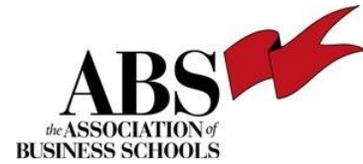


ABS Policy Network 2013 Ireland



Is it Possible to Balance Student Demands with Business Needs?

The Association of Business Schools ▶ 19 May, 2013

Kindly Supported by:

Bloomberg

FINANCIAL
TIMES

HOBSONS

upp
University Partnerships
Programme

The ABS Policy Network, Ireland, is part of a broader series of events that are being held by the ABS across the UK. These events provide a platform for key stakeholders in higher education (HE) policy and business school practice to engage in debate and discussion around pressing issues. The Irish network session has allowed challenges and opportunities to be explored in relation to the specific HE policy and business school environment in Ireland. The Policy Network aims to directly engage with stakeholders, to influence policy, and to increase media profile.



The series of events that make up the Policy Network have focused on one central question:

“Is it Possible to Balance Student Demands with Business Needs”

That question has been broken down into focused sessions with specific topics. The Irish event centred around the question of:

“What do Organisations Want From Business Schools?”

To help us negotiate these discussions, the ABS invited key players from within both the private and government sector in Ireland.

We were delighted to be joined by **Kirsty McManus**, Assistant Director of the CBI Northern Ireland, and **Professor Robert Gilles**, Professor of Economics and Head of School at Queen’s University Belfast Management School. Both individuals were able to give us valuable insights into the role and challenges of business schools in the Irish Context.

Representatives from both Republic and Northern Irish business schools participated in the discussions, as well as stakeholders from Invest Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Science Park, the British Council, Santander and the Financial Skills Partnership.

The event was enlightening in regards to understanding the different perspectives that exist around the role of Irish business schools as well as recognising the opportunities and critical challenges.

Profiles

Kirsty McManus – Assistant Director at CBI Northern Ireland



Kirsty McManus is Assistant Director at CBI Northern Ireland responsible for a diverse portfolio of members and lobbying responsibility for employment law, skills, education and energy policy in Northern Ireland. CBI is the voice of business and represents over 240,000 businesses across the UK. Kirsty has a degree in Information management from Queens University and an MBA from the Ulster Business School. Kirsty has over 12 years of industry experience and has previously worked in both the US and UK as an IT Project Manager. Kirsty is also a board member of the Northern Ireland MBA Association Chapter and the BITC Arena Network.

Professor Robert Gilles – Professor of Economics and Head of School at Queen’s University Management School



Robert Gilles is a Professor of Economics at Queen’s University since 2009. Previously he was a professor at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech, for short) in Blacksburg, Virginia, USA. He has a PhD from Tilburg University in the Netherlands. Professor Gilles’ research interests focus on microeconomic theory, game theory, institutional economics, network economics and the provision of public goods.

Guests

Mr	David Alderdice	British Council, NI	Ms	Sarah Kelly	Northern Ireland Science Park
Dr,	Gillian Armstrong	University of Ulster	Mr	Paul Marshall	AB
Mr	Richard Atfield	HEA	Prof	Marie McHugh	University of Ulster
Ms	Kerry Beggs	Santander	Ms	Kerry Quinn	Invest NI
Ms	Linda Brown	IOD	Ms	Victoria Robinson	ABS
Ms	Edith Caulfield	QUB	Dr,	Anne Sinnott	Dublin City
Ms	Angela Connolly	FSP	Miss	Stephanie Strickland	ABS
Prof.	Paul Humphreys	Ulster Business School			

Key Themes

Institutional Division of Labour



Business schools exist at an intersection of several key expectations. They must negotiate their roles as mass education providers, innovators for business, elite research institutions for society and often financial subsidisers for their home universities. Mission drift in business schools is therefore hardly surprising and such confusion can be understood as a symptom of poorly organised staff and academic commitment to specific roles.

During discussions, it was suggested that one solution could be a division of labour, where different academics focus on different roles; the deep thinkers, the general researchers, the teachers, the consultants for industry etc. This would need an honest and radical shift in the reward structure and career progression trajectories to ensure that real development is being achieved and focus maintained.

Research Impact and the Challenges

Dissemination of research for the benefit of society and business remains a paramount priority. Consistent effort should be made to ensure this process is effective. Whilst the introduction of impact into the Research Excellence Framework (REF) has refocused thinking within business schools, there remains a perception that the career trajectory of academics relies on the volume and quality of publications, regardless of whether they teach that research or if that research is consequential. There is a deep structural issue that needs to be addressed with honest conversations that can create meaningful change. Perhaps then we should be asking: "Is it possible to balance academic's careers, with the needs of business"...

Focused and Innovative Teaching

During discussions it was suggested that staff are not encouraged to be innovative with their teaching. Often what is being taught has no local contextual gravity or relation to the research being carried out by the lecturer in question. Business school teaching needs to be grounded in real case studies that can then be critically examined in a global business context by the student. In the division of academic labour previously mentioned, teaching represents an opportunity to synthesis business engagement and research and more effort should be made to encourage this.



International Outlook

The challenges outlined above represent a global issue. An international outlook and awareness of the processes abroad is integral for the success of business schools in Ireland. Whilst principle concerns are largely orientated around the recruitment of international staff and students, the question of competition, academic migration, and the global awareness of students deserves equal attention.

- > Increasingly organisations adopt a more global focus. They require graduates with a similarly international outlook and understanding. Business schools need to develop global business citizens able to compete in a global economy.
- > Students and graduates who go on placements abroad return as much stronger individuals with marked improvement in basic employability skills. Facilitating international placements for business students significant scale ought to remain a focus. How do we ensure that resources aimed at facilitating this (scholarships etc) are not siphoned off by the home university?

Employability Skills

Related to the above, a continued emphasis on equipping students with relevant skills through placements and practice based learning. Skilled graduates leaving business schools in Ireland, facilitate government priorities for attracting inward investment and company relocations to the region. Ensuring these skills based programmes and initiatives are in place requires significant resources and a certain amount of institutional autonomy.

Business Schools and Cross-Subsidisation

The cash-cow/business school association remains resilient. High students enrolments translate into low spend per head. Combined with significant numbers of high fee-paying international students and the business school starts to represent a financial resource for the university as opposed to legitimate school.



Business schools need to draw on the skills at the heart of their disciplines to re-design business and management education; selecting the key competitors, identifying the real barriers and designing the best strategies for success. The 'disconnect' that appears to exist between government policy and the business school's ability to adapt and respond is understood to be largely down to the governance policies and structures of the home university. There is little benefit of splitting from the university but a relationship has to be forged where the business school is not burdened by financial expectation.

Conclusions

- Through the process of engaging multiple interested stakeholders, the ABS policy network provided a forum for discussing the key challenges facing the Irish business school community and how these inter-relate with business and government.
- The themes identified provide clear channels to pursue a collaborative agenda in Scotland, in an effort to align government priorities, industry requirements and business school best practice.
- Developing these relationships across a triple-helix of stakeholders will help ensure that the research, advancement and teaching within Irish business schools is effectively communicated and therefore best positioned to further innovation and economic development.
- These aims are fundamentally related to ensuring that graduates from business schools are fully equipped with the necessary skills and presented with the best possible opportunities to apply them.