**Networking – A shining light in our darkest days**

At a time globally when a pandemic is dictating that we ‘keep our distance, isolate and limit our contacts’ it is ironic that school leaders need and value networking opportunities now more than ever! As humans, we are relational and therefore crave the connections that networking affords us. Consequently, keeping our distance and working remotely has been a challenge for all of us who enjoy the human experience of face-to-face communication but all is not lost!

School leaders are a very creative bunch and this pandemic has encouraged us all to find ways of keeping our contacts close and our communication conduits relevant. The learning we have gained from the past months will no doubt help us to build back better and perhaps revisit how we previously handled and managed our connections.

The immense value of networking has long been acknowledged by international education experts as essential to the professional development and wellbeing of school leaders. Opportunities to connect, communicate, converse and challenge have become the mainstay of our professional lives and what we gain from building strong relationships with colleagues and fellow leaders now supersedes all other forms of professional development.

Therefore, based on our recent experiences we have a valuable opportunity to revisit the ‘how and why’ of our previous interactions with one another, our students and our school communities. I believe we need to put creative energy into developing and nurturing those connections that truly support our professional pathways and revisit and eliminate some of those less essential and possibly long held habits we no longer need.

ICP as a Global Organisation has networking as central to its Mission and Vision. Being part of the ICP global network has nurtured and sustained members throughout the pandemic when morale was sometimes low and anxiety was high! Sharing concerns, solutions and experiences has genuinely helped strengthen our relationships and I hope to develop these observations further in a podcast discussion with colleagues.