

EDUCATION EXECUTIVE

SUPPORTING BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL EXCELLENCE IN SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES

Welcome
to our
November/
December
edition
2024



Why You're Not the Bad Guy

Within schools, it can feel like we're seen as the 'bad guy.' Lisa Bower encourages SBLs to view things from a different perspective

ALSO INSIDE THIS MONTH:

UNPICKING THE THREADS

Clare Skinner talks about what you can discover from analysing your accounts

EDEXEC LIVE 2024 IN REVIEW

We look at the highlights from this year's events and look forward to 2025

DISCOVERING AFFORDABLE ICT

Nigel Milligan on how to keep ICT cost effective and future forward



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School Business Leader Wellbeing Index 2024

This ground-breaking research collectively understands the Mental Health and Wellbeing of SBLs in state-funded schools across England and Wales

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School Business Leaders Wellbeing Index 2024

Working in schools in England and Wales

January 2024



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**Gold Trusted
Service Award**
2023

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**Gold Trusted
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Editor's comment

Do You Hear What I Hear?

It's almost December! That time of year when you're either freezing your toes off or desperately searching for those gloves you swore you'd put somewhere safe. At least with Christmas just around the corner, there's some festive cheer to look forward to – twinkling lights, mince pies and maybe a festive market or two!

But the work of a school business leader never really stops, does it? That's why this issue is packed with practical advice to help you not only keep up with the festive madness - but get ahead of it too!

This month, Jo Marchant shares practical tips on using data to manage your estate, helping you avoid those moments when it all feels as tangled as a string of Christmas tree lights. Gemma Tunstall shares her inspiring journey of going solar at Wellington School, proving that sustainability and schools can go hand in hand and make an impact on the community.

Nigel Milligan offers clever, budget-friendly strategies to rethink your ICT setup and Gary Henderson breaks down why Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) is essential in the digital age.

As the calendar year ends, it's a good time to check in with yourself too, so check out Lisa Bower's candid thoughts on being seen as the "bad guy". We've all been there – making tough decisions is part of the job, but it doesn't mean we're in it alone.

We've also got an insightful interview with Rebecca Cunliffe, who went from radio to wrangling school budgets! Her honest take on imposter syndrome, advocating for support staff and embracing the challenges of the SBM role is a great read to enjoy with a brew and a Quality Street or two.

So, as the festive season kicks off, I hope you manage to find a moment for yourself – whether it's sipping on a steaming mug of hot chocolate, watching a classic Christmas movie, or indulging in far too much cheese as you unwind!

Whatever your version of festive downtime looks like, make sure you take a moment to pause and give yourself credit for just how much you've achieved this year.

Here's to making it through December with a bit of comfort, plenty of indulgence and time spent with your loved ones!

See you on the other side,
Laura x

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 Laura@intelligentmedia.co.uk

LAURA WILLIAMS
EDITOR

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.

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Take a break for some light-hearted reading



Education Executive is the first business management magazine written exclusively for school business managers and bursars, bringing you the latest issues affecting your role, from finance to premises, procurement to HR. *EdExec* delivers the lowdown on all the hottest topics in education management right here, every month.

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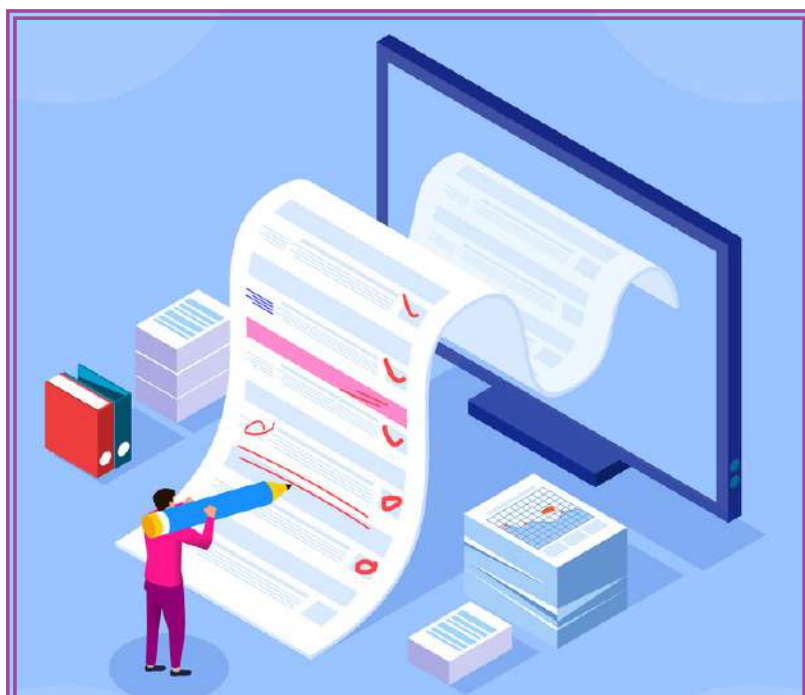
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NEWS

The latest news and views from the world of education



Ofsted Updates School Inspection Policies

As reported by *Gov.uk*, Ofsted has published updates to its state-funded school inspection handbooks as well as its deferral, pausing and gathering additional evidence policy, as routine school inspections returned this September.

State-funded schools will now not receive an overall effectiveness grade during graded inspections, following the decision by the Department for Education. This change has been reflected in the handbooks. The handbooks have also been updated to reflect the changes to ungraded inspections, designed to reduce the burden on school leaders and allow more time and flexibility for inspectors to get to know the school, including its context and priorities.

Other updates include a change to allow schools which have issues with safeguarding, but there are no other concerns, to remedy the issues before the report is published.

@garyhenderson18 It's great to see an all-girls team representing the UK. We need greater diversity in the STEM world so is great to see this being encouraged and supported.

Government Reinstates School Support Staff Body

As reported by *Gov.uk*, The School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) is being reintroduced to ensure fair pay, career progression and proper recognition for essential school support roles.

The reintroduction of the body marks a key milestone in the Education Secretary's commitment to reset the relationship with the sector. It will also play a vital role in helping to ensure that schools can continue to recruit and retain the staff they need to drive standards. The SSSNB will be tasked with making sure support staff are paid fairly and have access to training and career progression opportunities.

Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson said: "Support staff make up over half the workforce and our schools would grind to a halt without our brilliant teaching assistants, catering staff, caretakers and many more vital roles.

They make a huge contribution to children's education and the smooth running of our schools. By reinstating "the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) we will make sure they are properly valued and respected as professionals."



@sbl365 Does anyone else do that thing on a train where you find an eyeline to stare into, but it can't cross anyone else's eyeline, because eyelines are like lasers, and can't touch? Just me?

Government Boosts Education Funding In Budget

In a move that has been positively received by the education sector, the Autumn Budget announced a real-term increase in the education budget, including essential funding for core school budgets, substantial capital investment for schools, enhanced provisions for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the rollout of breakfast clubs.

Dr Patrick Roach, General Secretary of NASUWT – The Teachers' Union, said: "We welcome the Government's commitments to

education and public services set out in the Budget, which marks a step change in approach by the new Government.

The budget outlines a commitment to not only restore funding but also to ensure that schools have the necessary resources to provide quality education. As the education community reflects on the announcements made in the Autumn Budget, there is a sense of cautious

optimism regarding the potential for meaningful change within the sector."



School Absence Rates Drop Slightly This Year

As reported by *The Independent*, unauthorised absences in England fell this September, as higher fines aim to boost school attendance.

Department for Education data shows the unauthorised absence rate across schools in England was 2.0% in the week ending September 13th, compared with 2.1% in the equivalent week in 2023.

It comes as parents face higher fines if they take children out of class without permission this academic year as part of a government drive to boost attendance. School absence fines have increased from £60 to £80 under the changes, and a parent who receives a second fine for the same child within a three-year period will automatically receive a £160 fine.

The latest DfE school attendance data also shows that the overall absence rate – authorised and unauthorised – was 4.8% at the start of this term, compared with 5.0% in September 2023.



Schools Urged to Adopt OpEx Approach

A new report commissioned by the Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL), supported by the Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) International, suggests schools and trusts can boost operational capacity by 20-30% using commercial-style operational excellence techniques.

OpEx is defined as "the cultural transformation and technical enablement of an organisation that allows it to perform optimally and achieve its strategic objectives".

The report claims the approach could help to reduce and even eliminate waste from a range of tasks and processes over time.

ISBL CEO Stephen Morales said "If we apply OpEx we can create conditions where excellence is more likely to happen. The report is confident that a 20-30% increase in operational capacity is possible."

The report includes a practical framework for using OpEx approaches in schools and trusts. The framework includes a series of statements of what good OpEx practice looks like, leading with its impact on teaching and learning, and including process and quality control, resource planning and deployment and data performance measurement.



@EldonPrincipal Today begins the wild challenge of taming a new pair of Dr Martens. There will be tears, pain and blood but then utter loyalty and devotion. Need to break them in before the leaves fall...

What You Need to Know About Employment Rights Bill Changes

Ministers have introduced the Employment Rights Bill aimed at boosting economic security and growth for businesses, workers and communities across the UK. But how will this impact schools, and what key points should school business leaders be mindful of?

The government has introduced the Employment Rights Bill, designed to enhance economic security and growth across organisations, workers and communities. This new legislation brings important changes that school business leaders should understand and prepare for, as it could directly impact employment practices, policies and school operations.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGES

Revitalising the labour market is crucial, as one in five UK organisations with more than 10 employees are facing staff shortages. The new bill introduces 28 employment reforms, including ending exploitative zero-hours contracts and fire-and-rehire practices, while establishing day-one rights for paternity, parental and bereavement leave.

Statutory sick pay will also be improved by removing the lower earnings threshold for all workers and eliminating the waiting period before sick pay starts.

Alongside these changes, new measures will aim to make workplaces more adaptable to employees' lives, with flexible working becoming the default

where feasible. Large employers will also be required to develop action plans to address gender pay gaps and support employees going through menopause. Additionally, protections against dismissal for pregnant women and new mothers will be reinforced.

