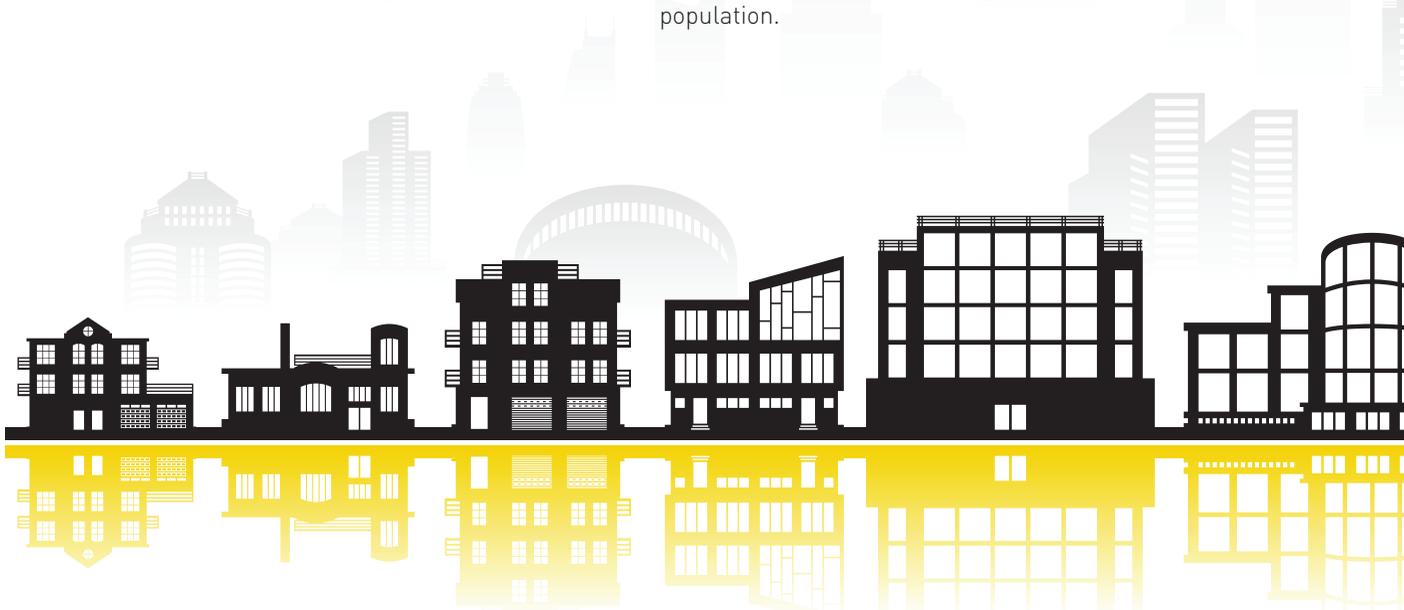


Defining the role of business schools

Baback Yazdani, Dean of Nottingham Business School, looks at how business schools across the globe might define their role

Today there are more than 12,000 known business schools across the globe, and the number is increasing every year. This is due to an increasing demand from the global student population, people at work who wish to advanced their careers, and of course the employers of graduates in business and management.

According to data collected by the Association of Business Schools (ABS) in the UK, 1 in 7 undergraduate students are now studying business or a related subject. This amounts to some 200,000 students across the country. 70,000 postgraduate students study business, management and closely related subjects; about 12% of the total UK postgraduate population.





>12k

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1:7

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12%

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The growth observed in the UK, is also reflected across the world with many new business schools being set up. This growth is a function of demand. All stakeholders, but particularly the students themselves, expect a lot from the educational experience we in the business school community provide. This puts a special responsibility upon our shoulders.

The stakeholders of a business school are a more widely-spread community than might be first thought of. Figure 1 overleaf shows a representation of business school stakeholders.



Business schools can be classified according to the main focus of their work, and how they interact with the wider stakeholders which make up the sources of their operating income. A great variety and diversity exists amongst schools, which reflects how they see themselves and their role and place in the world and how they respond to the pressures operating in their markets. These pressures, and market choices, include price positioning, rankings, and institutional focus.

We can however draw three very broad categories:

- 1: Research Focused
- 2: Teaching Focused
- 3: Integrationists

At one end of the spectrum there are those schools which aim to focus on excellence in teaching, and who build their market position around the teaching and learning experience. At the other end of the spectrum there are those that predominantly focus on research, reflecting the character of their client base and institutional heritage. These two positions can become quite polarised. A third position is what I call the 'integrationist' position; integrating research, engaging with business, and bringing research and business insights into its teaching and learning experience.

