



# EXPLORING PROFESSIONAL SERVICES MODELS IN UK BUSINESS SCHOOLS

October 2022

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# FOREWORD

It is a real privilege to introduce a substantive report led by data from within member business schools of the Chartered Association of Business Schools. Our member schools tend to operate at a scale that is not replicated in other disciplines and support the learning of student communities that are more diverse, more international, and more demanding than would be typical elsewhere. One in three of all international students in the UK are concentrated in business schools but we also deliver degree apprenticeships, executive programmes and part-time, multicampus and multi-mode study to large groups.

Our educational and research missions are only possible because of the combined efforts of academic and professional services staff. What is clear from the report is that those professional service colleagues deliver a wide range of functions. Regardless of whether those functions are delivered locally or centrally, the ability to meet the demands of a dynamic, competitive, and complex market is heavily influenced by collaboration, resource levels, and relevant expertise.

I commend the contents of the report to colleagues within and beyond our business school community. It is in everyone's interest to ensure that business schools excel and, in doing so, that they support their parent university's ambitions. We are truly fortunate in the Chartered Association of Business Schools to have such open conversations about what works in which circumstances and why.

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This report offers crucial insight into the operating models of professional services in UK business schools. Having been a Head of Professional Services for five years, I have witnessed first-hand changes to delivery models and have worked in close collaboration with my Dean to explain the levels of support required by the business school to match our sustained growth across all functions. Being able to draw on a practical, data-informed, widely benchmarked report under the respected Chartered ABS banner will not only help inform our future resourcing requests but will also help shape our internal strategic resourcing discussions. It additionally helps to underscore the breadth of activities that occur within business schools, and highlights external factors such as the expectations of accrediting bodies.

This report is exceptionally timely: as the Covid-19 pandemic eases, many of us are considering how we move forward and reimagine a new 'business as usual'. This report offers inspiration for reimagining services, whilst also making very practical suggestions as to the advantages and disadvantages of different professional services models. Above all, it also shows what a vibrant, supportive community of colleagues we have across UK business schools - and as Acting Chair of the Chartered ABS Professional Managers' Committee and a member of the Project Team, I am very grateful to and proud of the wonderful collaborative spirit in which this report was created, drawing on input from a very wide number of colleagues across the sector. I wholeheartedly commend and recommend this report to anyone interested in or responsible for the professional service resourcing models of UK business schools.



**Professor Robert MacIntosh**  
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**James Norman**  
Head of Operations and Business Services, Essex Business School, and Acting Chair of the Chartered ABS Professional Managers' Committee

# INTRODUCTION

## Background to the research project

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the United Kingdom regularly review and restructure their professional service functions at both a central or school/faculty/college level to identify how service delivery can be improved. This may involve a review of which services should be delivered centrally versus which benefit from being resourced locally, and an exploration of the benefits in service quality, workforce planning, and/or costs that a standardised and simplified organisational structure might bring to a school or university. The Covid-19 pandemic has, in a number of institutions, prompted a further series of such reviews, to increase universities' resilience in the face of uncertain income or staff mobility.

Enrolments in UK business schools have grown steadily since 2015/16, reaching a total of 475,000 in 2020/21, higher than for any other subject area<sup>1</sup>. Ensuring that service resourcing can 'keep up' with growth in student numbers, and with diversification in the educational offer and/or the business engagement activities of business schools, can be a challenge wherever professional services are positioned in a university.

In addition, some areas of specialist activity may not be visible to those outside the business school. Resourcing discussions consider how business schools can best provide the skills required for schools to: continue to attract large student cohorts, including those paying premium fees; deliver support and training in specialist software and databases used in taught programmes; maintain and strengthen connections with businesses and organisations; and manage multiple complex accreditation processes. The search for effective operating models to support all business school activities generates and benefits from dialogue between school leaders and executive management teams, between academics and professional service staff, and - supported by this report - between different UK business schools.

Local control of professional services within business schools provides the benefit that Deans can see and impact resource level and quality directly, bidding for investment as necessary. In contrast, centrally-provided services offer their own benefits, such as standardisation of services, systems automation, consistent data and reporting on service provision, and fewer management issues taking up time at the school level. Professional managers in this project have shared, however, that rapid implementation of centralised services can on occasion lead to the loss of resource for specialist areas of activity that may not have been captured in requirements mapping.



Ensuring that service resourcing can 'keep up' with growth in student numbers can be a challenge wherever professional services are positioned in a university.

<sup>1</sup> Student data from HESA 'Student enrolments by HE provider and subject of study' 2020/21, Table 49 <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/what-study>

## Aims of the project

Members of the Chartered ABS Professional Managers' Committee (PMC) are very familiar with these discussions, working with their Deans to ensure that high-quality and appropriate professional service support is delivered to a wide range of internal and external stakeholders. In support of such activities, the PMC aims with this project to:

1. Capture business school leaders' positive and negative experiences of centralisation and restructuring, in order to generate recommendations that Deans and professional managers might feed into consultations within their own institutions;
2. Identify key specialist professional services for business schools and investigate the degree to which these can be provided effectively in different operating models (generic vs. specialist services and centralisation vs. local delivery of services) and the levels of resource required to do so;
3. Provide qualitative and quantitative benchmarking data illustrating how services are delivered across the sector.



## Key audiences for the report

The research outputs will be of most use to business school Deans, Associate Deans responsible for resourcing, and professional managers. Outputs will also be of use to Faculty Vice-Principals and University Vice-Chancellors in understanding business schools' requirements for specialist services, and the advantages and disadvantages of different operating models.

## Project team

The research project was undertaken by a project team established by the Professional Managers' Committee of the Chartered Association of Business Schools, and included volunteers from within the Committee. The members of the project team were:

**Emm Barnes**, Strategic Project Manager, School of Business and Management, Queen Mary University of London

**Ramin Bokaian**, Research Manager, Chartered Association of Business Schools

**Nicolai Fassler**, Research Assistant, Chartered Association of Business Schools

**Merrill Jones**, Head of Professional Service, University of Sussex Business School

**Claive Juizo**, Project Research Associate, University of Sussex

**James Norman**, Head of Operations & Business Services, University of Essex Business School

**Andrea Pérez Porres**, Lead Research Associate, University of Sussex

**Nicky Randall**, Head of Resource and Planning, Faculty of Business and Social Sciences, Kingston University

**David Stannard**, Director of Administration, Henley Business School

**Sarah Verbickas**, Faculty Operations Manager, Leeds University Business School

The research outputs will provide qualitative and quantitative benchmarking data illustrating how services are delivered across the sector.

# METHODOLOGY

The project team adopted a four-stage methodology for this research project:

## **Stage 1: Literature review**

A review of existing recent reports and other publications on the drivers for centralisation in UK HEIs and the benefits and challenges that centralisation might bring. In addition to this review, the team undertook a survey of existing benchmarking methodologies and data sets, which included publicly available HESA data. A summary of the literature review is provided in the following section of this report.

## **Stage 2: Survey preparation**

The project team made use of existing Chartered ABS survey data to identify trends in operating models in use in member schools, as well as emerging or persisting change trends. In particular, the team focused on data from the 2021 Chartered ABS Annual Membership Survey, which included a number of questions about professional services resourcing and priorities within institutions<sup>2</sup>. Business schools were asked if they had local in-house support across 16 areas of activity and, if not, if they had plans to develop such support.

The survey showed that for 13 of the 16 areas of activity, more than half of the business schools responding had specialist in-house professional services support and that the areas in which such support was found most frequently were: equality, diversity and inclusion; wellbeing advice; student satisfaction; blended/hybrid/online learning delivery; and financial sustainability. Where such in-house professional services support was not currently provided, business schools cited planned areas for development as being: executive education and post-experience education (including degree apprenticeships); accreditations; knowledge exchange; data science and data analytics; and support for business, business innovation and start-ups.

The results of the survey in particular helped inform areas for focus within the team's own subsequent data collection.

## **Stage 3: Survey with follow up focus groups and interviews**

### ***Survey on professional services models***

Using information from stages 1 and 2, the project team created its own survey on professional services models, which was circulated to Deans of Chartered ABS member business schools in January 2022 (with the expectation that this would be partly or wholly completed by the schools' Head of Professional Services or equivalent). The survey asked a series of questions about institutional structure

The project team made use of existing Chartered ABS survey data to identify trends in operating models in use in member schools, as well as emerging or persisting change trends.

<sup>2</sup>Chartered ABS Annual Membership survey, November 2021

<https://cabs-199e2.kxcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Chartered-ABS-Annual-Membership-Survey-2021-Final.pdf>

(both the parent university and business school) and professional services resourcing. A copy of the survey questions is provided in Appendix 1.

Schools were also asked if they would be willing to participate in a future focus group and/or in-depth interview to be led by the project team as part of the research.

A response to the survey was received from 51 institutions and a summary of the results is outlined later in this report.

### ***Discussion at the Professional Managers' Annual Conference***

The project team delivered a breakout session at the Professional Managers' Annual Conference, held in March 2022 at Aston University, as an initial opportunity to share interim results with colleagues and to establish areas of discussion for the subsequent focus groups and interviews.

### ***Focus groups***

Following the Professional Managers' Annual Conference, the project team organised focus groups and interviews for those colleagues that indicated in the professional services models survey that they would be willing to participate in follow-up activities.

Two focus group sessions were held in May 2022 with 17 participants covering both Pre- and Post-92 HEIs. Focus groups were led by members of the project team and, whilst they had an open discussion format, were focused on the following areas and questions.