THE SBL ROLE

SBLs should familiarise themselves with these changes and review current policies to identify any necessary updates. It's essential for SBLs to carefully examine the reforms, along with the 'Next Steps' document for the Make Work Pay Plan. Additionally, SBLs should be aware of the creation of a new Fair Work Agency, which will consolidate existing enforcement bodies to ensure compliance with rights like holiday pay, and offer guidance to employers on legal requirements.

EXAMPLES OF CHANGES

- The two-year qualifying period for protections from unfair dismissal will be removed
- The government will consult on new statutory probation periods for new hires
- Clearer standards for employers by establishing a new right to bereavement leave
- Tackling low pay by accounting for cost of living when setting the Minimum Wage

As the government continues to review key areas such as pay discrimination, parental leave and carers' leave systems, further changes are likely on the horizon. School business leaders should stay informed and be prepared to adapt policies as new legislation is introduced to ensure compliance and support the evolving needs of their staff. ■

Employers will be required to develop action plans to address gender pay

SPOTLIGHT ON

Choose Respect: The Impact of Workplace Bullying

None of us like to imagine bullying happening in our workplace, yet recent data from the Chartered Institute of Professional Development reveals that it is still more widespread than we might hope

National Anti-Bullying Week will be held from November 13th to 17th this year, focusing on raising awareness and acting against bullying in communities and workplaces. The theme for 2024 is “Choose Respect.” In this article, we explore the surprising statistics on workplace bullying and discuss how school business leaders can work with heads and senior leaders to create safe and inclusive working environments.

THE EFFECTS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

Workplace bullying can severely impact teams, leading to decreased productivity and increased absences as employees try to avoid confrontational situations. It can also result in high staff turnover and, in the worst cases, expensive legal action.

The study found that certain groups are more susceptible to workplace bullying. Women report experiencing conflict more often than men (28% compared to 22%). Ethnic minorities also encounter higher rates of conflict at 29%. Those with disabilities are especially vulnerable, with 35% reporting conflict, compared to 23% of those without disabilities.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Identify patterns of behaviour. SBLs should closely monitor reasons for absences, recurring grievances and signs of low morale and discuss concerns with the SLT
- Encourage investment in training that promotes self-awareness, conflict management and inclusivity for all employees
- Stay mindful of external factors that can intensify workplace

conflict, such as rising workloads, deadline pressures or changes in internal structure

- Ensure staff understand the policies and reporting channels for addressing workplace bullying

It's important for school business managers to understand what constitutes acceptable behaviour in the workplace, as bullying isn't always intentional; some actions may be unconscious or unrecognised by those who engage in them. By understanding this, school business managers can model appropriate behaviour themselves and be better equipped to recognise when it's not happening. ■

COMMON TYPES OF BULLYING

- Verbal abuse
- Intimidation
- Social exclusion
- Micromanagement
- Cyberbullying
- Sexual harassment
- Discrimination

THE STATISTICS

- 25% of people have encountered workplace conflict in the last year
- Verbal abuse (34%) and discrimination (20%) were amongst the highest reported incidents
- Only half of employees who report workplace bullying feel satisfied with their jobs
- Employees who experience conflict are twice as likely to leave their job within a year



CLICK IT

This month's round up of the best *edexec.co.uk* had to offer our readers... We've done the hard work of pulling together the best bits and the most clicked content from the website, so you don't have to

MANAGEMENT



The Cost of Recruitment

With many schools facing recruitment challenges, Clare Skinner emphasises the importance of thoughtful recruitment strategies, ensuring that staffing solutions not only meet immediate needs but also provide the best value for money

Read the full article [HERE](#)



INTERNATIONAL CYBER SPORT TOURNAMENT GIRLS TEAM



ICT MATTERS

From Gaming to Growth: Esports in Schools

Esports as a term is still widely misunderstood especially within education circles. While out-dated images of 'gamer' personas can conjure concerns about isolation and addiction, as Gary Henderson points out, competitive gaming encourages teamwork, communication and confidence building

Read the full article [HERE](#)

DID YOU KNOW?

According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the youngest ever eSports pro got his start at just 6 years old!





PROGRESSION



Professional Development: Benefit and Impact

When school budgets are under serious pressure, it's often the CPD budget that is the first victim of any necessary compromises in the quest to balance the books. In this article, Val Andrew looks at the impact

and range of the benefits of ongoing professional development for SBPs both from an individual's perspective and the employer's perspective
Read the full article [HERE](#)

PROGRESSION



Lessons Learnt From our Lockdown Drill

"So, you're going to ring the bell, and everyone will stay in their classroom.... Isn't that what happens every hour of every day?" Gary Hennigan offers a reflective account of implementing a school lockdown drill, highlighting the challenges and successes of the process

Read the full article [HERE](#)



'Looking to make CPD a priority in 2025? Make sure to book yourself a place at one of the **EdExec LIVE events** taking place across the UK throughout the year!'





SUSTAINABILITY



Data and Metrics for Monitoring and Evaluating Progress

In their Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy, the DfE identified the important role schools must play in all aspects of sustainability. The area in which we have the most work to do is reducing our environmental footprint to achieve net zero. In this two-part article, the UKSSN share key tips and resources for the best use of data and metrics

Read the full article [HERE](#)

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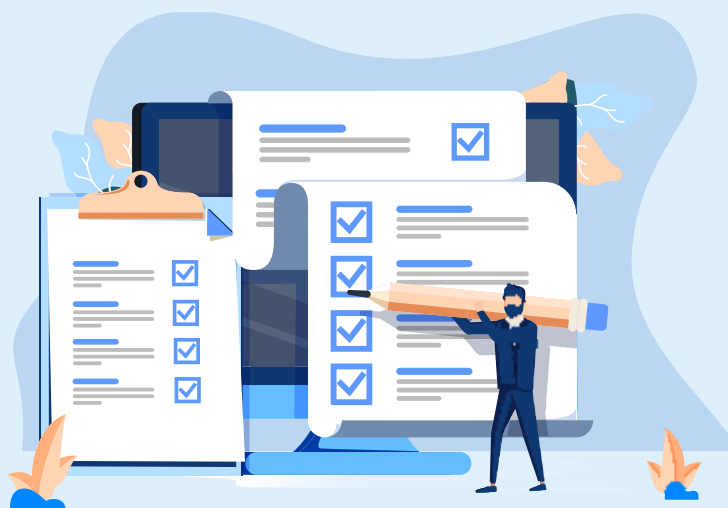
MONEY TALKS



No Need to Panic: Preparing For Your SRMA

In this article by Phil Burton, Success Academy Trust Business Manager, he draws on his recent experience of reviewing finances and explains why there's no need to panic at the prospect of a School Resource Management Advisor (SRMA) visit

Read the full article [HERE](#)



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Project Solar Power: From Idea to Installation



GEMMA TUNSTALL, finance and business manager, Wellington School, Altrincham, shares her experience of working with a community benefit society to install the largest community-owned solar array in Greater Manchester

We started in 2019, with the formation of Wellington School's first ever pupil eco-committee. From this group sprung a flurry of ideas of how the school could improve its impact on the planet. One item on a very long list was solar generation. In 2021, we commissioned an energy audit which was shortly followed by a global energy crisis; at this point we knew solar was now our top priority.

GETTING STARTED

Greater Manchester Community Renewables (GMCR) helped us to find our funding. GMCR is a society that aims to deliver carbon reductions and inspire others to take climate action by installing community-funded solar arrays.

GMCR asks the community to invest, they install the panels and generate electricity. The energy generated is sold to the school at a discount from the market rate, with surpluses exported to the grid. Income generated is used to cover project costs and pay back the community investment over 20 years. This means that GMCR take on the project

risks and costs, the school is asked to sign a lease agreement and electricity supply agreement to commit to purchasing the solar electricity used by the school.

Established in 2015, GMCR had a proven track record of delivering arrays worth £350,000 made up of 1,292 panels, at nine different sites. They'd previously generated 1.5 million kWh of clean electricity, saved their partners £160,000 on their bills and prevented around 570 tonnes of CO2 emissions! They even use any surplus funds to give grants to the community for carbon savings and environmental projects.

RAISING THE ROOF

GMCR offer full system design and structural surveys. We were fortunate that a lot of our roofs had very recently been refurbished so we knew we had thirty plus years lifespan remaining. Solar panels can be installed with weights on flat roofs and easily secured to some pitched roofs without damaging the surface. GMCR were very ambitious and aimed high, designing a system of almost 1,000 panels, setting a fund-raising target of £350,000!



With any project of this size - and the added complexities of working with a third-party organisation - there had to come some tricky parts

supply agreement (ESA) by our solicitors. This led to several communications back and forth and several iterations of the documents. There were some real head scratching moments, and it was here I realised how much I was learning well outside of my profession.

FINDING FUNDING

This was fully taken care of by GMCR. They timed the launch of their share offer to coincide perfectly with World Environment Day on 5th June 2023. GMCR generated interest through so many different avenues including our open morning, posting leaflets to residents, attending local festivals, sustainability shows, writing an article for the MEN - even appearing on BBC radio and the Manchester TV channel!

Working with them opened my eyes to the ways in which we as a school can engage with our community, not just for this project but for others in the future.

GMCR also took the time to present to our pupil eco-committee, asking for their support in spreading the word about their share offer.

THE LEGAL BIT

With any project of this size - and the added complexities of working with a third-party organisation - there had to come some tricky parts. It started with us commissioning a thorough review of the roof airspace lease and electricity

DFE APPLICATION

Once the contractual documents were agreed by both the school's and GMCR's solicitors, the next step was to prepare our application to the DfE for approval to grant the lease. The application form was as you'd expect, asking the important questions? Some to highlight would be;

- Rationale for choosing solar and consideration of other funding options
- Financial analysis and assessment of the adequate financial standing of GMCR
- Letter of support from the governing body
- H&S and safeguarding management
- Energy Management Plan
- Impact on insurance and any roof guarantees

The DfE contacted us with various follow up questions and requested some further changes to the lease and ESA. There were many emails and each time a change was proposed, it needed to be run past the solicitors again. All this hard work culminated in a meeting with representatives from the DfE - Land Transactions, Legal & Transactions Division, GMCR's solicitors and the school's solicitors to iron out the final details. A week or so later we received our approval! ▶

The installers chosen by GMCR were an absolute dream to work with

EASY INSTALLATION

From my perspective this was the easiest step of all. The installers chosen by GMCR were an absolute dream to work with, they worked in every weather imaginable, starting in December when we had strong winds!

