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ISBL

Institute of School Business Leadership

ISSUE 29 | SPRING 2022

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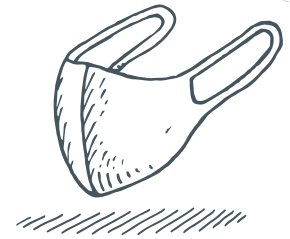
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Bethan Cullen

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



As we approach the second anniversary of the first lockdown of the pandemic, it is right that we reflect on the huge achievement, courage and resilience of our schools' leaders in keeping our schools open and ensuring continuity of provision. At the same time, remarkably, our education sector has continued to develop, evolve and innovate.

Towards the end of 2021, we were able to acknowledge and celebrate the specific achievements of school business professionals. For the first time in two years, we spent time face to face with practitioners, colleagues, key stakeholders, and leading sector specialists.

At our national conference in November, we experienced the palpable positive energy emanating from delegates as they reconnected with colleagues for the first time. There was a sense of optimism, a desire to share experiences, and a real appetite for knowledge and information. You can read more about the expert insights and tips from the conference on page 19.

Whilst the pandemic has presented enormous challenges, it has also required us all to think creatively, adapt to new environments, and adjust our working practices accordingly. Some of these adjustments have resulted in operational improvements that will serve us well beyond the pandemic. The National Schools Awards, hosted by Baroness Barran at the House of Lords in December, provided an opportunity to recognise the exceptional work of school leaders and their teams during this most difficult period (details of the winners are available on page 14).

Whilst celebrating success is important, we also appreciate the increased pressures that school leaders have had to endure. Capable and talented professionals are our education system's most important asset. It is essential that practitioners feel safe, respected and appreciated in their workplace environment. In this edition of *The Voice*, we cover the subjects of inclusivity and diversity (page 34) and how to create a positive working environment (page 38).

It is by harnessing our collective experience and knowledge that we can continue to influence and improve school business professional practice. As we step forward into 2022, we should take time to reflect on our achievements and also areas for improvement.

This self-reflection exercise should help inform our plans for the future.

As Jaz Ampaw-Farr, the motivational speaker at the 2021 national conference, stated, we are all the authors of our own stories, so the future is ours to write and define.

We look forward to supporting you during 2022 and beyond.

Bethan Cullen
Operations Director ■

SCHOOL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT WEBINARS

The Department for Education has funded a further series of webinars covering key elements of school resource management and integrated curriculum and financial planning (ICFP). All the webinars are delivered virtually and are suitable for school business professionals, school senior leadership teams, curriculum leads, and members of governing boards.

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THANKS TO JANE DURKIN ON HER RETIREMENT

Everyone at ISBL would like to offer their sincere thanks to Jane Durkin, from Inspire Education Trust, who has retired from her role as Head of Operations (31 December 2021). Jane has inspired and supported colleagues throughout her career through her role in regional local groups, including her development of the Central England Group; as a member of our special interest groups on both events and our editorial board (over the last 10 years); and through her system leadership, including development insights on the ISBL/CIPD programme. We wish her all the very best as she retires from her role.



WORD FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

As we approach the second anniversary of the pandemic's arrival in the UK, many will be reflecting on the last two years. Here at ISBL, we are doing precisely that. What did we do well, what would we have done differently, and what should we change going forward?



Stephen Morales

The first thing to point out is that the school business profession is made up of many diverse roles operating at very different levels. This diversity extends to qualifications, experience, accountability, professional autonomy and, in turn, pay.

The second thing to recognise is that the ambition of individuals within the school business professional (SBP) workforce is extremely variable.

Thirdly, the profession began to come of age in the early 2000s, when the Government, via the National College, invested heavily in building a new education workforce in the form of the School Business Manager. Nearly two decades later, it should be no

surprise that many from these early cohorts will soon be approaching retirement.

It's clear there are many big challenges for our profession: we have a huge diversity of roles serving our fragmented school system, a mixed appetite for career progression, a lack of investment in continuing professional development (CPD), continued pay disparity and an ageing workforce.

Our blueprint, 'Helping secure a brighter future for our children', focuses on the strands of work necessary to grow and develop an optimal school business leadership workforce and aims to address many of the issues above. However, what has been brought into sharp focus during



the period of the pandemic is that practitioners need support not just with their professional development but also with their emotional resilience, professional confidence and connecting with colleagues.

Looking back over the period of the pandemic, we can see how different needs were being met by a variety of groups. During a period of intense pressure and emotional turmoil, it was right that practitioners turned to each other for support and comfort via local networks or social media. Many national associations pivoted all their resources to provide updates on the constant flow of Covid-related guidance, and indeed many policy think tanks and representative bodies took the opportunity to position themselves as the single source of truth. Never in my career has there been so much information offered by so many.

Like other professional bodies such as ACCA, CIPFA and CIPD, our challenge was to continue to provide access to professional development opportunities during a period of crisis. However, it is hard to focus minds on professional growth and development when practitioners are in survival mode.

Through the pandemic, we have learned that it is important to get the mix right when it comes to formal accredited qualifications, short courses, practical guidance, and instant and easily digestible information.

Instant information

Sector news and updates need to be relevant, easily digestible and timely for SBPs who are time-poor and already wading through high levels of complex information. SBPs need the business of keeping up to date made very easy.

In an environment of information overload, we need to help practitioners sift their way through policy updates, guidance and regulations. We need to help our community get to the things that matter by creating a funnel of information that goes through a synthesis process and ends up as a coherent summary of what's important. This is no mean feat, however. Highly skilled content specialists with a deep understanding of the sector are a rare commodity. However, we are up for the challenge, and, in the new year, we aim to have a fully resourced solution in place.

Practitioners tell us that they like to hear from each other. During the pandemic, podcasts proved to be very popular, particularly when SBPs were prepared to share their stories, experiences, challenges and solutions. We aim to do more of this, and we have invested in a new platform that will better accommodate digital content. Additionally, we aim to run a series of webinars throughout the year, which will be delivered by subject matter experts and will be related to the key areas covered in the professional standards.

Accessible continuing professional development

We have a new mantra. CPD needs to be accessible, sustainable (in terms of the commitment required by practitioners) and relevant.

We will continue to lobby the Government on two fronts: more accessible qualifications via the apprentice levy route and more subsidised programmes for SBPs.

"During a period of intense pressure and emotional turmoil, it was right that practitioners turned to each other for support and comfort via local networks or social media."



We are currently running a pilot with the Department for Education involving 30 participants on a fully funded CIPFA level 7 qualification; we hope this can be scaled up.

Retention and succession

There is a looming crisis across the education sector linked to workforce attrition. There are several causes of this, including workload, an ageing workforce and pay relative to other sectors. The problem is not universal and is often a contextual problem. I would struggle to find a school leader who said they weren't busy, but on a journey from busy to burnout, there are many points. Whilst some are thriving in our evolving system, many are finding things overwhelming and unsustainable. We need to pay attention to the warning signs and, as a sector, coalesce around urgent solutions. We also need to think hard about how we attract the next cohort of teachers and SBPs into a sector that is so critical to our country's future success. Attracting new entrants to the profession is a key component of our strategy.

Whilst the wellbeing of our community is something we care deeply about, it is not the natural calling of a professional body. Despite our lack of expertise in this area, we are committed to working with other national associations, unions, and experts in this field to better support our professional community in its hour of need. ■



INFO

1 https://isbl.org.uk/documents/205214.4218596ISBL%20Blueprint%20for%20school%20business%20leadership%20practice_public%20version%20Online%20FINAL.pdf



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NEVER STOP LEARNING

Whether you are the school business manager in a small rural primary school or the chief financial officer of a large multi-academy trust, the pace rarely slows. Tahera Begum, ISBL Training Coordinator, discusses how you can find time for professional development.



Tahera Begum

Continuing professional development (CPD) is called that for a reason: we should always be developing professionally; it should be a continuous thing. However, for various reasons we either don't plan to do it, or it is happening and we cannot take time to recognise it. There are three useful tools that can help you make space for your own development:

1. CPD cycle

Essentially, the CPD cycle is a practical tool that helps structure your development plan, learning objectives, and outcomes so that the training (or learning) you undertake is suitable and worthwhile for your career. Using a simple structure will help you be more intentional in your own development and make sure that where you have undertaken training, you measure the impact of it and how it has improved what you do.



2. Reflection

Reflection is the process by which you assess the benefit of your development activities to yourself and your school, recognise strengths and weaknesses for self-improvement, and generate further ideas for personal and professional development.

CPD reflection encourages you and your team to identify links between development activities and their impacts, allowing you to modify any actions, behaviour, and learning objectives appropriately. It also prompts you to identify the purpose of each CPD exercise so that you assess what you are specifically gaining from them, and any areas of potential improvement in the future. Essentially, reflection is about learning from your experiences.

3. Development log

Keeping a record of your professional development helps you reflect on what you have achieved and how you have applied prior learning. This is especially beneficial when planning for your appraisal and considering your future development needs.

Development logs

ISBL offers members a way of capturing CPD using a personal CPD log that is available on the member portal. Alternatively, you could create a simple spreadsheet that captures:

- My goal
- What am I going to do to achieve this?
- What resources or support do I need?
- What are my success criteria?
- What was the outcome?
- What did you learn from this?

Your development log should record what you have done. This might be a specific piece of training, but also covers conversations with other professionals, reading books and magazines, and experiences where you have done something new.

Using these simple tools should help you identify areas for development, enabling you to plan the required learning. You should also be able to recognise and reflect on the learning and development you are achieving. We are always learning; we just don't pause to acknowledge it. ■

If you would like more advice on your own professional development journey, then please email training@isbl.org.uk or speak to Tahera Begum, our Training Coordinator, on 024 76 231221.

"Keeping a record of your professional development helps you reflect on what you have achieved and how you have applied prior learning."



BOOK REVIEW

Financial Intelligence for School Business Leaders

by Husham Khan



Husham Khan has more than 20 years of education sector experience as a school business professional. He is a former Chief Financial Officer of multi-academy trusts (MATs) and Chief Executive Officer and Director of Learning of two school improvement companies and now works for drb Schools and Academies Services as a School Business Manager specialising in financial management. He is also an advisory board member of the Association of BAME Business Leaders in Education.

Husham was in the first cohort to complete ISBL's CSBM and DSBM programmes and developed the financial training framework for all schools in Birmingham in 2003, which still runs to this day. He has also trained thousands of SBPs, head teachers, governors and trustees and developed and led on the National Executive Leaders Programme in 2015, raising the status of SBPs within MATs. He was also part of the working parties that developed the SLE role and SFVS framework.

His extensive and broad experience of school business leadership has led him to write his first book, published earlier this year, which will help colleagues rethink how they use financial data and how it aligns with the main drivers in a school or trust.

The 10 chapters help you rethink how you look at and analyse your school's financial data, enabling you to use it to maximum effect for more informed and effective decision-making. The book starts with chapters on retraining your brain and understanding metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs), then moves on to integrated curriculum financial planning (ICFP) before returning to how you can use metrics and KPIs for success.

There are top tips, easy-to-follow examples and great challenge tools, providing the expansion of knowledge you require, whatever stage of your career you are at. ■

Further information about how ISBL can support schools with ICFP is available at: <https://isbl.org.uk/Training/ICFP.aspx>

You can also watch a free video about ICFP, which was developed by ISBL and funded by the Department for Education, at: <https://isbl.org.uk/Training/Training-courses/DfE-funded-ICFP-on-demand-webinar.aspx>



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ROLL OF HONOUR



The following members have become Fellows of ISBL:

Donna Cartwright, Chief Operating Officer, Vision Multi Academy Trust, Whitefield, Manchester.
Mark Loader, School Business Manager, Northleach C of E Primary School, Cheltenham.

The following members have passed their School Business Professional Apprenticeship, with ISBL as their End Point Assessment Organisation:

Karen Bowen, Governance and Compliance Officer, Diocese of Hereford Multi Academy Trust, Hereford.
Elaine Oliver, School Business Manager, Litherland Moss Primary School, Liverpool.
Serena Sellick, Teaching School Leader, Tuxford Academy, Newark.
Lisa Tromans, Business Support Officer, Diocese of Hereford Multi-Academy, Hereford.