- Navigating the tensions between centralised models and business school resourcing, including standardisation vs. efficiency and effectiveness.
- Working with the central university to ensure appropriate resource and building assurances so there is trust to operate autonomously. This included increasing understanding around the needs of accreditations, the role of accreditations in strategic ambitions, and drawing on data, data analysis and business intelligence.
- Emerging trends in service delivery models and the ways business schools work with central services including: business partnering (where expert professionals from central teams, such as HR and Finance, work closely with school leadership teams to help both strategy and operational delivery), funding posts centrally, service level agreements and operating in the post-Covid environment.
- The priority areas for investment in professional services and the key drivers for these.

A significant majority of business schools reported they were reviewing and recasting existing professional services resource for a diverse range of reasons.

### **Interviews**

Following the focus group sessions, the project team undertook a series of 11 individual in-depth interviews with Heads of Professional Services from specific business schools, selected to cover both Pre- and Post-92 HEIs. Interviews were led by members of the project team. Whilst a set of core questions were identified by the project team (shown in Appendix 2) to provide a degree of consistency, the intention was that the interviews should be a free-flowing, informal discussion.

### **Stage 4: Data analysis**

The findings from the focus groups and interviews were coded to identify the most common themes, and the survey data was analysed to identify any differences in findings by institution characteristics and the extent of decentralisation of professional services functions.

Working with the central university to ensure appropriate resource and building assurances so there is trust to operate autonomously.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

This section sets the context of the research project by summarising existing literature on drivers for centralisation and identifying the benefits and challenges of the same.

The current literature around the drivers and evidence for/against centralisation in HEIs is quite limited. Nonetheless, it provides a starting point for this project, defining the boundaries of the research to be undertaken and pinpointing the research questions and areas for investigation.

The current literature has been categorised into three areas:

- Centralising within an HEI context, including centralised student services and other services.
- Centralising business support functions in other sectors and organisations.
- Recent research and the impact of Covid-19 on the ways in which professional services staff work.

## Centralising within an HEI context

This section looks at research into the centralisation of services within HEIs, starting with student services before looking at services more broadly.

### ***Student services***

The drivers for the centralisation of student facing services are to provide improved access to services for students to enhance the student experience and increase student satisfaction. This centralisation is often delivered via a “one stop shop” model.

The reviewed paper is entitled [“Managing the Student Experience in a shifting Higher Education Landscape”](#)

The HEA undertook the research in 2014 and looked at three key questions:

- Are changes in the higher education landscape leading to changes in institutional policies and practices which impact the student experience?
- Are there differences according to institutional types?
- Which managerial approaches appear to be the most effective in delivering enhanced student experiences, and why?

The drivers for the centralisation of student facing services are to provide improved access to services for students to enhance the student experience and increase student satisfaction.

The study looked at two research-intensive universities, two teaching-intensive universities and two in an intermediary group. The findings were that the research-intensive universities tried to effect culture change towards greater student support through existing structures, while the other two groups of institutions moved to centralisation and increased control over departmental practice.

“The effects of a more assertive student voice as a result of higher tuition fees, mediated through... different institutional responses, seem... likely to have mixed results. Some management responses to new student requests have led to positive outcomes (more accessible and more coherently structured university services, for instance), whereas others (for example, greater centralisation of decision-making) may in the longer-run reduce organisational flexibility and staff commitment.”

### **Other services**

A UniQuest blog post in 2016 looked at the drivers for centralisation of the marketing function. The post is entitled [“To centralise or not to centralise? That is the question...”](#)

This blog post by Caroline Scallan explores the benefits and risks of centralising marketing in universities, with a key risk being the loss of academic buy-in if the service is centralised. She highlights the top five areas to consider, for any university considering whether or not to centralise.

1. **Skills** – does your current set up mean you have adequate skills in the right areas to make a difference?
2. **Budget** – what is your resource and staffing budget across centralised and decentralised teams (and are you being asked to cut either of these budgets?)
3. **Size** – is your set up right for the size of your institution or do you need to round-skill people to take on many different roles?
4. **Targets** – are you meeting your current recruitment targets and, apart from external market factors, do you think there are truly any internal reasons why you are/are not?
5. **Ambition** – is your institution ambitious and does it want to grow its Home and/or International numbers?

A PhD thesis has been identified that focuses on university administrative systems and explores the impact of technology on administrative support and where it is undertaken:

[Glover, H.A. 2021, \*A Comparative Study of University Administrative Systems\*, University of Derby \(United Kingdom\).](#)

The findings were that the research-intensive universities tried to effect culture change towards greater student support through existing structures, while the other two groups of institutions moved to centralisation and increased control over departmental practice.

The PhD looked at the following research questions:

1. To identify whether different processes in student administration are performed better at a certain level of centralisation or decentralisation.
2. To examine whether motivation of administrative staff is harder to achieve in centralised administrative departments than in school or faculty-based departments.
3. To examine whether the level of sophistication of the Student Records Database is influenced by centralised or decentralised administrative structures.

Four universities provided case studies assessing the level of centralisation vs. decentralisation for the following administrative systems: admissions, examinations, assignments collection, student enrolments and student records. Staff were also surveyed for motivation and morale.

The evidence for factors influencing centralisation were consistency of practice, control of information systems and avoiding duplication of facilities or double handling. There was no evidence that factors of economies of scale, government needs for efficiency, the transition to a mass education system, or having interdisciplinary modular programmes were influencing factors.

### **Centralising business support functions in other sectors**

This section explores research outside the university sector that has influenced or is influencing moves to centralisation.

The first article is entitled [“To centralize or not to centralize?”](#)

This article suggests the urge to centralise should always prompt three questions:

- Is it mandated? (e.g. by external stakeholders)
- Does it add value? (e.g. will it add 10% to surplus?)
- Are the risks low? (e.g. risks of distraction or reduced motivation)

and that if the answers are no to all three, then one should not centralise.

“Most centralization proposals... will not be mandated and will not represent major sources of additional value. More often, the prize will be smaller improvements in costs or quality. In these cases, the risks associated with centralization — business rigidity, reduced motivation, bureaucracy, and distraction — are often greater than the value created. Hence, the proposals should go forward only if the risks of these negative side effects are low.”

A further report is entitled [“Report on the Centralisation of Business Support Functions in Scotland”](#)

The evidence for factors influencing centralisation were consistency of practice, control of information systems and avoiding duplication of facilities or double handling.

This research looks at business support functions in local councils in 2017 and identified four themes:

- Value-add services were prioritised (non-value-adding ones to be phased out).
- Transformation plans were aligned to councils' strategies.
- Customer-focused services (vs. merely transactional ones) were the aim.
- Virtual centralisation was used in some instances, where there are common staff and a common task pool but the teams can still sit within separate services.

Glasgow City Council centralised the core functions but left specialist services to be delivered locally. Savings were achieved by becoming more lean and making enhanced use of technological improvements.

In most of the case studies, the savings were driven by vacancy management and process redesign, and in some instances by increased spans of management control.

### Recent research

This final section has identified papers that could be of interest and relevance when considering ways of working rather than the location of professional services and the impact on service quality.

[The value of co-operation: an examination of the work relationships of university professional services staff and consequences for service quality.](#)

This paper looks at the way in which interpersonal and organisational dynamics impact on service outcome and perceptions of service quality. The research is focused on the internal staff of a university accessing services and explores expectations and service quality.

Finally, there is a paper about the impact of Covid-19, remote-working and the reorganisation of professional services which will be of interest for further research.

['Living at work': COVID-19, remote-working and the spatio-relational reorganisation of professional services in UK universities.](#)

This paper looks at the impact of Covid-19, the subsequent closure of universities and the move to remote working which presented a fundamental shift for the professional services staff. Academic staff have always tended to work more flexibly than have professional services staff. The research considers remote working as a means to enable boundary crossing, social connectedness and trust relationships. It explores what the future ways of working look like as professional services maintain remote working.

In most of the case studies, the savings were driven by vacancy management and process redesign, and in some instances by increased spans of management control.

### **Conclusion to literature review**

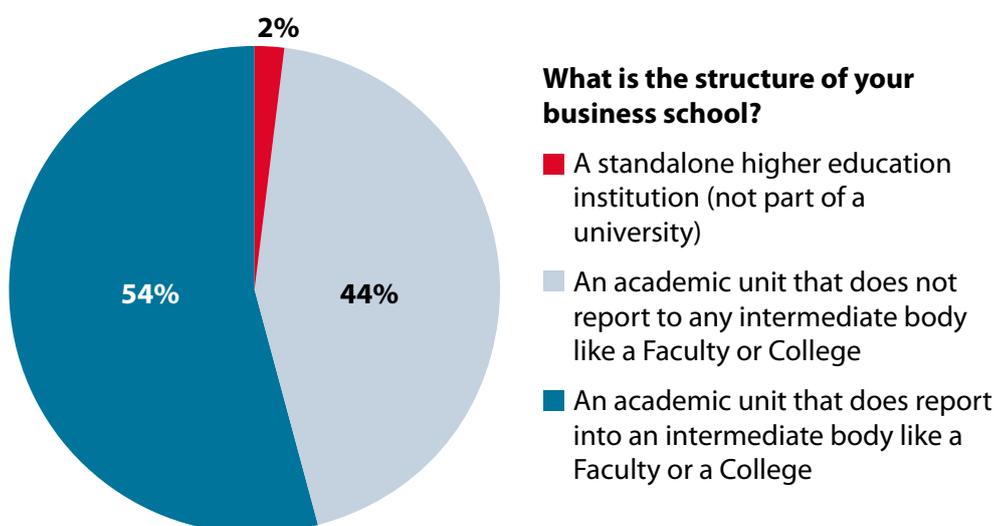
Various keyword searches have provided some insight into the current literature and research that explores centralisation and its drivers, alongside identifying some of the services that have been centralised. In addition, it also provides some understanding of the drivers for centralisation more generally. Finally, the literature looks at professional services, future ways of working and considerations of service quality which the sector is currently assessing and evaluating.