Communication throughout was excellent and they finished ahead of schedule. Most of the works were completed in school holidays but some were during term-time, and there was no disruption at all to the teaching and learning environment which was fantastic. GMCR also made sure that high-quality equipment was used, including solar panels manufactured outside China to minimise the risk of Uyghur forced labour in the supply chain, and power optimisers to improve performance and provide enhanced fault prevention and detection.

For me personally it's been an absolute privilege to lead on this project for our trust. I've learnt so much, (some things I didn't think I'd ever need to know as an SBL!). Working with GMCR has been fantastic, these volunteers are truly inspirational, providing support at every stage, working flexibly around the school's busy schedule.

Not only has this project made financial sense, but it also

most importantly makes a real difference to our community and the planet. We have demonstrated to our pupils that we listen to their concerns about climate change and are proactive.

I'm proud to have delivered something which will benefit our pupils for the next twenty plus years! I hope by reading this article I've encouraged you to do the same. ■

UKSSN OPERATIONS GROUP

The UK Schools Sustainability Network (UKSSN) Operations group ('the Ops Group') was created in 2021 to encourage and support school operations, business, finance, estates, governance and sustainability leaders to take sustainability and climate action in schools. The network includes members working in various educational settings, from individual local authority schools to large multi-academy trusts and federations. The Ops Group is free to join and led voluntarily by Helen Burge FISBL (acting COO at The Prior Learning Trust), Paul Edmond FISBL (CFSO at HEART Academies Trust) and Julie Rowlandson (Sustainability Officer at St Bart's Academy Trust).

GEMMA'S TOP TIPS

- Make sure community owned solar is right for your school
- Weigh up against alternatives including self-funding and government grants
- Register your interest early - the journey can take over 12 months
- Ensure thorough presentation to full trust board/governing body for approval
- Use online tools to assess what size of solar array is suitable for your school
- Get to know your roofs – age, materials, guarantees etc.
- Consult with your insurers early
- Engage with governors, pupils, staff and parents throughout
- Seek independent legal advice
- Be aware of the extra workload and keep going!

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Getting to Know You: Rebecca Cunliffe

From Piccadilly Radio to wrangling school budgets, this month, we're getting to know **REBECCA CUNLIFFE**. Rebecca sat down with us to talk about her new role, meeting Timmy Mallet and how she's embraced "winging it" along the way!

If someone had told you five years ago that you would be sitting where you are now, what do you think you would have said to them?

I'd have laughed in their face, to be honest, I'm still shell shocked. I spoke to the head teacher yesterday and said, thanks for taking a chance on me! I love the profession. School business leadership is something that I'm really passionate about, but I never thought I'd land a job like this - for me, this is the top that I could ever have hoped for!

Well, you must be doing something right! Even if you don't always see that in yourself.

Yeah, we all suffer greatly with imposter syndrome! It's only when you come into a community and you start speaking that you realise how much you know, because it's such a lonely job. You sit there thinking 'I don't know if I'm doing it right'. None of us know whether we're doing it right. We're all winging it!

Tell us a bit about your story, what did you do before you turned to school management?

My first job was at a radio station in Manchester called Piccadilly radio. I'd been going to a place in Rochdale called Roller City every week, and one of the DJs used to do a slot there. I got chatting to Dave Ward, and he needed an assistant on the breakfast show at the weekends. I had to be there at six in the morning, so I would get up at five, go into Manchester and walk into Manchester Piccadilly radio station to be greeted by people that I listened to on the radio. There was Mike Sweeney and Timmy Mallet!

I ended up with my own slot, called Becky's TV Roundup, which was a 10-minute slot on a Sunday morning about what had happened in the soaps the previous week. The downside was that nobody shortens my name so my mum didn't like that they called me Becky!



I think that that's one of my jobs – to make what I do more visible

That sounds a bit glamorous for a first job! So, what has surprised you about working in education?

One of the things about working in education is that you speak to anybody and say you work in education, the first thing they think is you're a teacher. Nobody has a clue that there's any other staff. I adore teachers. They're incredible, and work really hard, but without the support staff, you can't run a school. I'm still shocked when I say I'm a school business manager, and they go what's that? I'm 20 years in, and that the profile hasn't lifted. If you're not a teacher, nobody understands anything that you do. It's sad, but hopefully we can change things.

That must be hard, to feel like you're a bit invisible. How do you manage that?

I think that that's one of my jobs – to make what I do more visible. I've got a meeting booked with all the support staff in my new school to say I am your voice. You need to share with me your frustrations. You need to talk to me, and I will raise it. I can't do my job if they don't open up to me. I think that that's my role, to make sure that they're heard, and they've got a voice.

You've recently started in a new role, what's that been like so far? (This interview was held the day after Rebecca started her new position!)

It's a new job, a new school, a new challenge. I can't tell you how welcomed I felt. I was a little bit nervous driving in thinking, oh, here we go, new kid on the block! It's the silly things, like not knowing where the kettle is and the toilet. But straight away, somebody came and made sure that I knew where everything was. If you look after me and make me a brew, I'll be your best friend for life! I do feel very, very lucky.

So, tell us, what would you change about the SBM role?

I don't think I want to change the job. You've got to be a little bit loopy to want to do this, because you're dealing with a leaking toilet one minute, and then you're doing a £4m budget set the next. Then you randomly bump into a child in the corridor. They tell you that they've got a frog in their pocket. You know, I've seen it all, and I like the madness of it! The tagline for the whole industry should just be 'embrace it!' ■

QUICK FIRE ROUND!

Proudest professional moment?

A former colleague's daughter recently got married and I was invited. It's one of my proudest moments - to be on someone's wedding guest list is special.

Who Are Your Heroes?

I don't think I'd have done any of this without my husband. In the professional world, it would be Sue Edwards, who started the Lancaster Association of School Business Management - she's so dynamic, and she's been a real inspiration.

What's on Your SBL Bucket List for 2025?

I would like to install a brand-new kitchen in this school. I think they deserve those facilities. That's number one, find the funding and get the kitchen upgraded!

Why You're Not the Bad Guy



As school business managers, we often find ourselves being less popular within the school, and at times, it can feel like we're seen as the 'bad guy.' However, **LISA BOWER** encourages school business leaders to shift their mindset and view this role from a different perspective

often describe myself as the 'No' person.

It is important to remember that saying no is often not the easiest thing to do - in lots of cases it is the hardest. I hate saying no - I'd love nothing more than to be able to have an unlimited supply of Pritt Sticks, computers for all and teaching assistants milling around the school supporting all teachers and students. But we say no to protect the school.

We are one of the few people in the building who have foresight of the whole school picture. We can see the three-year forecast and are in the sometimes scary position of understanding the longer-term implications of budgeting decisions.

PROTECTING OUR SCHOOLS

We have a responsibility and a privileged position that means we must protect the future of the school. We need to remember that this is not easy. The number of emails that I have saying, "I know the budget is limited, but please can I have..." is unbelievable. But I have learnt that it is not worth being angry or upset with staff for doing this.

If we were in their shoes we'd probably be fighting for our resources and our students. So rather than being irritated by being asked, I now respect the request and explain the reasons why expenditure is not possible. One hundred Pritt sticks is nothing, but 100 Pritt sticks for 25 classes is something. I use the Pritt Stick example as it is the currency of primary school - when I left my first SBM role, the staff presented me with a giant three-foot high Pritt stick that the staff had made for me!

The battles are not all about money - time off, sickness absence and working from home are also current issues. I personally find it is easy to answer a question where there is a policy to follow. I never feel like the bad guy when I can say to a staff member that I can't give them what they want, because it would be against the policy. This is tough, because sometimes we would like to be flexible, but we must remember that those policies are there for the staff and to protect us too. Having robust policies that are followed by everyone, makes life much easier.



I personally find it is easy to answer a question where there is a policy to follow

PROTECTING OUR PROCESSES

If being the bad guy with resources and staffing wasn't bad enough, we are also often the bad guy with parents. I find this difficult; parents are entrusting their child to the school, but they must follow the policies and processes too.

I have had a recent example of this with our mobile phone policy. We have not for a long time allowed students to access mobile phones in school.

If they are caught on their phone, the phone is confiscated until a parent comes in to collect it. This makes parents very cross.

I typically hear "This is a great policy, we love that you don't allow phones in school, but in the case of my child they will need their phone". Enforcing the rule is tough, it makes you unpopular and can sometimes mean confrontational conversations. However, when this is happening, I remind myself that if I don't follow the process, I am undermining everyone else in the school that is working hard to follow the process.

PROTECTING OUR PUPILS

Finally, the most important people in a school are the students. I could easily be a soft touch for our students. If they haven't got the correct uniform, bus money, lunch money, or I hear them swearing, life would be much easier to let it go. But we are not there for that. As a school we give the students consistency and reassurance. I have asked one of our students so many times now to take his hood down in the building, that now when he sees me, he automatically takes it down with a smile on his face! Maybe I'm the baddie, or maybe I'm just trying to kindly enforce our school rules.

On reflection I think I see myself as the bad guy, but I don't think that is the way that I am viewed from around school. I believe that as a profession we are considered, fair, empathetic, realistic and sometimes a little bit fraught. We should give ourselves a break and remind ourselves that everything we do is for the right reason, to protect the budget, the staff, the parents and the students. Most days I can pat myself on the back for having achieved this. ■

EDEXEC LIVE

HUB EVENTS

Growth, Success and New Partnerships: *EdExec LIVE* Evolves

“A must attend”, “The one must-do event for me every year” – with feedback like that, it’s no wonder there’s such a buzz surrounding **EdExec LIVE**. As we wrap up this year’s events, we celebrate a fantastic year of growth and success and look forward to even greater things ahead

When the *EdExec LIVE* team began planning this year’s event lineup back at the start of 2024 (doesn’t it seem like a long time ago?), one goal stood out: making the events bigger, better and more engaging than ever. Fast forward to right now and with three highly successful events delivered, including a first regional hub event in the West Midlands, it’s safe to say it’s a case of mission accomplished!

