



State of Play: The UK Business Education Market in 2016

Description

Where next for providers of **business education** in the UK? A year-end survey has some enlightening indications of the challenges and strategic priorities ahead for **UK business schools**, as perceived by deans and senior leaders at the institutions themselves.

Are schools worried by the changes that recent government legislation and proposals might bring? How important is international expansion? What's the most effective way to ensure program offerings stay attuned to the real needs of business? The results of the **Chartered Association of Business Schools**'s (Chartered ABS) annual [survey](#) of members, which stretches to 122 schools and education providers, including [Oxford Saïd](#), [Imperial College Business School](#) and the [University of Edinburgh Business School](#), are outlined below!

Government policies and challenges facing UK business schools

In terms of challenges, it's interesting to note that from a list of 10 hot topics that MOOCs and technology's potential to disrupt the traditional provision of business education pose the least concern to UK business schools in the survey. Instead, the focus of respondents falls on the availability of research funding and on standing out from other institutions in an increasingly competitive market, the two topics that tested highest for the extent of their perceived challenge.

This brings us on to the perceived impact of recent government measures and proposals. While restrictions on immigration and post-study work options proved to be comfortably the main bone of contention here, the impending EU referendum doesn't seem to be a huge concern among these respondents. Considering the unease felt over immigration policies, this might reflect institutions' conviction that a 'Brexit' will be roundly overturned at the polls.

Objectives and predictions for the next three years

The student experience will continue to feature heavily as a priority in UK business education, according to respondents to Chartered ABS's survey. Making improvements in this vein tested highest among a list of 10 objectives that might be pursued over the next three years and is followed by the twin categories of raising standards of excellence in teaching and research.

Attracting **international students** placed fourth by this analysis, three spots above a desire to pursue international expansion, which itself came in just above expanding offerings in an online format. These results provide a reassuring sign that UK business schools intend to put the business of providing a quality education ahead of the business of growth.

Of course, the preceding line is not to belittle the [value brought to UK business education by international students](#), rather to show that there isn't much point in business schools attempting to extend their reach if the quality of what's on offer is found to be lacking.

Where will the UK's international students hail from?

As such, many UK business schools expect to see the number of their international students increase over the next three years, with the biggest rises anticipated to hail from Brazil, Malaysia, India and Nigeria. Meanwhile, over a third of respondents thought they might attract more students from the US – perhaps those that have been buoyed by the gains made by the dollar over the past year and the international uncertainty over the UK pound expected this year, in light of the forthcoming EU referendum. While over 30% also thought they'd see more international students from China enrolling in their programs, roughly a quarter of schools in the survey thought that there might instead be a decline in numbers from the East Asian nation, perhaps indicating a division of opinion over China's immediate economic future, in light of last year's slowdown in growth.

Right now, the most popular international strategy in place among respondents to this survey is an overseas partnership, cited by roughly three-quarters of UK institutions. However, many schools also have existing research and/or teaching links to call on and just over 20% plan to add this type of international outreach in the near future. Just over a quarter of these institutions said they already have a branch campus abroad (Dubai and Malaysia being the two most common locations), yet fewer than 10% said they had plans to add one in the next three years.

Are UK graduates of business education job-ready?

The Chartered ABS survey also asked business education providers to ascribe the level of importance they attach to range of factors they believe can ensure their programs remain attuned to the real needs of employers and the business world. Topping this list, understandably, were work placements and internships. These came in ahead of bringing in industry practitioners to teach and the use of blended learning – something that is suggestive of UK institutions' interest in using innovative delivery methods to ensure they can offer accessible and flexible options to those who might not be able to study without it.