thought what can I buy for another fiver or tenner whilst doing my own food shop?' All the staff at school began to join in and do the same thing. We used our school minibuses to deliver food parcels - this was before they'd even thought about giving free school meal vouchers and stuff like that.

We also had the point where we had a lockdown and food was in short supply, but we could get it through our own kitchen. So, just before the Easter holidays, we did a staff food shop where we ordered them in big bags of pasta and rice, and sold them – not making any money but just to support the staff. So, in our summer term we raised money.

I got sponsorship, we ran our own foodbank and delivered food parcels. We offered them to any family that needed them from our school - some were on free school meals, some were

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: I think managing change because it literally was managing change every day. Biggest achievement: I had a completely clean audit, a surplus budget, just running in COVID times where you didn't know what was the norm anyway. So I think getting through that first year, surplus budget; just ticking all the boxes and not having any issues. BIGGEST SURPRISE: Just how heavy the stuff is to do with the government. They're getting better at communicating, but the things they send out aren't easy. Some of the submissions aren't clear – you have to go into this system for that, that system for another thing - it's a very hard path sometimes to get the answers to things. BIGGEST LESSON LEARNT: How organised you have to be, and the responsibility you have. I have had points where I've felt, 'Oh, this is so big I can't do it' but, actually, you do get there.
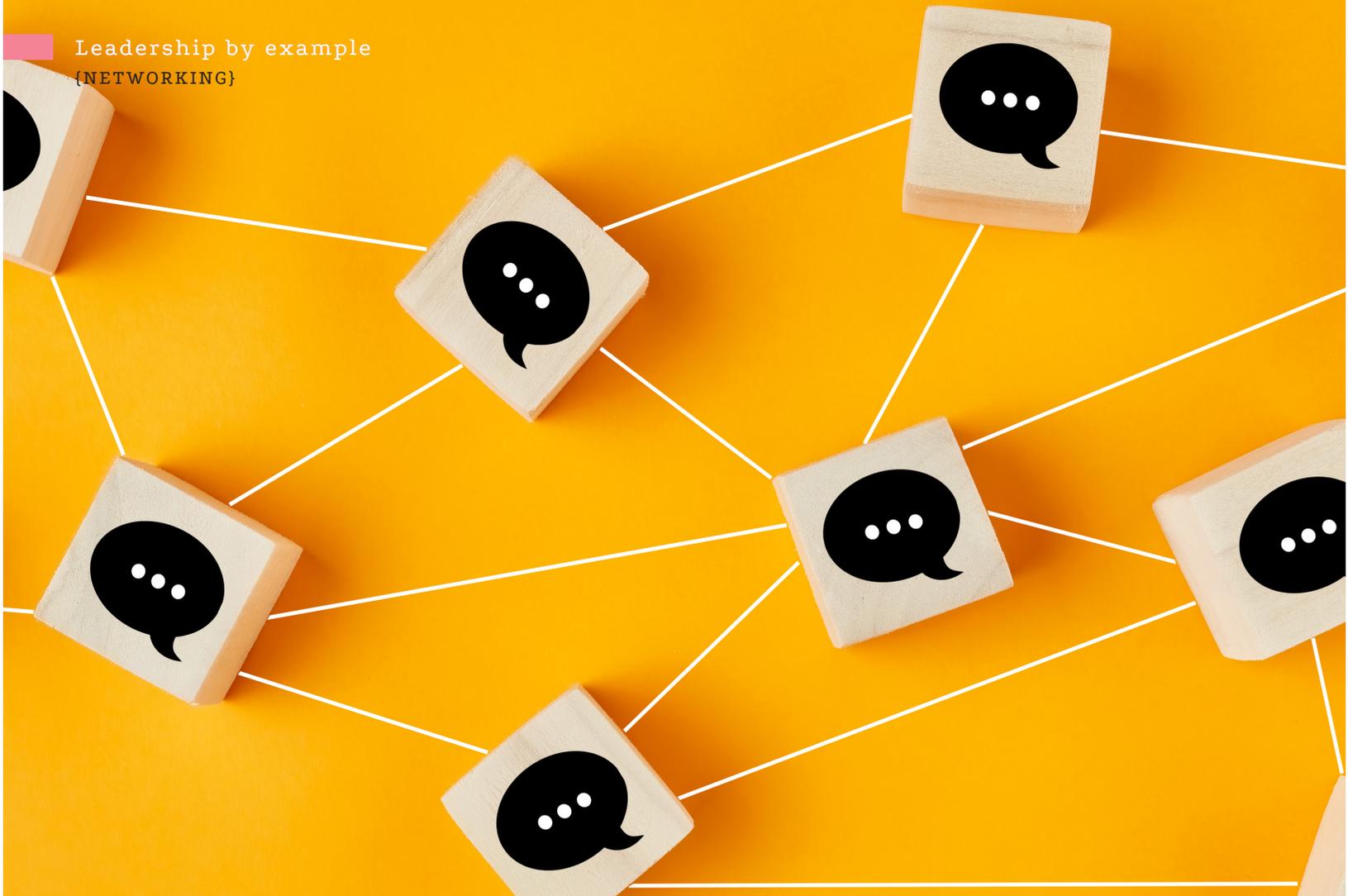
How to become an effective networker

Networking is often highlighted as being hugely beneficial in the school business management world – but mingling doesn't come easily to everyone. After a year of staying at home it might be even harder to step outside of your (literal) bubble - so how can you thrive, going forward, in professional networking situations?

With face-to-face events returning after a year of lockdowns and social distancing, the opportunity to network and meet new professional contacts also returns. As the saying goes 'No man is an island', and our ability to communicate and co-operate with others is the key to many aspects of individual success. People are inherently social creatures, and we spend our lives forming many types of networks, whether these be with family, friends or professional connections. However, not everyone finds networking professionally easy.

A professional network can come in handy for all sorts of reasons - yet sometimes it can be hard to know who you should be reaching out to, how big your network should be, or how to get started with networking. When networking, think of the *Wizard of Oz*. You need to find your courage like the lion, find your brain like the scarecrow and find your heart like the tin man.
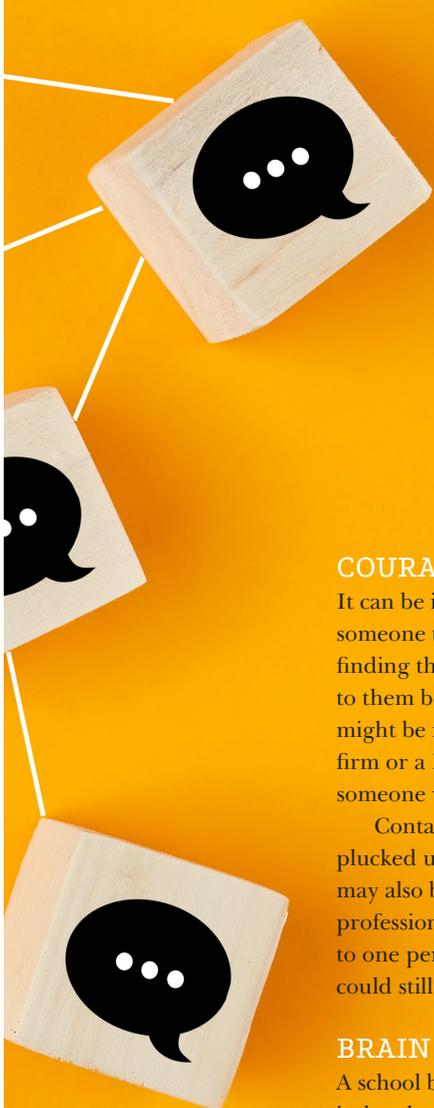
COURAGE

It can be intimidating to initiate a conversation with someone that you have never met before. However, finding the courage to approach someone may lead to them being able to benefit you in the future. They might be from a local recruitment company, a catering firm or a HR company – imagine, you might just meet someone who could provide you with a great deal.

Contacts also breed contacts and, once you have plucked up the courage to speak to someone, they may also be able to introduce you to other useful professionals. Even if you only feel brave enough to talk to one person, your network of professional contacts could still grow significantly.

BRAIN

A school business manger's work can often be quite isolated, and this means that knowledge-sharing can be limited. Networking with professional contacts enables you to share your knowledge with them and, more importantly, they can share their knowledge with you. Being able to 'pick the brains' of a procurement, security or ICT expert will provide you with an expert insight into a sector which you may otherwise not have had experience of. Every day is a 'school day', and it is vital that you keep up with the latest developments and trends in each of the sectors you deal with.

HEART

Networking has been compared to going on a blind date - and some of the same rules apply. Successful networking is all about making meaningful connections; people want to feel that you are genuinely interested in what they have to say. Keep good eye contact, smile, and ask relevant questions to highlight your interest. Do some research into who is likely to be in attendance, and prepare some starter questions in advance; this will help avoid any awkward silences which can occur when you aren't sure what to say. If you already have a bank of questions ready to go, the dreaded silence should stay at bay.

So, once you've made the connection, what's next after the event?