For those who joined us at one of this year’s three events, you’ll remember *Education Executive* editor Laura Williams touching on the values at the heart of the *EdExec LIVE* experience, as she welcomed delegates to the North, South, and Midlands.

“One of my personal missions is to empower SBLs to show everyone their superhero awesomeness and to give them the tools they need to do so.”

This focus on empowering SBLs to excel and find fulfillment in their roles became a defining theme for 2024, with each of the events featuring a programme dedicated to helping SBLs connect, grow and foster a strong sense of community.

ELEVATING, EMPOWERING AND ENGAGING

The year started with *EdExec LIVE* South, where SBLs gathered in London for expert-led seminars and hands-on workshops designed to build valuable new skills. Next, the Midlands event introduced the first-ever regional hub, bringing a new dynamic and element of collaboration, as we worked with regional groups in the area to deliver a brand-new partnership event.

Finally, *EdExec LIVE* in Harrogate wrapped up the year with the same energy and enthusiasm we saw in London, proving the passion and dedication of SBLs from start to finish! By adding an extra event to the calendar, increasing the total from two to three, SBLs had greater flexibility and options to choose the event that best suited their needs and schedule.

SPEAKER AND SEMINAR HIGHLIGHTS

Once again, our seminar speakers presented an inspiring series of talks that left attendees feeling energised and better equipped for the future, adding a wealth of new skills and strategies to their SBL toolkits.

What I love about *EdExec Live* is that there's a massive sense of community

better understanding of the varying needs and desires of SBL groups. This partnership aimed to bring together group members, colleagues from neighbouring areas and non-group attendees under one roof, creating a larger-scale event with enhanced networking and sharing opportunities.

NETWORKING, CONNECTING AND CATCHING UP

It was truly a pleasure to see so many SBLs fully engaged throughout each event, taking advantage of the time between seminars to converse, connect and forge new relationships—whether with old friends, new acquaintances, or by exploring the wide range of exhibitor stands at each venue.

It's through these connections that SBLs can support one another, exchange ideas and collectively navigate the challenges faced in their roles. As we witnessed at each event, the relationships formed and strengthened during these moments are instrumental in driving success and enriching the overall SBL experience.

Feedback from each of the event reflected this. *EdExec LIVE* South speaker Lorraine Ashover said, "What I love about *EdExec Live* is that there's a massive sense of community for SBLs and I love the fact that you see people coming in greeting one another." ►

EXPANDING
Our events are growing in 2025, expanding from three to eight events across the UK

Among the speakers were *Education Executive* regular contributors Rebecca Cunliffe and Kevin Parker, along with familiar faces like Clare Skinner, Emma Dalziel and Bal Bains amongst others. The diverse range of topics covered was a big hit with 2024 guests, covering valuable subjects such as maximising governance team relationships, simplifying sustainability and engaging staff with budgeting. Attendees also had the chance to enhance their self-care skills, learning strategies for better mental health and how to unleash their inner SBL superpowers.

In addition to our seminar speakers, the West Midlands hub event featured presentations from regional groups such as Birmingham, Solihull, Sandwell and Dudley. This fresh initiative not only established a strong precedent for regional engagement at future *EdExec LIVE* events, but also provided attendees with valuable insights from a group perspective.

The West Midlands event introduced something truly new and unique, created following extensive collaboration between the *EdExec* team and regional groups to gain a

THE CURRENT DATES AND VENUES ANNOUNCED FOR 2025 ARE:

- **EdExec LIVE North West:**
Manchester, February 2025
- **EdExec LIVE Herts & Home Counties:**
Hertfordshire, March 2025
- **EdExec LIVE West Midlands:** Birmingham, May 2025
- **EdExec LIVE Cumbria & The Pennines:**
Carlisle, May 2025
- **EdExec LIVE London & the South:**
London: June 2025
- **EdExec LIVE Liverpool and the Wirral:**
Liverpool, July 2025
- **EdExec LIVE South West Glos & Bristol:**
Gloucester, October 2025
- **EdExec LIVE Yorkshire & the Humber:** TBC, November 2025

Speakers presented an inspiring series of talks that left attendees feeling energised and better equipped for the future

Fellow speaker Rebecca Cunliffe echoed the sentiment, saying, “I love the variety of people that you get here. You see people from all different schools of different sizes, you’re welcomed at the door and there’s that opportunity to network and talk to the people on the stands.”

WRAPPING UP 2024

As *EdExec LIVE* Harrogate wraps up this year’s events calendar, the team is taking a moment to reflect on the incredible journey over the past twelve months. However, our sights are already firmly set on making 2025 an even more exceptional year. We are excited to reveal more over the coming weeks, with more details about our expanded program that aims to elevate the *EdExec LIVE* experience to new heights coming soon.

Those with keen eyes may have already noticed some early announcements regarding new dates and venues for the upcoming year. Our goal is to enhance the overall experience, offering even more opportunities for networking, learning and collaboration.

Laura Williams said, “2024 was all about establishing the standard for our new-look events, and 2025 will focus on surpassing that benchmark. We’re committed to delivering even more engaging and impactful experiences for the SBL community.”

2025 – EIGHT EVENTS, ISBL AND THIRTY REGIONAL GROUPS

2025 will see a major expansion of the *EdExec LIVE* events calendar, featuring eight confirmed events with the potential for even more. A pivotal aspect of this expansion is our formal partnership with the Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL). This collaboration means that *EdExec LIVE* will now fulfil ISBL’s commitment to hosting regional events.

This is fantastic news for the sector as we make strides towards building the biggest and broadest calendar of SBL



ELEVATING
We are pleased to be partnering with ISBL to deliver a new elevated event programme

events across the country, working with multiple business management organisations to deliver high quality, inclusive and targeted events.

The hub events will bring together multiple regional groups into single, comprehensive gatherings while maintaining the close-knit and engaging format that SBLs appreciate. This initiative is designed to create a more inclusive and robust events calendar, reaching SBLs across the UK. By collaborating closely with regional organisations, we can ensure that our events address the unique needs and priorities of SBLs in various areas.

As we look ahead to 2025, there is plenty to be excited about within the SBL community. With an expanded lineup of events and a commitment to collaboration and connection, SBLs who attend the new look events will be well-equipped to take on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. The enhanced focus on regional engagement and the formal partnership with ISBL will not only broaden the reach of our events but also ensure that each gathering is tailored to meet the diverse needs of SBLs, delivering what you want to see.



2025 will see a major expansion of the EdExec LIVE events calendar

A NEW YEAR, A NEW OPPORTUNITY

The *EdExec* team would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed to making this year the best yet: our incredible speakers, dedicated SBLs, enthusiastic exhibitors and everyone involved in creating these enriching experiences.

Bringing this year to a positive close, Laura Williams shared one final thought that we think resonates, “The topic I spoke about at my first event back in 2017 was ‘Demonstrating Impact and Gaining Recognition’ a topic that is as important now as it was then.”

“Attending an *EdExec* LIVE event goes beyond simply gathering the skills necessary for effective school management; it’s also about SBLs recognising their own value, appreciating their contributions and investing in their personal and professional development. As we approach the festive season, we encourage everyone to reflect on their growth and the importance of self-empowerment. Let’s enjoy Christmas and start the new year with purpose, empowered to make a meaningful impact in our schools and communities!”

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

If you’re looking ahead to 2025, you can discover more about what’s in store for future *EdExec* Events, including the dates and venues that have already been announced, by visiting the *EdExec* LIVE website www.edexeclive.co.uk. ■

ENGAGING
Want to find out more? Visit the *EdExec* LIVE website <https://www.edexeclive.co.uk/>

Operational Excellence Supports Effective Education Delivery

The emerging priorities of the new Labour government indicate a strong focus on promoting operational excellence and its benefits for the education sector. In this article, **ISBL** explains why this matters for SBLs



A focus on operational excellence ensures high-quality, equitable and efficient education, aligning resources and efforts to meet the evolving needs of students and society. This means that school business professionals can enhance their education provision, driving better outcomes for all students and supporting broader social and economic goals.

WHY DOES OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE MATTER?

The Labour government's priorities, such as reducing inequalities and delivering value for money from public funding, require efficient and effective operational systems to be successfully implemented across all publicly funded organisations.

A focus on operational excellence across our schools and trusts will support these priorities, as well as ensuring every child receives the best possible life chances.

Creating a holistic approach to operational excellence across an entire organisation will ensure that everyone is focused on delivering the best return on every resource, leading to incremental improvements, reduced waste and growth in overall impact.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Operational Excellence is the theme of this year's ISBL national conference, and we will be exploring the 12 key ingredients identified through the ISBL research conducted during June 2024.

The conference will demonstrate how all schools – regardless of size, phase or type – can benefit from an organisational focus on operational excellence and how this can lead to unlocking potential.

We will be aligning these insights to learning outcomes within ISBL's professional standards to ensure that all conference content provides the greatest opportunity for focused professional development, practitioner insights and shared learning opportunities.

ISBL's national conference aims to offer a unique blend of learning opportunities, networking and exposure to the latest sector trends and innovations, which means attending your annual professional body's national conference is more than just a ceremonial duty – it's a vital part of career growth and professional development.

WHY YOU SHOULD MAKE ATTENDING A CONFERENCE A PRIORITY

One of the most significant benefits of attending a national conference is the chance to network with peers, sector leaders and potential mentors. In today's interconnected world, building a robust professional network is invaluable because these connections can lead to new job opportunities, partnerships and collaborations. This networking extends beyond the conference itself, often leading to ongoing professional relationships that can be a source of support, advice and new perspectives.

Our national conference offers a one-stop solution for insights into the latest sector research, forecasts and



In an ever-evolving professional landscape, those who commit to continuous learning and networking stand out

innovation. By attending, you place yourself at the forefront of new developments within your field. Keynote speakers, expert panels and breakout sessions are designed to introduce you to the latest tools, technologies and methodologies.

