

Achieving world class schools

The importance of school business managers

I am particularly pleased to be here today addressing this, the second International School Business Management conference and am absolutely delighted to welcome colleagues both via video link and here in the audience from South Africa, the USA, Australia, Egypt and China.

This conference last year considered the contribution school business managers could make in helping lead schools into the twenty first century. Our focus this year is the role of the school business manager (SBM) and how they are uniquely positioned to help their schools become world class schools.

Education is the most powerful tool that we can use to change the world for the better and I believe school business managers have a central role to play in helping to improve our educational services.

Much has been achieved since last year and we will hear from colleagues from the United States and South Africa who will outline the developments that are being introduced in their respective countries. I want to personally congratulate our colleagues from Western Cape, South Africa who have worked so hard to develop their school business management pilot programme which is due to be launched very shortly in June.

In England we should acknowledge the widespread acceptance of the school business manager's role and the important leadership role they have adopted in many schools. The profile of the role has never been higher.

In summary all of the school business management measures made across the globe have at their core two key aims. These are to:

- improve the life chances of all our children

- enable head teachers and teachers to refocus their roles on leading learning, curriculum development and of course, teaching

In England currently there are nearly 7,500 school business managers - almost double the figure 10 years ago. The College has trained more than 5,000 school business managers – 1,700 in the last financial year alone. Over three-quarters of our diploma candidates are on their school's senior management team and most pleasingly over 95 per cent of our candidates say they would recommend these courses to their peers.

And yet whilst 90 per cent of our secondary schools have a school business manager, only around a third of our primary schools have one. In addition we are aware that a significant minority of head teachers and other stakeholders remain to be convinced that the real and tangible benefits that skilled and competent school business managers can bring to the school do far outweigh the perceived drawbacks, for example head teachers often cite additional cost.

Also we know that with the introduction of policies such as Every Child Matters, 14–19 Agenda, Extended Schools and the Children's Plan are likely to prompt further school structural and organisational change such as formal and loose federations and clustering of groups of schools. Clearly there will be a need for even more highly qualified, skilled and competent school business managers operating within our schools.

That is why the College commissioned ground breaking research to consider what schools might need in terms of the number and level of school business managers over the next five years. This work contributed to a request by the Secretary of State to provide advice on primary school leadership. In that advice we noted the issues of capacity and sustainability for primary heads and said that the best way to meet these challenges was to develop school business managers. Sir Michael Barber will provide more detail in his address and the Innovation Unit will provide an update on the progress we have already made in the delivery of the School Business Director Demonstration projects in their workshop later.

However three broad conclusions emerged from this research. These are:

- there will be demand for more competent, skilled and highly qualified school business managers operating at a higher level in our schools
- we need to increase the attractiveness and effectiveness of the head teacher role by consolidating its focus on teaching and learning – school business managers can help – research suggests that they can save up to one third of their head teachers time – imagine the impact the release of this level of resource could have on each school
- school business managers can essentially pay for themselves in terms of the resources they are able to save and the new money they can bring in

We are now embarking upon – in collaboration with our colleagues in the Training Development Agency for Schools and with the full support of the Department for Children Schools and Families – an intense major five year development programme which will both help improve the business management and leadership skills capacity in schools whilst tackling the projected increased requirement for school business managers over the next five years.

This work will build on the undoubted success of our Certificate of School Business Management (CSBM) and Diploma of School Business Management (DSBM) programmes delivering four separate but inextricably linked strands.

- Build a higher level Advanced Diploma of School Business Management and deliver a pilot programme in the autumn. This course which is aimed at enabling school business managers to both operate at a strategic level and deal with the organisational complexities that are likely to confront them will cover in more detail elements which include performance management, strategic financial management, leadership and organisational development at a strategic level.

- Test the concept of highly skilled school business managers/directors through 24–30 demonstration projects in a range of scenarios with an emphasis on the primary sector ie:
 - shared advanced SBM across a number of schools
 - school business director in a range of scenarios
 - advanced SBM in single small schools

The first demonstration projects have already been launched. They are:

- Fishburn Primary School, Co Durham
 - Yewlands School, Sheffield
 - West Sussex Local Authority
 - West Grantham Federation
 - Dyson Perrins Church of England High School, Worcestershire
 - Chesil Bay Partnership, Dorset
- Based on the evaluation findings of the demonstration projects develop a new course – School Business Director together with comprehensive accreditation of prior experience and learning guidance.
 - Raise the profile of the school business manager through a marketing and awareness raising campaign which stimulates demand and manages supply.

We are convinced that advanced school business managers and directors have a pivotal role to play in supporting their headteacher, working with others at a strategic level and leading the ‘business dimension’ of the school (or group of schools).

To achieve world class schools, we all need to foster a culture of openness and sharing, one that responds positively to continuous change and seeks continuous improvement.

school business managers should not be passive spectators simply releasing head teachers and others to secure this goal.

By possessing a unique blend of non-teaching skills, giving them a different insight, capability and capacity they are absolutely critical to managing strategic change and securing continuous quality improvement.

Finally, today is not simply about bringing colleagues together to update them on our respective achievements or latest initiatives.

I believe that many of the problems and issues confronting UK schools are the same or similar to those confronting colleagues across the world.

Consequently today is also about renewing contacts, making new ones, developing networks, sharing problems, reflecting on new approaches and ideas and of course learning of new and different programmes. This open dialogue need not and should not end today. As a delegate of the Conference you have become a member of the College's international community on talk2learn. Please visit that community and participate. Through that exchange we can all further refine ideas and the measures we plan to introduce to achieve our ultimate goal – the achievement of world class schools for all our children.