

Joanne Robinson, School Business Manager

Changing career to become a school business manager...

Prior to my career in school business management I largely worked in local authority (LA) and education roles, though at the very start of my career, I worked as a Receptionist and worked my way up to Sales Administrator for an accountancy training company when I lived in Leicestershire. When I met my husband, I moved from Leicestershire to Nuneaton in Warwickshire. Initially via temporary work at the Local Authority (Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council), I identified a new role for which I successfully interviewed. The role meant I was working within a multi-agency community cohesion project, the West Nuneaton Initiative, within a virtual team across NBBC and Warwickshire County Council and other multi-agencies. During this period, I completed an NVQ3 in Business Administration. I was aware that the job would come to an end as it was a European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funded initiative. I subsequently applied for an administrator role at North Warwickshire and Hinckley College, again another new joint project with an external company. The company was setting up a new IT centre in the town, where learners could drop in for two hour sessions between 9am and 9pm. Following the interview, they called me instead with an offer of an IT Trainer role. They told me I had impressed them at interview, and as part of this role I had to sit the range of IT examinations, which were City & Guilds Levels 1 and 2. As the role progressed, my hours increased and I was working more evenings than during the day. This caused clashes with my husband's job as he needed to work evenings as well, and we also had a young child. I subsequently secured a Town Centre Administrator role, working back at NBBC. This re-started my career with the Local Authority, a period which was to last 8-9 years. I was in Town Centres for 3 years, then the Parks Department in an Events Officer role, working with multi-agencies and volunteers on various events, including Britain in Bloom, The Borough Show, Civic Firework Display, Welcome Home, Armistice and Remembrance events.

In 2011, I approached the Civic Events Manager to discuss the fact I was looking to further my skills. My subsequent role in the Civic Events Team meant that I worked on all LA events from within that team. Austerity measures on LAs hit nine months into my role (late 2011), which meant overall shifts in LA structure, with some jobs being condensed or completely removed, my role was unfortunately one of those condensed and I was unsuccessful and decided to take a redundancy package that was on offer. I subsequently applied and interviewed for a Deputy Venue Communications Manager (VCC) with the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG). As a regional team member, I stayed in London throughout the training which I completed both at Canary Wharf and Riverbank Arena. Once completed, I was posted to Coventry for the football events. I think I was lucky to be part of something that is a once in a lifetime opportunity. I had a fantastic experience, learnt lots of new skills and ways of working and met some fantastic people from all over the world, some of whom I still count as good friends.

Following the Olympics, I worked briefly at Blaby District Council, then moved to Leicestershire County Council working for the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland – Local Resilience Forum (LRF). The LRF is a multi-agency which delivers emergency planning for the area and I was the Senior Administrator in the team. I was responsible for, and trained an apprentice to NVQ Business Administration - Level 2, learnt budget management and staffing budgets, and put all my previous planning and organisational skills into creating an efficient administration team.

It was during this time I saw an advert for a School Business Manager in Rugby, which I felt would allow me to apply my skills and varied experience base. Initially, when I was applying for SBM roles, I was getting interviews, though not the roles themselves, however with persistence I applied for my current post and was successful. It did however seem that things were against me from the start when trying to secure the post. My car had broken down a few days earlier, and the garage could not get a part for it. My Dad kindly offered to take me to the interview. On the day however, there was an accident on the M6, so the way into Rugby was gridlocked which amplified my nerves. I also remember completing the budget test and not being able to get out of the room that it had taken place in, I thought I'd got locked in. Well, it only happens to me I thought! After a nerve-racking wait, I got the all-important phone call to offer me the role, and I was over the moon. I started in January 2015, and the Head Teacher Dominic McBride had only been in post 4 months too. He was however very experienced with lots of plans to take the school forward.

To summarise my role, I don't think I have ever had one so busy, and it represents real variety. A typical day involves is being pulled from one thing another with frequently changing priorities. I can be managing budgets, one minute, to completing accident, incident and near miss forms the next then updating risk assessments, COSHH and educational visits next. The to-do list frequently goes window-ward as work comes in requiring more immediate prioritisation. Two and half years in, I really love my job and working in a school is the best thing that I have done. I have re-structured and manage the administration team, as well as managing the cleaning, caretaking and lunchtime team. I've also created new systems and structures, am a member of the SLT and am the school's Clerk to the Governors. My role is 52 weeks per year, and I take additional annual leave in lieu of my Clerks to the Governor role which helps my work-life balance. I am also a member of the Rugby SBM Group "SBM Ladies". They are always there when you need to ask a question or get some advice. In order to support my CPD, I am keen to start the DSBM qualification in September and I have just recently joined a new group, the Nottingham School Business Managers. I also plan to attend the regional conference in June this year at Kelham Hall.