This body of research provides some insight but is not sufficient in terms of quantity, breadth or depth, particularly in terms of a focus on business schools. Further research would be required that looks at the structure, size and scale of a university, the levels and degrees of centralisation and decentralisation, and the identification of which models are most effective in delivering the service, as well as other drivers such as accreditations and rankings that are key to determining which services are best delivered as either centralised or decentralised.

# SURVEY FINDINGS

In January 2022 we surveyed Deans of Chartered ABS member schools and asked a series of questions about the structure of professional services within their institutions. A total of 51 responses were received, which represents 42% of the Chartered ABS membership.

## Structure of responding business schools



**Figure 1 Structure of responding business schools**

Just over half of the schools who completed the survey report into an intermediate body such as a faculty or a college, and 44% do not report into an intermediate body. Only 2% of the business schools who responded are a standalone HEI and are not part of a larger university.

## Expected structural changes in the future

Respondents were asked if they expected any structural changes to their institution in the future and the proposed nature of any changes. 70% did not expect any structural changes in the coming years and of the 30% that did there was variation in the form of the anticipated changes. Two respondents cited centralising tendencies in their school, including functions in facilities and student services, which is expected to lead to reduced headcount for one of these schools. A small number of respondents said that plans to merge their school with another department within the university were underway or expected in the near future.

70% of respondents did not expect any structural changes in the coming years and of the 30% that did there was variation in the form of the anticipated changes.

Some of the responses reveal that schools had already been subject to recent structural changes, such as a merger with another school in the university, or the removal of an intermediate body such as a faculty or college, and therefore no further changes were expected for at least a few years. One of the respondents stated that their school would be moving from a matrix-based structure to a traditional school-based structure. Another revealed that their university was introducing changes to all professional services teams, and although the full impact of these was not yet clear, standardised structures had been introduced around certain thematic areas (including research) which entailed the introduction of generic job-family roles to ensure consistency in job titles and descriptions.

### Resourcing of professional services areas

**Table 1: % breakdown of the number of professional services staff (FTE) working for the responding business schools in each function**

Note: due to rounding the numbers in tables 1-5 may not sum precisely to 100%.

	0 FTE	1-3 FTE	4-6 FTE	7+ FTE	Total
a. Programme administration	0%	9%	7%	84%	100%
b. Student engagement and retention	12%	48%	24%	17%	100%
c. Student welfare	11%	34%	27%	27%	100%
d. Careers, skills and employability	4%	38%	27%	31%	100%
e. Alumni engagement and fundraising/development	19%	58%	12%	12%	100%
f. Executive education	26%	29%	26%	19%	100%
g. Transnational education	32%	41%	14%	14%	100%
h. Degree apprenticeships	41%	32%	18%	9%	100%
i. Supporting educational technology	14%	45%	20%	20%	100%
j. Student recruitment and marketing	5%	36%	20%	39%	100%
k. Staff recruitment and development	14%	58%	14%	14%	100%
l. Executive support	7%	67%	13%	13%	100%
m. Equality, diversity and inclusion	50%	38%	5%	7%	100%
n. Facilities management	14%	52%	12%	21%	100%
o. Financial management	2%	73%	14%	11%	100%
p. Research administration	5%	58%	33%	5%	100%
q. Knowledge transfer activities	29%	55%	10%	7%	100%
r. Business development (for example, fostering new connections with local businesses, or scoping new executive education opportunities)	9%	70%	9%	11%	100%
s. Accreditations (working towards or maintaining, and/or seeking to secure strong performance in league tables such as the FT)	11%	84%	4%	0%	100%
t. Projects office (for example, working towards a new building, or a new suite of programmes)	36%	52%	7%	5%	100%
u. Data analytics	25%	70%	0%	5%	100%
v. Internal communications, public relations and events	16%	57%	16%	11%	100%

Table 1 shows the number of staff split by FTE range per professional services function for the business schools who responded to the survey. Programme administration is the most resourced function with 84% of the schools reporting 7+ FTE staff.

Across the various functions the most common number of FTE staff is 1-3 (as indicated by the blue-coloured bars in the table), with 50% or more of the responding schools reporting that they had 1-3 FTE for 12 of the 22 functions. Those functions where the vast majority of schools reported 1-3 FTE were: 'Accreditations' (84% of responding schools); 'Financial management' (73%); 'Business development' (70%); 'Data analytics' (70%); and 'Executive support' (67%).

There were no functions in which a majority of the schools reported 0 FTE professional services staff working for them. The function for which the highest proportion of schools reported 0 FTE was 'Equality, diversity and inclusion' (50%), followed by: 'Degree Apprenticeships' (41%), 'Transnational education' (32%), 'Projects office' (36%), and 'Knowledge transfer activities' (29%).

**Table 2: % breakdown of the level of resourcing in each function for the responding business schools**

	Under-resourced	About right	Over-resourced	Total
a. Programme administration	39%	61%	0%	100%
b. Student engagement and retention	59%	41%	0%	100%
c. Student welfare	45%	55%	0%	100%
d. Careers, skills and employability	52%	48%	0%	100%
e. Alumni engagement and fundraising/development	56%	44%	0%	100%
f. Executive education	35%	65%	0%	100%
g. Transnational education	30%	70%	0%	100%
h. Degree apprenticeships	44%	56%	0%	100%
i. Supporting educational technology	43%	57%	0%	100%
j. Student recruitment and marketing	37%	60%	2%	100%
k. Staff recruitment and development	45%	55%	0%	100%
l. Executive support	31%	67%	2%	100%
m. Equality, diversity and inclusion	54%	46%	0%	100%
n. Facilities management	25%	70%	5%	100%
o. Financial management	17%	79%	5%	100%
p. Research administration	56%	44%	0%	100%
q. Knowledge transfer activities	32%	65%	3%	100%
r. Business development (for example, fostering new connections with local businesses, or scoping new executive education opportunities)	48%	52%	0%	100%
s. Accreditations (working towards or maintaining, and/or seeking to secure strong performance in league tables such as the FT)	32%	68%	0%	100%
t. Projects office (for example, working towards a new building, or a new suite of programmes)	49%	49%	3%	100%
u. Data analytics	59%	41%	0%	100%
v. Internal communications, public relations and events	31%	69%	0%	100%

Table 2 displays the proportion of schools reporting if they are under, over, or appropriately resourced for each function, which we are taking to be a reflection on the roles available in the schools rather than also representing difficulties in attracting or retaining staff. There were only six areas in which any of the schools reported being over-resourced, and in each case these represent a small minority of the responding schools. Across all areas, there were only eight respondents reporting over-resourcing.

Many areas were widely reported to be under-resourced. At least half of respondents reported under-resourcing in the areas of: 'Student engagement and retention' (59%); 'Data analytics' (59%); 'Research administration' (56%); 'Alumni engagement and fundraising/development' (56%); and 'Equality, diversity and inclusion' (54%).

The areas in which respondents were most likely to report that resourcing levels were about right include: 'Financial management' (79%); 'Transnational education' (70%); 'Facilities management' (70%); 'Internal communications, public relations and events' (69%); 'Accreditations' (68%); and 'Executive support' (67%).

**Table 3: % breakdown of the location of staff in each function for the responding business schools**

	School	Shared	Central	Other	N/A*	Total
a. Programme administration	83%	2%	11%	4%	0%	100%
b. Student engagement and retention	50%	11%	23%	5%	11%	100%
c. Student welfare	20%	11%	57%	2%	9%	100%
d. Careers, skills and employability	52%	11%	34%	2%	0%	100%
e. Alumni engagement and fundraising/development	27%	16%	45%	2%	9%	100%
f. Executive education	66%	5%	7%	2%	20%	100%
g. Transnational education	45%	12%	12%	5%	26%	100%
h. Degree apprenticeships	33%	12%	21%	0%	33%	100%
i. Supporting educational technology	30%	16%	45%	0%	9%	100%
j. Student recruitment and marketing	36%	14%	43%	7%	0%	100%
k. Staff recruitment and development	23%	12%	49%	5%	12%	100%
l. Executive support	84%	2%	7%	0%	7%	100%
m. Equality, diversity and inclusion	15%	10%	37%	2%	37%	100%
n. Facilities management	33%	19%	37%	2%	9%	100%
o. Financial management	32%	16%	45%	5%	2%	100%
p. Research administration	47%	21%	23%	5%	5%	100%
q. Knowledge transfer activities	24%	12%	36%	2%	26%	100%
r. Business development (for example, fostering new connections with local businesses, or scoping new executive education opportunities)	56%	20%	16%	0%	9%	100%
s. Accreditations (working towards or maintaining, and/or seeking to secure strong performance in league tables such as the FT)	78%	7%	4%	0%	11%	100%
t. Projects office (for example, working towards a new building, or a new suite of programmes)	41%	9%	23%	0%	27%	100%
u. Data analytics	33%	14%	30%	2%	21%	100%
v. Internal communications, public relations and events	41%	16%	27%	2%	14%	100%

\*We do not have professional service staff in this area

Table 3 shows the proportional breakdown for responding schools by location of professional services staff in each function. 'Student welfare' is the only area in which more than half of the responding schools stated that staff were located centrally (57%). However, a significant proportion of respondents stated that staff were located centrally in the following areas: 'Staff recruitment and development' (49%); 'Financial Management' (45%); 'Supporting educational technology' (45%); 'Alumni engagement and fundraising/development' (45%); and 'Student recruitment and marketing' (43%).