Be persistent, but leave enough time between each follow-up

GO SOCIAL

Gone are the days when business cards were the only way to communicate with a professional contact. If you get someone's name, but in the moment forget to ask for their contact details, search them on LinkedIn after the event and re-introduce yourself - you made the initial connection in person, so don't be afraid to follow it up with a connection on social media. Remember though, keep it professional; avoid contacting them through personal social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram.

USE THE RIGHT ETIQUETTE

Be clear about the kind of response you want. Are you looking for advice or information? Do you want to know about upcoming opportunities, or the details of a contact of theirs? Do you want to meet them one-to-one? A focused, concise and respectful request is more likely to generate a helpful reply. Be persistent, but leave enough time (usually a week or so) between each follow-up.

SO, WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

Put these tips into practice at our upcoming *EdExec* LIVE events in London (30th September) and Manchester (12th October). *EdExec* LIVE is an event specifically aimed at school business leaders and finance directors – an interactive learning and networking experience, quite different from other events currently on offer.

Join us and experience tangible, targeted, relevant information that makes a difference to your role and your school or academy. We have a stellar line-up of expert speakers confirmed, presenting on a broad range of school business management aspects.

This will be our tenth *EdExec* LIVE year and, after a decade of successful events, they only continue to grow in popularity and success. Email *hello@edexeclive.co.uk* to grab a ticket now! ◼

Back to school in the new normal

The WORKING SBM discusses how you can get going again in September after the chaos of the last two academic years you have had to endure

B ack to school feels different this year. I've always enjoyed the perception of the 'reset' that September gives us in school - the opportunity to start with a clean notebook, new staff joining the team, everyone with a positive outlook and refreshed after the summer break.

But this year feels different. It reminds me of the millennium when we all did actually party like it was 1999. We've been through something together over the last two years and it has changed us; it has certainly changed me. It means the reset this year really feels like a new beginning.

I also think that our recent challenges have demonstrated just how crucial a school is to a child's wellbeing. It's not until something is taken away that we appreciate how important it is - and not just the learning. The routine, the social interaction, the doing-as-you're-told, the reason to get out of bed in the morning, the access to nutrition, the impartial adults whose only agenda is to keep you safe and get today's lesson plan into you, the friends who shape you. Most of that was taken away by the pandemic, and ongoing fall out is inevitable.

I'm reminded of the Philip Larkin poem, *This Be The Verse*, which I won't quote – you'll have to Google it. In reality, our schools belong to their current pupils; it's their world, and one in which their parents can only play a minor supporting role. It's where they are safe and occupied, where they can spread out, test boundaries and discover their characters.

WHAT HAPPENS IF...
Education is as much about learning current rights and wrongs, as it is maths, English and science. We know that, in order to learn, children have to challenge the status quo. What happens if I leave this tap on? What happens if I don't do my homework, fight with my mates or pick on a smaller child? Take this opportunity to explore away and you are left with some very deflated and disengaged children, which is why I have spent an enjoyable term supporting summer school, painting over graffiti and replacing damaged furniture. If I had been through what our pupils have, I'd be bouncing off the walls too!

Even as someone who works in a 'futures thinking' environment, sometimes I feel overwhelmed by how rapidly everything is
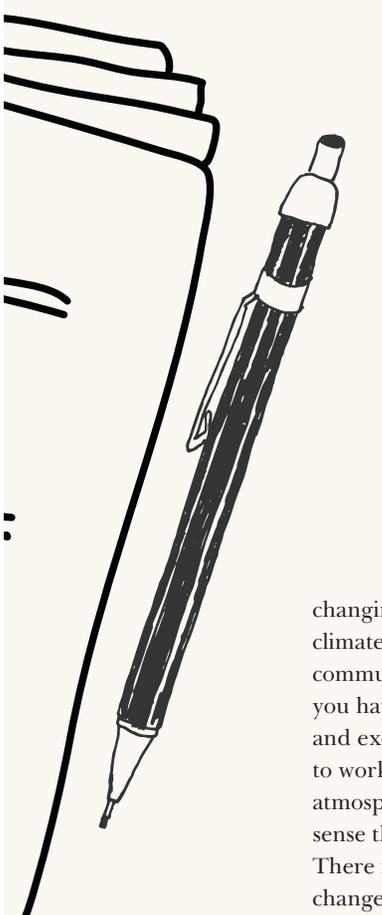
changing at the moment. Our thinking on climate, diversity, sustainability, technology and communication is moving so fast - to keep up you have to be curious, positive about change and excited for the future. I feel so grateful to work in a place where the energy in the atmosphere is palpable, and where you can sense the curiosity and the desire to learn. There is an excitement in our schools about the changes that are happening, and our pupils want to be involved.

That's why the reset feels so different this year. The world is different. Last year, if anyone complained about the need to share space or resources I'd say, 'You do realise there is a pandemic happening?' This year I plan to say, 'This is the new normal!' We are all part of a changing world. None of us, pupils or staff, have come out of this unscathed and we will all need to work together to emerge into this new normal.

A SEPTEMBER PLAN FOR YOU

So, to help our wellbeing, and get the most out of the reset, here is my suggested September plan.

1 **BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF** Whether you have worked all through, or been off, break yourself back into the new term hubbub slowly and kindly. A stressed SBM is no good to anyone. Remember the aeroplane instruction to 'put on your own oxygen mask before trying to help others'.

2 **PRIORITISE LIKE A NINJA** You can't do everything, so don't try. Managing your expectations of yourself is a key SBM skill. You are always telling others, but also keep telling yourself, you are doing a brilliant job.

3 **LISTEN TO THOSE AROUND YOU** Take the time to ask about their summer, how they are feeling and whether there is

There is an excitement in our schools about the changes that are happening, and our pupils want to be involved

anything they need. That's not to say you'll be able to help everyone. Keep asking yourself, do they need this, or do they want it? Two very different things.

4 **SPLURGE ON SOME FAB NEW STATIONERY** I like to stick motivational messages onto random pages through my new notebook which is a lovely surprise when you get to them later in the year.

5 **SEEK HELP IF YOU NEED IT AND ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO THE SAME** There is loads of support out there. You are not on your own.

If, like me, you are looking forward to the new academic year, share that enthusiasm with your colleagues and network. Your inbuilt SBM positivity and energy is catching. Next year will bring a lot more change - that's inevitable - but that is also what makes it fun.

Happy new year everyone. ◼

WorkingSBM has worked as an SBM for over 14 years – 'supporting constant change and running the engine room!' An active member of the SBM community, you can find her on Twitter @workingsbm or you can read her excellent blog at *https://workingsbm. wordpress.com*

ED LIVE
EXEC

London- 30th September 2021
Manchester- 12th October 2021
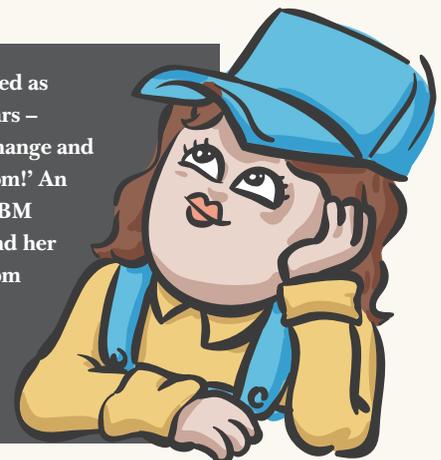
EdExec LIVE 2021: It's all about you and your school

After a year of focusing on everyone else and getting your school through the pandemic, there's never been a better time to focus on your growth, which, in turn, will contribute to the improvement of your school

Think of the events as live versions of our magazine; you will be presented with a huge variety of relevant, tangible information that you can actually use to your advantage back at school. Our seminars are dedicated to the issues that affect you and your role most, offering insights into topics such as benchmarking, whole-school wellbeing, confident leadership and smart budgeting.

YOUR DAY, YOUR WAY
EdExec LIVE is one of the only events that allows you to build your own itinerary and select only the seminars that are of interest to you and your school, ensuring the maximum value from the day. By selecting specific seminar topics relevant to you, you can be sure that your day will be filled with information and learning that will be directly relevant to you and your school's current requirements.

It's always difficult to take a day out of the office, but the question is: can you afford to miss out on these events?

We'll give you the tools you need to save your school money

ALL OF YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES, IN ONE PLACE

We champion the worth of thought leadership and strategic working and we also know the importance of practical advice on day-to-day issues. With sessions on CPD, human resources, whole school planning as well as 'nitty gritty' subjects like funding and policy, we'll give you the tools you need to save your school money.

Sessions cover finance, procurement, leadership by example, parents and teachers, wellbeing, community engagement, bid writing, CPD, innovative ICT, staff management, academy and MAT management (financial and operational) and more…

Visit our website at *https://edexec.co.uk/edexec-live/seminars/* to see the fantastic speaker line-up we have to offer you.

TAILORED TO YOUR SCHOOL AND SITUATION

The beauty of the live event is that you have the ability to choose the seminars you attend, ensuring the content is even more relevant for your specific school and unique situation. You know the challenges you and your school face better than anyone, so we provide you with the opportunity to learn more about the areas you need to skill up in in order to further the improvement of your school.