The following members have passed their CIPFA Diploma in Schools Financial and Operational Leadership:

Maria Llydon, Academy Business Manager, Mereside Primary Academy, Blackpool (cohort 19).
Paula Bartlett, Chief Finance & Operation Officer, Grove Learning Trust, Swindon (cohort 20).
Fokuo Achamfour-Yeboah, Finance Director, Aspirations Academies Trust, London (cohort 21).
Tara Brennan, Finance Manager, The City of Leicester College, Leicester (cohort 21).
Sarah Davis, Interim Chief Financial Operating Officer, Oak Multi Academy Trust, Leicester (cohort 21).
Anna Ferchow, School Business Manager, Charlton Kings Junior School, Cheltenham (cohort 21).
Jane Kellas, Finance and Operations Director, Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust, Birmingham (cohort 21).
Michael Lavelle, Chief Operations Officer, Tennyson Learning Community MAT, Luton (cohort 21).
Stephen Lester, Consultant, Cumbria (cohort 21).
Julieann Moodie, Trust School Business Manager, Trinity Academy Newcastle Trust, Newcastle upon Tyne (cohort 21).
Jane Sulley, Business Manager, Redmoor Academy, Leicestershire (cohort 21).
Alison Swinscoe, Regional Finance Manager, Greenwood Academies Trust, Nottingham (cohort 21).
Claire Walters, Academy Business Manager, Foxwood Academy, Nottingham (cohort 21).
Rebecca Watkin, Chief Finance and Operations Officer, Learn @ MAT, Bristol (cohort 21).
Jo Wibberley-Young, Chief Financial Officer, The Claxton Trust, Stevenage (cohort 21).
Fiona Wilcock, Business Manager, Mylnhurst Preparatory School & Nursery, Sheffield (cohort 21).
Edwina Wright, Chief Financial Officer, Enrich Learning Trust, Norfolk (cohort 21).

The following members have received a CEO Award from ISBL Chief Executive Stephen Morales:

Bobby Thandi, Deputy Chief Executive at L.E.A.D. Academy Trust, Nottingham.
Sharon Carlyon, Chief Operating Officer at Inclusive Multi Academy Trust, Watford.
Natalie Dalvarez, Deputy Chief Executive Officer at Diocese of St Albans Multi-Academy Trust.
Simon Oxenham, Director of Resources at Southend High School for Boys.
Abi Agidee-Adekunle, Chief Executive Officer, Accountant & Resource Management Consultant, Ashe Business Consulting. ■

ON THE MOVE

All the latest details on colleague changes.

Matthew Clements-Wheeler has left the role of Director of Support Services at Bordesley Green Girls' School and Sixth Form to be Executive Project Manager at **Keystone Knowledge**.

Jane Durkin has retired as Head of Operations at **Inspire Education Trust**.

Tracey Gray has left the role of Director of Support at Walbottle Academy to be an **Education Management Consultant**.

Nicky Gillhespy has retired as Chief Operating Officer at **LEO Academy Trust**.

John Lawrence has retired as School Business Manager at **George Mitchell School** in Leyton, London.

Ian Stewart has retired as Bursar and Clerk to Governors at **St. Catherine's School**, Twickenham. ■





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FAIR SCHOOL FUNDING FOR ALL



During the summer last year, the education sector was busy responding to the Government's latest consultation paper on the National Funding Formula. Stephen Morales, ISBL Chief Executive, gives us his thoughts on the current status.



Stephen Morales

The introduction of the National Funding Formula (NFF) at the start of the 2018–2019 academic year resulted in funding finally being distributed to schools more fairly across the country. This was a major step forward from the postcode lottery of the previous system, but local authorities (LAs) still had the power to adjust the final amount allocated to schools. "This local flexibility created further inequalities in a system that was already seen as unfair by many", explains Stephen. "The Government wants to remove the role of the LA completely and allocate funding solely and directly through the NFF."

This should make the funding system simpler and more transparent, with a single formula responsible for determining all schools' funding allocations. This will enable schools and trusts to plan consistently to drive up their academic standards, make the best use of resources, and provide every child with the best education possible.

Changing to this system will not be easy, however, and schools are obviously concerned about any impact on their funding allocation pre- and post-transition. "Schools will argue that they have geared themselves up according to the funding that is currently available," continues Stephen. "They will have recruited teachers, funded facilities, put in place interventions and more, so unwinding that will be very difficult. The quality of provision that's been delivered could be hampered by a disinvestment. That's why I think the proposals have been deliberately cautious."

Distributing the funding

As we wait for the Government to publish the outcome, following which there will be a second, more forensic, consultation based around the responses, Stephen is aware that time is moving on and that there are many children who continue to suffer because of funding inequalities.

"My concern is that if we 'kick the can' down the road for much longer, a whole generation of learners will not benefit from the redistribution. And it's the distribution that is key here; it's not the size

of the pie but how it is carved up because there is still huge discrepancy. We need to make sure that there is fair distribution of funding and that we support the most vulnerable children in the system appropriately. However, we don't want to create such turbulence that we move the problem from one place to another. That's the biggest challenge."

One recent positive was the appointment of Robin Walker as Minister of State for School Standards in last September's cabinet reshuffle. "Robin was previously Vice Chair of the f40 group¹ and campaigned for fairness and equal opportunities in education for all children, regardless of where they live. The fact he is now the minister presiding over school standards and funding will hopefully mean he will be lobbying for a fair NFF. I think there will be a pause and a rethink once the data comes out of this consultation before we come to the second phase." ■

"We need to make sure that there is fair distribution of funding and that we support the most vulnerable children in the system appropriately."



INFO

¹ The f40 group is made up of 42 local authorities who are among the lowest funded for education in England. The group seeks fairness and equal opportunities in education for all children, regardless of where they live, and wishes to see all schools properly funded to enable them to provide a quality education. www.f40.org.uk



CELEBRATING EXCELLENT PRACTICE FROM ACROSS THE SECTOR



While the education sector has been under significant pressure during the last two years to adapt and respond to the pandemic, the aspirations of our school leaders to develop innovation and excellence have remained in abundance.

On 8 December 2021, education stakeholders gathered at the House of Lords to celebrate and recognise these achievements as part of the National Schools Awards 2021.



Baroness Barran, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Education, delivered a keynote speech to open the ceremony.

These awards are designed to recognise and reward individual school leaders and schools for their incredible work during one academic year. However, last year the awards reflected on contributions made by schools over the last two years because we were unable to hold a ceremony during 2020 owing to the pandemic.

As a result, there were an overwhelming number of nominations received for the eight categories, with the shortlisted finalists showing an outstanding range of ingenuity, leadership, capability, and dedication to their school, staff, pupils, and community.

There was more evidence than ever before that a whole community focus had been adopted during the pandemic to ensure that a high-quality, effective, and accessible learning approach was delivered across the UK. This was recognised in the opening speech at the event from Baroness Barran, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Education, who commented on the resilience, enthusiasm, and dedication that all school leaders, staff, pupils, and volunteers – including governance colleagues – had shown over the last two years to those in their care and across their wider community. She thanked everyone on behalf of the country and in recognition of all colleagues working in these roles across the UK.

Stephen Morales said it was important that we celebrate the amazing contributions made by our colleagues across the UK, noting what better vocation can there be than developing the young people who will determine our country's future success.

He paraphrased Barbara Coloroso, international bestselling author and recognised speaker and consultant on parenting, teaching and school discipline, on the importance of developing opportunities for every child, saying "if a child who comes to us from a well-functioning family makes our job easier, we should ask ourselves what more can we do for those children who do not come from those backgrounds."

Stephen thanked all colleagues for the amazing work they do and said it was important that we take the time that the awards offer each year to pause and applaud the wonderful work that not only the award winners have made, but also those from across the education sector. As a whole school community, everyone has gone above and beyond this year to ensure that we have given children the very best opportunities.

It was a very tough decision to select a winner in each category considering the strong field of nominations, with the judges in agreement that all entries showed inspiring and transformational work in their institutions. We would like to thank everyone who took the time to make a nomination.

AND THE WINNERS WERE...

SCHOOL BUSINESS LEADER OF THE YEAR – Alison Moon, Veritas Multi-Academy Trust

As Trust Business Manager and Chief Financial Officer at Veritas MAT, Alison has been instrumental in developing both Governance and Business Team structures. Alison has been proud to develop her team based around the ISBL Professional Standards, who are now well positioned to support trust growth.

LEADERSHIP TEAM OF THE YEAR – Berkhamsted Schools Group

Berkhamsted Schools Group is a family of independent schools in Hertfordshire. As an organisation, it is committed to 'Developing Remarkable People' whether that is the 2,000-student body or 500+ staff. ▶



Alison Moon,
School Business
Leader of the Year.



Berkhamsted Schools Group,
Leadership Team of the Year.



SCHOOL OF THE YEAR – Highfurlong School

Highfurlong Special School in Blackpool is a four-times outstanding school for children with complex medical and general learning needs. The bespoke curriculum prepares pupils for all stages of life and enables pupils to leave school with qualifications and a genuine chance to succeed.

MAT OF THE YEAR – Wellspring Academy Trust

Wellspring Multi-Academy Trust has 29 academies across Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. The trust provides high-quality education in primary, secondary, special and alternative provision settings that are distinctive in character.

GOVERNOR OF THE YEAR – Elizabeth Jones, St Damian’s RC Science College

Elizabeth has made an exceptional contribution to the college, initially as Bursar and part of the SLT, and as Chair of Governors since 2011. Elizabeth provides strong leadership, demonstrated by St Damian’s moving from Special Measures to Ofsted Outstanding in all areas.

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE INNOVATION OF THE YEAR – Dave Scott, Northern Education Trust

Northern Education Trust is one of the largest and most successful trusts in the North of England, and Dave has played a pivotal role in supporting the transformation and development of EdTech and IT infrastructure in all 21 academies within the trust.

INCOME INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR – Christopher Willis, GFM Education

Chris has utilised his charisma and commitment to secure several high-level, strategic community and business partnerships, enabling funding and wider learning opportunities for Gosport and Fareham learners.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT OF THE YEAR – Sue Powell, Warlingham School

Sue has spent 34 years in the classroom with an ambition to make food technology relevant to young people. Driven by a desire to bring new talent into the most rewarding of professions, this passion led to outstanding leadership of Warlingham School’s teacher training and induction programmes.



Neil Oldham, Head Teacher at Highfurlong School.



Elizabeth Jones, Governor of the Year.



Dave Scott, winner of the School Infrastructure Innovation of the Year award.



Sue Powell, winner of the Lifetime Achievement of the Year award.



FIND OUT MORE

The most frequent question during the event was ‘How can we find out more about what the winning schools achieved?’ ISBL will be working with the Schools and Academies Show over the coming months to develop the winners’ applications into case studies, thought leadership, podcasts and topic sessions for our future events so that pupils across the country can benefit from new and emerging approaches and innovation.

You can find out more about the National Schools Awards at: <https://nationalschoolsawards.co.uk>

Group Energy Buying for a sustainable future

As an Approved Partner for ISBL, Powerful Allies is proud and delighted to launch a revolutionary new energy buying service called TogetherZero which allows MATS, Academies and Schools of all sizes to benefit from the economies of Group Energy Buying whilst delivering electricity contracts from 100% Renewable sources at Zero added cost.

With hitherto unseen levels of transparency and clarity, TogetherZero guarantees Best Value through full and open competitive tender, fixed price contracts to provide cost certainty and consumption monitoring to enable schools to identify and reduce waste.

When compared to existing Local Authority Procurement Baskets, TogetherZero sets entirely new standards reflecting the need for demonstrable low prices whilst reducing carbon emissions. A unique solution for a sustainable future.

What next?