Areas with staff commonly located within the school include: 'Executive Support' (84%), 'Programme administration' (83%), and 'Accreditations' (78%). Shared arrangements in which professional services staff are shared with another school(s) tended not to be common across any of the functions, although 20% of the schools said that this approach was used for their staff in 'Research administration' and 'Business development'. Responses indicating that a school does not have professional services staff in a given area mirror the data in table 1, with 'Equality, diversity and inclusion', 'Degree apprenticeships', and 'Projects office' being some of the most common areas with no dedicated staff.

### ***Other comments in relation to resourcing of professional services staff***

In relation to additional areas of resourcing that were not specifically covered by functions a) to v) in the survey, respondents mentioned the following types of professional services roles supporting their schools:

- Academic support
- Placements and study abroad support
- IT support
- Assessment management
- Business incubator management
- Quality assurance/programme validations
- Management of off-campus activities, including branch activities
- Health and safety
- Student retention

The location of staff based in the areas listed above varies. Some are located and managed within the school whilst others are central, but with a fraction of an FTE working with the business school. The comments reveal that some functions, such as 'Student welfare', 'Careers and Employability', and 'Research administration', consist of a mix of staff located within the business school and centrally (including sometimes at faculty-level too). One of the responding schools uses different models for standard university activities and non-standard activities (e.g. MBA/executive education programmes), with the standard activities tending to be supported more by central university or faculty teams. In another example, careers services for undergraduates are provided by the university and those for postgraduates by the school. One of the schools has its own project office covering several functions listed in the survey, including 'Data analytics', as the central data analytics team is unable to respond to discipline-specific requests.

Areas with staff commonly located within the school include: 'Executive Support' (84%), 'Programme administration' (83%), and 'Accreditations' (78%).

**Cost charging for professional services staff****Table 4: % breakdown of cost charging for professional services staff in each function**

	Directly charged to school	Charged to larger academic unit such as Faculty	Centrally provided	N/A*	Total
a. Programme administration	74%	11%	15%	0%	100%
b. Student engagement and retention	49%	4%	36%	11%	100%
c. Student welfare	29%	4%	58%	9%	100%
d. Careers, skills and employability	52%	9%	36%	2%	100%
e. Alumni engagement and fundraising/development	40%	2%	44%	14%	100%
f. Executive education	58%	12%	7%	23%	100%
g. Transnational education	50%	7%	18%	25%	100%
h. Degree apprenticeships	32%	9%	16%	43%	100%
i. Supporting educational technology	36%	9%	45%	9%	100%
j. Student recruitment and marketing	50%	9%	39%	2%	100%
k. Staff recruitment and development	27%	7%	55%	11%	100%
l. Executive support	74%	12%	7%	7%	100%
m. Equality, diversity and inclusion	14%	5%	42%	40%	100%
n. Facilities management	35%	12%	47%	7%	100%
o. Financial management	43%	7%	50%	0%	100%
p. Research administration	63%	16%	19%	2%	100%
q. Knowledge transfer activities	26%	10%	38%	26%	100%
r. Business development (for example, fostering new connections with local businesses, or scoping new executive education opportunities)	58%	12%	21%	9%	100%
s. Accreditations (working towards or maintaining, and/or seeking to secure strong performance in league tables such as the FT)	68%	11%	9%	11%	100%
t. Projects office (for example, working towards a new building, or a new suite of programmes)	38%	2%	29%	31%	100%
u. Data analytics	41%	2%	41%	16%	100%
v. Internal communications, public relations and events	43%	5%	41%	11%	100%

\*We do not have professional service staff in this area

The functions in which a high proportion of staff costs are charged directly to the school are: 'Programme administration' (74%), 'Executive support' (74%), 'Accreditations' (68%), and 'Research administration' (63%). There are three areas in which at least 50% of the responding schools reported that staff are provided and funded by the central university: 'Student welfare' (58%); 'Staff recruitment and development' (55%); and 'Financial management' (50%).

There were several other areas where at least 40% of respondents stated that costs were charged centrally: 'Facilities management' (47%); 'Supporting educational

technology' (45%); 'Alumni engagement' (44%); 'Equality, diversity and inclusion' (42%); 'Data analytics' (41%); and 'Internal communications' (41%). Across all areas only a small proportion of respondents stated that staff costs were charged to a larger academic unit, with 'Research administration' being the function with the highest proportion (16%).

### Management responsibility for professional services staff

**Table 5: % breakdown of management responsibility for professional services staff in each function**

	Managed in the school	Managed in a larger academic unit	Managed centrally	N/A*	Total
a. Programme administration	76%	7%	17%	0%	100%
b. Student engagement and retention	47%	2%	40%	11%	100%
c. Student welfare	29%	2%	60%	9%	100%
d. Careers, skills and employability	43%	9%	45%	2%	100%
e. Alumni engagement and fundraising/development	25%	2%	59%	14%	100%
f. Executive education	60%	5%	14%	21%	100%
g. Transnational education	45%	7%	23%	25%	100%
h. Degree apprenticeships	30%	7%	21%	42%	100%
i. Supporting educational technology	39%	7%	45%	9%	100%
j. Student recruitment and marketing	36%	9%	52%	2%	100%
k. Staff recruitment and development	30%	5%	53%	12%	100%
l. Executive support	74%	7%	12%	7%	100%
m. Equality, diversity and inclusion	17%	2%	44%	37%	100%
n. Facilities management	37%	9%	47%	7%	100%
o. Financial management	42%	7%	51%	0%	100%
p. Research administration	62%	12%	26%	0%	100%
q. Knowledge transfer activities	31%	8%	38%	23%	100%
r. Business development (for example, fostering new connections with local businesses, or scoping new executive education opportunities)	60%	9%	21%	9%	100%
s. Accreditations (working towards or maintaining, and/or seeking to secure strong performance in league tables such as the FT)	74%	7%	9%	9%	100%
t. Projects office (for example, working towards a new building, or a new suite of programmes)	36%	0%	33%	31%	100%
u. Data analytics	35%	0%	51%	14%	100%
v. Internal communications, public relations and events	44%	2%	44%	9%	100%

\*We do not have professional service staff in this area

Around three-quarters of respondents stated that their school had line management responsibility for staff in 'Programme administration', 'Executive support', and 'Accreditations'. Other areas where at least half the respondents stated that staff management was the responsibility of their school included 'Research administration' (62%), 'Business development' (60%), and 'executive education' (60%).

Functions where at least half of respondents reported staff were managed centrally are: 'Student welfare' (60%); 'Alumni engagement' (59%); 'Staff recruitment and development' (53%); 'Student recruitment and marketing' (52%); 'Financial management' (51%); and 'Data analytics' (51%). Across almost all of the areas no more than 10% of responding schools stated that staff were managed in a larger academic unit.

Overall, the responses do not reveal any strong tendency towards either management of professional services staff by the school or by the central university, as for many of the functions the proportions of schools reporting either approach are fairly even.

### **Future plans for professional services functions**

Several key themes were evident in the responses to the open-ended question on future plans for professional services functions.

#### ***Investment to scale-up business school activities***

Multiple respondents stated that their business school has plans for significant growth in student numbers, programmes, or research funding which will entail increased numbers of professional services staff if these objectives are to be achieved. Ensuring an appropriate student-to-staff ratio was noted as important for the maintenance of a high quality student experience while student enrolments increase. Enhancing the student experience will require better programme support and a focus on student community building. At some schools expansion is being driven by the opening of new buildings which will require increased staffing levels.

#### ***Supporting income diversification***

Income diversification is a strong factor in many of the business schools' plans for growth. It seems this is partly a recognition around the risks of over-reliance on tuition fee income from students outside of Europe which, as seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, can reduce suddenly and dramatically. Executive education programmes, consultancy and degree apprenticeships were cited as a means of diversifying income, with several schools looking to increase their business engagement capacity. The responses highlighted that all approaches to developing new sources of income, and strategic initiatives more broadly, require investment in professional services staff, particularly in the areas of project management and administrative support.

#### ***Growth areas for professional services***

A range of areas are being targeted for growth in professional services resources in the coming years. Several respondents highlighted the importance of accreditations, including the pursuit of accreditations not currently held by the school, in attracting students. Linked to the pursuit of accreditations, the need for business schools to strengthen their alumni functions was also cited. Multiple respondents explained that their school had plans to expand their executive

Multiple respondents stated that their business school has plans for significant growth in student numbers, programmes, or research funding which will entail increased numbers of professional services staff if these objectives are to be achieved.

education portfolio which would require resources to appropriately service existing contracts and generate capacity to pursue new opportunities. Other areas where respondents expected growth in professional services staff include: 'Data analytics'; 'Equality, diversity and inclusion'; 'Careers and employability'; the "Help to Grow" management programme; timetabling and workload modelling; 'Knowledge transfer activities'; and 'Degree apprenticeships'.

### **Digitalisation**

Enhancing and embedding technology throughout the activities of the business school is a consistent theme from the comments and would appear to be an on-going requirement with implications for professional services resourcing. Specific contexts in which future investment in technology were cited include learning and teaching, simulations for work-based learning, behavioural labs, and data infrastructure.

### **Discussions on possible changes to the delivery of professional services**

Respondents were asked for details of any discussions in the last three years about how the delivery of professional services may change in their school. Discussions of this nature are common and often revolve around whether a particular service should be managed centrally, in faculty, or at departmental level. The comments reveal that restructuring of professional services teams is a frequent occurrence, with the current trend being towards centralising resources at university level, and in some cases this has led to decreasing the number of FTE staff in order to save costs. Restructuring decisions often follow on from reviews of existing structures, student journey mapping, benchmarking against other institutions and the need to scale up as effectively as possible.