STAYING INFORMED

Staying informed about these advancements is crucial for maintaining a competitive edge in your profession. It allows you to implement new ideas and strategies in your work, making you a more effective and innovative professional.

CPD

Professional development is at the heart of our conference, with our workshops and seminars providing practical insights and practitioner-led learning experiences that can enhance your skills and knowledge.

COMPLIANCE

Participating in your professional body's events helps you stay compliant with sector requirements and demonstrates

your commitment to professional growth. This dedication can be a significant factor in career advancement because employers and colleagues recognise continuing professional development.

WELLBEING

Supporting your wellbeing through hearing from inspiring speakers, engaging in stimulating discussions and seeing the innovative work of others can reignite your passion for your field. This inspiration often translates into higher productivity and a greater willingness to take on new challenges and initiatives.

In an ever-evolving professional landscape, those who commit to continuous learning and networking, stand out.

ATTEND YOUR PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE THIS NOVEMBER

Champion your attendance and investment in your career, ensuring that you remain knowledgeable, skilled and motivated for yourself and your school or trust.

To help you demonstrate the value and opportunities that the event offers,

we have developed a learning outcomes overview, which you can access on our website.

Furthermore, all the sessions at this year's event will be recorded and available to attendees' post-event, so you can review, catch up, make further notes and cascade learning across your wider school and trust team. ■

This is a sponsored article, brought to you by ISBL.



Using Data to Manage Your Estate Effectively



You may be managing your estate effectively and efficiently, but you also need to be able to demonstrate how - **JO MARCHANT** has some advice on how to prepare for the questions your board may ask

The Department for Education's Good Estate Management for Schools suite of documents includes a handy top 10 estate checks for boards. It covers questions on effective estate management and who's responsible for delivery, having the right skills, knowledge, how estates are managed, building condition, complying with legal responsibilities, emergency response, funding for investing in your estate and demonstrating value for money. Great topics, but how do you deliver the evidence to demonstrate your estate is being managed effectively? Let's have a look at each of the different checks and what data you need.

ARE YOU MANAGING YOUR ESTATE EFFECTIVELY?

Three key documents are required to demonstrate that your estate is being managed effectively. These are your estate vision, which should be used to support your school's educational vision; your estate strategy, which should state how you intend to deliver your vision; and your asset management plan, which should detail how you intend to deliver your strategy. Get these documents right and you're off to a cracking start!

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

This will depend upon your setting and who is your responsible body. For example, for single academies, multi-academy trusts and free schools, the responsible body is the trust; for local authority-maintained, voluntary-controlled and pupil referral units, it's the local

authority. For foundation, and voluntary-aided schools, it's the governing body. If the responsible body for your setting is the local authority, they're responsible for carrying out various statutory maintenance inspections such as annual gas appliance checks. So, make sure that you're holding them to account for carrying out the checks and have the certification to prove they've been done.

DO YOU HAVE THE SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITY?

Whoever the responsible body is, you need to ensure that they have the capability and capacity to manage your estate effectively. For example, in an eight to ten school multi-academy trust, the central services team may have a suitably experienced head of estates. However, building projects will require additional expertise from professional construction consultants. Your scheme of delegation should document the circumstances in which external expertise should be brought in. It's helpful to have this in the form of a checklist for each project to identify the level of expertise required, and to evidence the decision-making process to appoint external expertise.

WHAT ARRANGEMENTS ARE IN PLACE FOR ESTATE MANAGEMENT?

This is where your estate vision, strategy and asset management plan come in. These should document how you plan to provide safe and well-maintained premises, how your estate will facilitate the delivery of the curriculum and provide a positive

learning environment for students. Your estate strategy and asset management plan should be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect improvements that have been carried out or changing priorities.

WHAT IS THE CONDITION OF YOUR BUILDINGS?

Building condition surveys are a visual inspection of your buildings, mechanical and electrical equipment. They should be carried out by a chartered building surveyor and specialist engineer every three to five years. Your condition survey will contain a prioritised list of all the maintenance and improvement works required, together with timescales



and indicative costings. Having this information to hand will help you to make informed decisions and demonstrate the evidence on which your decisions have been made.

ARE YOU COMPLYING WITH LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES?

Schools need to comply with health and safety law and other guidance regarding the maintenance of their buildings and facilities. This includes preventative maintenance and statutory inspection, and testing and management of asbestos. Documentation is key to demonstrating your compliance with legal responsibilities. For example, all schools should have an up-to-date fire risk assessment and be able to evidence that any actions detailed in it have been carried out.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE DAMAGE OR DISRUPTION?

All schools should have a critical incident/business continuity plan which is reviewed regularly. Staff should be aware of their roles and responsibilities in an emergency and be confident in carrying them out. It's also helpful to know what your insurance cover provides for in an emergency.

WHAT FUNDING DO YOU HAVE AVAILABLE?

All schools receive capital funding. It's helpful to have a prioritised list of projects over the next three years with indicative costings so that funding can be allocated as appropriate when it becomes available.

Get these documents right and you're off to a cracking start!

ARE YOU SPENDING WISELY?

Your financial procedures should document the procurement method for goods and services at different levels of expenditure, and how value for money can be evidenced. For example, this might include getting three quotes, using a framework agreement to appoint a supplier, or going out to tender. Maintenance expenditure costs should be budgeted for and the reason for increasing costs investigated.

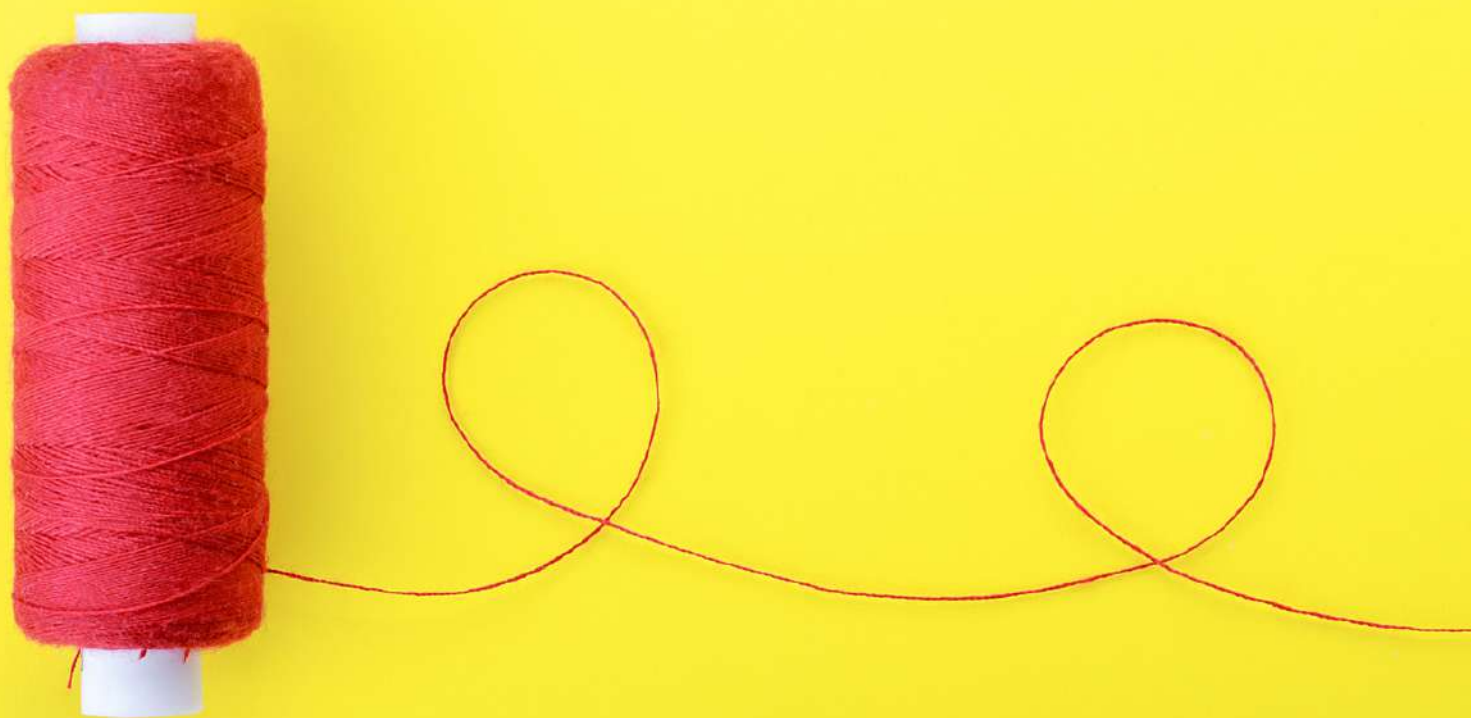
HOW CAN YOU BE MORE EFFECTIVE WITH EXPENDITURE?

Information is power! If you know how much a contract cost you last year, when the renewal quotes come in you can calculate the percentage increase. If the increase is above the rate of inflation, go back to your supplier and challenge them to justify their costs. If you work for a multi-academy trust, economies of scale can be achieved by negotiating trust wide contracts instead of contracts for each school.

Finally, when your board asks you these top 10 questions, make sure that you've got a document setting out what your evidence is and where to find it, so that you can easily demonstrate how your estate is being managed efficiently and effectively. ■

Jo Marchant MBE is the author of the bestselling *The School Premises Handbook* which can be purchased at [amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk) or other online retailers.





Unpicking the Threads of Accounts Management



Apart from being able to congratulate yourself on underspends and worrying about overspends, what else can you tell from your management accounts that can be useful in your SBL role? **CLARE SKINNER** has the answer

You will spend a lot of time preparing accounts, analysing the numbers and then reporting to your headteacher and governors/trustees - but what exactly are you telling them and how accurate is it?

In the first term of the new academic year, no matter what type of setting you are in or what stage in the financial year, it is a great opportunity to look at those numbers and really get the most from whatever they are telling you.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Much of your analysis will depend on how you produce your management accounts. I hope that your finance software does most of the leg work for you in terms of presentation and allows you to spend your time on the detail rather than the beauty of the report.