If you are interested in knowing more about TogetherZero, or the extensive range of energy buying services offered by Powerful Allies for MATS, Academies and Schools, please contact Charles Barker on charliebarker@powerfulallies.com, or call 01380 860196. Our website, www.powerfulallies.com also includes a schedule of school clients and client comments, plus details of the many Professional Associations for which Powerful Allies is an Approved or Recommended partner.



Key features	TogetherZero	Local Authority Procurement Baskets; Laser, Crown Commercial, WME, ESPO, YPO etc
All electricity from 100% Renewable Sources at Zero added cost	✓	✗
Transparent Competitive tender between leading OJEU Approved suppliers	✓	✗
Clear and concise Demonstrable Best Value comparisons	✓	✗
Fully inclusive energy pricing, excluding only VAT and CCL	✓	✗
Energy rates fixed for the duration of the contract	✓	✗
Accurate budget calculations and forecast consumption	✓	✗
Invoices direct from supplier	✓	✗
Free energy monitoring and reporting	✓	✗
On site energy reduction audits	✓	✗
Free entry to the Schools Carbon Challenge 2020	✓	✗



RECOGNISING SAFETY EXCELLENCE IN SCHOOLS



SafetyMARK – the national safety certification and support scheme for schools and Multi Academy Trusts.

WHAT IS SAFETYMARK?

SafetyMARK is a national safety and support scheme created specifically for the Education sector. It aims to recognise and reward those schools that have gone the extra mile to make their workplaces a safe environment for staff, pupils, and visitors. SafetyMARK also provides the support that you require to make the safety decisions that affect your school.

The scheme is provided by safety specialists for the education sector who recognise the unique safety issues that you experience daily. By achieving the SafetyMARK and being a member of the scheme, you can visibly demonstrate your ongoing commitment to maintaining safety excellence and providing a safety culture.

WHAT IS THE FULL SCHEME?

When you join the SafetyMARK scheme, you will get the following:

Competent Advice: SafetyMARK can act as your competent person and provide you with tailored safety advice that fits your school.

Advice when you need it: Access to an expert via email or telephone on an unlimited basis during your membership.

The Audit: A rigorous audit is conducted at the start of the scheme to examine and measure your existing safety management systems to identify any gaps that may exist against legislation and guidance.

Report and Action Plan: A detailed report is provided with a prioritised action plan attached so that you can quickly measure where you are with regards to compliance and allocate limited resources to those areas which most need it.

The Members Area: Access to an online members area and resource library which contains resources to help deliver your action plan.

WHAT ABOUT COVID-19?

SafetyMARK has been providing their members with guidance and support since the pandemic began. The SafetyMARK audit has also evolved to include an assessment of the reasonable and practical measures that schools are having to put in place to minimise COVID-19 Transmission on their premises. Standalone, more detailed COVID-19 assessments can also be provided where more assurance is required.

CONTACT US NOW FOR AN INFORMAL DISCUSSION ABOUT HOW WE CAN SUPPORT YOUR SCHOOL.

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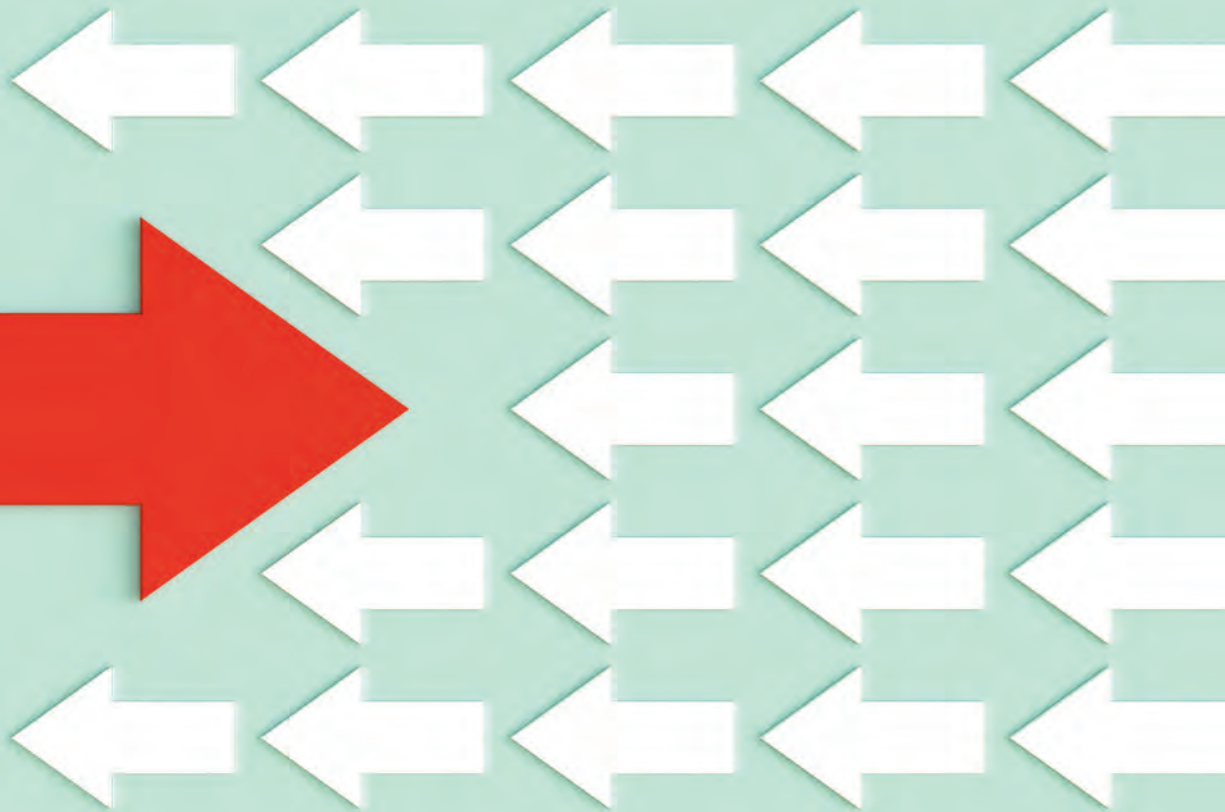


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DEMONSTRATING SOLUTION ARCHITECTURE AND RESOURCEFULLY LEADING CHANGE



There was a palpable positive energy and heightened energetic atmosphere at the national conference when, for the first time in two years, we were able to meet physically with other colleagues and share our lived experiences of the pandemic and our hopes for what is to come.

It was the first time that many practitioners had taken the opportunity to stop, pause and reflect, and the engagement and rich discussion that took place across the two days was evidence that collaborating and networking are critical continuing professional development (CPD) tools.

For the first time, we were able to offer a fully hybrid conference with 250 delegates attending the conference in person and approximately 50 delegates joining us via the online event platform. This agile approach allowed colleagues from smaller, rural schools with growing capacity issues caused by the pandemic to still participate in the event.

Sessions delivered on the main stage, plus keynotes and workshops, were live-streamed to the platform, enabling delegates to ask questions and interact as if they were there in person. We will continue to offer ►

"Many reflections during the event were about how difficult the past few years had been in education."



this flexible approach to engagement when we plan future conferences.

The event platform also gave delegates attending the event in person the opportunity to catch up on other sessions that they could not cover during the two days and share the tailored CPD with other colleagues at their schools, extending the investment value and opportunity of attending.

What reflections did delegates take back to school?

Rightly, many reflections during the event were about how difficult the past few years had been in education and how leaders had often not been considered in the complexity of the delivery models they had to adapt and develop to support the nation's access to high-quality learning during this period.

Speakers, including our own CEO Stephen Morales, talked about the ingenuity, resilience and capability of the school business profession to effectively design and deliver solutions in an ever-changing environment. It was our profession who took the lead in ensuring that schools remained available to learners through remote learning solutions, upskilling and developing ICT skills across the workforce, and in implementing ingenious solutions for the separation of bubbles and the effective delivery of school services while bubbles were employed.

Our motivational speaker, Jaz Ampaw-Farr, concurred with the resourcefulness of the school business profession and the clear determination and courageous leadership that had been employed, saying "School business leaders are at the edge of the frontline who fight for the highest good of their team."

She talked about the power of our own story and how, as the editor, we have the ultimate power in defining the plot. She offered delegates the challenge

of ensuring that they were authoring their own story and encouraged them to be the leading character rather than a supporting role. As the architects of solutions, we must take the time to define our own journey and ask ourselves 'who do we want to be?' She recognised that there will be times of adversity, but it is how we respond to these by pausing, pivoting if necessary, and then reframing our response that is important.

Motivational speaker, Jaz Ampaw-Farr.



Workshop speaker, Andy Mellor.





This is something we can all ask ourselves and reflect on as we start the new calendar year: What is my story? Am I writing the story or allowing others to determine my future, and what do I want my story to say so that I can shape and influence it?

Delegates left the conference with a sense of optimism that despite future challenges, they were part of a capable workforce who have the skills, knowledge and experience to unlock solutions for the sector. Further recognition of the strength and competency of school business professionals (SBPs) was paid by John Edwards, Interim CEO of the ESFA, who noted that it was SBPs who had worked tirelessly to keep colleagues and pupils safe while enabling continued access to education.

Engaging practical CPD opportunities

With 16 workshops and a range of panel discussions to choose from at the conference, the content had been specifically designed to meet both the ISBL professional standards and the current and future demands of SBPs.

Andy Mellor, who has previously been a head teacher and currently sits on the NAHT SBL Council, offered insights into whole-school wellbeing, with practical tips on how school leaders can support staff and help pupils to thrive. Given the priority of wellbeing post the pandemic and in Ofsted's priorities, this was a hugely beneficial session with some simple tips and reminders:

- ensure there is opportunity for freedom of decision-making; take and give ownership – people manage their own time best
- empowered teams are productive teams and generate great innovation
- take time to review project activity and stop anything that does not impact on pupils, except what must be done for legal reasons
- pupil and staff wellbeing can lead to a 20 per cent uplift in overall performance – how can you unlock this?
- recognise that there are times when you will have to say 'no'. This can be delivered positively, especially if referring to strategic plans and opportunity costs, and
- do not put unnecessary pressure on yourselves or others. Be realistic with the ambitions that are set.

We were pleased to welcome a wealth of experts to talk about strengthening equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) within schools: looking at the bigger picture. These experts included Dame Alison Peacock from Chartered College of Teaching, Yvonne Spencer from VVW, Cheryl Campbell from ABBLed, Emma Knights from NGA, and Stephen Morales, who talked openly about the continuing lack of diversity within the education community and how we can all be responsible for taking action and making change.

Stephen also emphasised the work ISBL is leading with other system stakeholders and that we are only at the start of this programme of work, with much still to do. ■



CHARITY SUPPORT

As a charity, ISBL wishes to support and raise the awareness of other charities whose work assists colleagues and the wider community, and we were delighted to welcome Our Dementia Choir as our chosen charity this year.

This charity is one that resonates more personally because a member of the choir's committee is our own Karen Bonser, who has been a practising SBP and advocate of ISBL from its start as the National Bursars Association. Having set up the Nottinghamshire School Business Managers Association, which was renamed the Association of Business Leaders in Education (ABLE), Karen knows the growing demands of the role as well as the responsibilities leaders have for the wellbeing of their staff and pupils.

Society is seeing a growth in dementia cases, and it is the immediate family who initially must support and care for their loved ones, which can add huge daily pressures. Through the work of the choir, those suffering from dementia can reconnect through the power of music and families can gain support from a wider network.

If you would like to find out more about the choir and their work, visit: www.ourdementiachoir.com



OUR THANKS

We would like to thank everyone who engaged in the conference this year because we recognise that with the challenges presented through the continuation of the pandemic, taking time away from school is not easy. However, the feedback from those who came was that the content was exceptional and the opportunity to network and reflect hugely beneficial.

If you have not yet re-engaged with conferences, please consider reconnecting through our regional conferences during this spring term, which are free for members to attend. Find out more at www.isbl.org.uk

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ACHIEVING BEST PRACTICE WITH **SchoolMark** ✓

Stephen Mitchell, co-founder of SchoolMark, explains why gaining SchoolMark accreditation can help your school achieve better outcomes for its pupils.

