

Cox steers a new course for business schools

Sue Cox, Dean of Lancaster University Management School, discusses her new role as an EFMD vice-president with **George Bickerstaffe**

Sue Cox (right), Dean of Lancaster University Management School (LUMS) in Britain, has been appointed EFMD vice-president for academic affairs.

The first woman to fill the role, she joins Thomas Sattelberger, the vice-president for the EFMD's corporate activities and a former board member for human resources at Deutsche Telekom in Germany.

The official appointment lauds Professor Cox's "high professional qualities, outstanding achievements [and] commitment to EFMD". All true, of course, but, unofficially, one cannot help thinking that the appointment really came about because she is such a nice normal person, capable of switching without missing a beat from the intricacies of managing a large business school to the equally byzantine ins-and-outs of coaching the England football squad. (She is a highly knowledgeable football fan and a long-time supporter of British Premier League team Stoke City, a mid-table outfit admired for its "direct" playing style.)

With Sattelberger continuing to overlook the corporate network, Professor Cox's role leading EFMD's academic network will involve the representation of business schools within EFMD and supporting the challenges involved in running a business school.





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Interestingly, though, her experience gives her a foot in both the corporate and academic worlds. Although she has been dean at LUMS for 11 years and before that was Director of Loughborough Business School, also in Britain, her training was in organic chemistry and she worked for a time at Boots, a leading pharmaceutical and retail group. Her main professional interest was in planning and managing hazardous sites and she still advises the British government in this area.

But she has always been active in the management education field as well, combining heading LUMS with two terms as a member of the EFMD Awarding Body, chairing numerous EQUIS panels and working in collaboration with AACSB, the American accreditation body. She is also a former chair of Britain's Association of Business Schools (ABS), a representative body for British business schools.

What this has taught her, she says, is that business schools can be very different from each other and need a representation and network that recognises that.

"Being chair of ABS, even though it was just concerned with Britain, made me aware of the diversity of business schools," she says. "Here at Lancaster we are a quite substantial school with a big research base and we are a very large part of the university. So compared with other schools we have a lot of size and considerable autonomy."

One of the things she believes EFMD has to recognise and respond to better is this diversity. For example, she says that though the European business schools model may seem relatively homogeneous it also contains considerable variety.

And, of course, the growth of business schools in China, India and other parts of Asia has accelerated and complicated this diversity. This, she thinks, has considerable implications for EFMD.

"Differing ideologies, cultures, even religions, all affect the way business

education happens," she says. "That makes it very complex and difficult to be a global accrediting body."

One of the biggest challenges now facing EFMD, she suggests, is acting as a global provider of services to very varied and geographically distant business schools from a single "epicentre".

Responding to this, she says, is likely to lead to some major changes in the way EFMD works in relation to its business school members. And it is this change that Professor Cox, in her new position, can be expected to, if not drive, then certainly enthusiastically cheer on from the sidelines in her best football fan style.

For example, she suggests that "in future we [EFMD] will probably need to establish new and different sorts of presences around the world to provide greater proximity and to better represent the needs of the schools".

Like the overseas offices many business schools have established in recent years?

"Yes, they will be an office in a way but they will be more than that," she says. "They will be a focus for events and things that we can do."

"For example, we want to do more short one-off events for, say, half a day that people can drop into. But obviously no-one is going to get on a plane to come from China to Brussels for one of those."

"This is going to be a big change and it is a big change that is driven by a series of imperatives. It's going to be exciting."

These responses are also a way of potentially helping business schools to face up to what Professor Cox believes is one of the main challenges for them in the future – the growth of good business schools outside Europe and America. Increasingly this means that more overseas students can stay in their own country to study rather than travel to Europe or America.

On the other hand, she points out that there will always be some foreign



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PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF LANCASTER UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT SCHOOL (LUMS)

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students who can afford a cultural and educational experience overseas. The challenge here for business schools in host countries, says Professor Cox, will be to link that experience with employability and employment for these students back in their home countries.

“This is something that we at LUMS are working on and it may be something for EFMD to think about as well,” she says. “What we are considering is taking careers office people to establish networks with the corporate world in these students’ home countries. EFMD can help here, building better networks and connections with the corporate world in these countries.”

Indeed, she regards this as part of another dimension of her vice-presidential role.

“It is a mistake to think of ourselves as a set of Deans working in isolation,” she says. “In fact we are all embedded in a community that both needs and can contribute to management education. We need to be more connected at all levels.”

While she does not quite agree with the suggestions that all these changes will mean EFMD should lose the “E” from its title, another area she believes needs addressing is the relative lack of penetration by EFMD into America (though its profile in Canada is relatively high).

“If you look at our accredited schools then we have done well to establish ourselves on the ground in countries like China and India,” she says. “But in America we are not so established and we have relatively few accredited schools there. I’d like schools in America to recognise the value of the EQUIS approach.”

Despite her increasingly high profile and success at Lancaster (the school is triple accredited by EFMD, AACSB and AMBA and has expanded significantly during her leadership), she professes no great ambitions to do anything else (that niceness again).

“This job allows me to do the things I’m interested in,” she says simply.

She is, though, no Pollyanna. Professor Cox warns that the management education market (and the MBA market especially) is currently very tough though she argues that LUMS, with annual revenue around £45m and 290 faculty and staff is big enough and experienced enough to survive and prosper.

She does add, though, that another big challenge facing business schools is simply how to manage the myriad activities – from executive education and career offices to pure research and doctoral studies – that larger schools currently have to be involved in.

“The challenge is to balance this whole portfolio and continue to do well in all of it,” she says

For the moment she is not totally convinced (as some others in the field are) that business schools are facing such an existential threat that they need to embrace massive radical changes to their structure and purpose. She is not one for throwing all the pieces up in the air and seeing where they land.

In any case, she says, “my own feeling is that if you did throw all the pieces up in the air, then when they came down things would not look that different. The best researchers, the best teachers want to be together. That’s human nature. People naturally form communities. Of course you want to avoid functional silos but this coming together can boost ideas.”

However, she acknowledges that in some ways “we [business schools] do need to change. We can’t just sit here. We need to adapt to new technology. We need to look at new markets, all in the context of a complex world and tough economic conditions. We have to be open to sustainability issues, ethical behaviour issues and general good practice. And we have to make a difference.

“If business schools don’t make a difference – why do we exist?” **gf**