I always start with annotation around significant over or underspends of course, but why they are there and what you need to do to stop them recurring needs to be considered. Drill down! I start with areas



Where the data doesn't look right, ask what can you do to fix it?

of expenditure lines, move to ledger codes and interrogate cost - all to understand my variance. Only then am I able to address the issues, as I have a full picture.

I often review what codes have been used for expenditure lines and reallocate costs to ensure that everything is accounted for as accurately and consistently as possible. Where the data doesn't look right, ask what can you do to fix it? Simple activities like reviewing your spend profiling across the year could reduce any anomalies in your report. A bit of housekeeping on your accounts will allow you to focus on the line that is causing you problems or think of things from your "lovely things list" to spend that additional income on.

Don't just focus on your income and expenditure sheet either - spend time on your cashflow. Use it to understand when you could afford a larger outlay and if you need to agree different payment terms with suppliers to spread costs. Will the ability for academies to enter certain finance leasing options without pre-approval from the government improve your financial situation long-term?

What can you learn from your balance sheet? I use this to help me manage our transactional performance around finance when reviewing creditor and debtors. Are we maximising the payment terms we are offered or are we compromising our cashflow (and potential bank interest) by just paying everything as soon as the bill comes in? Who owes us money, why has it taken them so long to pay us and do we need to change our processes in chasing those debtors as a result? Why are we not claiming back our VAT every month and why on earth do we have POs on the system with no invoices when the work was done 3 months ago?!

All these activities can and will result in you finding ways to improve your operation in order which, might, in turn improve your financial position.

ASSUMPTION VERSUS EVIDENCE

We all need to pull out our crystal ball when we are developing budgets, particularly around that small spend area of staffing (!?). So, how can you back up your assumptions and ensure that they are reliable and remain so at this point?

PROTECT YOUR CPD!

I constantly hear people tell me that they are "too busy" to attend a webinar or go to a conference for the day, but I strongly disagree. What is more important than you being fully up to date with the latest education related information that gives you evidence to support your assumptions? ►



Things will change from the day you submit to the day that your budget gets approved, so know about what happens in between and how that will impact your assumptions for the current month, term and year. Evidence from the DfE, unions, ISBL and our networks all underpin the advice and guidance that you provide as a key element of your role. You must keep on top of things, so never apologise or put off that CPD.

You can now take all the previous actions and put them into your income and expenditure report and your cashflow forecast so that your outturns are as accurate as they can be at that point in time.

INFORMATION PRESENTATION

When we present our financial information, we often do so to individuals who are not finance savvy and therefore, we must make the information accessible to them. The words you add as narrative are just as important, if not more so than the numbers on the report.

Of course, you should celebrate the successes, but heads, governors and trustees need to understand the risks the information presents. You need to provide narrative around scenarios and “what ifs” in plain language so that they can make decisions quickly and with the best outcome.

Target the information to your audience so that they understand the big picture or the finer details dependent on the role they play in your setting. Trustees do not need to know if the art department has overspent by £50, but they do need to understand how

Target the information to your audience so that they understand the big picture

staff sickness absence is causing the supply budget to double. That’s the other thing - where there are issues, present solutions in your reports. Be clear on the options available to address the problem and the variety of outcomes each of those options could create.

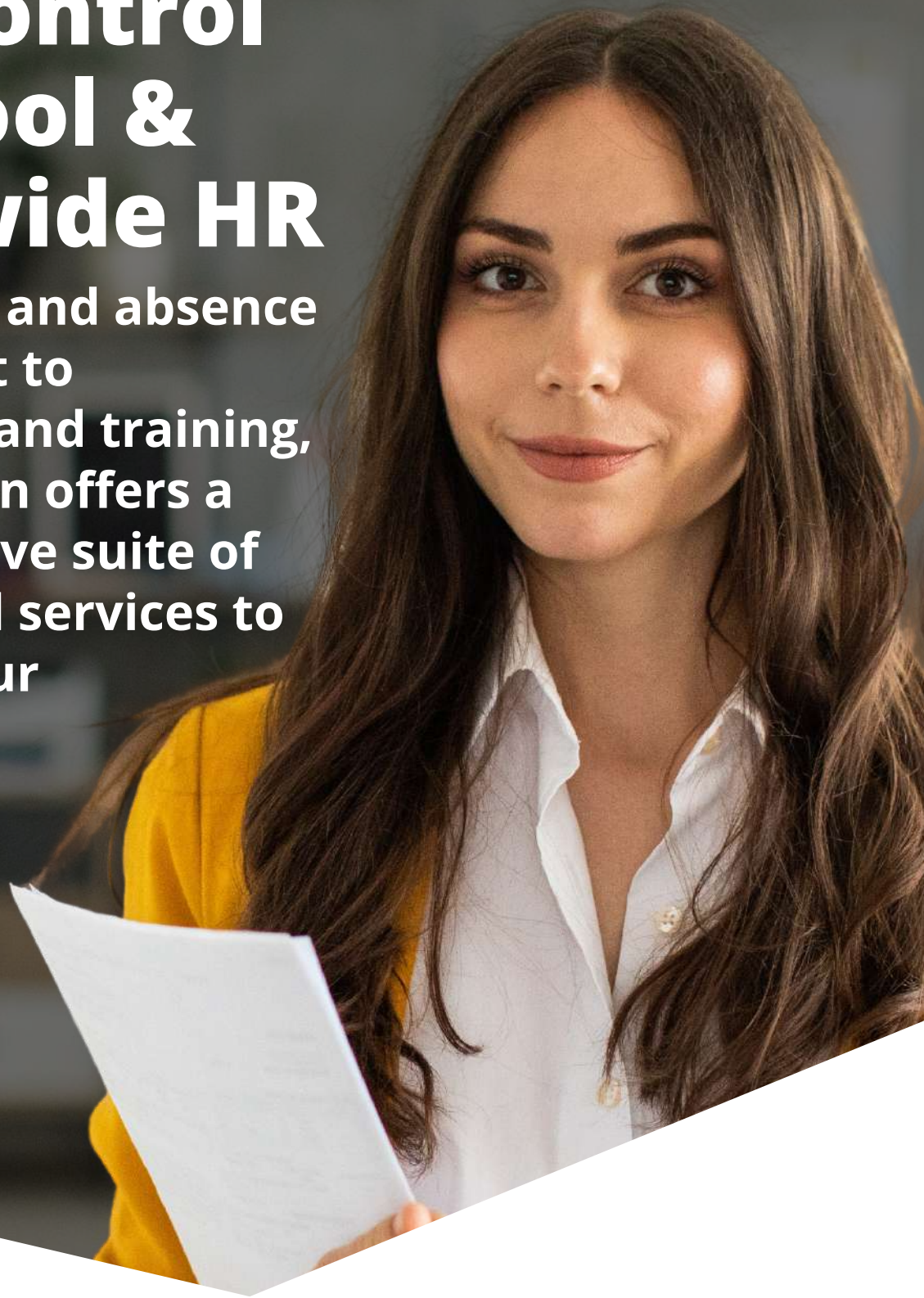
Finally, summarise your month end position against the KPIs that have been set and agreed, showing the progress from month-to-month so that can be tracked and monitored as well.

It would be very easy to roll out the same reports month after month but, apart from being quite boring, we wouldn’t be doing our jobs properly. Build up your resilience by challenging yourself and investing the time and effort in unpicking your numbers each month. Then you can clearly evidence where you have made things better through the data you have analysed, the options you have presented and the decisions that you have implemented.

Et voilà, job satisfaction! ■

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Education

SWITCHED ON

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

Thousands of Parents Pledge Smartphone Ban

As reported by *The Guardian*, parents at 20% of UK schools have joined a campaign promising to withhold smartphones from their children until at least age 14.

A “parent pact” organised by Smartphone Free Childhood has been signed by at least one parent at 6,537 schools, with the signatories representing just under 35,000 children. The pact states that “acting in the best interests of my child and our community, I will wait until at least the end of year 9 before getting them a smartphone”.

According to research by the media regulator, Ofcom, 89% of 12-year-olds own a smartphone.

Smartphone Free Childhood said the pact was anonymous, but it has broken down data on sign-ups into regions and schools, publishing the findings on its website.



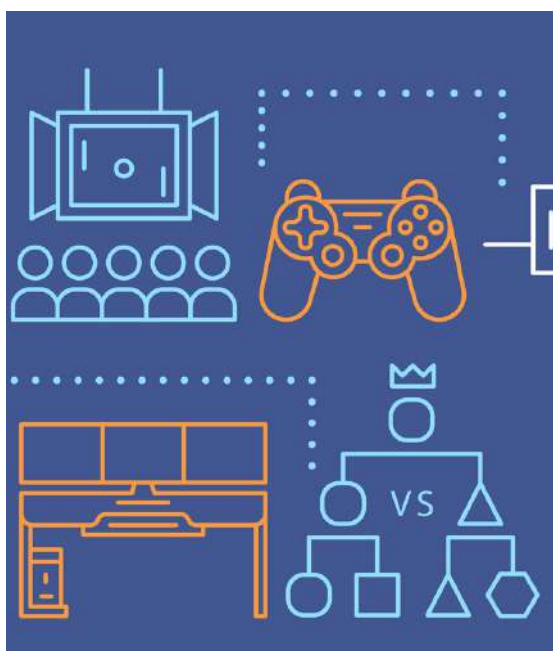
Grammar School Kitted Out with Esports Hub

Reigate Grammar School, a private school situated in the rolling greenery of Surrey, has launched a state-of-the-art esports hub on its campus.

The hub includes 24 fully kitted gaming PCs in a renovated IT room that will act as both a teaching space and a gaming facility for the school’s esports club. It makes Reigate Grammar School one of a select few high schools in the UK to have such a venue.

The esports hub was made possible by a donation from Andy Paul, CEO of gaming hardware manufacturer Corsair, who attended the school and wanted to give back to the students there.

Paul worked with the school to find a solution: to donate top of the line PCs to plug keyboards into, alongside all the other gear that comes with an authentic gaming setup. Paul and other Corsair employees held a workshop with the schoolchildren, who built the PCs themselves under Corsair’s guidance. Each computer case is signed by the kids who built it.



