

ABS Policy Network 2013 Scotland



Is it Possible to Balance Student Demands with Business Needs?

The Association of Business Schools ▶ 11 June, 2013

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▶ Introduction

The Association of Business Schools (ABS) Policy Network, Scotland, 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 Scottish network session has allowed challenges and opportunities to be explored in relation to the specific HE policy and business school environment in Scotland. The Policy Network aims to directly engage with stakeholders, to influence policy, and to increase media profile.

This series of events focus 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 with the Scottish event centring around the question of:

“What do Organisations Want From Business Schools?”

To help us negotiate these discussions, the ABS invited key players from within different sectors in Scotland.

We were delighted to be joined by **Sandy Kennedy**, Chief Executive of the Saltire Foundation, **Linda Murray**, Leadership and Organisational Development at Scottish Enterprise, and **Ron Livingstone**, Head of School at the University of the West of Scotland. All three individuals were able to give us valuable insights into the role and challenges of business schools in the Scottish Context.

Representatives from Scottish business schools, RBS, the Confederation of British Industry, Universities Scotland and other key stakeholders participated in lively and committed discussions. The event was enlightening in regards to understanding the different perspectives that exist around the role of Scottish business schools, as well recognising the opportunities for collaborative initiatives that would serve the interest of multiple parties.

Profiles

Sandy Kennedy – Chief Executive, Saltire Foundation



Sandy Kennedy, is the Chief Executive of the Saltire Foundation. The Saltire Foundation accelerates the development of Scotland’s most promising business talent by giving them unique opportunities to work with, learn from and network with the world’s leading business players.

Sandy’s extensive commercial background has involved the successful start-up of Bowie Castlebank Group’s online ecommerce sites, the turnaround and growth of over 600 of their physical retail stores, as well as securing a partnership agreement with the largest supermarket chain in the UK.

Educated at Cambridge University he became a qualified lawyer with Ashursts in London specialising in venture capital. He joined 3i, the private equity firm, in 1996 and worked on a mix of traditional leveraged deals and tech venture capital. In 2000, he won the Chris Hill Prize for best overall MBA student at Strathclyde.

Linda Murray – Leadership and Organisational Development, Scottish Enterprise



Linda currently leads the Leadership and Organisational Development team in Scottish Enterprise. Her main objectives are to develop and establish appropriate services for companies and sectors to enable Leadership Development, support culture change and address barriers to growth.

Linda currently chairs a cross agency working group on behalf of Scottish Government, charged with driving up leadership, ambition and entrepreneurship in Scottish companies.

Following the publication of the Scottish Government Strategy on Youth Employment Linda is leading the SE response focusing on how we connect our growth and productivity agendas to youth employment and encouraging a more proactive approach within SE as an employer.

Ron Livingstone – Head of School, University of the West of Scotland



Ron Livingstone joined UWS as its head of business school in August 2010. Previously, he worked at Glasgow Caledonian University where he held positions including director of the MBA programme and associate dean.

Ron has worked in management roles for some 30 years across blue chip companies and small to medium-sized entities, as well as running his own business.

He has research expertise in strategic change management and has a wealth of consultancy experience on the strategic development of tourism businesses and developing strategic approaches for competitive advantage in the public sector.

Guests

Mr	Richard Atfield	HEA	Ms	Shelia MacDonald	RBS
Prof	George Burt	University of Stirling	Mr	Paul Marshall	ABS
Prof	Ian Clarke	University of Edinburgh	Mr	Ben McConville	GCU
Prof	Denis Fischbacher-Smith	University of Glasgow	Mr.	Iain McMillan	CBI Scotland
Ms	Fiona Godsman	Institute for Enterprise	Mr	Charles Mariott	Universities Scotland
Prof	Gill Hogg	Heriot Watt	Prof	George Stonehouse	Edinburgh Napier University
Prof.	Sabine Hotho	Head of School	Mr	Neil Stewart	Neil Stewart Associates
Ms	Tina Livingstone	FSP	Miss	Stephanie Strickland	ABS
Dr.	Jillian MacBryde	University of Strathclyde			

Key Themes

Competition

Business Schools in Scotland are set in the broader international environment of business and management education. In addition, the significant rise in online and free learning provision for management education poses a significant challenge to in-situ schools. This is especially pertinent for those school considered middle tier. Business schools must therefore be able to adapt and compete effectively in order to sustain their relevance and embed the advantage for school based learning in relevant materials



Harnessing Existing Capacity

Communications, promotion, orientation and presentation would pose significant strategic challenges to some organisations. However, business schools are the home to leading academic and innovative thinking about these exact aspects of organisational success. Experts in strategy, marketing, project management, and much more exist in these institutions and could be drawn upon to increase the success of institution. Moreover, processes of this kind would present an opportunity to draw on industry to be involved, which in turn may result in relevant and accessible case-studies for students or opportunities for student participation and consultation.

Communications and Promotion

During discussions, it became apparent that the 'disconnect' that is often thought to exist between business schools and businesses may largely be down to a lack of awareness or appropriate communication. Initiatives that address the needs of business are being taken up by some schools, in most cases very successfully, but this evolution has yet to be noticed by parallel sectors. It has become apparent that effective communication and tailored, front-end image development (through effective and cutting edge website development, marketing campaigns and testimonies) is integral to ensuring business can relate to educational institutions and their multiple offerings.

Internationalisation

Scottish business schools have a very strong track record when it comes to international strategy. The international student population in Scotland contributes a significant amount to the Scottish economy, business schools are well placed to enhance this contribution through attracting and retaining international students, but also through maintaining these networks post-graduation in order to harness international links for the future.



Orientation and Presentation

Image creation and development must be supported by a business and management school attitude that matches and complements that of industry. Business schools that have industry engagement quoted in their strategic missions should ensure this is supported with a professional and business-like organisational structure and process; pace, following up and following through, customisation and polished communication should all be priorities.

Supporting Small and Medium Sized Enterprises

The economy of Scotland largely relies on small and medium sized organisations (SMEs). Subsequently, a key challenge for Scottish business schools is how to engage and support them. Business schools in Scotland are faced with a dual challenge:

- Producing relevant and applicable research into SME development,
- Deciphering effective ways to connect and build relationships with businesses that may not have developed organisational structures that facilitate university collaboration.

Understanding the Role of Business Schools

Business Schools are incredibly diverse across the sector; they focus on business, management, undergraduate, postgraduate, doctorate, research and executive education to varying degrees. Diverging demands articulated by different stakeholders at different periods in time, largely pulls the school in a number of conflicting directions. This often results in ambiguous missions and imprecise focus. What we understand is that business schools have multiple service users; students, industry and public policy/society. It is not therefore a lack of understanding of what needs to be delivered but rather a lack of practical action towards focused and realistic goals. This is fundamentally related to the need to manage the expectations of business schools.

We need to select the challenges that business schools **can** realistically address (within either their existing, or slightly adapted, institutional framework and economic capacity). Such challenges may highlight the need to differentiate business schools depending on their ability to meet such distinct challenges. For instance some schools may be more suited to driving forward local business and SME engagement and support, and some maybe better equipped to facilitate policy development for business and society.

Conclusions

- Through the process of engaging multiple interested stakeholders, the ABS policy network provided a forum for discussing the key challenges facing the Scottish 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 Scottish 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 Scottish business schools are fully equipped with the necessary skills and presented with the best possible opportunities to apply them.