In our personal lives, outside of the school gates, we are surrounded by messages encouraging us to become the 'most perfect' versions of ourselves. There is an almost-constant encouragement to strive for healthier bodies, expanded minds, and a financially secure future.

We all aim to improve our lives, so shouldn't we take this attitude into our institution and start pushing for more? Compliance, by its definition, is meeting the minimum standards to conform to laws or regulations, so why don't we use these benchmarks as a starting point rather than an end goal? Continuous improvement in our careers means looking for the 'art of the possible'

and working towards the top rather than accepting the minimum required. Best practice means putting children first and giving them the best possible outcomes.

SchoolMark encourages schools to move beyond compliance and improve their school business practice. Although the focus of schools is to educate and foster a lifelong love of learning, there are still aspects of running a school that are similar to running a business. Adopting standards that are already common in other sectors allows schools to gain the most out of their budget and shore up their future position because turbulence can be unexpected. ►



Stephen Mitchell





"SchoolMark encourages schools to move beyond compliance and improve their school business practice."

Created by the sector for the sector

SchoolMark is the only sector-specific accreditation for validating and celebrating best practice in school and trust resource management and has been created by people in the sector who understand the challenges of school business delivery. Developed in consultation with the Department for Education and awarded by ISBL, it is designed to drive an improvement in the quality of education through increased efficiency of resources and an improved academic return on investment. SchoolMark lauds schools with the highest standards of resource management and provides a curated support plan to help those who haven't quite made the standard.

Minimum input for maximum output

Centring on the tenets of quality, optimisation and assurance, SchoolMark is designed to be as low an impact on workloads as possible. Participants use self-assessments in nine key areas of resource management and provide existing documents such as annual accounts, board minutes, and internal audit reports as evidence in an online portal. The only new document required is the application.

This simple process gives SchoolMark's school financial experts an insight into how your school runs. The assessors use their professional opinions and real-world experience to judge each application on a case-by-case basis. Every school is different, and this is reflected in the common-sense appraisals provided, which take local context into account. Every application is followed by a detailed report outlining the achievements as well as recommendations for improvements. If your school meets the standard, you will become SchoolMark Accredited, and this is celebrated with a public register, press releases, and an article in *The Voice*. Schools will also receive a plaque.

Benefiting your school or trust

SchoolMark can raise the profile of your school or trust by providing tangible proof to your stakeholders that the highest standards are being met. By proudly displaying your SchoolMark plaque, you will be building your

reputation as a team that is always seeking improvement as part of a fiscally responsible establishment.

The SchoolMark process provides a structured framework for strategic reflection and supports internal scrutiny. Resource management should be considered an interconnected web that ensures skills and funds are placed where they will make the most difference. What does resource management best practice look like in your school? There's no one-size-fits-all rule, but having a fresh set of eyes to look at your processes could get you out of the trap of 'that's how it's always been done'.

Governors and trustees can gain confidence through the independent verification that the school's funding is being used correctly and for the greater good of the pupils in their care. SchoolMark can also demonstrate that it is carrying out thorough, robust reviews of schools, ensuring financial probity and assurance, and this introspection gives an opportunity to identify where savings could be made. By identifying improved efficiency and allowing more funds to be focused on supporting the day-to-day running of the school or other strategic activities, we believe that every school will be able to save more than SchoolMark costs.

School business professionals (SBPs) underpin the whole school but rarely receive the credit they so rightfully deserve within the schools themselves. You only have to look at the outpouring of support for the School Business Leader of the Year on Twitter after the National Schools Awards to see the strength of professional community spirit. By celebrating the impact that the hard work of SBPs has on schools, we hope to further raise the status of the profession to gain the recognition it deserves. ■

SchoolMark

BETTER OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

SchoolMark was founded with the ambition to improve the education of Britain's children. Schools with better resource management deliver better outcomes for their pupils. The useful framework and constructive expert feedback that SchoolMark provides offers schools the chance to move past just being compliant. Why not use SchoolMark as a way to rise up and start excelling?



WHAT ACCREDITED SCHOOLS AND TRUSTS SAY

"SchoolMark has helped us to exercise our duties as trustees by providing independent verification that our trust's resource management systems and procedures follow best practice."

Nigel Harrison, Chair of Trustees, Symphony Learning Trust

"ATT is committed to continuous improvement across all aspects of trust management and is proud to be one of the first recipients of the SchoolMark accreditation."

Debbie Clinton, CEO, Academy Transformation Trust



GETTING THE MOST FROM EDTECH



UK schools spend approximately £900m on education technology (EdTech), yet how do they know that the product(s) they are purchasing will actually provide the quality of learning they need? Dan Sandhu, co-founder of the EdTech Evidence Group, explains how schools can use trials and pilots to assess the value and impact of EdTech products and services and how to find clear evidence about the impact of their products.



The pandemic has meant that everyone in school now has a greater understanding of EdTech and how it can support teaching and learning. However, with so many products on the market, finding one that meets the needs of your schools can be a challenge.

This is where the EdTech Evidence Group (EEG) can help. The EEG brings together a growing number of UK EdTech companies who share a belief that there needs to be a step-change in the level of evidence available about EdTech products and services. The EEG believes schools and trusts need to be able to easily access information about the value and impact of EdTech, running webinars and providing resources to help schools.

Although a teacher or head of department may initiate any product evaluation work, the school business professional (SBP) must be involved, particularly with large-scale projects. Researching the available options

can help save time and money and ensure EdTech products used in the classroom will be impactful.

Success criteria

Before starting a trial, setting clear success criteria is important. The teacher, or head of year, should be able to develop teaching and learning success criteria, but they may overlook things that are less directly about supporting learners. SBPs are key here and need to ask about:

- **adaptability** – is it possible for EdTech to flex to meet different needs? Or is it quite restrictive?
- **ease of use** – how long did it take teachers to understand how to use the tool? How much training was required beforehand? Did teachers enjoy using the tool? ▶



Dan Sandhu



"Look out for EdTech companies that can provide objective research, offer trials for free, and have clear processes for supporting schools as they evaluate their product."

- **actionable insights** – lots of EdTechs provide data about how a tool is being used by learners, but how easy is it for teachers to use the data to support students? Is there a dashboard to help a head of department or senior leadership team?
- **personalisation** – can an EdTech resource be tailored to different students and their needs? Personalisation is very time-consuming, so if EdTech is able to do this, it can really help free up teachers' time to support their students.

Trials, pilots and test beds

There are various ways to try out an EdTech product with learners. First, you can have a free trial for a short period of time, generally less than a half-term, which enables you to 'try before you buy'. It is important to use this time wisely to get as much as you can from the trial, so you should:

- set clear goals for your trial
- recruit a group of teachers to trial the product and ensure they get the training they need to trial the product effectively
- get advice from the EdTech company about the best way to run the trial and check the levels of customer support for trials, and
- gather hard data and views from teachers, students, and other stakeholders who have been involved.

Second, you can pilot a product for a longer period of time, such as a term or whole school year. If you choose this option, the EdTech solution is usually purchased for a small number of classes that then provide valuable insight and a rich set of data. Once evaluated, the school can then roll the product out more widely.

Pilots and trials work well where an EdTech product has a track record. However, some EdTech products may be at an earlier stage of development and need test-bed schools to get more closely involved in developing the product. This can give you free access to a product for a term or longer, with your feedback on what's good (or not) ensuring it meets the needs of your school.

Further EdTech evidence

As well as trials, EdTech companies may be able to provide other evidence about whether their tool supports teaching and learning. This can include a wide range of information including:

- **independent studies:** for instance, the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge and RAND Europe have undertaken an independent study² looking at the progress of learners using Sparx Maths, an EdTech programme aiming to improve maths outcomes

for secondary school pupils. EdTech provided the data for them to analyse but was not involved in analysing the results

- **findings from school surveys:** these can be useful for gauging impact, but check how large the sample size is or request a copy of the numeric results rather than just the percentages. If the sample is below 200, then approach with caution
- **detailed case studies:** these are more than simply 'marketing copy', providing a useful insight, particularly if there is a school or multi-academy trust similar to your own
- **randomised control trials:** these are often seen as the 'gold standard' in education and remove the risk of bias in research. However, they can be costly and out of reach for most EdTech companies, and
- **customer retention rates:** this isn't traditional evidence but is more useful than just knowing the number of schools using a product. As a rule of thumb, if it's more than 80 per cent, then it suggests schools value the product.

At the end of the day, budgets are tight, and getting the most from any EdTech investment is essential. Look out for EdTech companies that can provide objective research, offer trials for free, and have clear processes for supporting schools as they evaluate their product. If you can stay focused on the problem you're trying to solve you will be in a good place to reap the success of EdTech. ■



"The EEG brings together leading UK EdTech companies who share a belief that there needs to be a step-change in the level of evidence available about EdTech."

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- 1 www.edtechevidence.com
- 2 www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/programmes/sparx



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REACHING THE RIGHT OUTCOME

Carrying out a workplace investigation can be daunting. They are sometimes required to understand the relevant facts and enable the employer to reach a decision in a fair and reasonable manner. If the outcome results in dismissal, a flawed process runs the risk of the employer losing an employment tribunal claim based on procedure alone. Penny Walters, Senior HR Consultant at Stone King, takes you through the correct process.



Penny Walters

The first thing to do at the start of any investigation is to take a step back and be clear about what you are trying to achieve. Look at the relevant policy, keep referring to it, and take time to consider:

- who is the best person to investigate the matter? Do they have the time and resources to conduct the investigation?
- who might preside over any decision-making that follows the investigation?
- what are the terms of reference?

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to appoint an investigating officer from outside the setting, such as a senior leader from another school within the trust or an experienced external investigator.

It is then good practice to inform the employee under investigation that it will be taking place. You should:

- provide them with a copy of the relevant policy
- inform them of the approximate timescales, and
- specify the next steps, for example interviewing witnesses and collecting other information.

"The first thing to do at the start of any investigation is to take a step back and be clear about what you are trying to achieve."



There are only very limited circumstances when you might choose not to inform the employee, for example where this might result in important evidence being destroyed.

In some cases, it may be appropriate for the employee to be suspended with pay pending the outcome of an investigation. However, there are several things to consider before suspending an employee, and you should seek HR or employment law advice before this action is taken.

The investigation

The necessary investigation should be conducted within a reasonable time frame to ensure that witnesses' recollections remain fresh and accurate and to obtain relevant documentation. At all times, it is important for the investigators to adopt an inquisitive approach. A common mistake made by investigators is where they set out to apportion blame and only seek evidence that supports the accused party. Instead, they should seek to understand all the facts and present them in a clear and concise way. The investigator should also enquire if there are any existing warnings on file.

Confidentiality

The principle of confidentiality applies equally to the investigator, the employee under investigation, and witnesses. You must not discuss the investigation with other employees or with third parties, and there may be some situations where you should consider keeping the identity of witnesses confidential. If in doubt, you should seek HR advice.

Interviewing the employee

It will be necessary for you to interview the employee at the centre of the investigation to establish the facts, provide guidance about who else should be interviewed, and determine what other evidence should be gathered.

An investigatory interview is not the same as a disciplinary or grievance meeting. The purpose of an investigatory interview is to establish what happened, while the purpose of a disciplinary or grievance meeting is to decide what to do about it.

There is no statutory right for the interviewee to be accompanied at investigatory meetings. However, many policies permit this, particularly for the employee under investigation, so check if your policy grants this right. Generally, we recommend this is limited to a trade union representative or colleague, but you may also wish to consider whether a companion should be present as an adjustment, for example if someone's first language is not English.

It's important to prepare a checklist in advance of an investigation interview, so:

- familiarise yourself with the facts and prepare a chronology of events
- consider the most appropriate order to interview witnesses
- prepare questions, but be flexible about asking additional questions or amending them as new information comes to light
- reassure the witnesses that you are simply looking to establish the facts, and
- be open to answering any queries that the witnesses might have prior to the meeting.

