

PATHWAYS INTO SCHOOL BUSINESS LEADERSHIP



Stephen Lester MBE BSc (Hons) ACMA FISBL

Stephen graduated from Nottingham University in 1979 with a BSc (Hons) in Agricultural Science and began his career working in the field of animal nutrition. His career developed rapidly, moving from a graduate trainee role as a nutritionist through to an International Sales & Development post, becoming Operations Manager for a company in the UK. His increasing skill portfolio was deployed within the livestock feed production business as Agriculture and then Supply Chain Director for Sun Valley Foods. Areas of responsibility within these roles ranged from operations, buying, administration, food production- breeding, hatchery and growing - to procurement, processing and distribution. He then moved with his family to the USA to join a new start up business in speciality animal feeds.

Following a move back to the UK, Stephen became a governor in a local school and began a new chapter in his career as a School Business Manager. He joined a new school and took post as a Vice Principal / School Business Leader, responsible for finance, premises management and catering. During this time, he gained valuable experience serving as a Director / Trustee of the Clifton Catholic Education Foundation. After six years in this role, Stephen moved to a medium sized Multi Academy Trust within Cumbria, where he served as Chief Operating Officer and member of the Trust Executive Team, until his recent retirement. He now works as a consultant within the education sector, as a School Resource Management Advisor and as a DfE Chief Financial Officer mentor.

Stephen believes that the key transferable skills from his time in industry which made the biggest impact in his new role were: interpersonal skills, the ability to build rapport quickly and effectively, delegation, time management, succession planning and decision making – both short term and strategic. Training he had undertaken previously as a qualified accountant proved to be very useful – the biggest asset though, he feels has been his time spent as part of a school governing body. He describes the dual responsibilities of governance and school business leadership as hugely rewarding and fulfilling – using the skills he honed in a previous career in Industry to support schools in achieving the best possible outcomes for their students.