

A photograph of a man and a woman in a professional setting, likely a meeting. The man, wearing glasses and a light blue shirt, is looking towards the woman. The woman, with curly hair and wearing a white blazer, is gesturing with her hands as if speaking. They are seated at a desk with a laptop open. The background shows a window with a view of a building.

# Diploma in School Financial and Operational Leadership

# About the course

School business leaders provide critical support and operational leadership to School CEO's, Headteachers and Senior Leadership Teams – of which they will often be a part.

The evolving educational landscape has changed the offer from Local Authorities, and as a result school business management professionals have become even more important, especially in Academies and Multi Academy Trusts (MATs). This means that school leadership teams increasingly need to include a Chief Finance/Operations Officer or similar role to oversee (amongst other things) finance, corporate governance, risk management and strategic procurement.

In response, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and The Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL) have worked in partnership to develop the Diploma in School Financial and Operational Leadership, offering high-quality training for school business management professionals.

The Diploma has been mapped by CIPFA as broadly equivalent to a level seven (post-graduate) qualification in relation to degree of challenge.

## Programme focus

The programme aims to ensure that resources and expertise are deployed in the most effective and efficient way, to deliver optimum learning outcomes for all children and the delivery of a world-class education system.

It takes into account past qualifications and provides a flexible blend of e-learning, workbooks and face-to-face sessions to enable participants to develop their skills in:

- Financial management and reporting
- The education funding environment
- Writing business cases and taking investment decisions
- Governance, accountability and assurance
- Procurement and contract management
- Liaising with, and providing information to, internal and external auditors.

This training recognises the government's commitment to public sector efficiency and value for money. ISBL is working with the Department for Education in its drive for a self-improving educational system, which is capable of developing and managing organisational structures.

## Who is the course aimed at?

The programme is aimed at School Business Professionals (SBPs) - individuals who are current or aspiring Chief Finance Officers (CFO) or Chief Operating Officers (COO) in schools and academies.

Programme participants could be currently working inside or outside education, with different paths through the programme available for different past skill sets and experiences. Those working in education could be from: Local Authority maintained schools, independent Academies and MATs or independent schools.

Participants who have completed the Level 4 CIPFA/ISBL Diploma in Financial Skills or who are Chartered Accountants will benefit from a faster route through the programme.

## What you are required to commit to

The programme is made up of nine modules within three stages, which participants must have successfully accomplished to gain the qualification accreditation. Past qualifications may enable participants to be recognised by CIPFA as having accomplished some modules, and so allow them to pass directly on to stage 2 or 3.

## Two routes to accreditation

The duration, content and cost is dependent on previous qualifications:

	Modules	Full programme	Practitioner programme
Stage 1	1	✓	
Stage 2	2-6 (5 modules)	✓	✓ (2 of the 5 modules)
Stage 3	7-9 (3 modules)	✓	✓

### Full programme

Anyone taking the full programme will need to undertake all three stages of nine modules.

- The first stage of the programme, the Foundation Stage, equates to one module and will provide participants with basic skills and knowledge about academy finance and operations, allowing them to undertake the second and third stages of the programme with confidence.
- The second stage of the programme, the Intermediate Stage, will then build on this knowledge covering complex issues around the finance and operations of academies and school structures.
- The programme culminates with the third, Practitioner Stage (see below).

### Practitioner programme

Anyone who has achieved the Level 4 CIPFA/ISBL Diploma in Financial Skills or who are Chartered Accountants can opt for this route.

Participants will start at Stage Two, the Intermediate Stage and undertake two modules (2 and 6).

All participants have to undertake the third Practitioner Stage, which will equip them with the knowledge and experience to tackle more complex issues around the finance and operations in academies and school structures.

It will provide contextual knowledge for those operating in high-level finance positions, but not familiar with the education sector, and will also assist those School Business Professionals (SBPs) already in the sector who wish to expand and develop their role.

### Benefits

#### To participants

Those who successfully complete the Diploma in School Financial and Operational Leadership will be able to progress their career, assured that they meet the highest professional standards. This programme has been designed to provide a route to a professional accountancy qualification via CIPFA, should participants wish to pursue this in the future.

They will receive exemptions on the CIPFA Professional Qualification or their chosen route of study.

#### To employers

This prestigious programme will enable employers to be assured of value for money from the certificate holder and so ensure the highest possible drive for public sector efficiency.

#### To the profession

Programme completion will also provide necessary evidence when applying for ISBL Fellowship, should participants wish to receive this accolade from their professional body and be recognised across the sector for professional excellence. Successful participants will also be able to apply for CIPFA Affiliate membership.

This programme has been specifically designed to meet the Professional Standards as developed by the key sector stakeholders and practitioners and recognised by the DfE.

