

## Leadership and the school business manager

**Counting dinner money used to be the extent of the financial responsibilities for the 'person in the school office' but today's School Business Manager (SBM) is just as likely to come equipped with ICT and HR skills as the ability to add up small change.**

What does it mean for a school's strategic leadership? How can SBMs support the headteacher? And what hurdles have to be overcome so that SBMs can maximise their skills for the benefit of the school community?

They were some of the questions tackled in a lively talk2learn discussion on leadership and the school business manager.

Christina Eracleous, Business Manager at a special school in London, encapsulated the potential variety of the role: "A good SBM is the health and safety rep, human resources advisor, administration backbone, negotiator, host, psychic, promoter, fundraiser, banker and hub of all knowledge," she said. "A SBM does support the headteacher in numerous professional ways, but quite often is *the critical friend who prompts actions that need to be taken or addressed.*"

Keith Marshall, Support Services Director at a high school in Buckinghamshire, said that as SBMs were often accustomed to working in teams, they could pass these and other soft skills on to others: "I see one of the roles of the SBM is to educate and guide the whole Senior Management Team (SMT) on how to share decision-taking, passing it down to the lowest possible level. This enables those at the top of the pyramid the space and time to concentrate on the really important strategic issues."

But, according to many, what hinders the SBM's ability to offer such support is often the attitude of headteachers or others on the Senior Management Team and their unwillingness to relinquish traditional responsibilities.

One SBM described a headteacher who "insisted on being the one



to decide every little detail. *He needed to be in control of everything* and found it very difficult to delegate to anyone. If he did, all decisions had to be authorised by him."

Another bursar in a rural primary school was surprised to find that her move to the senior management team was met with some hostility, yet resistance was not insurmountable, she suggested:

"There have been numerous changes within the education establishment over recent years and suspicions are understandable. However, as an SBM *one of the major aspects of the job is to ensure clear communication and negotiation.* I don't think I will be fulfilling my role effectively if I allow this situation to continue."

Many felt that better promotion of the role by local authorities would encourage headteachers and other leaders to delegate more. Johanna Stock, Administrator at a primary school in Olham, had a more radical idea: "Including the role of the SBM in NPQH would go a long way to promote it," she said. "Many people on SMTs will be looking to move up to leadership posts but will probably have gained their experience in schools without a SBM and therefore be unaware of the potential."

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