During service centralisation projects, business schools have emphasised the differences in scale and scope of their activities, which are distinct from other disciplines, and the need to carefully manage accreditations and activities related to rankings. Highlighting the level of professional services resourcing within the school compared to peers was another approach used to push back against proposed centralisation. Some of the responding schools had lobbied their university for a 'hub-and-spoke' model for professional services delivery (this is discussed later in the report in the section on Location of Professional Services staff). Others have considered the possibility of a shared support structure with other faculties.

### **Further analysis of survey data by school characteristics**

Further statistical analysis was carried out by comparing elements of the survey data with publicly available HESA data on participating schools' student and staff numbers<sup>3</sup>. An analysis was undertaken to determine any correlations between the extent of the decentralisation of the participating schools' professional services functions and other characteristics such as size of student and staff populations, university incorporation status, and number of accreditations held by the business school.

<sup>3</sup>Student data from HESA 'Student enrolments by HE provider and subject of study' 2020/21, Table 49

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/what-study>

Staff data from HESA 'HE staff FTE by HE provider and cost centre' 2020/21, table 11

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff/areas>

Enhancing and embedding technology throughout the activities of the business school is a consistent theme from the comments and would appear to be an on-going requirement with implications for professional services resourcing.

The correlations analysis also compares certain of these variables with a measure of 'leanness', which gives an indication of the extent of non-academic resources in the school relative to the size of the student body. The decentralisation measure is also compared with the total number of staff across the business school's parent university. The variables used in the correlations are defined below.

1. **Incorporation:** Whether the parent university was incorporated before or after 1992.
2. **Decentralisation:** Of the 22 professional services functions reported on through the survey, the proportion of these located within the business school.
3. **Leanness:** The number of students in the school per each non-academic member of staff.
4. **Accreditations:** The number of accreditations held by the business school.

**Table 6: Correlation analysis by business school characteristics and extent of decentralisation of professional services functions**

Variables	Correlation
Total University Staff vs. Decentralisation	0.44
Incorporation vs. Decentralisation	0.47
Decentralisation vs. Accreditations	0.50
Leanness vs. Decentralisation	-0.43

The most noteworthy findings from the analysis can be seen in Table 6, above. It is important to keep in mind that correlations do not equal causations, but some possible reasons behind the relationships are given below.

#### **Total university staff vs. decentralisation**

The correlation of 0.44 indicates a positive relationship at respondents' universities between the overall number of staff (academic and non-academic; all subjects/faculties) and the likelihood to decentralise business school functions. That is, the more staff at the university, the more likely the business school's functions will be decentralised. One possible explanation is that decentralised functions typically require more staff to run them.

#### **Incorporation vs. decentralisation**

This figure (0.47) indicates some degree of relationship between incorporation status and the extent of business school decentralisation, with pre-92 institutions being more likely to have decentralised professional services functions in their business schools.

Some of the responding schools had lobbied their university for a 'hub-and-spoke' model for professional services delivery.

### ***Decentralisation vs. accreditations***

One of the more significant correlations (0.50) indicates that the more decentralised a business school's functions are, the more accreditations it is likely to have. This could suggest that giving business schools greater autonomy in their operations increases the scope for them to gain and retain accreditations, as well as a level of autonomy over operations being an expectation/requirement for accrediting bodies.

### ***Leanness vs. decentralisation***

The relationship between the number of students per non-academic staff at business schools and the extent of decentralisation shows negative correlation, in that business schools with a greater number of decentralised functions are more likely to have fewer students per non-academic staff member (i.e. the more decentralisation, the better the level of resourcing relative to the size of the student population).

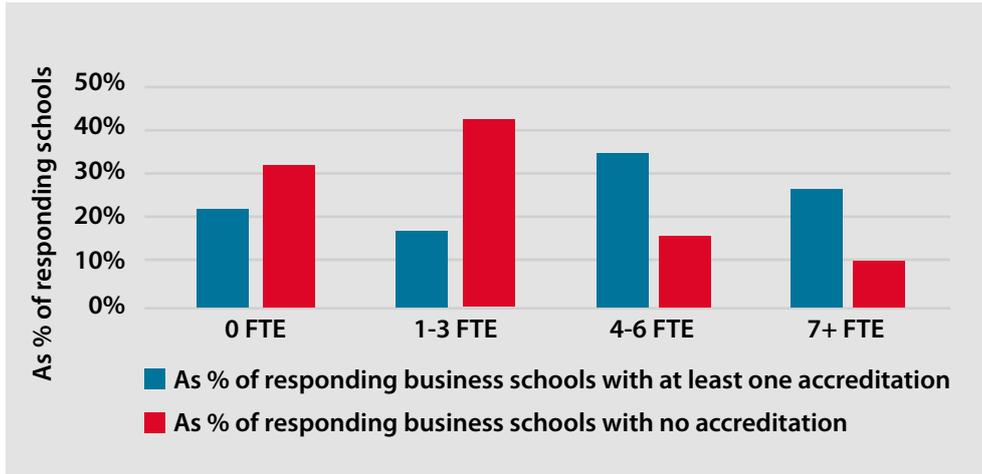
### ***Comparing accreditation status with staff FTE across all functions***

The accreditation status of the business schools participating in the survey was compared with their responses to the question on the number of FTE staff in each of the professional services functions. The analysis indicates that business schools holding at least one accreditation are generally better resourced across most functions in terms of number of staff.

For 19 out of the 22 functions, the proportion of business schools with an accreditation reporting that they had seven or more FTE staff in the function was greater than those with no accreditations. In addition, for all but two of the 22 functions the proportion of business schools with an accreditation reporting at least four FTE staff was higher than for non-accredited schools. Although the underlying cause cannot be determined conclusively, it may suggest either that attaining accreditations requires a higher level of professional services resourcing and/or that attaining and maintaining the accreditations provides the business school with a strong case for more investment in those resources. The full data for staff FTE compared with business school accreditation status can be found in Appendix 3.

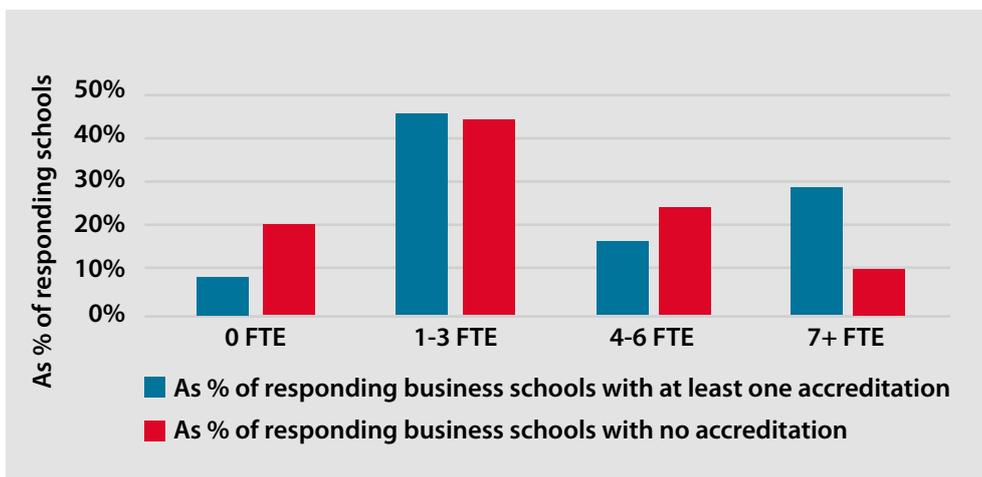
Looking more closely at certain niche functions which may require growth in resource levels in the coming years, we see that business schools with accreditations are generally better resourced than those without. Figures 2 to 5 show the FTE professional services staff by the accreditation status of the responding schools in the functions of 'executive education', 'Educational technology', 'Knowledge transfer activities' and 'Data analytics'.

The analysis indicates that business schools holding at least one accreditation are generally better resourced across most functions in terms of number of staff.



**Figure 2 Staff FTE in executive education by school accreditation status**

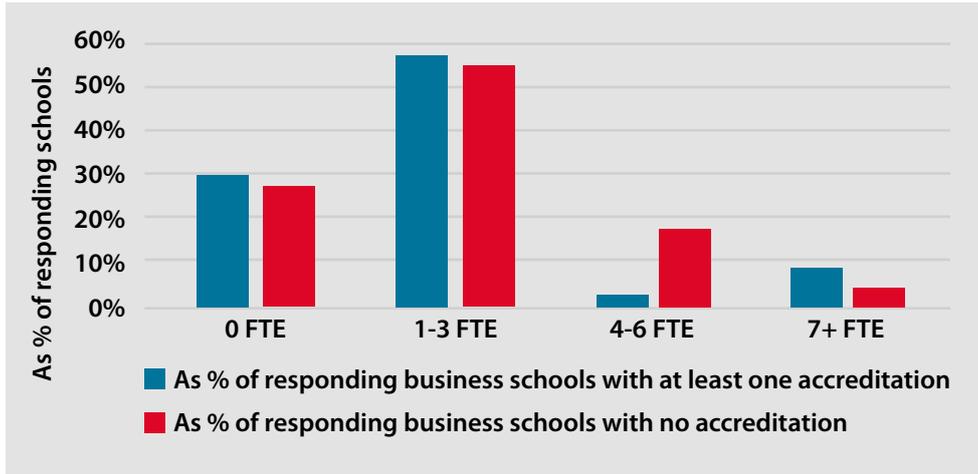
Of the business schools who responded to the survey, those with at least one accreditation were more likely to be better resourced in their executive education function. Of those with an accreditation, 35% had between 4-6 FTE staff in executive education, compared to 16% of those without. Similarly, 26% of those with an accreditation had 7 or more FTE staff in this function, compared to only 11% of those without. However, while there would appear to be a connection between schools holding at least one accreditation and being better resourced in executive education, the survey results found that having an accreditation does not necessarily determine if a school has an executive education offer. For example, 92% of the business schools who responded to the survey have an executive education offer despite 53% of these holding no accreditations.