[www.isbl.org.uk/professionalstandards](http://www.isbl.org.uk/professionalstandards)

### Entry requirements and exemptions

Whilst there are no specific entry requirements, this programme of training would be most applicable to those who are undertaking, or have in the past undertaken, a School/ Academy Business Manager or Education Finance roles and responsibilities. Those who have achieved the Level 4 CIPFA/ISBL Diploma in Financial Skills or who are Chartered Accountants can opt for the Practitioner programme.

## Programme content: three stages made up of nine modules

Stage	Module	Online Workbook	Face-To-Face	Assessment	
<b>Stage 1</b> Foundation Stage  Stage 1 has one face-to-face session	1	Overview of Public Sector and Academy Finance**	✓	✓	
	1	Accounting and Academy Terminology**	✓	✓	
	1	Key Aspects of Academy Trusts**	✓	✓	
	1	Statutory Duties**	✓	✓	
	1	Introduction to Resource Accounting and Capital Accounting (including Accruals Accounting and the Accounts Direction)**	✓	✓	
	1	Introduction to Layout of the Financial Statements and Annual Report**	✓	✓	
	1	Overview of Financial Management (Budget Planning, Monitoring and Control)**	✓	✓	
<b>Stage 2</b> Intermediate Stage	2	Certificate in Financial Reporting in Academies (those already holding this qualification will be exempt from this module)	E-Learning and multiple choice exam	✓	
	3	Better Business Cases – Introduction**	✓		
	4	Education Funding**	✓		
	5	The Audit of Academies**	✓	✓	
	6	Procurement and Contract Management		✓	✓
	** Those having completed Level 4 – CIPFA / ISBL Accredited Finance training are exempt from these modules				
<b>Stage 3</b> Practitioner Stage	7	Strategic Financial Planning (Curriculum-Led Funding), Costing and Finance Efficiency in Academies	✓	✓	
	8	Accountability, Assurance and Governance	✓	✓	
	9	Advanced Audit Requirements	✓	✓	
Qualified Accountants may pass directly into the Practitioner programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)</li> <li>• Association of International Accountants (AIA)</li> <li>• Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI)</li> <li>• Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)</li> <li>• Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland (ICAS)</li> <li>• Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)</li> <li>• Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA)</li> </ul>				

## Accreditation and assessment

To gain accreditation, participants are required to complete or pass:

### Multiple-choice exam

Certificate in Financial Reporting  
Intermediate Stage 2, module 2

### Portfolio of evidence

A portfolio of evidence must be produced for modules 1, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. This records evidence of learning and critical analysis, and how the skills developed have been translated to the working environment.

Accreditation will require participants to complete reflective activities on each workbook, and this will also be covered in the face-to-face sessions.

## Still unsure about which of the programmes is best for you?

We would recommend that:

- If you are already working in an academy or a maintained school, you move straight to the **Full Programme qualification**
- If you have completed the Level 4 Diploma in Financial Skills, you move straight to the **Practitioner Programme qualification**
- If you have a professional accountancy qualification, you move straight to the **Practitioner Programme qualification**

### How to book your place

To find out when the next available dates are and to book your place, please visit:

[www.isbl.org.uk](http://www.isbl.org.uk)

## Duration and cost

Programme Route	Duration (approx)	Hours of learning (approx)	Cost (ISBL members)	Cost (non ISBL members)
Full	12 months	200 hours	£2,950 + VAT	£3,540 + VAT
Practitioner	6 months*	80 hours	£2,050 + VAT	£2,460 + VAT

\*Each cohort contains a mix of delegates taking both the Foundation programme and the Practitioner programme. For those on the Practitioner programme, this means that the programme will take 12 months to complete, but as you are exempt from some modules, your hours of learning will be reduced.

### Further information

If you have any further questions or would like to discuss your options with one of our professional development colleagues, then please:

**email** [training@isbl.org.uk](mailto:training@isbl.org.uk)

**call** 02476 231 221

**[www.isbl.org.uk](http://www.isbl.org.uk)**

# About us

## Why train with CIPFA?

CIPFA has a long history of delivering outstanding training to finance professionals and public service leaders in the UK and across the world.

As the only professional body exclusively for people in public finance, we understand the market challenges and are committed to providing the best training and development tools to support practitioners at all levels of public service, throughout their careers.

## About ISBL

The Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL), formerly known as the National Association of School Business Management (NASBM), is the UK's only professional body representing all school business professionals and has been established and supporting the sector since 1997.

As an institute, it is our responsibility to ensure that all our professional members, from entry through to executive level, can access robust training and qualifications, which are underpinned by our Professional Standards and are recognised by the sector.



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[cipfa.org](https://www.cipfa.org)