

Elaine Armstrong, Flying High Trust

The Flying High Trust is a primary schools' multi-academy trust which was founded in June 2012 in Nottinghamshire. The schools range in size from small to large with all schools working closely together. Currently the trust consists of 14 schools, with another 2 schools joining in July 2017. All schools within the trust have access to the professional expertise and development opportunities offered by the Candleby Lane Teaching School alliance which has a strong membership of schools who work collaboratively to continuously improve & produce outstanding outcomes for children.

In terms of the finance provision within the Trust, this includes a Director of Business & Finance and Elaine Armstrong who is the Business and Finance Manager. It is the headteachers within the schools who line-manage the individual Business Managers, though Elaine explains, the relationships between all of the Business Managers are close, and the Director of Business & Finance & the Business and Finance Manager provide finance support to the Business Managers in the schools. There is also an active buddying system in place for all new Business Managers. Of the 14 Business Managers, 4 of these have come into post since September 2016, and all were from LA schools. Some of the more experienced Business Managers working in the other schools then buddy with the new Business Managers. There is a clear acknowledgement of the difference between LA and academy-based Business Manager roles within the Trust, and the buddying system provides required support in their transitions.

All 14 Business Managers located in the schools under the Flying High Trust have been completing self-assessments across all areas of the Professional Standards using the self-assessment Excel tool accessible from the ISBL website. The Business Managers have returned their assessments to Elaine who has been collating all the Professional Standards self-assessments and has noticed patterns in terms of the training support required which have been specifically identified from the self-assessments.

Across the group of Business Managers, there is a need for training in most areas under the procurement discipline, plus the asset management area of infrastructure, and bid writing and income generation in marketing. This is not an isolated finding, where ISBL research (2016) suggests that there are training needs in procurement and marketing for ISBL members (based on a survey response of around 250).

Elaine now plans to utilise the results to set up training for all the Business Managers within the Trust. The Business Managers have regular meetings where they all meet to discuss any updates and to share best practice. The Trust will use these sessions along with other training days to provide any training that is needed for the schools within the trust. School Business managers who have been identified as strong in other areas will also be able to assist with supporting the other schools.

Elaine's profile

In terms of Elaine's background, she came to her current role in November 2016 following 25 years in LA finance, supporting school finance for schools under the Nottinghamshire County Council and Derby City Council jurisdictions. During Elaine's employment, she gained the BEC

national qualification in business studies, the AAT qualification (Level 4), and the NEBS supervisory management qualification (now ILM). Elaine's final LA role was as Business Finance Partner for Nottinghamshire County Council. In 2010, the Association of Accounting Technicians made her a fellow member as she had held her qualification for 25 years. Since completing these courses, Elaine continues to undertake various short courses in the following areas: Business partnering, how to be an effective manager, presentation skills, HR procedures, recruitment & selection, responsibility for information, plain English, value for money, PPA & financial planning, as well as attending CIPFA and ISBL conferences and software training (PS financials, Orovia, HCSS, FMS, Excel and Word).