**Figure 3 Staff FTE in educational technology by school accreditation status**

In relation to the number of FTE professional services staff supporting educational technology, schools with an accreditation would appear to be slightly better resourced in this function as a higher proportion reported 7 or more FTE staff and they are less likely to have no staff at all. However, it is unclear if accreditation status is a strong driver of a business school’s willingness to invest in staff dedicated to supporting educational technology.

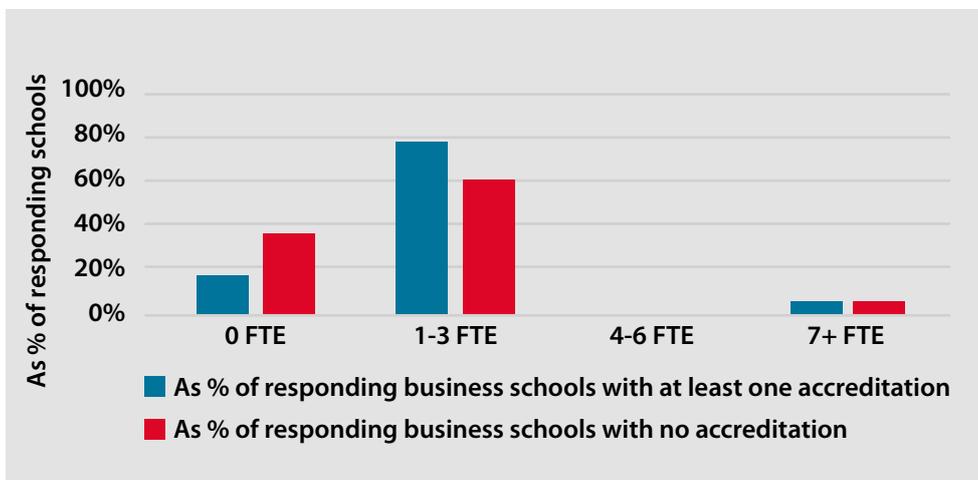
Of the business schools who responded to the survey, those with at least one accreditation were more likely to be better resourced in their executive education function.



**Figure 4 Staff FTE in knowledge transfer activities by school accreditation status**

Figure 4 would suggest that the number of professional services staff in a business school supporting knowledge transfer activities is not strongly influenced by whether a school holds an accreditation or not. Over 50% of the schools who responded to the survey have between 1-3 FTE staff engaged in knowledge transfer activities, irrespective of whether they hold at least one accreditation or not. In either category, the proportions of schools with more than 3 FTE staff serving this function are small which would indicate that knowledge transfer activities currently have relatively low levels of involvement amongst professional services staff.

Over 50% of the schools who responded to the survey have between 1-3 FTE staff engaged in knowledge transfer activities, irrespective of whether they hold at least one accreditation or not.



**Figure 5 Staff FTE in data analytics by school accreditation status**

Figure 5 shows that the data analytics function is not allocated a significant level of resource as amongst both accredited and non-accredited business schools no more than 5% have 7 or more FTE professional services staff working in this function. However, schools with an accreditation are more likely to have at least one staff member working in data analytics and less likely to have none at all. This could suggest that schools must have some resource dedicated to data analysis and reporting if they are to meet the requirements associated with attaining and maintaining their accreditations.

# FINDINGS FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

The focus group discussions and interviews centred around three themes: challenges in business schools, investment priorities, and ways to make interactions between school and centre more effective and straightforward. The focus group themes were shaped by the discussion of the survey findings at the Professional Managers' Annual Conference in Aston, which highlighted the growing importance of relationship management skills in navigating situations where the resource requirements in business schools vary from the norm for an academic department.

## Challenges in business schools

At the beginning of each of the focus group sessions there was a brief 'icebreaker' activity, in which participants were asked "What is the core business of a business school and how (if at all) do you think this has changed recently?" Key observations were:

1. That whilst the fundamental core business of business schools (teaching and research) had not changed, there were changes in the focus of these, with business schools often at the forefront of innovation. There was, for example, a clear shift in the focus of research towards demonstrating impact, and in teaching there was an enhanced focus on graduate employability and learning outcomes. There was also increasing attention being paid to determining how business schools can differentiate themselves from their competitors;
2. That income generation remains a top priority for business schools and they are often the first port of call for the central university in relation to additional contribution;
3. That there is often a disconnect between budgets for academic staff and professional staff i.e. growth in academic staff numbers is often not matched by a similar growth in professional staff numbers. As a result, professional staff often have no capacity to cope with changing stakeholders and new initiatives.

The main challenge facing professional services in business schools is the high workload and under-resourcing, often caused by rapid and/or sustained growth in student numbers that has not been matched by investment in services teams. HESA data shows that between 2014/15 to 2018/19, the number of FTE academic staff in the Business and Management cost centre grew from 11,550 to 13,220, a proportional increase of 14%<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, the total non-academic staff in the Business and Management cost centre fell by 1% over the same period, from 4,750 to 4,685.

<sup>4</sup>HESA 'HE staff FTE by HE provider and cost centre' 2020/21, table 11

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff/areas>

Data for the years after 2018/19 was excluded from the long-term comparison in the commentary as after 2018/19 the reporting of non-academic staff in the HESA staff return became voluntary.

*"So, I think the university has got an understanding for what it wants for a business school but less of an understanding for the business school to get there"*

*"Even though the academic budgets might grow, and academic endeavours and initiatives might be developed and attempted, the professional services budgets are constrained in the university, and so we can't grow the professional services staff needed to support the academic endeavour"*

Some schools have found that senior management may be content to invest only in additional academic staff, which can leave schools struggling to maintain strong recruitment and/or student satisfaction, and to perform functions not all academic units need to deliver (such as securing and maintaining accreditations).

The pandemic placed additional financial pressure and uncertainties on many universities and in some instances, precipitated a rapid move to centralise a range of professional services as a way of cutting costs. Focus group participants described the resulting loss of autonomy as posing new challenges, as Deans and Heads of Professional Services had to quickly learn how to negotiate a sufficient 'share' of centralised resource to be able to meet the demands placed upon them to ramp up their own income generation for the financial wellbeing of the parent university. The interviews further highlighted that centralised professional services staff are also often lacking in capacity due to being responsible for serving multiple faculties/departments. In addition, in some cases centralisation of posts can lead to functions being partly delivered in a school or faculty team and partly via a central directorate, with schools receiving requests for action or reports from multiple sources.

Many interviewees reported frustration that while their business school generated a large proportion of the surplus for their university, this does not translate to investment back into the school. This can lead to staff burnout with "academic staff creaking at the seams" and professional services teams which are "super-lean". It can also cause issues when seeking accreditations as business school accrediting bodies look for a degree of financial autonomy. There was consensus in the focus groups that the data reporting cycle expected by the centre had become increasingly demanding, and had resulted in professional services staff feeling overwhelmed at times and left struggling to meet the requirements for data reporting alongside their responsibilities to deliver the business school's academic mission.

The lack of financial autonomy experienced by most focus group participants and interviewees can mean that Heads of Professional Services spend days each year compiling business cases for extra or replacement staff and/or for non-pay costs such as new furniture or PCs, to secure the necessary budget from centrally-controlled budgets. Having to make the case for what might look like special treatment, in order to maintain market share or to launch new knowledge transfer partnerships, and not being certain of support for those business cases, is causing professional managers and their Deans considerable if not chronic stress.

Many participants expressed the need for more resource to underpin or drive business school success - the value of professional services staff - whilst lamenting that services staff are only seen in terms of their financial cost. Under-resourced professional services teams lead to overworked academics who have to take on additional administrative responsibilities and manage without support for potentially impactful new projects. Opportunities are missed through the lack of capacity to take forward novel programmes, partnerships, and research. There are hidden costs of not investing in service teams. Several suggestions were made as to how to make an effective case to the centre for additional staff, including benchmarking of student-to-staff ratios compared to other business schools,

*"We'll only get additional staff if we can show that we've increased our income, so you've got to get the income first in order to get the resource which will lag behind, which is a bit of a problem because you're always putting your staff under duress in order to kind of backfill the resource that you'd needed up front"*

*"But it's just all these different customers that you have to service all the time, so it's your students, your partners, your alumni, your business contacts, the university itself, your other colleagues"*

hiring staff for specific projects on fixed-term rather than permanent contracts and articulating how additional resource might generate new income for the business school.

### Investment priorities

Focus group participants shared their investment priorities, with digital technology skills and equipment for blended, hybrid or online delivery of teaching being a common focus. Blended delivery is now expected by students but this requires the central university to support investment in digital infrastructure, including training for staff on how to use it. For some teaching staff a degree of cultural change may be needed to acclimatise to the blended model. Support for the mental health and wellbeing of both students and staff was also a frequently cited target for investment; a service that is often provided effectively via a centralised team, these roles also work well when placed locally in the school itself.

The need to plan for and develop additional high-quality space to serve student growth and keep attracting strong cohorts emerged as another priority area during interviews, as did a desire to invest in more reliable and usable data systems to inform school management decision-making and help facilitate the growth in student numbers expected by the centre. The qualitative research highlights that some business schools do not have the systems needed to generate robust data reports promptly, thus requiring staff to resort to inefficient workarounds.