Additionally, in relation to the employee being investigated:

- seek clarity on any discrepancies
- challenge what the employee is saying provided it is from an objective perspective, for example to help you understand where there may be conflicting evidence, and
- ensure the whole story is uncovered, not just the evidence that might support one narrative.

"You should conduct the necessary investigation within a reasonable time frame."

During the interview:

- remind witnesses to keep the matter confidential
- take notes (ideally a separate note-taker should be present) and ensure witnesses understand this may be shared with the employee
- adjourn the meeting if the witness needs a break
- be mindful that the objective is fact-finding, and remain focused on that
- don't disclose any unnecessary confidential information
- don't encourage the witness to offer their opinion, and don't share yours, and
- avoid rushing to judgement or speculating on the outcome.

After the interview, it is good practice to give the witness a copy of the notes made for them to check and sign.

Conclusion of the investigation

Once you have gathered all the information, it is normal practice to draft a short report summarising the facts. In a disciplinary investigation, you may need to decide if this warrants consideration at a formal hearing, but crucially not the outcome of that hearing. The report should summarise the evidence in an objective manner, considering the employee's version of events and pointing out where there are differences, distinguishing between facts and opinion.

You should present all the evidence to the individual(s) who will make the decision. For disciplinaries, this usually involves meeting with the employee and presenting the evidence at a formal hearing, but the decision will be taken by another manager, governor or panel.

Workplace investigations can sometimes be more complex and challenging in nature. In these circumstances, we recommend you refer to the ACAS Code of Practice¹ and take HR and/or employment law advice. ■

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INFO

1 www.acas.org.uk/investigations-for-discipline-and-grievance-step-by-step

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TAKING THE STRAIN OUT OF STRESS

Education staff have worked round the clock over the past two years to configure and maintain remote learning, support pupils with their emotional wellbeing while homeschooling, and support each other throughout the pandemic. However, it's not just Covid that has been on their minds. Gemma Scotcher, Head of Communications at Education Support, explains why the pandemic and other home- and work-related issues are contributing to an increase in anxiety levels and what can be done to help improve our mental health and wellbeing. ▶



Gemma Scotcher

We are all human, and challenges in life or at work can cause us anxiety, reducing our wellbeing and effectiveness. In current times, there has been no greater challenge for those working in schools and colleges than maintaining the education of millions of students during the pandemic. Trying to return to business as usual whilst dealing with catch-up concerns has certainly been a stressful time. However, even before the pandemic, education staff were tackling a massive increase in the emotional content of their work, causing stress and anxiety, as Gemma explains.

“Funding pressures, curriculum changes, increased awareness around pupil/family poverty and whether children had access to food at home, and a rise in student’s mental health issues caused by exposure to social media were some of the issues that teachers and school leaders were having to deal with. And they still are. Schools are one of the public sector services that families still trust, meaning they feel confident speaking to staff. As a result, staff are taking on a pseudo-social worker role that they aren’t trained for, and without the proper skills, rest and self-care, that can quickly evolve into stress and burnout.”



Causes of anxiety

However, it’s not just school-related issues that contribute to stress and anxiety. Marital/relationship problems, bereavement, work-life balance, debt and housing issues, boundary disputes and childcare problems are just some of the many problems that affect staff at home. And we all know that even when the issues are home-based, they can still affect us at work. But how do we know when a staff member is struggling if they don’t openly talk about it?

“There are several signs, such as changes in behaviours, to look out for,” continues Gemma. “There may be someone who is really committed, passionate and good at what they do who may suddenly seem different, has mood swings, is disengaged, and has poor concentration. There may be someone who is usually very caring to others but suddenly seems like they are protecting themselves by not giving or caring as much. We call that compassion fatigue. These behaviours can lead to ‘presenteeism’, where staff are turning up and trying to do their job when they are not really well enough to be in school. The pupils often pick up on this and are affected by it, so having a high level of observation around team members to see if there are any dramatic changes in behaviour is important because it can help to prevent burnout in staff.”

Employee Assistance Programmes

Everyone deals with stress and anxiety differently, so it is up to school leaders to prioritise staff wellbeing and ensure staff are supported in the appropriate way. Having an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) can be one way of achieving this, as Gemma explains. “An EAP is like having an insurance policy: it is there in case staff need help, and the emotional and practical support provided through it can be accessed immediately.”

The support offered through an EAP includes telephone, online and face-to-face counselling from accredited, professional experts, plus specialist support for home- and work-related issues. This support is backed up with a range of wellbeing resources and information that can be accessed online at any time.

The EAP offered by Education Support was introduced at Morecambe Road School in Lancashire in spring last year, as Fiona Gill, School Business Manager, explains. “We set up a staff wellbeing team in January 2020, and in the April we brought in an on-site counsellor for one day each half-term for staff to talk to face to face. The staff were hugely appreciative of this, but we felt there was a gap in between these sessions for help with urgent staff wellbeing issues – whether personal or professional. The free 24/7 counselling and advice service provided by the EAP certainly fills this gap and has helped considerably with improved staff wellbeing and reduced absenteeism caused by stress.”

As part of the senior leadership team, SBPs like Fiona are responsible for helping create a positive work-life culture. “Investing in an EAP shows staff that you take their mental health and wellbeing seriously and enables them to be properly equipped and supported to do their best work” concludes Gemma. “This, in turn, will help with improved retention, reduced sickness absence and less presenteeism.” ■



Education Support provides a free 24/7 employee assistance programme for all those in the education sector. Further information is available at: [educationsupport.org.uk](https://www.educationsupport.org.uk)

If you are looking for immediate emotional support, 24/7, from a qualified counsellor on any personal or professional issues, call **08000 562561**.

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A COLLECTIVE APPROACH TO EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION



The Global Equality Collective app is the world’s first diversity and inclusion app for education and businesses. We talked to Nicole Ponsford, co-founder, about how her latest project is helping close the inequality gap within the education sector.

Nicole (Nic) Ponsford’s career has been quite a journey: from marketing and advertising executive, teacher, examiner, and advanced skills teacher, to author, educational and technology thought leader, and now digital education specialist. Career highlights also include winning the New Technologies and Inclusion – Outstanding New Teacher award for establishing media studies on the school curriculum, becoming director of EdTech UK (the national independent organisation, advisory forum and strategic body), editor of EdTech UK magazine, and having a central role on the Department for Education’s EdTech Demonstrator Programme, where she supported schools nationally with remote learning during the lockdowns of 2020–21.

Little wonder then that with all this experience in the education sector, she would be anything but successful in her latest venture with business partner Cat Wildman, who herself has a string of accolades to her name including Telegraph Woman of the Year 2018 and being



Nicole Ponsford

"The GEC App is a simple cloud-based, tick-box assessment tool that can be completed anywhere and on any device."



one of The 100 Most Influential Leaders in Diversity and Inclusion at the World HR Congress in 2020.

Nic's passion to tackle equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) stems from her time teaching students from deprived areas, her outreach work around new technologies that she did with primary school children and those with special educational needs, her work for Achievement for All, an education charity that helps all children learn, regardless of their background, challenge or need, and the fact she has experienced close family members with disabilities and additional needs.

Nic's latest project, Global Equality Collective (GEC), began when she came into contact with Cat via a Twitter group they both belonged to. There was a realisation that the leadership inequality issues Cat talked about within the corporate world were similar to those in the education sector. "No one was taking responsibility for the gender pay gap in the education sector. There was a lack of women as head teachers, and the workforce was primarily made up of white middle-class individuals. Furthermore, schools were discriminating against pupils because of their 'boys v girls approach' in terms of subjects and activities offered. Cat was a kindred spirit who, like me, realised there was an urgent need for change."

Having considered the various digital platforms that could be used to tackle ED&I, GEC was born. "We initially focused on gender and intersectionality issues on the corporate side and diversity and inclusion within the education sector" explains Nic. "Via our Twitter group, we started to bring people together to form a collective, and we now have more than 15,000 people in our online communities and more than 350 subject matter experts (SMEs) across diversity and inclusion.

"However, following the murders of George Floyd and Sarah Everard, we realised people were ready to get a bit more serious about diversity and inclusion, so we decided to upgrade the platform. Thanks to some successful crowdfunding via our collective, we raised £230,000 to enable us to develop a framework, which has been launched as the GEC App."¹

How it works

The GEC App is a simple cloud-based, tick-box assessment tool that can be completed anywhere and on any device. It is built around the nine protected characteristics of the Government's Equality Act 2010 (see panel), but goes beyond this, including parents'/single parents' rights, socio-economic status, and sustainability as well.

A member of the senior leadership team does the self-assessment first, with the results showing the position they feel the school is currently in with regard to ED&I. A longer version of the assessment is then sent out to all staff members, with their responses providing a final equality mark that enables the school to understand its staff's views around ED&I and identify any gaps in its ED&I status and provision.

"The self-assessment covers everything about how inclusive and sustainable schools are" continues Nic. "I am working with Helen Burge, ISBL Fellow, with regard to how we must not just look at human rights within schools but also recognise climate change and therefore look at creating carbon neutral schools."

Once you have identified any gaps, you and your staff can access a complete suite of quality-assured e-learning and training resources via the GEC library. This contains webinars, videos, podcasts, case studies, and playbooks (reading lists and blogs) provided by the SMEs and covering all areas of ED&I. Staff should then repeat the self-assessment annually to hopefully demonstrate how many gaps have been closed.

Since its launch to the education sector in January 2021, 100 schools have signed up, including Thomas Tallis School in Blackheath, London. Business Director Cheryl Campbell explains the school's experience of using it so far.

"We have been signed up to the GEC App for a few months now but took the decision to roll it out in a structured, staggered way. After the initial self-assessment by the school's lead on anti-racism, the self-assessment was sent to two different groups of staff: one group was the school's leadership team, and the other group was the anti-racism strategy group. These results will be used to inform the school's need for training and development in this area. As a school, we are using the app to bring together the strands of ED&I work that run through our school plan. The next groups to complete the assessment will be the working groups for Gender Equality and LGBTQ+.

"The staff response to the app has been positive so far, and I am confident that the use of the GEC App will have a positive effect on raising the awareness and understanding of a range of ED&I issues. I certainly have no hesitation in recommending it to other SBPs to use in their schools."

Cheryl's response is good news for Nic, who concludes: "We want this to be an accessible tool for ED&I, which has always been handled by expensive consultancies or by a recruited Head of ED&I. This is a tool for every school to benefit from, so take a look and see what GEC can do for you." ■

"The self-assessment covers everything about how inclusive and sustainable schools are."

THE PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EQUALITIES ACT 2010 ARE:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage or civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion/belief
- sex (gender)
- sexual orientation.



MEMBER OFFER

As part of a pilot to help schools access the app and review their ED&I approach, ISBL is offering the first 50 members who sign up to trial the app 10 per cent off (RRP £150). To find out more and join the pilot, email office@thegec.org



INFO

1 <https://thegec.org/app>

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THE IMPORTANCE OF HAPPINESS WITHIN THE WORKPLACE



Andrew Marsh

Being happy at work is a seemingly obvious statement and naturally desired job requirement, yet it is something that is out of reach for so many people. Andrew Marsh, Advocate at Education Mutual, looks at how you can help colleagues improve their workplace happiness.



A recent survey by Mindspace¹ has found that more than one quarter of UK employees are unhappy in the workplace and are looking to change their situation. The survey, in which UK workers rated their happiness at 73 per cent – compared to Germany's 81 per cent and 93 per cent in the US – places the UK at the bottom of the pile in terms of workplace happiness, which is something that needs to change.

It is commonly known that happy workers are better workers. An extensive six-month study of BT employees by Oxford University² found that productivity increases

by 13 per cent when they are happy. The relationship between job happiness and productivity has always been understood, but the study represents the first causal field evidence for this relationship.