Ofqual Urges Schools to Prioritise Cybersecurity

Ofqual is reminding schools and colleges of the importance of cybersecurity after a poll highlighted the risks associated with poor cyber hygiene. The prompt comes as a Teacher Tapp survey found one in three secondary teachers did not have cybersecurity training, in the last academic year.

Ofqual's executive director of General Qualifications Amanda Swann said, "Losing coursework that is the result of many hours of

hard work is every student's nightmare. Even more distressing is losing a whole class or year group's coursework because of weak cyber security."

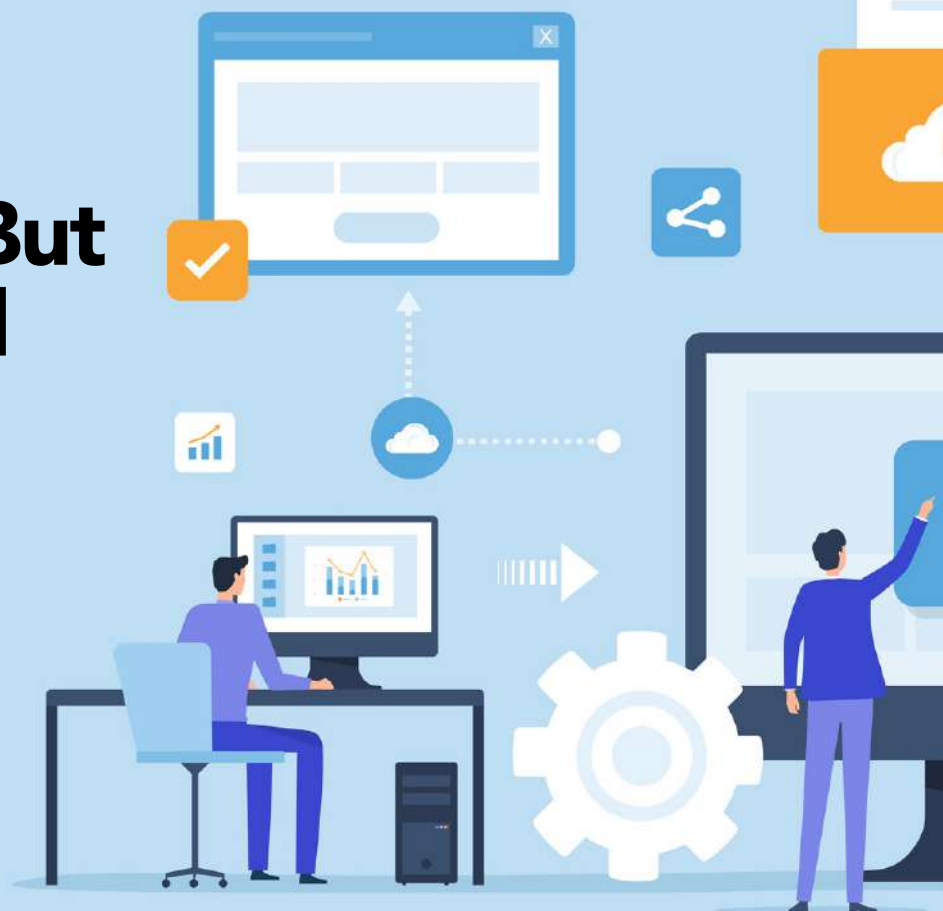
The poll, which surveyed teachers across England, also found that 34% of schools and colleges in England experienced a cyber incident during the last academic year. For tips designed for schools on how to defend against cyberattacks, SBLs can visit the National Cyber Security Centre school resources page.



Building an Affordable But Streamlined ICT System



There are many ways to be more creative, especially in the world of IT. In this issue, **NIGEL MILLIGAN** offers an outline of what should be considered before making changes



It is often said that schools are very good at doing the wrong things very well. For instance, the ongoing deployment of laptops that have the usual set of issues for pupils and staff. Shall we look at a different solution? No, let's keep on doing the same as we have always done. Why? Because this is the 'conventional' solution. Conventional solutions stifle creativity and prevent pupils and teachers from moving forward in a more cost effective and user-friendly way.

ASSESSING SCHOOL NEEDS

First, define what the systems will be used for and factor in communication, data management, collaboration and business processes

Review access user requirements, number of users, access levels along with security and where/when they are working

Ensure the solution is scalable for growth and there is capacity to add users and functionality

AFFORDABLE AND SCALABLE

Don't just go with the conventional approach. For example, there are many scenarios where an iPad will do everything and more for pupil use. Many IT departments don't like iPads and will throw any excuse into the argument that they're not a proper computer etc.

There are schools that only use iPads for everyone, teachers and pupils. If laptops are the preferred choice for pupils, then consider Chromebooks or converting older Windows laptops with Google Flex. This has been a great way to allow schools to transition to Google with a minimum outlay.

Don't let your IT provider / department insist on having the most expensive network solutions. There are plenty of lower cost solutions that are still reliable and secure.

Servers? This is a big cost you can eliminate, especially for Primary Schools. I am often horrified to hear that they have invested sums up to

£8,000 for an onsite server. Moving everything to the Cloud along with a robust Cloud backup solution is far more cost effective and enables more flexible working. Through experience, Google Workspace and Chromebooks have been the best way to move away from onsite servers.

Storage? Again, expensive on-site hardware has become a thing of the past by embracing the use of Cloud storage and shared drives. It makes life much easier for all users whilst maintaining a secure environment. Open-source firewall options such as PfSense offer a robust solution at low or zero cost compared to the cost of proprietary solutions.

CLOUD SOLUTIONS FOR FLEXIBILITY

Cloud based solutions such as Google Workspace for Education offer schools (for free) a full complement of solutions. When all these services are embraced, teaching and learning is massively improved.



Incorporate a routine for training new staff members as part of your induction programme

Staff and pupils can collaborate easily. Microsoft's attempt at educational support with Teams is not as good as it could be. Again, with experience we work more and more with Google Workspace, especially with Primary Schools.

Most MIS/Finance systems are cloud based along with other educational resources such as Mathletics, Purple Mash & Edshed. This now means there's no requirement to have to have a device such as a Mac or Windows machine. Chromebooks & iPads are perfect for a quicker and more seamless access to web-based resources.

Cloud backup solutions such as Syscloud connect perfectly to Google Workspace etc, to ensure data is securely backed up with an unlimited retention period in place. The low cost along with bundled pupil accounts backed up gives schools confidence and peace of mind.

Cloud based telephone systems such as CircleLoop offer affordable and flexible telephones. They can be app

based as well as offering desk phones too. They currently have an offer of a 3-month trial along with a 20% discount for life.

IMPLEMENT STRONG CYBER SECURITY PROTECTION

Ensure there's a secure firewall in place and kept up to date on your physical sites. If remote access is required there are many great options from setting up a VPN to 3rd party software such as Logmein or the free Google Remote Desktop option.

Robust endpoint protection and patch management (Windows) - there are lots of options for schools to use, Sophos & Avast are amongst the most popular choices. It is essential that Windows devices have the latest patches installed to protect from any malicious attacks.

Encryption - Switch on full disk encryption on workstations and servers where necessary. iPads with a passcode set are encrypted by default.

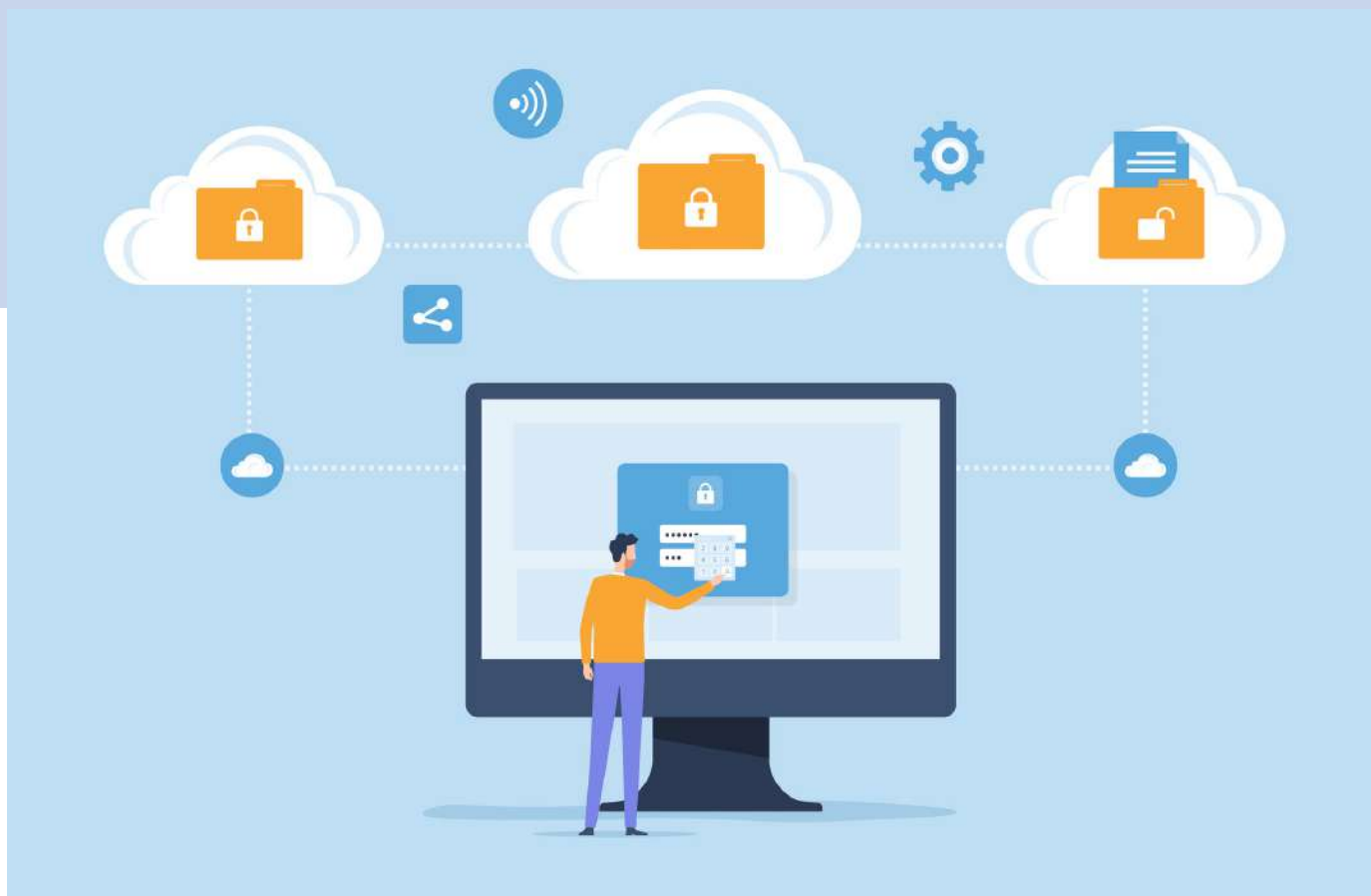
Set 2 Factor Authentication as a mandatory measure for all users who have Global Admin or User Management. We are in the process of advising schools to set 2FA as a mandatory requirement for all Staff users.