Two further professional services were flagged as areas where schools would strongly value having greater local control over how these are resourced, to improve not only how those services are delivered but also how the business school meets its strategic objectives, namely Human Resources (HR) and alumni engagement. Participants felt that investing in an effective HR team would take pressure off the business/executive support teams in schools that typically have high staff turnover and would potentially improve staff retention and foster a better working culture. Participants also reported that centralisation of alumni management leads to a poorer quality of engagement with more focus on fundraising. Some schools feel they can make a far greater impact with more control over alumni engagement, and can also better meet the expectations of accrediting bodies with in-house teams ensuring that alumni can help inform programme design and review, support student employability work and contribute to fundraising. The interviews highlighted executive education as a market with significant growth potential but for this to be realised schools need investment in a B2B marketing function. Similarly, if research income is to be increased there needs to be investment in resources to win and deliver the research contracts.

### Improving collaborative working between the school and the centre

#### *Being known and understood*

A disconnect between business schools and central university structures and teams formed an important theme in the focus groups and interviews. When change projects are underway, seeking to centralise a service or function, it is vital for the project lead, typically from a central professional services directorate, to map how the processes work in, through, and across academic schools, to avoid the error

*"We could have far more people on our executive courses if we had a B2B marketing outfit"*

*"But I think in some areas, the focus needs to change. So for example we need to have more focus on staff development now than we've ever had before, particularly with technology and the impacts of hybrid delivery and things like that, and currently I don't think there's enough time or focus on developing people"*

of centralising 90% of a function only to leave 10% un-resourced or ambiguously defined (where it's not clear whether the newly centralised team will fulfil some 'bespoke' elements or if this will be left to schools). It was remarked in the focus groups that it would be more effective if decisions on the location or level of resourcing for a particular function were driven by a desire to design a quality service rather than simply reducing costs.

Participants shared their concern that often central university teams and committees often overlook the peculiarities of business schools, with their outward focus on engagement with business, large and diverse communities of students including executives and apprentices, and the quest for international recognition by accrediting bodies. Interview participants commented that business schools require a degree of autonomy and flexibility to be able to operate effectively, which may not always align with university strategy and internal processes. For example apprenticeships, which involve assessments by Ofsted and relations with employers, entail very different processes from normal degrees and do not fit neatly into university processes. A similar tension exists around accreditations and the need to demonstrate to the accrediting bodies the business school - rather than the university - strategy. This results in the challenge of writing a business school strategy which whilst aligned with the overall university strategy may need to demonstrate a degree of autonomy and legitimate difference in areas such as internationalisation, alumni engagement, and student support.

Making sure that representatives from professional services and academic schools are invited to sit on university committees and project teams is seen as a collegial way to avoid decisions being made that fail to meet the needs of staff and schools, or that come as surprises with no prior consultation. Business schools can work with their parent universities to effect valuable change internally, where there is a shared 'can-do' culture. If working relations between senior staff in the business school and the university are healthy it is much easier to facilitate change. Mutual recognition of a shared purpose and values can be powerful in overcoming tensions during negotiations between different parts of the institution.

Nothing beats the value of a Dean, however, in getting a business school's interests heard. This means being vocal if new policies or processes are set to be imposed that would adversely affect the business school. Having a clear business school strategy set by the Dean with active buy-in from the university senior management will provide a mandate for the resource requests required to deliver that strategy. This clarity of understanding helps to reduce the risk of tensions that can develop during resource negotiations. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (or equivalent role) and the business school advisory board can be key stakeholders in developing and obtaining approval for the strategy.

### ***Location of professional services staff: What is optimal and why does it matter?***

An overriding theme from the discussions on location of staff was that having professional services staff embedded within the school was the preferred approach, either via business partnering or a 'hub-and-spoke' model.

Business partnering is a common approach for services such as Finance and HR and can deliver successful outcomes for both parties. When school representatives

*“And what our employers will want, and what our apprentices will want, is not the same as what a degree student would want. We've got to work differently with them”.*

are invited to sit on the recruitment panel for a new business partner, this allows a school to have input from the outset on the skills required for this type of collaborative working. Ensuring business partners are regularly invited to school meetings and are encouraged to be co-located for part of the working week also fosters improved collaboration and makes them feel that they are part of the school. Involving business partners in planning processes can foster a sense of shared goals, improving their commitment and service to the school. Interview participants stressed that the aim of business partnering should be effective delivery of a medium-term (two to three years) strategic plan, rather than parachuting in to manage crises or provide short-term support.

Under the 'hub-and-spoke' model, a school pays for the resource but this is managed within a central professional services function. Interview participants believe that staff being located in the school results in better service outcomes, and location may be more important than who holds line management responsibility.

What ultimately determines the quality of a service is who designs and delivers it, not where they sit or are line managed. Interview participants reflected that the closeness of working relationships and the willingness of central staff to interact directly with business school staff, both academic and professional services staff, were essential for making any delivery model work effectively, and as one participant articulated *"You can make any of these models work, it's all about the people, it's nothing but about the people."*

### **Improving collaboration**

Participants in the focus groups and at the Professional Managers' Conference were generous in sharing with one another their experiences of and tips for improved collaboration with service leads and teams outside the business school. These findings have informed the conclusions and recommendations below, and the project team are most grateful to all Heads of Professional Services who have made constructive suggestions for improving how business schools and centralised services can better meet the needs of students, staff, businesses, and wider stakeholders.

*"So one of the things I'm trying to push for is more business partner models, so we have designated people we can build relationships with and they can get to understand the complexity of business schools, etc"*

*"We tend to find if we do it as an individual school basis, we get nowhere, but if we do it as all 12 schools in our university, if we do it as very much joined up; we might have slightly different requirements, but we all are saying the same thing, that we need X, Y, Z, that has definitely worked better than doing it on an individual level"*

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has been a long time in gestation. The Professional Managers' Committee of the Chartered ABS first discussed researching professional services resourcing levels and operating models in 2019, as many members were facing calls to streamline or cut costs in teams, even whilst student numbers grew and new initiatives such as apprenticeships or transnational education were launched. The aim was to support professional managers as a community, to help one another in implementing radical changes to service delivery and in arguing for increased or different resource.

The initial focus was on the impact of centralisation of professional services on business school operations, to gauge which way the pendulum was swinging – towards centralisation (which seemed to be the case) or back towards decentralisation – and to build on existing literature that explored the benefits and pitfalls of centralisation. As ambitions for the project were refined, the committee shared experiences of areas of professional services expertise that are needed specifically in and for business schools, expertise that is often diluted or wholly lost during university centralisation efforts. Whilst specialist professional services areas are highly visible in many disciplines (such as drama, film, modern languages, and all the sciences), the 'specialness' of business schools is less immediately evident to those outside the discipline. The project aimed to find out which service functions really had to be held locally, as well as what level of resourcing business schools had – and felt they needed.

The findings have been a combination of startling and heartening. Startling in that almost no school reports that any service area is over-resourced. Startling in that almost all schools shared that they were reviewing and recasting their existing professional services resource, either to support income diversification or free up capacity to address strategic imperatives, or to try to catch up with growth in student numbers and needs. Heartening in that a number of colleagues have forged effective allegiances with colleagues in similar roles in other academic disciplines within the institution to present compelling cases for specific additional or distinctive resources in their schools. Heartening in that professional managers have gladly given their time to share with the community what has worked for them, when seeking to build trust and establish a degree of autonomy for their schools.

## Conclusions

1. There is strong interest in these questions of whether professional services staff are deployed to the right functions and working in the best structures. The high level of responses to the survey, on a par with the 2021 Chartered ABS Annual Membership Survey, demonstrates the appetite amongst Deans

There is strong interest in these questions of whether professional services staff are deployed to the right functions and working in the best structures.

and Heads of Professional Services to gather more intelligence about how others are facing staffing challenges.

2. A sense that business schools are under-resourced is shared across almost all respondents. Even when looking at arguably the most essential service area – supporting teaching and learning via programme administration, student support, and careers support – around half of schools say they do not have sufficient posts. Any approved investment for expansion in teams lags behind growth in student numbers, leaving staff feeling chronically overworked and unable to respond creatively to new opportunities or directives from university senior management. Although the centre often expects professional services staff to take forward strategic initiatives developed at university level, capacity to deliver 'business as usual' activities at school level may already be constrained.
3. The majority of business schools have described how they are reviewing and recasting existing professional services resource, with interesting and diverse reasons provided. There is a sense of trying to "move our pieces around the board" to keep functions served. The focus groups and interviews described how this non-stop effort can leave managers and their teams feeling exhausted and under-appreciated. As schools are asked to do more – to take in extra students, launch new programmes, or diversify income – with no funding for additional professional services staff, business school teams feel stretched thin to the point of invisibility.
4. Very few universities are fully centralised or decentralised, instead varying their approach between functions to try to yield the best results without excessive cost. Functions such as student welfare and engagement, or research administration may be staffed both in schools and centrally. Securing a consistently easy and effective working relationship between the local and central teams is possible. The resourcing levels reported here reflect only those under the control of schools.
5. Relationship management is perhaps the most crucial skill for Heads of Professional Service. Business partnering models, where senior members of central HR, Finance, and IT teams serve as linkage points for service managers in schools, can work extremely well, when both sides of each pairing have the time and competence to truly listen to one another and seek solutions that serve both the needs of the university as a whole and of the school.
6. Collaborating with senior level colleagues, such as Directors of Operations, within other faculties can be a powerful means to determine the separation of responsibility and accountability between the centre and school-based professional services teams. This can be thought of as collective bargaining, where senior colleagues across different faculties present a united front when negotiating where specific services should sit, case by case and school by school.

Very few universities are fully centralised or decentralised, instead varying their approach between functions to try to yield the best results without excessive cost.

## Recommendations

### 1. Provide data for what you need

Evidence-based business cases for investment or alternative delivery models can be very effective. These should be data-driven, using Chartered ABS data and other sources such as JISC for comparator information and for benchmarking. Where possible, 'buzz' words that resonate with senior managers in the university should be included. Business cases should set out the context of the business school's operating environment in terms of the relatively high number of international students, involvement in accreditations and rankings, and align this context with the resources required by the school to operate effectively.