This is poignant for all business leaders, especially school business professionals (SBPs) who are facing the challenge of managing significantly higher sick days and a retention crisis. For many years, job satisfaction amongst teachers was significantly higher than other graduates who developed their trade in other fields.³ However, there is cause for concern amongst education leaders because



whilst the anxiety and job happiness levels amongst other graduates have recently plateaued, the same levels for teachers are plummeting to alarming scores.

The Government is noticeably concerned by these statistics and the impacts they will have on the already worrying retention crisis. It appears their method of navigating through this is to increase the delivery of wellbeing services into schools, which has recently been complemented by the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter,⁴ which 'aims to improve wellbeing in schools and colleges by encouraging debate and accountability'.

There is a breadth of research, statistics and data regarding declining teacher retention. This level of research even extends to headship, but one will struggle to find a similar level of exploration and publication that focuses solely on SBPs; yet SBPs are tasked with managing and motivating a tired workforce and are asking for more to be done by the Department for Education (DfE) to improve workplace happiness in schools.

A survey of school teams in 48 countries, conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),⁵ is bleak reading for education professionals based in England because the report found that they had longer working days than anywhere else – apart from Japan. The average working week for secondary school staff was 48 to 49 hours a week, with primary school staff in England working 52 hours a week in 2019. According to more up-to-date data from a survey in November 2020, the working week for secondary school staff was 55.7 hours and for primary school staff it was 59.3 hours per week,⁶ which was an increase of more than 10 per cent in just over a year and is a worrying trajectory.

According to the survey, head teachers fit in 63.3 hours a week, with only 2.8 hours of that time spent in the classroom. This suggests that the rest of their time is spent in an administrative or managerial position, evidencing the amount of administrative work required in education institutions. The question therefore is: why weren't SBPs considered for this survey? It would have been interesting to gain their thoughts on the onerous workloads.

How to improve workplace happiness

1. IMPROVE SCHOOL CULTURE

The responsibility of driving a more productive and positive culture in school doesn't always have to fall within the leadership team. Instead, identify who from your overall workforce has a positive attitude and high output and make them your 'positive leaders'.

Supporting staff to be 'positive leaders' can come in many forms, for example:

- financial help for their ideas or initiatives
- allowing staff to access courses that will aid their development, and
- making other staff aware that a member of staff is leading on workplace happiness.



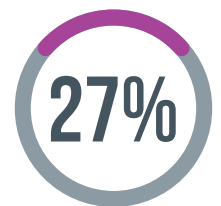
Education Mutual, which provides a non-profit-making alternative to staff absence protection, provides stress coaching free with all memberships. Staff are coached to notice deteriorating signs of mental health amongst colleagues, understand how to deal with this, and set up better practices within school. This represents a fantastic example of how school leaders can delegate responsibility of workplace happiness to colleagues.

2. CREATE A GOOD WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The most important contributor to the environment is the physical surroundings. We spend approximately a third of our time at work, which can become overwhelming from time to time – especially if we are expected to work in uninspiring environments.

Research shows that a well-designed space can increase an employee's productivity by up to 20 per cent. If we look at classrooms, for example, teachers spend significant time and effort in making the room a bright, creative and inspiring environment that will aid the children's learning, but is that same effort and attention extended to the staffroom/staff spaces? In my own experience, working as a supply teacher across many schools in South Yorkshire, creativity and attention to the visual and physical surroundings often ends at the door. It's likely that either the staffroom is victim to a lack of ownership, unlike the teacher-led classrooms, or the importance of a relaxing and fun space is understated. Having a warm and welcoming staffroom can make all the difference to your mood at work – and that of your colleagues. ■

MORE THAN
ONE QUARTER OF
UK EMPLOYEES



are unhappy in
the workplace

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- 1 <https://hs.mindspace.me/tof/happiness-survey>
- 2 www.ox.ac.uk/news/2019-10-24-happy-workers-are-13-more-productive
- 3 Education Policy Institute 2020: <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/wellbeing-school-workforce>
- 4 www.gov.uk/guidance/education-staff-wellbeing-charter
- 5 www.oecd.org/education/talis
- 6 www.superprof.co.uk/blog/how-many-hours-do-teachers-actually-work/#Chapter_a-few-statistics



SUPPORTING YOUR EYFS JOURNEY

The updated early years foundation stage could see nurseries and primary schools needing to revise their approach and investment in resources. TTS and Early Years Expert Alistair Bryce-Clegg discusses what tools should be prioritised to ensure best value.

The EYFS (early years foundation stage) framework covers children from birth to five years old and must be followed in all registered early years settings. It outlines the standards that early years providers and practitioners must meet to ensure that children are kept safe and healthy and that they develop the skills and knowledge they need to start school and further develop during their reception year.

Recent changes to the EYFS Framework, which have been implemented to improve outcomes from children, reduce workload for practitioners, and simplify assessment, mean that early years providers and primary schools must revise their approach and investment in resources to ensure they are meeting the new standards.

On announcing the changes, Ofsted’s Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, stated that the updated EYFS has more of a focus on the unique needs of early years settings and the children taught in them, highlighting the importance of not creating a curriculum that is based



Alistair Bryce-Clegg

“The updated EYFS has more of a focus on the unique needs of early years settings and the children taught in them.”



on teaching-to-assessment outcomes. As a result, there are now seven areas of learning underpinning the EYFS curriculum, and school business professionals should understand the impact of them to ensure that any resources required to meet any revisions in the school's learning improvement plan are budgeted for.

1. COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE:

play-based environments are the perfect place for acquiring and rehearsing communication and language skills because being alongside peers allows children to be comfortable and secure. A role-play or small-world area can be good for encouraging children to talk, but only if it contains resources that they want or are able to talk about.

2. PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PSED):

the revised EYFS places a strong emphasis on children making healthy choices, so having resources that help teach them about looking after their bodies is important. As well as this, consider creating an environment that encourages movement both indoors and outdoors.

3. MATHEMATICS:

to meet the new EYFS, the Early Years environment should offer rich opportunities for children to be able to count, sort, arrange and make sets. This could be through construction, transient art, a creative area, woodwork, small world and more. Children need the opportunity to see and manipulate numbers themselves, so consider using small pebbles and tens frames for counting.

4. LITERACY:

this area is about children developing a love of reading. This can be achieved by making the act of reading with them a special and enjoyable time and by ensuring that environments are print-rich. Singing has been shown to have a positive impact on children's ability to recognise sounds within words.

5. PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT:

this is split into gross and fine motor development. For gross motor development, throwing is a typical behaviour of children in the early years, so having beanbags or paper aeroplanes handy is perfect. Fine motor development comes from everyday activities such as painting, cutting and construction.

6. UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD:

the addition of culture to the 'People and Communities' focus ensures that children have a broad understanding of cultures besides their own. Stories, songs and rhymes are great ways of celebrating cultures whilst giving children information and appreciation of them. Visitors and trips are also incredibly valuable. The addition of natural to 'The World' gives practitioners the opportunity to make use of outdoor spaces and resources that use nature.

7. EXPRESSIVE ART AND DESIGN:

the key words in this section are explore, experiment, and create. In areas like painting, modelling and malleable materials, new resources and media can be introduced. This gives children the freedom to create, interpret and explore. ■

LEARNINGS FROM AN EARLY ADOPTER

Rack House Primary is a two-form entry school in Wythenshawe, Greater Manchester, with nursery and reception provision. The school was an EYFS Early Adopter,¹ meaning it took on the new framework in September 2020 rather than September 2021.

Initially, the school was aware of an outcry about certain aspects of the new framework, and this did cause some reservations. However, after much deliberation, the school decided to go ahead with the Early Adoption. It was curious about the changes and supportive of the people that were involved in its creation and knew that as experienced practitioners, the framework could be interpreted in a way that would benefit the children in the school.

The next step was to update the bespoke sequenced curriculum to acknowledge the new non-statutory and statutory documents. The school ensured it included everything it felt the children needed, and prioritised the following:

- ensuring ICT ran through all areas of learning, progressively, for all age groups
- matching texts for the 'People, Culture and Communities', 'PSED' and 'Past and Present' areas of the framework with literacy
- marrying new assessment statements up with existing bespoke sequenced curriculum
- adapting timetabled adult-led sessions to ensure the appropriate balance of adult-led and child-led learning, and
- ensuring nothing was too over-prescriptive and that there was still creative space for adults and children to learn in the moment.

TOP TIPS

1. Do not disregard what you already do.
2. Ensure your learning programme is tailored to the needs of your children – each child and cohort is unique.
3. Working in collaboration with your specialist team members is vital.



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1 www.tts-group.co.uk/blog/2021/09/03/top-tips-from-eyfs-early-adopter-rack-house-primary.html

TTS Talking EYFS is a range of content created by leading global suppliers of education and teaching resources, for TTS. Visit www.tts-group.co.uk/early-years

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STAYING SAFE FROM THE RANSOMWARE ATTACKERS



News that the National Cyber Security Centre has been investigating an increased number of ransomware attacks on education establishments over the past 18 months is concerning for schools. We discuss what you can be doing to protect your school against such attacks. ▶



Paul Edmond

Seventeen schools in a multi-academy trust in Cambridge, six schools on the Isle of Wight, two schools in Kent. These were just some of the schools targeted by cybercriminals between spring 2020 and summer 2021 who encrypted and held to financial ransom information such as staff and student personal details, medical records, and teaching resources.

With ransomware attacks on the rise, the update of the ESFA Academy Trust Handbook (September 2021) continues to put a greater emphasis on cybersecurity. Baroness Berridge, the former Under Secretary of State for the School System at the Department for Education (DfE), stated "Many of you will be aware of the increasing number of cyberattacks involving ransomware that are affecting the education sector and others. I know that these events can have devastating effects on organisations and individuals, and the Department continues to work with crime prevention agencies to help trusts protect themselves. The handbook highlights the National Crime Agency's advice not to pay ransoms, and to approach us if your trust finds itself in the very difficult position of contemplating such a payment."¹

Throughout the long period of homeschooling during the pandemic, the increase in the number of devices remotely accessing schools' cloud-based servers made it easier for attackers to compromise school systems, fuelling the increase in ransomware attacks.¹ Such was the scale of the problem that the UK's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) notified all educational organisations about the increasing cyber risks, and in December 2020, the FBI published an urgent security notice communicating the risk of cyberthreats to distance learning programs around the world.^{1,2}

As a consequence, John Gilbert, Chief Information Officer at the DfE, warned head teachers that they must "understand the nature of the threat and the potential for ransomware to cause considerable damage to your institutions in terms of lost data and access to critical services. Part of this is identifying your 'crown jewels' and ensuring you have an incident action plan, along with your defences. Having the ability to restore the systems and recover data from backups is vital in the event of an incident."¹

Keeping your school secure

The primary method of access in these ransomware attacks has been through a school's remote desktop protocol (RDP), the interface that allows external access for staff to manage systems and services remotely. It is therefore incredibly important for schools to test the vulnerabilities in their IT systems, rectify them, and then manage the systems effectively so there is less chance of being compromised.

"The NCSC website provides a very helpful toolkit to help organisations find out how resilient they are to cyberattacks."

National Cyber Security Centre
a part of GCHQ

10 Steps to Cyber Security

This collection is designed for security professionals and technical staff as a summary of NCSC advice for medium to large organisations. We recommend you start by reviewing your approach to risk management, along with the other nine areas of cyber security below, to ensure that technology, systems and information in your organisation are protected appropriately against the majority of cyber attacks and enable your organisation to best deliver its business objectives.

- Risk management**
Take a risk-based approach to securing your data and systems.
- Engagement and training**
Collaboratively build security that works for people in your organisation.
- Asset management**
Know what data and systems you have and what business need they support.
- Architecture and configuration**
Design, build, maintain and manage systems securely.
- Vulnerability management**
Keep your systems protected throughout their lifecycle.
- Identity and access management**
Control who and what can access your systems and data.
- Data security**
Protect data where it is vulnerable.
- Logging and monitoring**
Design your systems to be able to detect and investigate incidents.
- Incident management**
Plan your response to cyber incidents in advance.
- Supply chain security**
Collaborate with your suppliers and partners.