One thing that is universal to all schools at the moment is the fact that budgets are tightening, expectations are increasing and schools are being forced to do more with less. *EdExec* LIVE aims to bring together innovative solutions that will help you strengthen your school's position – now and in the future.

No one knows the business of running a school better than those who do it, but we know how difficult it is for you to find the opportunity to leave the office; it's well worth the effort, because *EdExec* LIVE is a fantastic opportunity to network with others in the profession, share experiences and solutions and forge long-lasting professional relationships to benefit you and your school.

SO, WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

We can't wait to welcome you back to our events and finally get to see all of your wonderful faces in person! Join us at London (30 September) or Manchester (12 October) and let's make one of the first face-to-face SBL events the best one yet.

Get in touch with us now by registering your interest to *hello@edexeclive.co.uk* or let us know you want to roll over your ticket from previous events! ■

BOOK TICKETS
email hello@edexeclive.co.uk to reserve your place
Learn more at edexeclive.co.uk
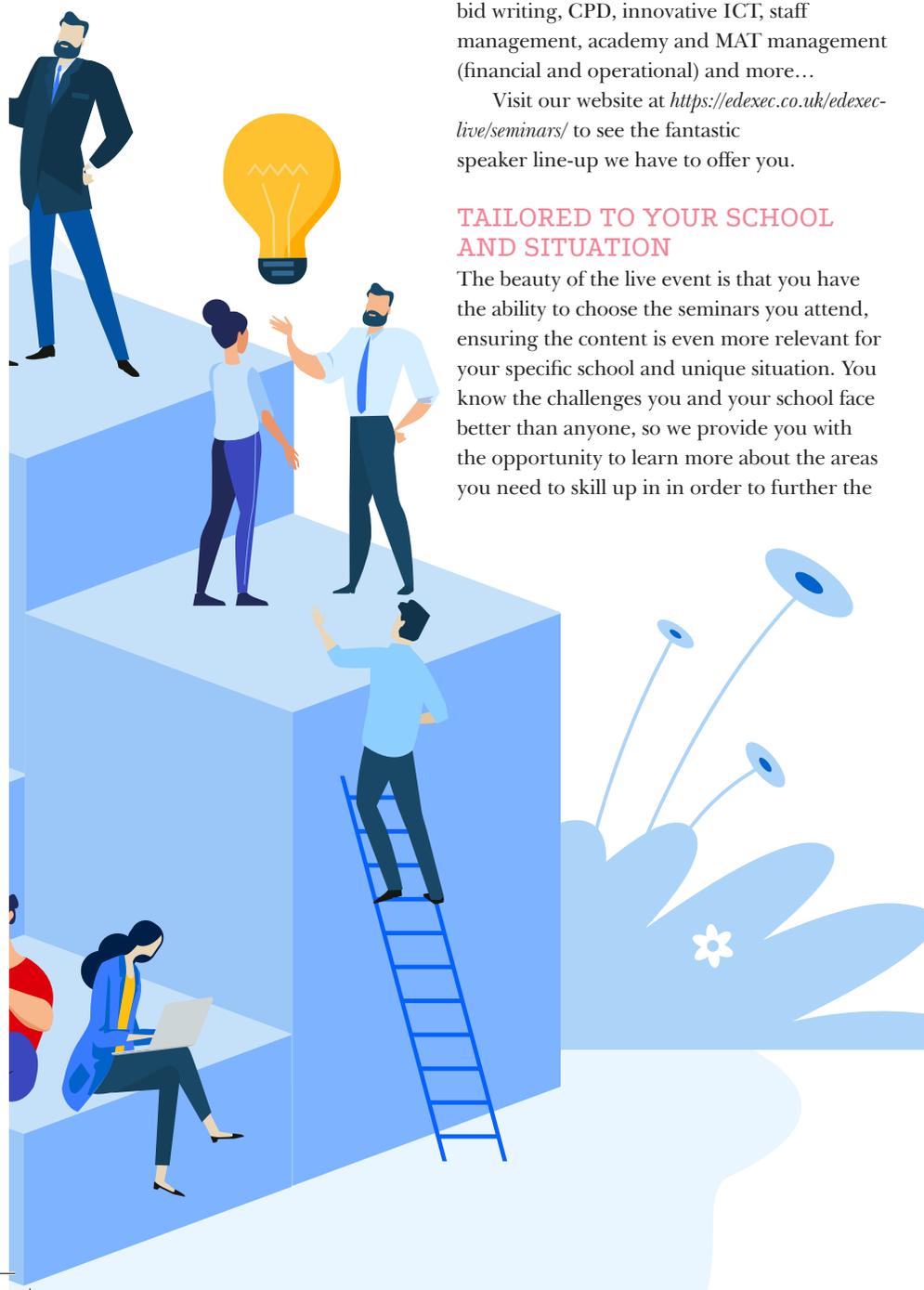
Smarter *sustainable* procurement

HELEN BURGE, deputy COO, The Priory Learning Trust, discusses how you can enhance your school's green credentials and put sustainability front and centre of the procurement process

As school business professionals we are focused on school resource management and how our procurement can obtain value for money by considering the three Es' – efficiency, effectiveness and economy - but, when it comes to sustainable procurement, we need to think of the three E's plus the principles of environmental and social.

For some schools the sustainability aspect of procurement is already a given; they are buying green energy, procure from companies which have a low environmental impact, don't use single use plastic, have their urinals on a timer and have pigs or goats consuming their kitchen's organic food waste. But that isn't the reality for a lot of schools. What if your school has a bit of a culture shift to make towards being sustainable in its procurement practices and yet there is little or no appetite to make the changes due to blockages?

"The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it." Robert Swan

Who are the blockers? If you completed a stakeholder map of low/ high influence of outcome and low/high support for your efforts, where would people sit? Who is the natural champion of sustainable procurement in addition to you as SBP? How can you activate them to do more communicating about the green agenda? Who has high influence and low support? How do you manage them?

"We can't save the world by playing by the rules, because the rules have to be changed. Everything needs to change – and it has to start today." Greta Thunberg
It would help to bring sustainability up your setting's agenda by including on the strategic plan and within your policies. Consider your school's approach to sustainability and its targets to reduce energy consumption, waste or opt for greener suppliers. When you next review your policies, consider how sustainability can be threaded through them. It's probably already mentioned in curriculum policies, but what about your procurement or finance policies? Do you have a sustainability policy?

"There is no such thing as 'away'; when we throw anything away it must go somewhere." Anne Leonard
We know that small changes in our habits can have an impact on reducing waste - for example, the removal of single use plastic bags in our supermarkets, or choosing to refill a water bottle rather than buy another bottle. By considering procurement as a process which starts with the idea that something is needed, and ends when we pay for its disposal, we can truly consider the sustainability of the school resources we manage.

It's unlikely that on your (online!) procurement requisition form you have a line about where, when, how and at what cost the school resource will be disposed of at the end of its life; however, considering the hierarchy of waste (Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, Recycle) - especially the first three steps, which take place before additional purchases are made - could reduce your waste costs and will reduce the amount going to landfill. For example:

GREEN THINKING
A school resource amnesty is a real eye-opener as to how often purchases are made out of habit rather than necessity. To avoid this, going forward, you could consider a centralised stationery cupboard. This will take time to set up successfully, and could create other issues (for

> We know that small changes in our habits can have an impact

HIERARCHY	EXAMPLES

REFUSE – minimise waste	▪ **Avoid single used plastic**
	  - **Encourage catering contractors to stop using single use plastic.**
	  - **Install water fountains for students and staff to fill their reusable water bottles.**
	
	▪ **Unnecessary packaging**
	  - **Avoid using suppliers with high use of packaging.**

REDUCE – dependency on harmful, wasteful and non-recyclable products	▪ **Paper consumption**
	  - **If you must print, print double-sided.**
	  - **Don't glue work sheets into work books.**
	▪ **Limit laminating**
	  - **Ask yourself, 'Does this sheet of paper need to exist on this planet long after I don't?'!**

REUSE – rebalance our throw away culture	▪ **Polly pockets, plastic wallets, punched pockets**
	  - **If you need plastic wallets, can you empty ones holding content no longer required?**
	▪ **School resource amnesty**
	  - **Before placing next year's stationery order, organise a clearing of cupboards of unwanted items into a central area, then reallocate.**

example, no-one informing the office when the last box of photocopier paper is opened…) but, with practice, it could work. The next step would be a cross-curricular collaborative purchasing exercise.

Once you've established that a purchase definitely is required, you'll need to consider the supplier's green credentials. You could create a list of eco-friendly suppliers – based on your own prerequisites – which could be encompass their packaging, locality, fair trade, bee-friendliness and recycled product range. Also then consider recycling opportunities they offer, or their community engagement

Everything needs to change - and it has to start today

and social benefits, as well as price and ability to deliver on time - in an electric vehicle, not a dinosaur-juice powered one! Can you feedback to suppliers to encourage them to change their practices, for example, to reduce the number of deliveries, or switch to e-invoices? Could you learn from their sustainability practices?