This integrationist position is one we aim for at Nottingham Business School. But taking this stance creates the challenge of competing effectively for top quality business school faculty. Consequently the number of business schools which successfully integrate their main lines of activity are limited to a small amount in most countries.

This integration can prove difficult when rankings are a key objective, because the pursuit of a top-class research agenda is an important driver of rankings. Similarly those schools where teaching dominates – particularly at MBA level, frequently find it difficult to stay relevant and excel in research.

However, the most transformational gain is at the full intersection of the three main activities of research, engagement with business where the ideas gain reality and relevance and are tested, and education that reflects both rigorous research and application, as shown in the Figure 2 below. But simplicity is hard to achieve and only a few do actually manage to hit the sweet spot.



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Simplicity is hard to achieve and only a few do actually manage to hit the sweet spot

Figure 1:
The Main Stakeholders of Business Schools

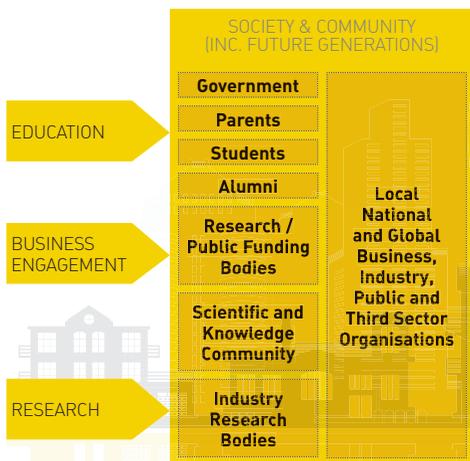
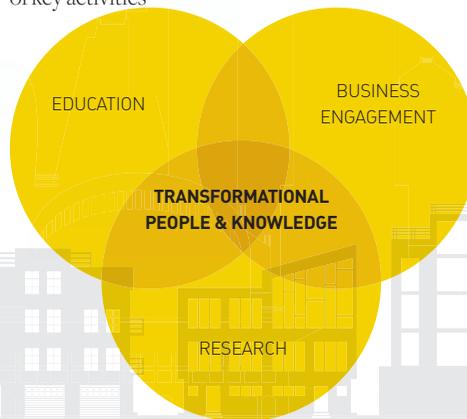


Figure 2:
Transformational gains at the intersection of key activities



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The number of business schools which successfully integrate their main lines of activity are only few in every country

600

We have an aim to design and deliver programmes that integrate theory and practice – to help execute this strategy, we have carefully cultivated long term relationships with businesses that sponsor 600 fully paid placement opportunities every year

Nottingham Business School's Integrationist Approach.

Nottingham Business School (NBS) aims to pursue this 'middle way' integrationist approach. Although, as discussed this raises a number of challenges, we try to do so via a number of deliberately designed and executed strategies.

First and foremost is our mission statement. This gives a public 'this is who we are' statement, and sets us up to be judged on whether we succeed or fail in its execution. NBS has set itself the mission to provide education and research that combines academic excellence with impact, transforming business and organisations through knowledge and people. This reminds us – NBS faculty, customers and stakeholders – that we are here to serve our customers. In the sometimes inwardly-focused world of business education and scholarship, we find this is a valuable reminder!

Secondly, and following from the overarching mission statement, we aim to set out definitions for each of our operations of research, business engagement and education. The research mission of NBS is to develop research with impact on business, management and policy. Therefore, we set ourselves an orientation towards 'Business R&D' rather than 'pure research'. We challenge ourselves to test research in business practice, with our corporate and government clients and students.

Similarly our business engagement mission is to embed the NBS way of applying theory to practice and focus on work based learning, and assuring a supply and development of top business and management and leadership talent.

The role of education for NBS also fits our integrative stance. We state that we aim to design and deliver programmes that integrate theory and practice. Even at undergraduate level we aim to ensure application of theory in real business environment through a range of work and practice based learning. To help execute this strategy, we have carefully cultivated long term relationships with businesses that sponsor 600 fully paid placement opportunities every year. Similarly the postgraduate programmes are designed to ensure practice and application of theories. We have tried to reflect our mission through design; the NBS MBA includes a week long team based Consultancy Project in major UK companies, an International Consultancy Project and an applied Dissertation based on a strategic problem for a partner company or industry.

The 'integrative' approach is not for everyone. Its pursuit is partly about setting out a strategic intent, but more importantly, about delivering that intent. As with the execution of any successful strategy, it requires discipline and perseverance. **gf**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Professor Baback Yazdani is Dean of Nottingham Business School (NBS) and Professor of Product Development, and the Vice-Chair and member of the Executive Board of the UK Association of Business Schools.