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Identifying vulnerabilities and managing the IT system effectively is what Paul Edmond, Chief Finance Officer (CFO) at HEART Academies Trust in Bedford, and ISBL Fellow, does as part of his role. "Having responsibility for coordinating and managing IT is something many CFOs and other school business professionals (SBPs) do in their role, so it's important to have a very good knowledge of IT and how it works. I have a fantastic IT team who I rely on day to day, but in terms of managing and putting in the right systems and processes, that is my remit."

So what has Paul implemented to ensure his trust is as cybersecure as possible? "Pre-pandemic, we introduced a number of policies to strengthen our ICT security. We undertake an annual ICT audit in partnership with our internal auditors that helps us verify our systems and procedures and also have an annual network penetration test, which involves third parties trying to break into our systems so that we can see if they are as robust as we think they are. Weaknesses within the configuration of firewalls and filtering and policies for security updates and patch management can be a major issue, leaving both systems and children vulnerable. The Trust ICT team, supported by our third-party suppliers, carry out regular housekeeping to ensure this is not the case. Every staff member also has mandatory annual cybersecurity training to ensure they are more aware of what they are doing online."

"Security issues during the periods of remote learning were obviously a concern to us, so we had a close look at all our different ICT systems and policies, starting with our password policies. Weak passwords can significantly undermine the strongest network security, so we moved to ensure everyone had a long password of at least 15 characters and introduced multi-factor authentication, meaning all those working from home had to go through a two-step process to log in via a system of text messages and confirmation codes. With our suppliers also holding a lot of school data, we also revisited what they were doing to ensure our network and data remained protected. We have also introduced a new email protection system to flag and filter out spam and phishing emails, and if staff are emailing someone new, a pop-up appears on their screen to check the person's details are correct."

Paul is also making use of all the information on the National Cyber Security Centre's (NCSC) website,³ which provides practical resources to help schools improve their cybersecurity. "The website provides a toolkit to help organisations find out how resilient they are to cyberattacks, plus there is plenty of information about what all school staff should be doing to improve their school's cyber resilience." To complement the resources available from NCSC, Paul is also making use of advice and support from other academy trusts. "There are schools and trusts throughout England with a wealth of expertise in addressing the cybersecurity challenge, and the vast majority are very happy and willing to collaborate and help."

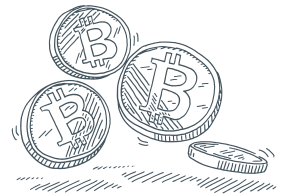


"Weak passwords can significantly undermine network security."

Continuity planning

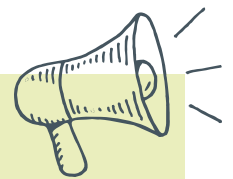
Although you can put all the necessary processes and securities in place to try and prevent an attack, nothing is ever 100 per cent foolproof, so Paul explains what he has in place to quickly resume business as usual should his school be the victim of an attack.

"We have daily data backups on the premises and virtually, with any backup tapes and drives held offsite to prevent them being compromised. These backups are tested regularly to ensure the data is still there. We also have cyber insurance, so if something does go wrong, we can call in the experts to limit damage. However, the insurance company does expect us to do the annual penetration test and have multi-factor authentication in return, otherwise we are not covered. As long as we can evidence that we are promoting good cybersecurity, then we are on the right route to full compliance." ■



TOP TIPS

- Keep software and systems up to date, ensuring security patches are implemented when released.
- Have strong password policies and multi-factor authentication, with regular checks that staff are complying.
- Undertake annual cybersecurity training to ensure staff are fully aware of their online activities.



1 www.impsoftware.co.uk/blog/the-academy-trust-handbook-2021-and-the-importance-of-cyber-security

2 <https://us-cert.cisa.gov/ncas/alerts/aa20-345a>

3 www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/education-skills/cyber-security-schools

The following webinar can help you find out more about how to be cybersecure; www.impsoftware.co.uk/videos/episode-12-live-why-do-mat-cfos-need-to-be-concerned-about-the-growing-risk-of-a-cyber-security-attack

Free cybersecurity training is available via: www.ncsc.gov.uk/information/cyber-security-training-schools

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ESTATE



For any education provider, their buildings are arguably their greatest asset but also their biggest risk. In the short term, the likelihood is that underinvestment in education buildings will continue. Rob Tyler, Partner and Education Sector Lead at Baily Garner, discusses the importance of condition surveys and how they can help in developing estate strategies.

Without understanding the condition of the estate, those responsible will continue to grapple with the challenges of balancing budgets alongside ensuring the continued safety of building users and providing the best possible teaching environment. Those with a strong grasp of the condition of, and wider strategy for, their estates will reap the greatest benefits. Those who do not have this data to support capital works will not.

For schools maintained by local authorities, the ultimate responsibility for the condition of your site will reside with them. For academies and multi-academy trusts (MATs), however, the responsibility resides with the responsible person. Regardless of your establishment, the need to understand condition does not diminish. A condition survey and the development of an estate strategy is a critical starting point in understanding your estate.

The Department for Education (DfE) has procured the Condition Data Collection (CDC) programme, which aims to collect condition data on 22,000 education establishments between 2021 and 2026. This is the third programme of its kind and aims to identify and prioritise investment in schools. At the recently held Education Estates conference, I attended a presentation on CDC, which stated that the total condition need identified to date stands at a staggering £11.4 billion. In recently published guidance for the Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) and for CDC itself, the DfE identified that the CDC report is not a condition survey and the data collected is

high-level. It is therefore crucial that responsible bodies are not reliant on this information and actively manage their estates to be aware of both the condition and potential associated liabilities.

The condition survey

It is vital that education buildings and wider sites are maintained and improved in a proactive way to ensure reactive maintenance and repairs do not become the norm. There are several tools that can be implemented in this process, and understanding condition is the start of this journey.

The condition survey is an inspection undertaken by qualified individuals to assess the physical condition of the components forming the site. A well-rounded and all-encompassing survey should capture the buildings' fabric, external parts, and mechanical and electrical services. The report produced will be supplemented by condition survey data, which will provide key detail



Rob Tyler

"A condition survey and the development of an estate strategy is a critical starting point in understanding your estate."



A condition survey can identify works that need to be done (such as the replacement of this roof), ensuring your estate remains in a usable condition.



"The condition survey is an inspection undertaken by qualified individuals to assess the physical condition of the components forming the site."

around the condition of building components, each of which will be provided with a condition grade from A to D (good to bad) and a priority rating 1 to 4 (urgent to more than five years).

Once graded, each element should be quantified and a cost attached for recommended works, along with details about the element's lifespan and replacement year, if required. This is important to allow longer-term life-cycle costs and projections to be made over a given period, and it is this information that will inform your strategy around prioritisation of work or potential disposal/rebuild of buildings.

Finding the funds

A further consideration when understanding the condition of your estates is around securing capital funding. Knowledge of the funding available, coupled with a wider strategic plan, allows you to directly focus on specific areas of capital improvement. This could be in many ways, including apportionment of School Condition Allocation (SCA) or bid-based funding such as CIF. Again, this core data and understanding of condition and priorities across your estate will be instrumental in your approach to justifying works and securing much-needed funding.

At Seaford Head School in East Sussex, for example, a condition survey of its estate showed it to be in a poor condition. As a stand-alone academy, the avenue to secure capital funding for estate improvements was via CIF, so, following completion of its survey, the school developed a strategy around bidding through CIF to address life-expired elements across its two sites. As a result, eight capital projects totalling £3m have been delivered, ranging from roof replacement to replacement of a life-expired building. The original condition survey was pivotal in allowing the school to understand its estate and justify the urgent need for funding in a proactive way.

Some organisations experience a transition from bid-based funding to SCA, either through growth or joining an existing, eligible MAT, and the funding is also applicable for maintained schools. Understanding where to allocate SCA is important, but this is something that can only be fully achieved once the condition is known and understood.

For example, Leigh Trust in Birmingham has moved on from obtaining funding and delivering projects utilising CIF and is now allocating SCA funds. To assist with this transition, condition surveys are being undertaken across the estate to support the planning of future works. Tom Blewitt, Chief Operating Officer of the trust, explains, "The move from bid-based funding to SCA was significant for our trust, and we are now working on developing a wider estate

management plan for our estate, ensuring we are allocating the funding in the areas that need it most. This plan will be critical in successfully maintaining and developing our estates in an organic way and building toward a more sustainable future."

For the senior leadership team and responsible person in any school environment, there are continuous challenges, pressures and factors that determine the success of a school. The management of your estate should not be a contributing factor to this ever-growing list of duties and concerns. By implementing the correct asset management tools through a condition survey and estate strategy, you will have at your disposal the information and vision to ensure you are proactive in the management of your estates. ■

TOP TIPS

1. A condition survey is critical to understanding your estate and formulating your strategy for maintenance and improvement.
2. Condition surveys can also assist with justifying urgent need for funding in your bid applications, such as CIF. They can also be used to allocate or form the basis of internal bids for securing SCA.
3. Do not rely on your CDC Survey – you should always hold thorough condition survey data from an independent specialist for your estate.



DISCLAIMER

Baily Garner is a multidisciplinary construction consultancy specialising in architecture, building surveying, building services engineering, project management, quantity surveying and sustainability consultancy.

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We have increased the range of vegan and vegetarian choices on our menus including new ingredients for the children to try.

How can we help you?



If you are considering your future catering requirements, we would welcome the opportunity to show you around one of our Primary school operations.

Please contact Ian Carpenter (Head of Sales) by email iancarpenter@pabulum-catering.co.uk or telephone 07970 754095.



ENSURING COMPLIANCE WITH NATASHA'S LAW



Natasha's Law came into effect on 1 October 2021 and requires all food outlets to provide full ingredients lists, including allergen information, on foods pre-packaged for direct sale on the premises. Hazel Bourne, Business Manager at In-house Safety, outlines what schools should be doing to comply with the regulations.

Approximately five to eight per cent of children in the UK suffer from a food allergy,¹ meaning schools are consistently aware of the need to closely scrutinise their allergen management systems to protect students. However, the introduction of Natasha's Law in October

2021 means you must now comply with new food labelling regulations to protect any allergy sufferers in your school or face substantial penalties.

Natasha's Law was introduced following the death of Natasha Ednan-Laperouse after an allergic reaction to ►



Hazel Bourne



an undeclared ingredient in a pre-packaged sandwich. The law only applies to food that is pre-packaged for direct sale (PPDS) on-site, with food classed as PPDS if it:

- is fully or partly enclosed by the packaging
- cannot be altered without opening or changing the packaging, and
- is ready for sale to the final consumer.

So how will Natasha’s Law affect your school?

If food is served from a hot or cold counter and is unpackaged, then no labelling changes are required – although full allergen information should still be available. Food that is packaged after it has been ordered is not affected either. If the food is bought in already packaged (e.g. confectionery, crisps, sandwiches) and then sold, your supplier must ensure there is a full ingredients list on the packaging.

However, if your caterers make hot/cold food and package it on-site, or buy in packaged food and then repackage it on-site, then the new regulation will affect you. Examples include:

- site-made, packaged sandwiches, cakes and biscuits
- salad pots
- fruit pots
- breakfast pots
- packed lunches provided by the school
- boxes of hot food such as pizza or nuggets available on the hot counter, and
- food served at school functions or events if it is packaged in advance.

There is certainly a lot to think about to ensure compliance with the new law, especially because many schools have been left in the dark about it all, as Mike Richardson, Sales and Marketing Director at



Nadim and Tanya Ednan-Laperouse, whose daughter Natasha died from an allergic reaction.

Pabulum Catering, explains. “Initially, the knowledge around Natasha’s Law was limited in schools because the ‘emotional’ connection to this new legislation was with high-street outlets. Schools did not realise that it was going to affect them as much, and the Food Standards Agency only issued guidance² on the new rules in late summer 2021, when schools were on holiday.

“We are also not aware of any full guidance from the Department for Education. Many schools have therefore relied on their professional caterer to provide a robust and compliant solution, but with differing interpretations of the law, many schools may have been left vulnerable.”

