

Values and ethics

ISBL code of ethics

The Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL), is the professional body for individuals managing and leading school operations. Our 3,000 members work throughout the education sector, in maintained schools, single academies, multi-academy trusts and other collaborative structures where public money needs to be effectively and efficiently managed.

As the only UK professional body to specialise in school business leadership, ISBL's qualifications are the foundation for a career in school business.

We also champion high performance in public services, translating our experience and insight into clear advice and practical services for our education sector professional community.

ISBL shows the way in education finance and operations management by standing up for sound financial and resource management and robust corporate governance.

The importance of ethical behaviour

The work of school business leaders needs to be trusted by society at large, education stakeholders and other school leaders. It is expected to be free from personal bias, carried out competently, and subject to appropriate scrutiny. It is the principal added value of the school business leadership profession that such matters are underpinned by these professional standards, which reinforce high standards of rigour and competence.

A further expectation of behaviour is overlaid on those who work in the public services, who are perceived as being in positions of public trust.

Whether by accepting a public role or by becoming an SBL, you are in the public eye and potentially vulnerable to heavy scrutiny. So, what we do reflects not only on ourselves, but on our employing organisation, on the institute to which we belong, and ultimately on our profession.

As SBL professionals, you submit to a commitment to rigorous education, training and assessment, coupled with continuing professional development (CPD). This equips you to deal with complex issues, frequently with a high technical content that might not be accessible to other stakeholders who rely on your work. Accepting to be bound by published, high standards of ethical behaviour is a powerful way of creating confidence that you will not use this knowledge to mislead or gain personal advantage.

Fundamental principles of ISBL's ethical code

Integrity: this is about being truthful, straightforward and honest, dealing fairly with people and situations; it rules out making misleading or false statements, whether by omission or inclusion of information, either knowingly or without taking care to find out.

Objectivity: the avoidance of bias, whether for personal self-interest, or because of pressure from another, and closely allied to independence. This includes a responsibility to escalate concerns in the event of identifying or observing irregularities.

Professional competence and due care: this is about acquiring and maintaining appropriate technical and other relevant skills and competence to perform your work, doing it thoroughly and correctly, on a timely basis, and ensuring that users of our output understand its context and limitations.

Confidentiality: information about organisations and people encountered in the course of your work should not be disclosed, inside or outside the work environment, to anyone who does not have a legal or professional right to it, and especially not to secure a personal advantage for anyone.

Professional behaviour: this is about complying with professional standards and statutory obligations, and avoiding actions that might bring the profession into disrepute.

Principles of public life

In addition to adhering to ISBL's ethical code, public sector professionals are expected to be familiar with, and to apply, the seven 'principles of public life, which include':

Selflessness – the avoidance of doing things for personal gain – resonates closely with the notion of professional conduct.

Openness – may seem to sit uncomfortably alongside the exhortation to confidentiality, but in practice they are complementary. Openness recognises that activities undertaken with public money ought to be visible to the public, so that temptation to doubtful or corrupt activity is made harder: so a breach of the confidentiality principle through abuse of a piece of inside information for personal gain would be easier to spot if the consequent transaction was open.

Accountability is required in the overall conduct of business. It applies to all public sector employees. It might be argued that this principle is encompassed within professional competence and due care, but it is possible to say that this is not a special requirement that marks the school business leadership community out from public service people in general.

Leadership in public life is about setting a good example, implicit for all SBLs in the fundamental principles. But the ethical code should remind us that the burdens of example-setting grow with seniority. So, while all professionals must set a good example by their conduct, there is an extra obligation on those who are finance directors, chief executives or heads of other functions. All SBLs who manage staff should ensure that they lead by example and provide proper training, including in ethics and other aspects of professional behaviour, for their teams.

For all SBLs, this combination of principles represents a formidable standard to live up to. The remit to operate and report ethically applies across the whole range of school business leadership duties, too, including those exercised in a role outside the finance function. Many SBLs work in areas that process information about non-financial performance. Recognising that the systems supporting non-financial performance information may not contain all the controls, checks and balances associated with financial figures, there is no less duty on the SBL to report accurately, objectively, fairly and professionally on such measures.

Behaviours

The information in this section describes the essential personal behaviours that a school business management professional needs to demonstrate in order to undertake their role.

Behaviour	Behaviour description
Agile	Is adaptable, flexible, reflective and capable of leading and managing change.
Decisive	Can identify and consider options, make recommendations and robustly defend decisions in a timely manner, using evidence to support proposals.
Leads	Inspires and motivates others within their team, school/trust and the wider profession. Leads functions, people and/or projects within the remit of their autonomy and responsibility.
Collaborative	Works effectively and inclusively both within and outside of the organisation so individuals, teams and the learning community can benefit from shared capacity and knowledge.
Resourceful	Uses resources, information and knowledge to overcome obstacles and finds creative/ innovative solutions to develop self, team and/or organisation.
Emotionally intelligent	Manages and uses emotional intelligence when problem-solving and considers new innovations and change. Demonstrates confidence and the ability to negotiate, challenge and influence alongside care for others, diplomacy, approachability and resilience. Demonstrates both contextual and professional self-awareness.