### 2. Map user journeys

When a change in service delivery model is proposed, 'user journeys' must be mapped out to determine precisely who is responsible for each step and likely outcome in a process. This reduces the risk that a service will be largely centralised (taking the resource out of the school) except in especially difficult cases. Ambiguity over responsibility should be avoided – if programme administration is to be centralised, will this also include executive education and short courses or will the school be left to handle those whilst the resource and expertise is moved to a central team?

### 3. Network

Commit to meeting with senior managers in other schools, both in other disciplines and across the Chartered ABS network; connections made via Heads of Professional Services meetings and conferences can be helpful in working through which arguments can be most usefully made in the face of under-resourcing in key areas, and in providing evidence of benchmarking against peers.

### 4. Showcase what you do as a school

Not feeling valued, not feeling understood, and not feeling supported go together - this is a call to action! It is the responsibility of business school leaders to better communicate what makes business schools special and just different enough, even whilst supporting and furthering the university strategy. Craft and share a consistent and concise message to colleagues across the university about what the school is doing that sits outside the normal expectations for an academic unit. University senior managers and central professional services directors may be wholly unaware of the breadth of business school activities. Invite into the school the senior role-holders who need to know and understand the differences.

### 5. Invite colleagues to get to know the school

Build greater awareness and understanding of how the school runs amongst key stakeholders in central service teams by inviting colleagues to attend school service team meetings. Strengthen rapport by making time for social meetings during the working week. Offer to serve on project teams exploring how to improve central team processes and invite representatives back in turn to change project teams in the school.

It is the responsibility of business school leaders to better communicate what makes business schools special and just different enough, even whilst supporting and furthering the university strategy.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 – QUESTIONS FOR SURVEY ON PROFESSIONAL SERVICES MODELS

### *About the structure of your school*

Q1. Is your business school:

- A standalone higher education institution (not part of a university)
- An academic unit that does not report into any intermediate body like a Faculty or a College
- An academic unit that does report into an intermediate body like a Faculty or College
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please describe)

Q2. Do you expect to see the structure change in the future? If so, how and when?

### *Resourcing of professional services areas in your school*

Q3. For each of the areas listed at a.to v. below, please tell us:

- How many professional services staff (full-time equivalent) you have working for your business school's needs? (FTE range options: 0, 1-3, 4-6, 7+)
- Whether you find this level to be under-resourced, about right, or over-resourced
- Whether they are organisationally located in your school, are shared across a group of schools, or whether they are organisationally located in a central team?

**Note:** Where staff work across functions, please select the one that best represents the majority of their role.

Q3a. Please insert here details of any additional areas of professional services for your school

Q3b. If you selected 'Other' within the 'Location of Staff' drop-down list for any of the areas of a. to v. in the previous question, please give a brief description of the location of staff for each area as applicable

Q4. For each area in a. to v. please tell us where the costs of these staff are charged to, and who manages these staff?

- Where staff costs are charged
  - Directly charged to school
  - Charged to larger academic unit such as Faculty
  - Centrally provided
  - N/A – we do not have professional services staff in this area
- Responsibility for management of staff
  - Managed in the school
  - Managed in a larger academic unit
  - Managed centrally
  - N/A – we do not have professional services staff in this area

Professional services areas reported on in Q3 and Q4:

a) Programme administration; b) Student engagement and retention; c) Student welfare; d) Careers, skills and employability; e) Alumni engagement and fundraising/development; f) executive education; g) Transnational education; h) Degree apprenticeships; i) Supporting educational technology; j) Student recruitment and marketing; k) Staff recruitment and development; l) Executive support; m) Equality, diversity and inclusion; n) Facilities management; o) Financial management; p) Research administration; q) Knowledge transfer activities; r) Business development; s) Accreditations; t) Projects office; u) Data analytics; v) Internal communications, public relations and events

Q4a. Please insert here details of any additional areas of professional services for your school

### ***Future plans in the areas of professional services***

- Q5. If you are in the process of making additional investment in any area, why is this (e.g. due to seeking accreditations or diversifying income streams)?
- Q6. Have there been any discussions in the last three years about changing how these services are delivered? Please describe.

### ***Participation in follow-up research***

- Q7. Would you be willing to take part in a focus group or interview to further explore some of the issues around centralisation and specialisation of professional services staff?
- Yes
  - No
  - Other (please specify)

## **APPENDIX 2 – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

- What's the expectation of your central university as to how professional services operate in your business school?
- Are there any pressures you are presently under? For example, to centralise some services or to reduce staffing in some areas?
- Which professional service functions have you found most need to be delivered locally, i.e within the business school itself?
- And which have you found to be easiest to centralise or share across other academic areas? Have any such centralisation moves improved services for your business school?
- Have you experienced effective "business partnering" with central service teams? If so, what do you think made it so effective in this case?
- What has been effective in securing a measure of autonomy in your business school?
- If you were to invest in any professional services areas, what would they be?

### APPENDIX 3 – SCHOOL ACCREDITATION STATUS AND STAFF FTE ACROSS PROFESSIONAL SERVICES FUNCTIONS

Note: due to rounding the numbers in the below tables may not sum precisely to 100%.

	<b>[a. Programme administration] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	0%	8%	0%	92%	100%
No accreditations % of total	0%	10%	14%	76%	100%
All responding schools % of total	0%	9%	7%	84%	100%

	<b>[b. Student engagement and retention] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	17%	39%	17%	26%	100%
No accreditations % of total	14%	52%	29%	5%	100%
All responding schools % of total	16%	45%	23%	16%	100%

	<b>[c. Student welfare] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	9%	30%	22%	39%	100%
No accreditations % of total	14%	38%	33%	14%	100%
All responding schools % of total	11%	34%	27%	27%	100%

	<b>[d. Careers, skills and employability] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	4%	29%	29%	38%	100%
No accreditations % of total	5%	48%	24%	24%	100%
All responding schools % of total	4%	38%	27%	31%	100%

	<b>[e. Alumni engagement and fundraising/development] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	13%	46%	21%	21%	100%
No accreditations % of total	26%	74%	0%	0%	100%
All responding schools % of total	19%	58%	12%	12%	100%

	<b>[f. Executive education] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	25%	17%	33%	25%	100%
No accreditations % of total	32%	42%	16%	11%	100%
All responding schools % of total	28%	28%	26%	19%	100%

	<b>[g. Transnational education] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	38%	29%	13%	21%	100%
No accreditations % of total	25%	55%	15%	5%	100%
All responding schools % of total	32%	41%	14%	14%	100%

	<b>[h. Degree apprenticeships] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	42%	38%	4%	17%	100%
No accreditations % of total	40%	25%	35%	0%	100%
All responding schools % of total	41%	32%	18%	9%	100%

	<b>[i. Supporting educational technology] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	8%	46%	17%	29%	100%
No accreditations % of total	20%	45%	25%	10%	100%
All responding schools % of total	14%	45%	20%	20%	100%

	<b>[j. Student recruitment and marketing] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	4%	25%	13%	58%	100%
No accreditations % of total	5%	50%	30%	15%	100%
All responding schools % of total	5%	36%	20%	39%	100%

	<b>[k. Staff recruitment and development] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	13%	58%	13%	17%	100%
No accreditations % of total	16%	58%	16%	11%	100%
All responding schools % of total	14%	58%	14%	14%	100%

	<b>[l. Executive support] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	4%	63%	21%	13%	100%
No accreditations % of total	10%	71%	5%	14%	100%
All responding schools % of total	7%	67%	13%	13%	100%

	<b>[m. Equality, diversity and inclusion] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	48%	39%	4%	9%	100%
No accreditations % of total	53%	37%	5%	5%	100%
All responding schools % of total	50%	38%	5%	7%	100%

	<b>[n. Facilities management] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	8%	54%	8%	29%	100%
No accreditations % of total	22%	50%	17%	11%	100%
All responding schools % of total	14%	52%	12%	21%	100%

	<b>[o. Financial management] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	4%	63%	17%	17%	100%
No accreditations % of total	0%	85%	10%	5%	100%
All responding schools % of total	2%	73%	14%	11%	100%

	<b>[p. Research administration] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	4%	46%	42%	8%	100%
No accreditations % of total	5%	74%	21%	0%	100%
All responding schools % of total	5%	58%	33%	5%	100%

	<b>[q. Knowledge transfer activities] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	33%	54%	4%	8%	100%
No accreditations % of total	26%	53%	16%	5%	100%
All responding schools % of total	30%	53%	9%	7%	100%

	<b>[r. Business development] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	8%	63%	17%	13%	100%
No accreditations % of total	10%	80%	0%	10%	100%
All responding schools % of total	9%	70%	9%	11%	100%

	<b>[s. Accreditations] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	0%	92%	8%	0%	100%
No accreditations % of total	24%	76%	0%	0%	100%
All responding schools % of total	11%	84%	4%	0%	100%

	<b>[t. Projects office] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	38%	50%	4%	8%	100%
No accreditations % of total	38%	52%	10%	0%	100%
All responding schools % of total	38%	51%	7%	4%	100%

	<b>[u. Data analytics] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	17%	79%	0%	4%	100%
No accreditations % of total	35%	60%	0%	5%	100%
All responding schools % of total	25%	70%	0%	5%	100%

	<b>[v. Internal communications] staff no.</b>				
	<b>0 FTE</b>	<b>1-3 FTE</b>	<b>4-6 FTE</b>	<b>7+ FTE</b>	<b>Total</b>
1-3 Accreditations % of total	9%	48%	26%	17%	100%
No accreditations % of total	24%	67%	5%	5%	100%
All responding schools % of total	16%	57%	16%	11%	100%



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