Having the conversation, learning and then implementing change is key, as everything needs to change – and it has to start today! ▪

Boxout to go here

To learn more about how to put sustainability on the SBP agenda, join us at *EdExec* LIVE 2021 where Helen will be delivering a seminar on this topic. Email *hello@edexeclive. co.uk* quoting the code SEPT21 for discounted tickets.

Bringing your school community back on site post-COVID

SIMON HEPBURN, founder of Marketing Advice
for Schools, (www.marketingadviceforschools.com)
explains how you can bring your community back
together again after a year and a half of being apart

Schools have been effectively closed to large parts of their communities for the past year and a half. Parents have had to stop at the school gate, clubs and community organisations have cancelled activities and are only returning gradually, taster sessions and open days have been difficult to organise and links with feeder nurseries and schools have been reduced to online meetings, if they've happened at all. From September, things will change - without national restrictions, schools will be able to do what they want to restart those links. Speaking to school business leaders, this throws up many new challenges; which events should you put on, when is a good time to start, and does it make sense to behave as it if it is 2019 again without taking on many of the innovations which have emerged in response to the pandemic?

As with many challenges in schools, the solution is to take a step back and plan this return around your school's real needs. Here are my tips...

1 **Identify your most important stakeholders - who matters most to the future of your school?**

Many primary (and some secondary) schools are facing recruitment shortages due to demographic changes and urgently need to prioritise engaging with prospective parents. Others, including some schools that opened in the past couple of years, have a clear need to engage with the local community, and some will be looking to focus on income generation by restoring lettings. Work out which matter most to you!

2 **Be realistic about the number of events you can do**

In many school communities there's a keen desire to return to normal as soon as possible, and re-instate lots of events, but this may not be realistic. At the start of next term secondary schools may be asked to focus on testing again, and many events will need weeks or months of promotion (and, in some cases, reassurance). Therefore, it will be important to ensure that events are booked centrally!

3 **Consider fewer, but larger, events**

Some schools I talk to find it hard to get their community to events. Paradoxically, one reason can be that there is too much choice and people don't hear about the event most suitable for them in the all the 'noise' from others.

An innovative solution to this is to merge events into one – I call them 'hero' events when I'm training school business managers. Examples would include 'festivals' which bring together a wide range of talents from across the school, 'fairs' that involve not just students, parents, and teachers but also local community groups and charities, and large-scale productions that show off drama, music, dance, art and other creative activities! Try to involve as many students as possible, and

An innovative solution to this is to merge events into one - I call them 'hero' events

also look for opportunities to involve feeder schools, prospective parents, former students, community organisations and more.

4 **Create a buzz to ensure events are full**

Doing fewer events means more time to promote them – for example, using your school's social media platforms or newsletter to talk about the auditions, costumes and rehearsals for a production - and mentioning as many students as possible, safeguarding permitting, will mean lots of people hear about it!

You can build on this by encouraging people to sign up for events in advance – this also gives you confidence as an organiser. Charging for admission is a decision that can cause problems in schools looking to be inclusive, but a good alternative is to ask for a donation – either to the school's Parent-Teacher Association or a local charity.

If you have a school Facebook community, setting up your activity as a 'Facebook event' *(https://www.facebook.com/events/)* is a very good way of increasing attendance as people can see which of their 'friends' are going!

5 **Use events as part of wide engagement programmes**

Once you've got people to your school, make sure you keep in touch with them. If there's a clear reason for the event, such as student recruitment, send targeted emails, starting with a summary of the event and 'next steps' in the recruitment process. For other events ask people to sign up for your newsletters or social media – perhaps using QR codes as people are now used to them in pubs and restaurants!

6 **Don't throw away your COVID innovations**

Finally, during the lockdown schools innovated with communication in many ways and it's important to realise that many were popular. For example, only 24% of parents in this survey by ParentPing wanted to go back to fully face-to-face parents evenings (https:// parentping.co.uk/the-future-of-parents-evening/)! Some stakeholders will be busy whenever you hold face-to-face events and recording or live-streaming them will help you to engage more of them – as well as giving you exciting content to put on your website! ∎

Keeping SBM groups functioning during the pandemic and beyond

SUE EDWARDS, managing director at the LASBM Alliance Ltd, discusses the challenges of running an SBM network group during COVID-19 and how she overcame the many hurdles the pandemic presented to continue to support members

What happened to school business managers' networks when the country (world, even!) was in lockdown? Our main purpose is to provide regular conferences for our members' professional development and, suddenly, we were unable to deliver them. Would we be able to keep going? How could we continue to provide value for money for our members and sponsors?

As with all other organisations, we needed to come up with a plan to ensure it would be business as usual so that our stakeholders would continue to feel valued and remain loyal to the group.

WE CONSIDERED OUR PRIORITIES AND AIMS DURING THE PANDEMIC:

- To provide an effective communication network for members.
- To provide relevant CPD for members.
- To support the group financially through sponsorship of the online community, events and advertising.
- To remain a constant during trying times.

Like many other SBM network groups, we have an active online community, providing great opportunities for members and sponsors to communicate with each other. Probably unsurprisingly, the pandemic led to more activity

on the site than in normal times, as the problems members were facing (free school meal vouchers, lateral flow testing, managing staff/pupil illness and self-isolation, etc) were common to all.

Two of our committee members commented, "COVID-19 brought with it so many new challenges it was difficult to know where to turn for advice and support as we were all in uncharted territory. I feel very fortunate to be part of such a strong and active network in my area (LASBM), so I never felt completely alone. There was (and still is!) always someone willing to help, or share ideas and experiences, so that what could seem a daunting and insurmountable problem was shared, halved and generally solved, together."
Andrea Barnes, business manager, Penwortham Girls' High School

"Being a relatively new SBM, for me, being part of my local network (LASBM) has been invaluable in giving me support and guidance. The global pandemic has brought the SBL community even closer together, with us all facing the same challenges and experiences. Having the support of the online network means that it doesn't matter if the person is just down the road or 250 miles away, we have all been on the same journey and are therefore able to offer support through forums or virtual conferences. I know without the support of the network then the last 18 months would have been a lot more challenging and isolating."
Vicki Newsome, school business manager, Burscough Village Primary School

When the pandemic situation failed to improve, with restrictions still in place, it was time to consider how we might provide CPD for our members as an alternative to live events. Members and sponsors were clearly missing conferences and we had had to cancel our two summer term events in 2020. We considered virtual conferences using Zoom but didn't feel that the platform would be conducive to the level of interactivity we were hoping to achieve. A bit of research led us to the Hopin platform as an option for delivering events, and we used it to put on our first virtual event in October 2020. Although nothing can compare with the buzz of a live conference, Hopin enabled us to represent our live events much more effectively. Its features include a main stage, meeting rooms, an expo area (for our sponsors), and online and video chat facilities. Unlike with live conferences, we were not limited by space, so could include more delegates than usual. Feedback on the event

was excellent, which encouraged us to go on to provide a further two virtual conferences this year, both of which received great feedback.

We have been very aware that our members were missing their conference days out, especially the lovely lunches they always get at our events, so wanted to provide something extra as part of their membership. Sadly for them, this wasn't food, but fortunately our site provider, Neil Limbrick of The Education Collective, had set up a virtual learning zone (VLZ), to which we subscribed so we could make it available to our full members. The VLZ is an ever-growing collection of video presentations on (currently) 15 topics within eight topic areas relevant to SBMs and is available at an extra cost to groups who use the same provider. Members are able to access the videos at times to suit themselves and select the relevant topics to meet their professional development needs.

Another change we made since the start of the pandemic was to increase the frequency of our e-newsletters. Previously, we had provided a termly newsletter, but in the absence of live events we upped this to around monthly during term time. The reasons for this were twofold; it was important to be seen to be active and keep the LASBM flag flying, and our valued partners and sponsors were keen to find other ways of engaging with our members and the wider community.

We appreciate that the reason for some SBM network groups being put 'on the back burner' during the pandemic was because of the increased responsibilities and time constraints for those group leaders working in schools. Having retired from my school job five years ago, I have been able to dedicate my time to running the group – with the added advantage of already having a home office – so it has been easier for us than for most groups. Because we recognised the pressures on other group leaders, we extended an invitation to them and their members to attend our virtual events and had a small number of takers. We are now looking forward to the autumn term when we will, hopefully, be able to proceed with our two planned live conferences. If anything changes in the meantime, we will be ready to change our plans.

I have been asked recently how we might 'come back' from the pandemic. My response was to say we've never been away and it's been business as usual – done differently, but still going! ■

The global pandemic has brought the SBL community even closer together

How could flexible working look in your school?

Enabling flexible working could help schools retain staff who might otherwise leave the role, or retire early

The extraordinary events of the last year and a half have seen a dramatic increase in home and flexible working for employees and the evidence suggests that many employees would like this flexibility to continue longer term in some form. The Office for National Statis`tics reported that almost half of all employees in the UK were working from home during the first lockdown; many of these people had never worked from home before but now the experience of flexible working means many more will expect this practice to be common place in workplaces.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF FLEXBILE WORKING?