The new compliant labels

The law states that any PPDS food sold in your school must now be labelled with the name of the food and a full ingredients list of all the raw materials, shown in descending order of weight at the time of production. It’s not enough to say that something contains a spice mix or nuts: the label must state exactly which spice has been used, for example mustard, and all nuts must be declared separately. Any allergens must be emphasised every time they appear in the ingredients list, either in capitals, bold type, contrasting colours, or underlined, and at a particular font size.¹

It’s important to note that variations in ingredients may occur, so your ingredients lists need to be checked carefully. For example, different brands of mayonnaises, pickles and dressings may have different ingredients, so either your catering team needs to use the same brand each time to ensure the labels are correct or the ingredients lists need to be checked regularly. Given the current supply chain issues, it is likely you will get substitutions delivered, so this is something that needs to be looked at closely.





When it comes to printing the labels for your PPDS food, you may need to consider purchasing specific software and printer(s) for the school kitchens. The software will ensure the labels are compliant and should ultimately save time if you are producing the same foods regularly. An incorrect label is potentially more dangerous than no label, so it is essential that time is available to make this work. Environmental Health Officers will be adding this to their inspection lists when they next visit your kitchens. ■



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Maria Taylor, School Business Manager at Breck Primary School in Lancashire, explains how her school has overcome the challenges of Natasha's Law in a slightly different way.



Natasha's Law came at a time when our catering team faced staffing challenges. However, the team stepped up to the mark and undertook research to ensure the school would meet its legal obligations in time for the introduction of the new law.

Alongside hot lunch options served from behind a traditional counter, a 'Costa' style option was introduced a few years ago so the children could select from a choice of on-site pre-packaged sandwiches, fruit, snacks and puddings. It was these items that proved to be our biggest obstacle with regard to packaging and the new labelling.

Various options were discussed between the senior leadership team and the catering team, following which we reviewed the labelling compliance tools available via the Foods Standards Agency website. Our pupils were then consulted about what the new law meant, and because they are very keen on reducing waste, the school community made the decision to change from pre-packaged to made-to-order options, which are served on a plate with accompanying salads and extras. This has meant more children are moving to the hot lunch option, and we have reduced our waste and improved our service, leading to a less stressful lunch experience for all members of the welfare and catering teams.

TOP TIPS

1. Decide how you are going to label any foods affected by Natasha's Law – e.g. printer, labels, software.
2. Talk to your suppliers about stock and substitutions so that your labels remain correct.
3. Train staff in the requirements of Natasha's Law and how to label.
4. Arrange an independent audit to see how well your allergy management systems are working.



THE LACA ALLERGEN MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE FOR CATERING IN EDUCATION

LACA – the school food people has produced allergen management guidance that aims to support schools, caterers and pupils in understanding the best practice with regard to managing allergens safely. The guide provides details of a risk assessment process tool that can support schools and caterers in assessing the risk status of delivering a medical diet request safely, including allergen management.

If you are a LACA member, you can access the Risk Analysis Process Form and guidance document at: <https://laca.co.uk/laca-school-allergens-guidance-and-risk-analysis-process>



INFO

- 1 www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-food-allergen-labelling-and-information-requirements-technical-guidance_0.pdf
- 2 www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/prepacked-for-direct-sale-ppds-allergen-labelling-changes-for-schools-colleges-and-nurseries

The Food Standards Agency has a tool to help you identify if the food you serve is PPDS. Visit: www.food.gov.uk/allergen-ingredients-food-labelling-decision-tool

Allergywise training, recommended by the Food Standards Agency, is available via: www.allergywise.org.uk/p/allergywise-for-schools



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WHY YOUR SCHOOL NEEDS A MARKETING PLAN



Emily Richards

Emily Richards, Founder & Director of The Stickman Consultancy, talks about the importance of an effective marketing plan.

There isn't a school in the land that doesn't undertake curriculum planning or have a detailed plan for their school budget, yet so many schools don't give any consideration to planning their marketing. We frequently hear that a marketing budget isn't necessary because 'we just spend what we need to at the time', such as for open evenings or a few adverts.

Too often, no allocated budget (no matter how small) equates to no school marketing plan.

Why is this an issue?

Well, without a school marketing plan, you run the risk of wasting precious resources because you are throwing potentially expensive marketing activities out there and seeing what sticks. Furthermore, a scattergun approach to marketing will lead to empty school places and a shortage of funding, and when you consider the value of each and every pupil at a school, it's clear that this will make a significant dent in your school's finances.

Creating a marketing plan is therefore essential in getting results, in making your efforts count and keeping your school financially healthy.

The beauty of a marketing plan is that you can see at a glance how everything you are doing works together, and planning your marketing activities in a coherent and consistent way across the term or academic year prevents you from making ad hoc (often expensive) decisions. You will see exactly what marketing activities should be happening when and where, ensuring your budget is used effectively and efficiently. ▶

"Without a school marketing plan, you run the risk of wasting precious resources."





For non-marketers, however, the very idea of creating a marketing plan might sound time-consuming, difficult and perhaps somewhat daunting. We've therefore outlined three key areas below to consider when forming one:

1. KNOW YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Understanding and defining who you're targeting with your marketing is the very best first step you can take. Why? Because this will inform what your message is and the marketing activities that you do. So, list out where they live, where they spend their time and what they are looking for when choosing a school for their child.

2. DEFINE THE NITTY-GRITTY – WHAT AND WHEN

Taking the target audience profile that you will have built (following tip no. 1), it's now time to define the details. List out your selected marketing activities (online, offline, usually a bit of both) and plot these along a timeline, e.g. a term, so that you can see exactly what will be happening and when. As we've said, choosing the right marketing channels is simply about being where your audience is, so this is why it's so important to take the time to understand who you're trying to reach. Concentrate on just a few marketing activities at a time – less is more – and do them well.

3. SHARE THE MARKETING PLAN ACROSS YOUR SCHOOL

Getting buy-in across your school is crucial in driving results with your marketing, so share what you're doing with all staff. Take a slot during your next INSET day and share with everyone what the marketing plan is and why it is important. Encourage staff to get involved: to re-share and comment on school social posts, take pictures if they see the school's promotional activities out and about, and so on.

Bonus tip – evaluate what you're doing

A bonus tip is to evaluate your marketing activities. This will enable you to pinpoint the things that are (and aren't) working and to then remove any activities

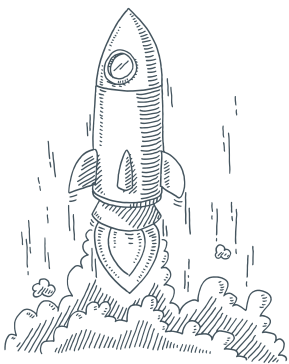
that don't have a measurable impact. According to Albert Einstein, the definition of insanity is 'doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results', so understanding what activities to continue with versus those that can be binned is essential in making your marketing budget work hard for your school.

Proof in action

Of course, the sixty-four thousand dollar question is: does working to a school's marketing plan really impact pupil recruitment?

The head teacher of a north London 3–11 school, who had never had a marketing plan before, certainly thinks so. A few weeks after implementing his plan, he said "We've already had approximately eight enquiries, and I've already had three people signing up for the nursery next year. It's absolutely fantastic."

There is no doubt that during the pandemic, and particularly during lockdown periods, schools have been unable to fully implement their planned activities. Nevertheless, schools have been taking the opportunity to create pupil recruitment plans for the next admissions cycle, giving them the confidence and agility to move quickly as 'normal' service resumes. By creating and working to a powerful but simple school marketing plan, you will save money, save time and positively impact your pupil recruitment. It is an essential element – just like curriculum and budget planning – of a flourishing school. ■



The Stickman Consultancy (school marketing specialists) has designed an online course for primary schools entitled '3 Step Framework to Building an Awesome Pupil Recruitment Marketing Plan', which maps to ISBL's Professional Standards. Karen Turner, Deputy Head at Newburgh Primary, has done the course and says "The course gave me a grounding in school marketing, but at a level that you could understand if your background isn't in marketing. I definitely learnt an awful lot, and it didn't actually take that long to do."

ISBL members receive a discount on the course, so why not find out more at: [https://isbl.org.uk/Training/Training-courses/Marketing-e-learning-\(Primary-recruitment\).aspx](https://isbl.org.uk/Training/Training-courses/Marketing-e-learning-(Primary-recruitment).aspx)

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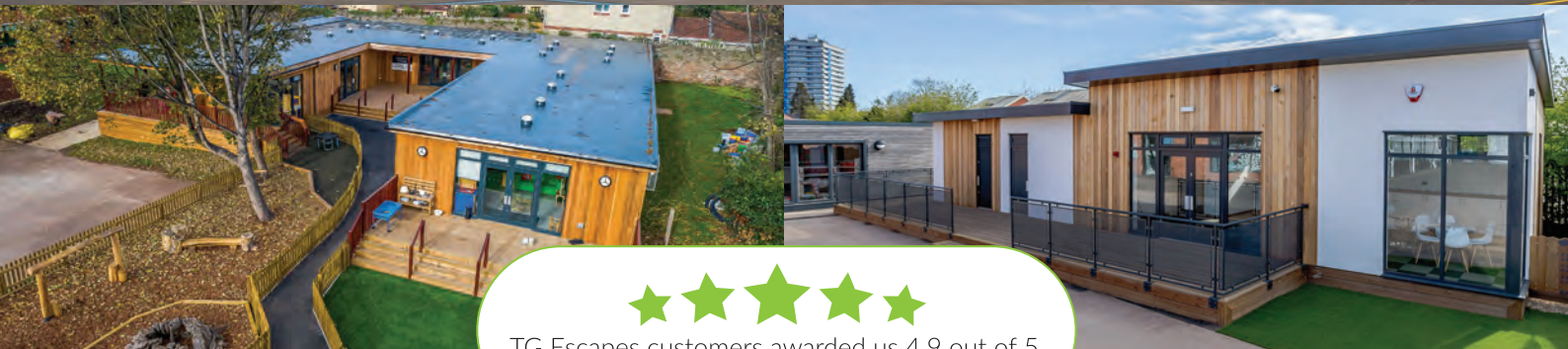
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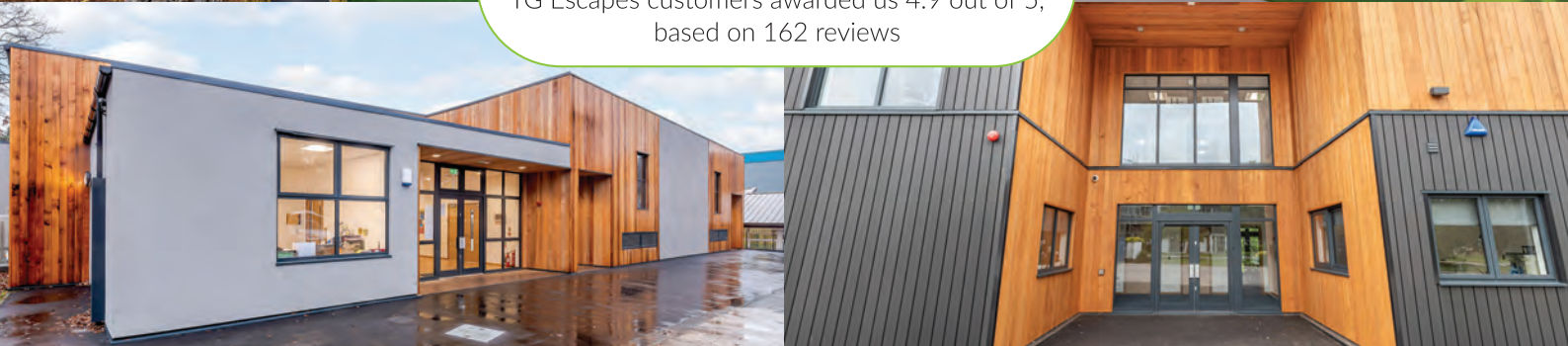
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