Staff cyber security training is essential and should be done regularly.

REDUNDANCY AND BACKUPS

Ensure systems have a robust redundancy and backup in place. For example, NAS/Server storage is usually set up as a multi drive RAID configuration that maintains the storage volume in the event of a drive failing. Physical servers should be backed up to another physical location as well as an offsite cloud-based solution.

Physical servers and core equipment should be connected to an Uninterrupted Power Supply so in the event of a power failure they will continue to run or are safely shut down. There are many options available - the most popular brand in use are APC units. ►



STAFF TRAINING

User training should be carried out regularly. Incorporate a routine for training new staff members as part of your induction programme.

The more confident staff are in the safe use of the systems, the more cost effective your systems will be.

SUPPORT AND MAINTENANCE

Adopt a strategic plan for the ongoing replacement and maintenance of all IT assets and ensure you have a proactive IT Support service in place. Consider a service that offers transparent costs so you know how much site time you have available so you can plan for maintenance and development projects. Many IT support companies have a regular site visit each week and often, this isn't an effective use of the time.

Ensure that staff members understand basic IT issues and how to check / triage these before raising a support request. Avoid unnecessary extra support costs by educating staff about what should and should not be connected.

Ensure your IT Support provider is keeping all systems up to date and if iPads

Conventional solutions stifle creativity and prevent pupils and teachers from moving forward

are in use, make sure they are updating the Apps as soon as they are available in the Mobile Device Management.

Wi-Fi needs to be updated as soon as possible whenever there are new firmware upgrades. Many times, devices (laptops, iPads etc) are not updated to the latest operating system and patches. There are then issues with connectivity due to the Wi-Fi not supporting the latest security updates.

Server updates and patches should be applied as soon as possible.

Ensure that leavers user accounts are

suspended and deleted as soon as possible. This should be part of the ongoing routine which needs to be established as part of the IT Support package process.

FUTURE PLANNING

Ensure that all selected hardware is as upgradable as possible. Many network switches come with long-term or lifetime warranties.

As part of the strategic planning in school there should be a 'live' asset register. This will allow for the ongoing lifecycle of devices to be planned correctly.

CONSIDER AUTOMATION

To help reduce human error, consider using automation tools for data backups, software updates and monitoring. There are also many other app automation integrations available by using the Zapier tools which have a wealth of workflows to help save time.

I hope all of this has helped you to think seriously about your school IT systems and gives you the confidence to think differently and seriously consider alternative ways forward. ■



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TECHNO GEEK

How Multi-Factor Authentication Can Secure School Systems



In an age where data breaches, phishing attacks and ransomware are on the rise, schools are increasingly vulnerable to cyberthreats. Here,

GARY HENDERSON discusses the benefits of Multi-Factor Authentication



The last time I looked at Microsoft's threat detection statistics, around 80% of detected malware was detected in educational institutions. You don't have to look far to find reports of schools which have suffered a cyber incident, with this often resulting in data being extracted by criminals. Put simply, educational institutions house data that criminals perceive as valuable and are seen as susceptible to extortion. Additionally, schools have numerous users with access to critical data and systems, yet their cyber security resources for prevention, detection, and recovery are often limited.

WHAT IS MULTI-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION (MFA)?

When using digital tools or accessing data we first have to login or to authenticate, proving who we are and that we have the correct permissions to access the data or system. This usually involves a username, often your email address, and a password. This is basically a single factor of authentication.

Now, passwords are not the only possible authentication factor we might be able to use. Generally, the possible authentication factors are broken into three broad categories:

- **Something you know:** A password, PIN, or secret question
- **Something you have:** A physical device, such as a smartphone
- **Something you are:** Biometric data, such as a fingerprint

MFA involves using more than one authentication method taken from more than one of the above categories. We might have facial recognition on a trusted device, so the facial recognition is something you are, while the trusted device is something you have. The fact there are two parts to authentication is the multifactor side of things.

Traditionally MFA generally involves a password and then something you have, this could be one of the following: a device, such as your phone, a code sent via SMS when you try to login or a physical token which provides a code or which you connect to the device.

In all the above cases, if a criminal gets your username and password via a data breach, they won't have access to the second factor and therefore would be unable to login.

It is important to note that MFA increases cyber security, making it more difficult for criminals to access systems and data. However, it is not impenetrable and cyber criminals have found ways to compromise devices which allows them to bypass MFA, such that it needs to be considered as another part of cyber defence, albeit a very important one.

It is also important to note, that MFA isn't a school specific defence and is simply good cyber security practice. If you can turn on MFA with your personal email, social media accounts and other important online tools and services, it makes great sense to do so.



WHY SCHOOLS SHOULDN'T BE AFRAID OF MFA

For schools, the idea of implementing MFA can sometimes seem daunting. Concerns often revolve around two key areas: complexity and cost. However, these fears are largely misplaced.

It's true that MFA requires additional steps to log in, but it also results in increased security. With time, these additional steps become natural. However, it's vital to recognise the potential detrimental effects of an incident, should one occur.

This could include no access to IT systems, including phones, school management systems, documents and data, for many weeks after the attack. It may also involve cyber criminals extracting data on staff and students and sharing this online.

Related to this, some users may raise concerns about being asked to use personal devices as their second factor. It is worth pointing out that security precautions such as MFA also help to protect their data as held in HR systems, payroll systems and the school management system.

Every user with MFA enabled further helps to secure this data. Once they have MFA for the school accounts, they might be more inclined to use the same

authenticator app with their personal accounts, making themselves more secure.

MFA should cost little to implement other than in terms of training and awareness. Hardware tokens, which are the most secure solution, can be expensive, however generally this isn't required for most users and an authenticator app-based solution is more than sufficient to improve security while limiting cost.

In short, the potential benefits of MFA far outweigh any perceived drawbacks.

Start with users who have access to the most sensitive accounts or data

IMPLEMENTING MFA

When embarking on the journey to implement MFA, organisations should be transparent and communicate with users as to the reasons for implementing MFA and how it will protect the school, school community and their data.

MFA doesn't need to be enabled for everyone at once. Start with users who have access to the most sensitive accounts or data. This would likely involve any IT staff initially, followed by senior leaders, business managers, HR and payroll staff who may have access to significant amounts of sensitive data. From there you can then move to teaching staff, possibly rolling out on a department-by-department schedule. The key is to enable MFA for as many people as possible.

MFA is fast becoming a standard IT security measure. We increasingly see it in email solutions, social media accounts and other online services. Given schools are subject to such significant attacks it only makes sense to enable MFA in schools to protect the data of our students, staff and the school. ■

LIVE IT

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



Caption competition

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



LIFE HACK

Just brought a new bed sheet? Use a pen to mark an X in the bottom right-hand corner of the sheet, that way whenever you go to put it on the bed, you'll know which way up it goes.



Designing the Fire Engines of the Future

Solar panels and a 'plane to reach house roofs' were among the suggestions put forward by children asked to design the fire engines of the future. More than 60 young people took part in a competition to mark the 50th anniversary of Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue. Graham Wiggins, head of fleet and equipment services, said: "It was inspiring to see many of the entries include consideration for the environment." The winners met their local firefighters and were allowed to try out some of the fire service equipment. Those taking part were asked to consider how technology might advance over the next 50 years. Harriet from Ely, winner in the 12 years and over category, incorporated a solar-powered siren in her design and made it smaller 'to get down narrow roads'.



Brain Teaser:

It has keys, but no locks.
It has space, but no room.
You can enter but can't go inside. What is it?

Answer: A keyboard.

DID YOU KNOW?

Ketchup was once marketed as a medicine, prescribed for those suffering from indigestion as far back as 1834.



Life can only be understood backward,
but it must be lived forwards.

Søren Kierkegaard

A Real-Life Jurassic Park?

The Tasmanian tiger, a wolf-like marsupial that once stalked the forests of Tasmania, could be brought back from extinction after a team of US and Australian researchers claimed a series of scientific breakthroughs. Colossal Biosciences, the Dallas-based company behind the effort, previously announced plans to use the latest advances in gene editing and reproductive biology to bring woolly mammoths and even the dodo back from the dead. The plan is not without its critics, however. "De-extinction is a fairy tale science," Professor Jeremy Austin from the Australian Centre for Ancient DNA told the Sydney Morning Herald in 2022 when the project was announced.



Well,
knock me
down with
a feather!



IMAGINE THE
PUMPKIN PIE...

In a Belgian town where residents are affectionately referred to as "pumpkin eaters," there's much celebration after a local took home first prize in the European Pumpkin Championship.

Mario Vangeel grew the largest pumpkin of the year, weighing in at an impressive 2,539 pounds (1,152 kg). Transporting his massive gourd from Kasterlee to Ludwigsburg, Germany, for the competition was no small feat—after all, it weighed as much as a 2007 Honda Civic! Vangeel plans to compete at next year's World Pumpkin Championship, where he hopes to break the record held by Travis Gienger, of Anoka, Minnesota.

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