One survey across industries found that 76% of employers felt that implementing flexible working has a positive impact on staff retention. Flexible working may offer development opportunities for existing staff - for example, through a part-time job share of a leadership role. Supporting and facilitating this flexible working practice has been reported as a strategy used by some employers to try and help reduce their gender pay gap. It can also allow teachers to better manage their work-life balance and improve their wellbeing, helping to reduce ill-health absence, or enable a quicker return to work after maternity leave. Enabling flexible working can also help in forward planning for workforce changes in schools, especially in relation to succession planning.

An increasing proportion of teachers are working part-time; the proportion of men in teaching doing so in 2018 was nine per cent, compared with an average for all UK employees of 13%, while the proportion of women doing so was 29%, compared with 41%. With the changing demands of workers in our 21st century economy, it is more important than ever that teaching is compatible with family life - and work life balance more broadly - in order to be attractive to aspiring current and inactive teachers.

Case study: White Meadow Primary School

White Meadows, in Littlehampton, West Sussex, has used flexible working to recruit and keep high-calibre staff, supporting the school's path from special measures to a 'good' Ofsted rating. Over the last eight years leaders at White Meadows have used flexible working to attract and keep a group of passionate, resilient teachers who relish the challenges of their roles, and are prepared to go the extra mile to support their pupils.

The drive for flexible working was initially led by the school's headteacher (now its executive head) who set out to create a culture in which people's lives did not take second place to their jobs. In practice, this meant taking the approach that they would try to accommodate flexible working requests, for whatever reason. So, how did they do it?

Leading from the top
The school's leadership team openly champions flexible working; for example, the current headteacher worked a four-day week in her previous role as the school's deputy headteacher. As a result, staff are confident that they can be honest about their need for flexible working.

Taking a proactive approach
Staff who are due to take maternity leave are asked about their return plans before they go, giving the school time to work out the best way to accommodate their wishes.

Flexible staff are celebrated, not tolerated. Candidates are told about the flexible approach during their tours of the school.

Taking time and care with job design
Leaders work hard to match part-time roles and partnerships with staff needs and personalities, as well as the needs of pupils.

Championing the benefits
Leaders are open about how the school benefits from flexible working. For example, they are positive with staff and parents about how job shares provide a 'fresh' teacher part-way through the week, as well as providing some pupils with a mid-week chance to start again. As a result, parents are generally supportive.

Making the most of staff members' outside interests
One part-time teacher runs the education unit in a local museum for the rest of her working week. As a result, the school has built strong links with the museum and asked the teacher to use her experience to write the school's history curriculum.

Being flexible about flexible working
Leaders are careful not to assume that staff will work outside of their part-time arrangements. For example, if staff attend inset days on their scheduled days off, they are given the time back. Staff are allocated three days' personal leave to allow them to attend their own children's school events, or take care of other personal priorities.

HOW COULD JOB-SHARING WORK?

Sue Harte, headteacher at John Stainer School, has implemented job-sharing in her school. "Requests for flexible working may well come out of informal conversations about a member of staff's future - for example, if they become pregnant - or, they could be part of a performance management conversation where we might discuss what they aspire to in the next few years.

"For example, one of our

Strong teachers are attracted to our school because we are prepared to be flexible

teachers is an aspiring artist; he wanted to work part time so that he had more time to paint. We have an open and honest dialogue about any flexible working requests, looking at

impact, feasibility and how we might plan ahead. We consider both their needs, and how it can work practically in the school. I think about staffing for the following academic year around May-to-June."

Sue believes that, as well as benefiting staff, it also benefits the school. "Strong teachers are attracted to our school because we are prepared to be flexible. We have explicitly advertised for new partners to join an existing job share, and we have gained a number of teachers who were attracted by our

reputation for flexibility," she says. "We had a lot of interest in our teacher vacancies this year, and being flexible also means we have very good staff retention as we are able to accommodate changes in family circumstances, which means teachers can look after their children and work part time.

"The parents are used to the children having more than one teacher. They know that it works well because their children are happy, and the results are consistently good." ■

Switched on

The latest news and views from the world of ICT and edtech

Mobile 'phone ban in schools would hit deaf pupils hard

"Will the education secretary introduce new technology to help deaf pupils socialise at break times if this vital tool is taken away?" asks Mike Hobday, director of campaigns at the National Deaf Children's Society, in *The Guardian*.

"This year has forced major changes in schools, from closures and face coverings to cancelled exams and catch-up sessions. Far too many have something in common – little to no consideration of deaf pupils' needs. This time, it's banning mobile 'phones in schools (Education secretary wants ban on mobile phones in English schools, 29 June). It's understandable that ministers see them as a problem in class, but what about the thousands of deaf pupils who rely on theirs? I doubt the education secretary has plans to provide an alternative to their speech-to-text apps. Can he suggest another way to access the information they will miss? And will he introduce new technology to help them socialise at break times if this vital tool is taken away?

"It's vital that the needs of deaf children, and those with other distinct educational needs, start being included in the major education decisions, going forward; currently however, the concerns and questions vastly outnumber the answers."

@UnofficialOA: I don't know who needs to hear this, but everyone else's diet has gone right out the window, and no-one else has been going to the gym recently either. #edutwitter

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@jonathanteacher: Tomorrow my son and I will make our last shared journey to the same school. New adventures await us both in September. I'll miss his endless commentary about the other drivers on the road. I'll miss the complaints about my music choices. I'll miss his little face in the mirror.

Money schools spend on paper per year could buy three million Chromebooks

A study, conducted by Vitreous World, has calculated that the total cost of paper used in schools is equivalent to the cost of three million Chromebooks! The research found that teachers use an average 99 pieces of paper a day (30 sheets of paper per class multiplied by 3.3 - the average number of classes teachers teach per day) which, when multiplied by 190 teaching days, and 548,078 full time teachers, equates to an estimated £484,539,317 on paper print-outs. A Google Chromebook costs around £173.20 per year, which equals approximately 2,797,517m devices.

The research found that 72% of teachers were concerned about their schools' dependence on paper, and recognised that most of their pupils would end up in careers where they were more reliant on digital skills. The overwhelming majority of respondents (77%) claimed they had had to teach themselves digital skills, with 52% saying their classrooms lacked devices and 47% saying they wanted more educational software in their teaching.

Meanwhile, 56% of teachers – those who already heavily used edtech in the classroom - believed it had improved outcomes for their students and 85% of respondents said they were excited about the benefits that technology can bring to teaching.

Hengjie Wang, CEO and co-founder of Kami, agrees. "As schools look for ways to help students catch up from what many fear to have been a lost year in education…there is an opportunity to aid this - and students' success in their future careers - by putting technology at the heart of teaching practices."

Why aren't more girls in the UK choosing to study computing and technology?

As reported by *The Guardian*, getting women into tech careers has never been more important, but teachers believe old-fashioned stereotypes about subjects such as design and technology and computer science put girls off choosing them at school.

In 2020, the number of girls choosing to study GCSE computer science was 16,919 – just over 21.4% of total entrants – compared with 61,540 boys; slightly fewer girls and boys picked the subject compared with the previous year.

Girls studying design and technology for GCSE fell from 29,741 in 2019 to 28,763 last year and, sadly, these low numbers are reflected in job roles. The percentage of women employed in tech has barely moved from 15.7% in 2009 to approximately 17% today.

Sarah Walsh, a technology teacher at the Hathershaw college, Oldham, says getting girls into STEM classrooms is vital for the future of UK industry. "In most schools only about 10% of students taking product design would be girls, whereas food technology has always been around a 50-50 split and textiles is 90% girls," she says.

"We no longer use the terms 'woodwork, sewing and cooking' in schools, but we know students still pick up those terms, perhaps from parents and grandparents who recall doing 'woodwork' at school. It's a very old-fashioned idea and can put girls off. It's not just boys sitting in a workshop with tools; technology is so much more than that now and, although work has been done in education, we need to challenge the stereotypes and the image of these subjects if we are to draw females in."

Technology has been a huge feature of the pandemic, with the creation of COVID test kits and the test-and-trace system. Sarah believes this has highlighted a need for "creative and dynamic" people with "problem-solving attitudes" who can get the job done. "Students have been able to see the role technology can play in the real world. We don't know yet whether this will draw more girls in - there will be a lag before we see the effect - but the need is greater than ever."

A recent study by the Learning and Work Institute found the UK was facing a 'looming digital skills crisis' caused by the falling numbers of young people taking IT courses. It found a gender gap in digital skills, with young women accounting for just 17% of A-level entrants in IT subjects. There have also been concerns that fewer girls are choosing to study computing since the old information communication technology (ICT) GCSE qualification was phased out and replaced by computer science.

In 2019, 17,158 girls studied computer science, compared with the 20,577 girls who studied ICT in 2018.

What is the EdTech Demonstrator Programme?

