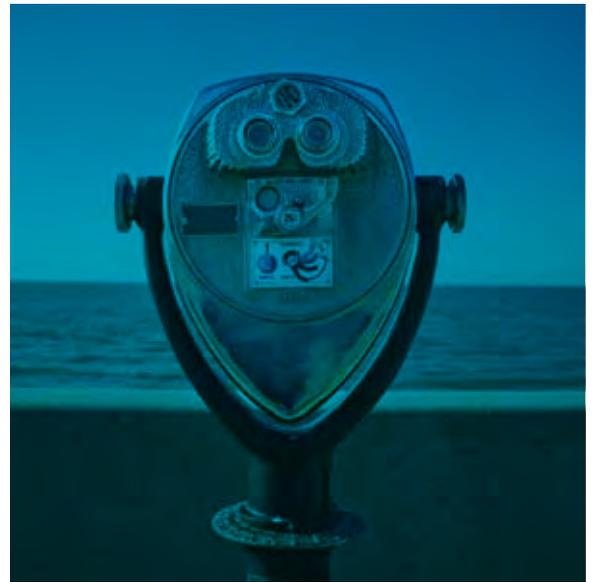


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137

The See the Future study had 5,375 respondents drawn from 137 countries



THE FUTURE IS OUT THERE

Andrew Crisp reports on a major new study that explores the future challenges facing business schools

Turmoil is probably too strong a word but “uncertain” may not be strong enough to describe the landscape that business schools are operating in today.

Much has been written and many conference speeches given about the impact on business schools of the global financial crisis, growing international competition, the importance of sustainability and ethics, and more recently the likely impact of new technologies.

To put some data behind these predictions and get a view of what students and employers are thinking, CarringtonCrisp, with the support of EFMD, has recently run a new study called *See the Future*. With 5,375 respondents drawn from 137 countries, the data clears away some of the fog for those planning their business school’s future.

Conducted online, the study sought to seek the views of prospective students, current students, alumni and employers. Questions were set out under five broad headings: the role of business; the value of a business education; sustainability, ethics and corporate social responsibility; internationalism; and the place of technology. Data was collected in May 2013.

The good news is that more than seven out of ten respondents believe business is a force for good in society. However, few expect business to continue as it is. The same number also expects business models to change to allow better engagement with society. Over 81% agree that business and business education needs to be about more than just maximising shareholder value.

The starting point for the study was to understand better the attitudes to business as a whole.

Recent media coverage of business, whether it has been the performance of the banks, chief executives of car companies using executive jets when their businesses are failing, youth unemployment in the eurozone or even cities going bankrupt in the US, will undoubtedly influence perceptions especially among young people.

While an overwhelming majority of respondents agree that business leaders should behave ethically at all times, 8% of prospective undergraduates disagree and the number rose to 15% among current postgraduates from China and 13% of current Indian undergraduates.

Given the interest in changing business models and moving away from shareholder value, it is not surprising that more than 80% of respondents also agree that “sustainability and ethics should be embedded in all business education programmes”.

Many schools have already introduced ethics and sustainability modules to their business programmes but the demand from both employers and students is that these subjects be a seamless part of the curriculum whether students are studying finance, marketing, HR or any other aspect of business.

Of course, before thinking about curriculum, schools need to consider what attracts students to them.

Rankings have long been known to have a significant influence, yet the only business school rankings that considered sustainability in a major way, *Beyond Grey Pinstripes*, was recently suspended.

Despite the absence of sustainability in rankings, just under half of all respondents in the *See the Future* study agree that “schools that don’t teach sustainability, corporate social responsibility and ethics should be ranked lower than those that do”.



81%

Over 81% of respondents agreed that business and business education needs to be about more than just maximising shareholder value

80%

More than 80% of respondents also agree that “sustainability and ethics should be embedded in all business education programmes”

80%

Over 80% of all managers/directors agree that "I expect my organisation to use technology to deliver more workplace learning in the future"



Without sustainability rankings, prospective students will seek other measures of a school's commitment to such issues.

Over 60% of respondents in the study agree "business schools should run projects to give back to local, national or international organisations and communities". Many examples already exist – from supporting reading schemes in local primary schools through to helping social enterprises in emerging economies.

The study data seems to suggest such projects may have a quantifiable impact on business school selection among potential candidates.

Many prospective students suggest that choice of school is often based on study outcomes, most often associated with their future careers. For many years money was a focus of those outcomes as students sought highly paid jobs in banking and consulting.

