



My journey to ISBL Fellowship – Amanda Kaye

I started my career in an industrial management traineeship at British Transport Docks Board after graduation and after 2 years there completed a similar scheme at Shell UK. I'd left Uni and was determined not to drift into a comfortable, 'cushy' role - they did exist in those days! I'd completed my degree and first career move during 1970's unrest and wanted to make a difference. I was also the first person in my family to go to university. The men in the family were self-employed businesspeople and I was expected not to be a perpetual student. In addition, when the Equal Op's act came in in 1976, employers were obliged to take on women in management roles, so I was part of this very first wave and Shell was comparatively enlightened. At the time, I had no idea what this was going to mean. My first role was tough, with mainly male colleagues with non-working wives and their having children the same age as me. This affected me profoundly and it took me a long time to work out what my personal management style could be. All the role models were male and there was a natural tendency to simply copy the way men did things, and that does not necessarily work if you are female, 20 something and 5'4"!

What I also discovered quickly was that my history degree hadn't qualified me for what I was then doing in practice, so I was encouraged to aim for a company secretariat qualification as a member of the ICSA, the Institute for Chartered Secretaries & Administrators now known as the Governance Institute. It took me 3-4 years to become a chartered secretary. When company law was formed in the Victorian period, it meant companies needed two directors – one had to be the company secretary/chief administrator, and so led to professionalising the work of company secretaries, e.g. dealing with stocks and shares, property dealings, proceedings for formal meetings, etc. The syllabus covers law, accountancy, economics, admin, audit, etc. and is rigorous. It took me twelve exams to get the qualification in 1984. I had been with Shell for two years at this point and it was important an employer could sponsor me and give minimal time off needed for study.

During the 1980's, company secretaries were administering mergers and take-overs which did not appeal so I decided to move into the finance function in Shell and to become an accountant. I was keen to stay at Shell but I married an academic mathematician who worked in Oxford and so I applied and moved to UKAEA near Oxford where I continued my studies for CIMA. This was a struggle. I didn't have a maths background and studying history had encouraged me to question, which is a disaster for passing exams in tax! I soon moved to Oxfam and, after enjoying overseas work for 3 years, had my children in my late 30's. Fortunately, Oxfam had one of the earliest workplace nurseries and for a further 5 years I was effectively a deputy finance director, overseeing treasury, tax and financial accounting. During this time, the Charities SORP was under development and Oxfam colleagues were heavily involved with the debates about best practice for charity accounting. It was a great relief to complete CIMA and to become an FCMA.

A motivating factor for me at this stage was that I had an established career when I married at 29 and my husband was finishing his PhD at 23 and then got his first research role. I was used to being the breadwinner but family considerations continued to dominate my career path. I left Oxfam when my husband became a lecturer in Birmingham. By then I had become



a competent charity accountant. However, I found myself moving sideways into education because I couldn't work in London, where almost all the large charities are based, and I had young family. I surprised myself by getting the job as Bursar at St Anthony's in Oxford, a graduate college of the university, and my husband commuted to Birmingham from living just outside Banbury. I got the bug for the sheer variety of the bursar role and that marked the start of my new career as a leader in education in the late 90's.

I returned to mainstream accountancy again when I joined Warwick University's finance team in 2001, I enjoyed that role though I had less connection to the delivery of education than at Oxford where I sat on committees and worked directly with academics. Meanwhile, we had relocated to central Birmingham and my children of 10 and 12 needed more care and direction than when they were small. I applied for a bursar role in my younger son's school. It was a successful prep school and I stayed 6 years, over-lapping with my son for just a memorable two terms - he was frequently in trouble! When my first marriage ended and personal circumstances changed, in 2009 I applied for other independent sector bursar roles resulting in a challenging period at a prestigious but precarious boarding school in Oxfordshire. It was early days for academies at that stage and salaries were not comparable and I was keen to ensure I could retain a similar level of pay for practical reasons. Independent school bursars are paid more than their mainstream counterparts/equivalents because they run businesses without a financial safety net.

Unexpectedly, I came back to Birmingham to marry an inner-city vicar, when my experience in charities and the independent sector made me a suitable candidate for working in academies. I took up my current role in 2014 as Business Manager at Aston University Engineering Academy, mostly because I could walk there from home but now I commute across the city (as you do....!). I am responsible for providing strategic financial leadership within the senior leadership team, reporting to the governing board. AUEA opened in 2012 and is the most well-established of some 50 University Technical Colleges around the country. It now has 700 students and as a mature SAT is looking to join a local MAT soon. UTCs are vital new institutions and there is rarely a dull moment!

When it then came to applying for ISBL Fellowship, I believed this to be something that I should be able to gain considering my wealth of experience and ability to provide ample evidence as part of the process. I did have some confidence that if I went about this the right way, I could gain Fellowship. I'd heard about people re-applying after an initial attempt because the first time round they had been a bit over-confident and needed to provide more evidence, so that set-back did not daunt me. By then I'd also been on BASBM's committee for 4 years and presented at BASBM conferences previously, so I felt obliged to keep trying because I believe in the profession and was aspiring to the highest standard of professionalism. I knew I wanted ISBL Fellowship as an accolade and badge of achievement. I was also concerned to continue to be marketable towards the end of my career. After you've got an Oxford degree as a woman in the 1970's, you feel you need to go on achieving and giving back to society as someone who has had the privilege of a good education. I think I will always want to achieve.