The EdTech Demonstrator Programme provides schools and colleges with free, peer-to-peer support on the effective use of technology in education. Support is tailored to the needs of each school and college, supported by a diagnostic tool which aligns with a review your remote education provision framework. To find out how to access this support, click here.

Phase one of the programme ran from April 2020 to March 2021. The original programme was refocused in April 2020 to help support remote teaching and working during the COVID-19 pandemic. Phase two began in April 2021 and will run until March 2022; it will support schools and colleges to use technology to:

- help students catch up;
- reduce teacher workload;
- manage their resources effectively;
- improve access to the curriculum;
- achieve wider improvement aims;
- support remote education if and when required.

Demonstrator schools and colleges are a network of providers which have shown they can use technology effectively, and have the capacity to help other schools and colleges to do the same. In 2021-2022 the network will continue to support schools and colleges with remote education when it's needed. ∎

@Nazmameah1: Omg…had my first ever online parents evening… and it does literally cut off after your six minutes! Oh well… good for the teachers! No long boring convos with hyper parents!

Assessing your school's ICT needs

ROYDEN GOTHELF, RightICT, explains how you can assess what your school really needs when it comes to technology

An audit can verify that the systems and applications that you have in place are appropriate, efficient and adequately controlled to ensure a reliable, efficient and secure service - but, how can you be sure what you really need when it comes to your ICT provision?

Do not base what you need on what you've got, and do not assume what you've got is inadequate. Take a step back and talk to the people who use IT informally, or use a satisfaction survey.

Get input from the school improvementsleader(s) and work with the SLT to understand the school improvement plan; by understanding the plan you can start to identify gaps in the IT provision as well as things you have that you no longer need - there will be opportunities to save costs. Talking to the people who use the IT - the teaching staff, the non-teaching staff and the pupils - is key and, when talking to these people, group them as their needs will differ. For example:

● The IT manager will have a set of basic Infrastructure requirements – for example, the amount of file storage needed, the technical switches on the network, etc., assuming that there is no change to the way the school is using the IT.
● The SBM will have a set of needs - for example, school MIS, financial systems, reprographics.
● The teaching staff will have a set of needs - for classroom equipment and

technology or ICT we used to hear from schools, 'We need to make savings', 'We don't have the budget', or 'Can you reduce our costs?' What we now hear more of is, 'We want to improve our curriculum offer; how can technology help?"

In isolation technology is a cost; however, it's also a valuable resource – and outstanding school outcomes cannot be delivered without the correct resources. In an audit we can identify well-running resources but, if they are not fit for purpose, they could risk holding the school back at this time of change in education.

A SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE

When talking to educationalists who operate outside of schools, we hear that the UK is leading the growth in education technology, with hundreds of start-up companies delivering a range of platforms and services to digitise education. Academics are enthused about how teaching will progress from instructional learning to experiential learning

> A mind shift is needed – from seeing technology as an expense to a resource to invest in

through the use of educational apps. There are apps readily available to support subjects such as maths, while virtual reality is primed to change science learning by bringing experiments too dangerous to actually do into the classroom.

How does this outside view sit with the lack of money

in schools? It's a challenge. School leaders need to be able to make use of these new technologies in their schools – students will start to expect this as they will be using them outside of school and, eventually, in the workplace. A mind shift is needed – from seeing technology as an expense to a resource to invest in. Leaders must take a strategic approach, not by having a year-on-year digital plan to make this obsolete, and upgrade that, but by linking their technology to whole school outcomes.

STRATEGIC IT PLANNING IS BEST APPROACHED BY LOOKING AT THE WHOLE SCHOOL STRATEGY

MISSION: WHOLE SCHOOL OUTCOMES

Consider this scenario. The school network manager is told to reduce costs although they've been requesting investment to upgrade the outdated infrastructure causing computers to run slow. The school's struggling to justify expenditure and find the funds. At the same time the leadership team has been working on the three-year plan, part of which includes the improvement of STEM education; they know they must give staff training and equip classrooms. They believe STEM will attract the best teachers and students to the school and add value for the existing students.

The finance manager is assessing the costs and asks the network manager what's required to support the plan; they propose a network upgrade and are wondering if something can be done for the science rooms, rather than

the whole school. Funds may be raised as capital investment, or taken from another faculty. Importantly, now, technology is not seen as an isolated cost but one that is required to deliver the STEM plan.

Strategic IT planning is best approached by looking at the whole school strategy, seeing where technology contributes to that strategy and working out technology costs on that basis. ∎

About the authour

Royden Gothelf - Strategic IT planning, reducing costs, improving education for all. Edtech business owner/mentor/ project manager, enabling effective the use of technology in transforming education, teaching and administration. Royden writes about it, talks about it and works with academies, schools and local authorities to successfully deliver it - saving costs and improving outcomes every time! *www.rightict. com twitter @rightict e:royden@rightict.com.*

More infomation

To learn more about how deliver remarkable school improvements with technology, join us at *EdExec* LIVE 2021 where Royden will be delivering a seminar on this topic. Email *hello@ edexeclive.co.uk* quoting the code SEPT21 for discounted tickets.

teaching applications.

And so on...remember, the IT stakeholders will have common needs and specific needs.

At RightICT, we use the 'needs first' approach and focus on how embedding technology in your wider school development plan can unlock its true potential and determine ICT needs. When talking to school leaders about

HOW TO JOIN OR CREATE A SBP NETWORK

Being part of an SBP network is a great way to meet others also working in what can be a very isolated role. So, how can you join one near you? Or, if there isn't one near you, how can you set one up?

The last year and half has been a very isolating experience for most of us, and for some of us it has meant literal periods of isolation at times! So, now more than ever, it is important we network with others and form connections to help us grow, learn and connect with like-minded individuals in similar circumstances.

JOINING AN EXISTING NETWORK
There are currently over 100 school business professional networks across the UK. The DfE can put you in touch with an established network so you can ask questions directly and benefit from peer-to-peer support. To see if there's a network near you check the School Business Professional Networks Directory.

CREATING A NEW NETWORK
You can create your own network if there isn't one near you. The DfE are keen to support new networks and you can contact the DfE School

Commercial team at *schools.commercial@education. gov.uk* for help and information.

STRUCTURING YOUR NEW NETWORK
It's best to form a working party or committee to start your network. This doesn't need to be on a formal basis initially; it should be a small group of people with a common vision and sense of purpose to share the workload.

As your network grows you may want to create a constitution and elect committee members. Whatever structure you choose, it needs to suit the size of your network and be able to develop according to your network's needs.

Some groups charge a membership fee to cover the cost of room hire or meeting refreshments; if your network is small, this may not be necessary. You can also negotiate free access to meeting spaces.

If you do charge a membership fee, you'll need to ensure finances are organised appropriately and managed transparently.

WHO TO INVITE

The most successful networks have an inclusive approach to membership. Often, they'll start with a few people, but will expand over time. Inviting other professionals from diverse organisations such as primary, secondary, academies and maintained schools, faith schools and so on, will lead to more effective sharing of best practice and ideas.

Building a broad membership will ensure:
- the network is sustainable;
- the workload is shared;
- there will be new ideas;
- a range of best practice is shared.

Being inclusive, flexible and adaptable is key to attracting members to your network and retaining them.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR NETWORK

The most successful networks combine face-to-face meetings, emails, online forums and direct contact with individual colleagues. You can also meet using telephone conferencing tools such as Skype.

One major benefit of networks is the opportunity for members to develop their skills and knowledge. You could use your network meetings to provide training, sharing the cost among members.

SETTING UP A MEETING You need to think about the length and frequency of meetings. Short meetings provide a good focus for debate and will not take up members' time excessively. Full-day meetings that happen less frequently work well if members have long travelling times and can't attend as often.

SELECTING A CHAIRPERSON AND SETTING UP AN AGENDA Asking someone to chair the meeting will help keep discussion on track. Circulating an agenda in good time allows members to know what to expect, attend meetings most interesting to them, and prepare accordingly.

If your network members represent diverse organisations you may have challenges in developing an agenda that's relevant to everyone. You can overcome this by having:
- collective meeting sessions involving all members;
- sessions where members are grouped to focus on matters specific to their situation and needs.

Successful networks will often arrange collective sessions before moving into focused sessions in one network meeting.

The most successful networks have an inclusive approach to membership

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INVITING OTHERS TO PRESENT It's good to invite other organisations and specialists to deliver presentations, but make sure there's time to discuss local issues - these are usually the most beneficial for members and will often identify topics for future meetings.

PROMOTING YOUR NETWORK

There are many ways you can promote your network. Word of mouth can be very effective and your members will have contacts in organisations such as unions, schools forum, local authorities, headteacher associations and governor groups. Social media can also be a successful way of growing your network and engaging with peers in other regions.

You can help other professionals find and join your network by registering with:
- DfE Schools Commercial team: contact schools.commercial@education.gov.uk to request a registration form for your network to appear on GOV.UK. After verification, you will be informed when details of your network will appear on the school business professional network directory.