Money remains important, especially given the high fees associated with many business degree programmes. However, the study suggests that more students value a business education as a way to a more fulfilling job rather than a more highly paid one.

For many graduates, employment may also have an international dimension whether that means working overseas or simply dealing with international organisations and companies. Over the last 20 years internationalism has become an accepted part of a business school's offer, delivering little by way of differentiation from competitor schools. So what do students and employers really want when they talk about internationalism?

To start with, more than two-thirds of all current and prospective students would be interested in studying abroad for all or part of their degree. The US remains the most popular destination with the UK second but Singapore and China are on the rise, ranking fourth and sixth respectively with many respondents.

Selection of where to study internationally is primarily based on the reputation of a school and of a country but employment prospects on graduation also play a part. For more than 30% of those responding to the survey the attraction of an international study destination was based in part on "the sporting and cultural profile of that country".

Just think about the Premier League in the UK. In 2012/13 the television coverage of the League reached 212 territories with a total audience of 4.7 billion in 643 million homes and more than 185,000 hours of coverage.

If your business school is in a city which shares the same name as a Premier League football club, that's an awful lot of name awareness when a student starts searching Google.

Of course, few decide where to study based on a football team but when in conversation about global brands with young people in China and the first three spontaneous answers are Nokia, Manchester United and David Beckham, the power of sport becomes clearer.

Employers perhaps have a less emotional view of how internationalism should fit into a business school.

60%

Over 60% of respondents in the study agree "business schools should run projects to give back to local, national or international organisations and communities"



If your business school is in a city which shares the same name as a Premier League football club, that's an awful lot of name awareness when a student starts searching Google

Almost all agree that a good business education should develop an understanding of business in different parts of the world. Interestingly, though, just over a third of all managers and directors also agree that “graduates should learn another language as part of their degree”.

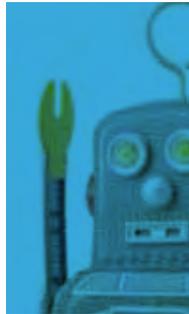
Increasingly that language learning might be delivered via technology, perhaps utilising native speakers at the end of a Skype connection rather than lecturers in the classroom. And it is technology, especially MOOCs (massive open online courses), which currently account for much of the discussion about the future in business schools.

The *See the Future* study found a degree of scepticism about MOOCs but at the same time a desire to embrace technology for learning.

The generation entering business schools today has grown up with digital technology. It is a core part of their lives. They expect it to be a part of education and understand it offers the opportunity not just to enhance the classroom experience but for lifestyle learning around their other commitments.

More than 50% of all prospective and current students agree that they “would not study a business programme in a MOOC” though around 40% would study for some of their business degree online.

Around half of all managers/directors agree that “I am uncertain of what a MOOC offers and how it can be part of a business degree” and that “I would not recruit a graduate who had only studied online”.



50%

More than 50% of all prospective and current students agree that they “would not study a business programme in a MOOC”

Despite the embrace of technology among prospective and current students, around three-quarters agree that “I don’t believe an online degree offers the same opportunities for a student as traditional campus study”.

While MOOCs may offer a cheaper alternative plus the opportunity to study at a time and place convenient to the student and the potential to study under some of the best teachers from around the world, there is still some way to go to convince students and employers that the opportunity offers the same benefits as traditional campus study.

Where technology and learning seem likely to have a greater impact in the short term is in informal settings as well as the workplace.

Over 70% of prospective students, current students and alumni want lifestyle learning, using technology to learn without disrupting work and family commitments.

Delivered via video and podcasts or through apps on a smartphone or tablet, technology offers the opportunity for “anytime anywhere learning” with students getting taster sessions or the chance to bring skills up to date.

At the same time, more than 80% of all managers/directors agree that “I expect my organisation to use technology to deliver more workplace learning in the future”.

Predicting the future is a difficult business.

Should a business school focus on money or fulfilment, China or Chicago, sustainability or shareholder value, on campus or online?

Whatever choices schools make, there is no escaping the “unknown unknowns” as Donald Rumsfeld, former US Secretary of State for Defence, put it.

But customer insight does provide the opportunity for informed choices.



70%

Over 70% of prospective students, current students and alumni want lifestyle learning, using technology to learn without disrupting work and family commitments

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew Crisp is co-founder of CarringtonCrisp and one of the authors of the *See the Future* report. For more information on the report, please contact Matthew Wood at EFMD matthew.wood@efmd.org