

ISBL round table – 13 September 2019 – Stone King, London

This, the first of a series of ISBL round tables, centred on a discussion related to professional development, career progression and the broader education sector skills deficit within our evolving system.

Colleagues appeared to be unanimous with their view that the SBP community remains diverse in terms of remit, skills and experience. There was recognition that small standalone schools offered limited scope for progression and development.

When offered the three scenarios – a fully maintained sector, a fully academised sector or a mixed economy of schools – opinion appeared to favour an environment where schools work closely together enjoying economies of scales, the benefits of aggregation and the scale to offer greater opportunity and professional growth.

The group recognised that the development of executive leaders remains a challenge for our system. A strong view was expressed that SBL skills were perhaps more transferable to executive positions than those of their pedagogical colleagues. A number in the room are already deputising for their CEO and perhaps being groomed to assume this most senior role in the future.

However, according to delegates in the room, there remains confusion over what represents a high-performing SBL. There appears to be a perception across the system that senior SBLs, particularly CFOs and COOs, must be qualified accountants with little appreciation for the broader experience and skills demanded from the role. Those responsible for SBL recruitment and the performance management clearly need more support and guidance. Whilst ISBL's Professional Standards for School Business Leadership are a very helpful reference point, they are still not widely embedded in head teacher and governor practice.

The group recognised that improving practice at the lower end of the profession remains a problem. A lack of investment in CPD, apathy within leadership teams and an ageing workforce are all contributory factors.

The solution presented by the group focused on developing clearer cradle-to-grave career pathways, the suggestion being that the journey from entry to the profession through to senior executive posts is well understood and underpinned by both professional standards and relevant qualifications. Practitioners should be able to navigate this career pathway and choose a pace and level that suits their needs and aspirations. Those operating in trusts felt this approach would fit neatly into their structures and provide an important succession pipeline.