In addition, you will be invited to join our network leaders' group. This is a growing community of network leaders providing support to each other. As part of this group, you will receive notifications that are relevant to your role as a school business professional.
- Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL): register by contacting them at the ISBL website.

ENSURING TRANSPARENCY

You must ensure that any commercial relationships that your network has - for example, sponsorship, speakers, and negotiated discounts with suppliers - are transparent to all members.

All purchasing decisions in schools must be made on merit and clearly adhere to local purchasing policies and regulations covering fair, open and transparent competition. Network members should not be under any obligation to purchase from specific suppliers. ◼

Techno Geek

Getting personal: how digital learning is changing the role of the teacher

HUGH VINEY, headteacher at Minerva's Virtual Academy, discusses the transformation of remote education which has occured over the last year

The impact of school closures over the last year or so have fast-tracked exposure, and wider acceptance of, digital learning ten-fold, not just for students but for schools and teachers too. As progressive learning continues to shift more towards online platforms, reliance on the use of technology - both inside and outside of the classroom - is becoming more widespread. Historically, teaching has always been about 'presenteeism' in the classroom, but advances in digital learning platforms mean a teacher no longer needs to be physically 'present' for the delivery of every aspect of a lesson, and the future role of teaching will need to adapt in line with this.

The potential of online learning is vast. It is likely that future classroom-based teaching time will adopt a more blended approach to delivery - an element of face-to-face combined with digital learning - thereby freeing-up teaching time and resource to allow for more focused mentoring. Teachers will, increasingly, need to hone their skills to become focused motivators, engaging in deeper, one-to-one feedback, as well as meeting the complex social and emotional demands of a diverse pupil population. That said, many of the more traditional, core teaching skills - such as a passion for education, and retaining the ability to inspire and enthuse children - will remain at the heart of teaching.

PERSONALISED LEARNING PROVISION

Freeing-up teaching resource, improving efficiency, and reducing the paperwork that has always gone hand-in-hand with traditional schooling, will also allow teachers to spend more quality time with pupils who are struggling, or require more regular intervention. Essentially, online platforms will help to shape more tailored, individual, learning provision in schools. Personalised learning has become a major talking point within the education sector of late, along with the need to nurture teaching skills to deliver a more individualised approach to learning. Not all children learn at the same pace or in the same way so this is really about balance, and flexing, to adapt to different styles of learning, whereby all children have the opportunity to achieve to their highest potential, and to be the best they can be.

There is much evidence out there to support the notion that effective learning can be delivered via fit-for-purpose online learning meaning that guided learning, led solely by a teacher, may not be the best use of time or talent in some

scenarios. For example, the entire GCSE syllabus across 11 different subjects can be studied without the physical need for a teacher to be present, providing there is an option to obtain support as and when it is needed – this is where teaching as a role needs to adapt. Teachers of the future will focus more on bespoke intervention, motivation, wellbeing, mentoring, nurturing confidence and boosting resilience in pupils while they learn and flourish.

Performance and attainment can also be tracked effectively online. In the future, teachers will benefit from monitoring how their pupils work online and will be able to spot potential issues and provide the right support at the right time. Many sophisticated learning platforms will also ensure that a pupil cannot move on to the next topic or lesson until they have completed the current task sufficiently, and in line with the teacher's requirements, for example. Teachers can also benefit from additional proficiency testing features via online platforms for an additional layer of certainty.

In a sense, the role of

> Although it is likely that teachers will have to relinquish a greater element of physical control than previously, they will be able to use this to their advantage

the teacher is simply evolving to become more specific and more honed to each child. Although it is likely that teachers will have to relinquish a greater element of physical control than previously, they will be able to use this to their advantage in providing deeper, more focused, learning direction.

EVOLVING TEACHING SKILLS

The pandemic forced schools, teachers, parents and pupils to become Google Classroom and Zoom literate overnight, but it is the extensions, the add-ons and the additional digital resources, available to deliver effective lessons, that teachers will need more training on. Traditional schools would never have used cloud software to run their learning operations had it not been for the pandemic so, from

this perspective, the pandemic has fast-tracked the education sector by about 10 years. This undoubtedly means that the skills teachers need today around digital learning will continue to grow.

Teachers will, inevitably, continue to build on their level of tech literacy simply via hands-on, day-to-day learning. Teachers will become used to accessing homework, learning content, correspondence and test results via the cloud, centralised in one place. This is particularly relevant as we head towards another summer of teacher assessed grades, and an ongoing requirement to build a robust evidence trail of assessments – cloud computing will play a significant role here, and teachers will be building new digital skills, on the job, as part of this requirement.

Teachers will also have new responsibilities as digital learning evolves - for instance, understanding who has accessed or downloaded data, in what location, and even onto what device, will become part of a teacher's responsibility in the future, supported by technology. ∎

LIVE IT

Time to take a few moments out for some light and interesting reading – a well-earned break from numbers and statistics!

What a wonderful world

The 1,000th captive-bred hazel dormouse has been released into the wild in a UK-wide reintroduction scheme for these threatened mammals according to BBC News. Big-eyed and famously sleepy, the dormouse is a woodland and fairy tale icon, but it is a species in decline. Once widespread, the animals have now disappeared from 17 English counties. Reintroduction, scientists say, is the only way to bring dormice back to habitats from which they have been lost. The project - a collaboration between the wildlife charity People's Trust for Endangered Species, Natural England and the University of Cumbria, brought 15 breeding pairs to a secret location in the Arnside and Silverdale area of outstanding natural beauty in Lancashire.

LIFE HACK

Drilling into the ceiling? Attach the base of a plastic cup to the drill to prevent dust and debris from getting in your eyes.

Pub quiz

1. Continental United States has four time zones; can you name them?
2. What was the Turkish city of Istanbul called before 1930?
3. From which US city does the band *The Killers* originate?
4. Name the coffee shop in US sitcom *Friends*.
5. How many human players are there on each side in a polo match?

Answers: 1.Pacific, Mountain, Central, Eastern 2.Constantinople 3. Las Vegas 4.Central Perk 5.Four

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that each insect is a host to ten bacterial species? There are around two billion species on planet Earth - with 6.8m likely to be species of insects - and up to 10 types of bacteria live inside of each of these insects!
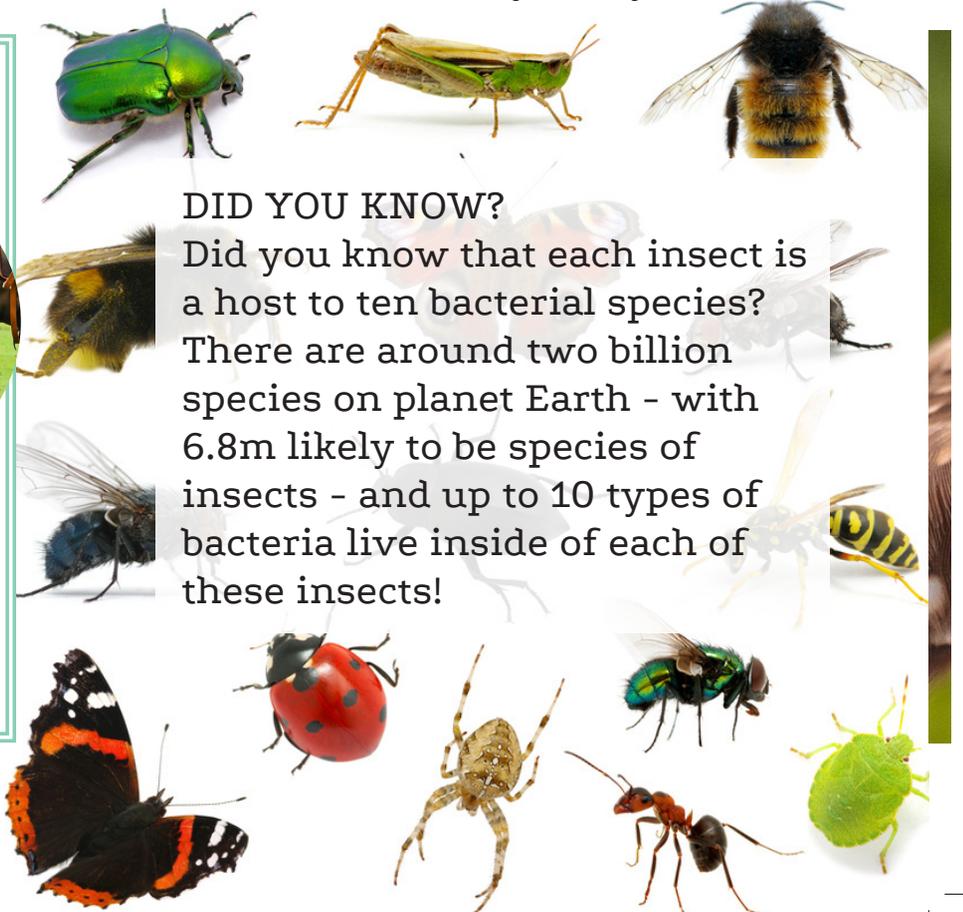
I would walk 5,000 miles

Thumbs up!

BBC News has reported that a woman has completed a 5,000-mile walk from Ukraine to Wales. Ursula Martin arrived back in Llanidloes, Powys, on Sunday - nearly three years after setting off from the Ukrainian capital Kiev. The trek was to raise awareness of ovarian cancer, which she was diagnosed with 10 years ago. At the time of her diagnosis, she was due to walk back to the UK after kayaking the length of the River Danube, which runs from Germany to Romania. "I ended up in Bulgaria about to walk back to Britain, and I got ovarian cancer," she said. "I wasn't ready to go back and do the big tough journeys, so I did a 3,500 mile walk in Wales which was very much a 'symptoms of ovarian cancer awareness-raising journey'. Then I had this sense of 'Where was I? What was I doing?' and I was about to walk across Europe - I just wanted to finish what I started."

"The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing."
Walt Disney

Caption competition

Let us know your funny caption ideas by tweeting us
@edexec

Well, knock me down with a feather!

RUNAWAY MONKEY REUNITED WITH FAMILY

A runaway monkey has been reunited with its owners after being found at a train station near Glasgow, *Sky News* has reported. Scotrail put out an appeal on social media after the primate was found at Cambuslang train station on Saturday afternoon, calling for its owners to get in touch. "I've dealt with lost 'phones, handbags and glasses over the years, but this is definitely a first," the operator tweeted. "If you've lost your monkey... it's waiting on the next service from Cambuslang into the town." Hours later, the owners had been found, and the monkey - believed to be a marmoset - was taken home again.

Access to CPD for school business leaders in 2021

VAL ANDREW discusses how to access CPD in the world of the 'new normal'

I
t has been clear for the last few years that most members of the first generation of school business leaders are now approaching retirement age – the sector stands to lose tons of experience, which is a real concern. However, through my involvement in delivering CPD for the profession - including the latest iteration of Diploma in School Business Management Level 4 programmes - it's also clear that there is a new generation of school business leader emerging from the shadows, champing at the bit, keen and ever-eager to tackle the challenges ahead.

In this 'almost' post-pandemic era what then are the options for these eager new school business leaders with a real thirst for knowledge and information about the role and the profession more widely?

Traditionally, professional development for SBLs has included studying for specific qualifications linked to the areas of expertise required for the role – for example the remaining generic SBM qualifications (DSBM at Levels 4/5) various apprenticeship routes up to Level 7, or a range of more specialised courses and programmes in the separate disciplines that make up the SBL role such as finance, HR, project management, estates/premises management, data management etc.

Outside the realms of professional study, SBLs have had access to local and regional networking groups, local and national conferences and workshops, sessions run by various organisations - ASCL, ISBL, NAHT and others - guidance from DfE/ESFA, and the opportunity to attend whole school training at INSET days. This is not an exhaustive list, but you'll note that most of these would have involved physical attendance.

I'm a huge advocate of face-to-face sessions; there's nothing quite like seeing the whites of the eyes of your tutor/facilitator to reinforce their credibility and kudos, and to have the opportunity to network with other delegates over the table in professional discussion, or between sessions over a coffee. However, some of us are not yet ready for a full return to face-to-face engagement and, for the time being, having to settle for virtual engagement online. The burning questions are:
• is this so bad?
• is it detrimental to our new breed of SBLs?

My response to both of those questions is a resounding 'NO'.

STUDYING FOR PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Most training providers have transitioned their delivery models across to an online format very successfully. At Best Practice Network we record the online tutorials and workshops for participants to access if they are unable to attend the live session, there are online discussion forums during the live tutorials and on the VLE, and we have a series of 1:1 coaching sessions to support individuals with their studies. Online delivery allows participants to factor in their study time when it suits them best, without having to incur additional costs travelling to a training venue and

taking time away from school, so can be tailored more directly to need and circumstances, and be cost effective at the same time.

CONFERENCES AND ONLINE WORKSHOPS

There are real advantages to these virtual sessions too. Again, attending virtually removes the need to incur additional travelling costs or spend whole days away from the desk. Lots of online conferences now take place over several days, meaning you are able to dip in and out, and only attend the sessions of real interest. If you select the wrong workshop you can leave without the embarrassment of walking out – there's every chance that nobody will notice if you just log out.

REGIONAL SBL NETWORKING GROUPS

These are undoubtedly an invaluable support mechanism for SBLs and also provide CPD opportunities too. Many of these groups have also transitioned their delivery to online platforms and have continued to operate during lockdowns. I expect many will resume face-to-face engagement now the restrictions relax but, potentially, in areas of wider geographical reach some might retain online elements into the future, and adopt a hybrid approach - being ever mindful of the ongoing budgetary challenges that schools face.

COACHING AND MENTORING

This was already emerging as a popular choice for many SBLs even before the pandemic, but the opportunity to continue through online channels has increased the potential for this as another incredibly valuable support mechanism to help SBL professionals network and develop their own personal skills. The advantage is that

If you select the wrong workshop you can leave without the embarrassment of walking out

specific, 1:1, focus on individual challenges and needs – this tailored approach is a powerful way of identifying which skills you need to develop and how this might be achieved.

The characteristics of good professional development include being rich in content, relevant to personal and professional needs, practice-focused, challenging and sustainable. All of the above delivery methods tick these boxes. Speaking to other training providers, the consensus is favourable for continuing with virtual delivery, based on feedback from their participants. A key advantage is the cost saving, mindful of the ongoing pressure school budgets are likely to experience and, whilst some sacrifices are necessary, it is still possible, with a little creativity and proactivity, to expand your network of 'phone a friend' colleagues even though you don't meet them face-to-face.

Don't forget that at virtual events there won't be any queues for the toilets, you can nip and grab a coffee when you're actually thirsty without anyone knowing, and you can still check your emails if you need to without the fear of a judgemental stare! ∎

Val Andrew

- Programme manager for Best Practice Network DSBM Level 4 - find out more: *https://www. bestpracticenet.co.uk/ dsbm-l4*
- Patron of ISBL
- Formerly ASCL School Business Leadership Specialist (2010 - 2018)
- Recipient of ISBL CEO Award for exceptional contributions to school business leadership in 2018
- Semi-retired SBL and very proud grandma

60 seconds with

We speak to MAGGIE DUNCAN, school business manager at The Derby High School, Bury, about the colour of unicorns, inspirational SBL networks, and the fun that the students at her school bring her

Maggie Duncan
School business manager at the Derby High School, in Bury

What led to your current role?

I was working at an amazing primary school with an inspirational head. I had a little time off to be with my daughter and realised that I was ready for my next challenge professionally. However, I didn't pursue it until my headteacher retired. I wanted to go back into secondary so applied for a few roles that were advertised. I learned so much in this process about myself - my strengths and weaknesses and what I wanted from my next setting. I also met some great people along the way. However, I truly clicked with the staff I met in my current school and jumped at the chance when I was offered the job. What I wasn't expecting was that my first year would consist mainly of managing all the requirements of a pandemic.

Favourite aspect of working as an SBL so far?

Actually, working with the students - it grounds me and inspires me every time. I have been lucky to be a stagehand at a student performance of Joseph where my heart burst with pride. I have chaperoned proms, been the lead on educational visits, settled an argument about what colour the best unicorn is (it's purple, by the way) and students have taught me how to 'whip nae nae'.

Greatest professional achievement?

Selfishly, it is successfully presenting a business case to governors for my position on SLT and renumeration as such. Actually in my role, my biggest achievement was raising £280,000 of income and savings in one year to put back into the students' education and experiences.

How do you continue to grow, professionally and personally?

Networks, Twitter, listening to advice and mirroring behaviours of those that inspire me. I have found this year hard and did 'lose my mojo' for a while, however the fire has been reignited. To help fuel that fire I have bought some books - *10% Braver, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, Managing Difficult Conversations, Who Moved My Cheese?* and *Productivity for School Business Managers.*

Who do you take inspiration from?

Professionally - everyone I meet. I learn something new from every encounter. However, there are four very strong ladies who have been through a terribly challenging year but have continued to be amazing and have, or will, overcome their hurdles.

Personally - my seven-year-old son and two-year-old daughter. They have dealt with all the changes this year brilliantly. My son is kind and caring and competitive. My daughter has high expectations, a wicked sense of humour and has a huge appetite - all traits that I admire greatly!

Working with the students - it grounds me and inspires me every time

Three words to describe the role?

Exhausting, frustrating but truly fabulous!

One thing you could change about the role?

The lack of respect/recognition of the role by some colleagues in the sector.

Funniest SBM moment?

There have lots over the years but most recently was watching a video a student had made using staff pictures. The headshots were singing and dancing! It really made me belly laugh - I admired the student's technical skills and sense of humour. ∎

GET YOUR DIARIES OUT!

We're back with dates for our 2021 events!

It's been a tough 12 months, with more challenges to come – so we thought we would bring a little slice of (professional) happiness for us all to look forward to…!

Get ahead of the professional curve, network and re-charge by joining us at *EdExec* LIVE – our leading school business management conference

ED EXEC LIVE

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London- 30th September 2021

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