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Business Studies: An Overview of Undergraduate Studies in the UK

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Foreword

This is one of three subject overview reports that have been prepared as part of the SOMUL project (the full title of the project is *What is learned at university? The social and organisational mediation of university learning (SOMUL)*). The project is part of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. SOMUL is being undertaken by a research team from the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information and the Institute of Educational Technology at the Open University and the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning at the University of Stirling. The aim of the project is to increase our understanding of the learning outcomes from an increasingly diverse higher education system and to investigate how these are socially and organisationally mediated.

The present phase of the project is focusing on student learning in three subjects: biochemistry, business studies and sociology. Students studying in five different university settings in each of these subjects are being asked about their experiences and their perceptions of learning over a two year period. As part of the context setting for the study, overview papers have been prepared for each of the three subjects. The purposes of the overviews are two-fold: (i) to sensitise the research team to subject cultures and issues relevant to designing and conducting the fieldwork; (ii) to provide a basis for eventual comparison of empirical findings on the three subjects and the assessment of their applicability to other subjects. Later in the project, we shall be investigating student learning in a further five subjects.

We are grateful to the authors for preparing these reports and to the support provided by the three relevant subject centres of the Higher Education Academy. All three reports and further information about the SOMUL project are available on the project website at www.open.ac.uk/cheri/SOMULhome.htm.

John Brennan
Project Director
August 2005

Introduction

This report is intended as an overview of Business Studies at undergraduate level in the UK and also to highlight factors which may differentiate schools across different institutions. Three main areas will be addressed: First, a summary of what is meant by 'Business Studies' will be attempted for what is a very diverse area of study and if possible some core components of study will be highlighted. Second, some historical account of the rise in popularity of this study area will be outlined, including changes in teaching numbers and other statistics taken from available sources such as HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency). Finally a brief review of the literature will serve to underline problems and differences unique to the discipline.

The underlying aim of this document is to provide some basis on which to examine potential collaborator institutions for inclusion into the Social and Organisational Mediation of University Learning (SOMUL) project funded by the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme. A summary of the overall project is attached as an Appendix.

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Business Studies as an Undergraduate Course

Unlike Psychology, which seems an umbrella term for a few distinct named degrees, 'Business Studies' seems to capture very varied schemes of taught undergraduate degrees. For example, Cardiff University lists the following:

Degree Schema/UCAS Code
Honours BSc
Psychology C800 BSc/Ps3
Applied Psychology (4 years) C810 BSc/AP4
Honours BA
Psychology C802 BA/Ps
Applied Psychology (4 years) C812 BA/APs4
Joint Honours BSc
Physiology and Psychology BC18 BSc/PhysPs
Joint Honours BScEcon
Psychology and Criminology CM89 BScEcon/PC
Joint Honours BA
Psychology and Education CX83 BA/EdPs

Degree Schema/UCAS Code
Honours BSc
Accounting N400 BSc/Ac
Accounting and Finance N490 BSc/AcF
Business Administration N200 BSc/BA
Accounting with a European Language N410 BSc/IAc
Business Administration with a European Language N290 BSc/IBA
Economics with a European Language L160 BSc/IEc
Honours BScEcon
Banking and Finance N300 BScEcon/BF
Business Economics L114 BScEcon/BE
Economics L100 BScEcon/EC
Joint Honours BSc
Business Studies and Japanese NT12 BSc/BSJ
Joint Honours BScEcon
Accounting and Economics LN14 BScEcon/AE
Accounting and Management NN24 BScEcon/AM
Business Administration and Transport Management NN29 BSc/BATM
Business Economics and Transport Management LN19 BScEcon/BT
Economics and Management Studies LN12 BScEcon/EM
Economics or Industrial Relations and a Humanities Subject see p73, p102, p116

Sheffield University produces a similar pattern; for undergraduate courses their web site for Psychology indicates there are four schemes available, while the Management School lists 11 courses with Business Studies in their title. A number of other UK HE institutions seem to follow this pattern: QAA sources indicate that as of June 1999 there are around seven thousand UK Honours degree programmes that have in their title "business" and/or "management". These include individually named awards, modular degrees, pathways and programme specifications, which are delivered both within and outside business schools. The number of programmes offered by institutions varies widely, from single programmes in one or two cases, to over five hundred in institutions with large modular degree schemes. It becomes apparent that there is great diversity of specialism in business studies, and this also goes some way to indicate the popularity of these schemes in that so many are supported. Courses run for three or four years, the longer period occurring in Scotland generally or in England with work experience, which sometimes is undertaken abroad. Recently work placement has become less common and 'thin' sandwich courses have developed where time is taken out in a number of smaller bites. Part-time study is also an option at many institutions.

QAA Benchmark Statements

Perhaps the best description of 'What is Business Studies' is found at the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/benchmark/honours.htm> website in 2004. This information takes the form of benchmark statements that refer directly to bachelor degrees with honours for general business and management programmes but do not cover courses aimed at particular business functions such as marketing. The following is an abridgment of the information provided by the QAA benchmark process and ABS (Association of Business Schools) website <http://www.the-abs.org.uk/>.

Business and management programmes can be categorised as having three main aims:

1. **The study of organisations, their management and the changing external environment in which they operate.** "Organisations" should be understood throughout this text, to include a wide range of different types including, for example, public, private and not-for-profit, together with a comprehensive range of sizes and structures of organisations.
2. **Preparation for and development of a career in business and management.** "Preparation for business" should be taken to mean the development of a range of specific business knowledge and skills, together with the improved self-awareness and personal development appropriate to graduate careers in business with the potential for management positions. This includes the encouragement of positive and critical attitudes towards change and enterprise, so as to reflect the dynamism and vibrancy of the business environment.
3. **Enhancement of lifelong learning skills and personal development to contribute to society at large.** Not every graduate will engage subsequently in a business and management career, or have entered directly from secondary education. Therefore, "lifelong learning skills" should be understood to include the development and enhancement of a range of general transferable intellectual and study skills, which whilst being highly appropriate to a career in business and management are not restricted to this (QAA, 2004).

Importantly for the current SOMUL research project, it appears that while there is a clear expectation that all such general degree programmes should cover these three purposes, the actual balance will vary among individual HEIs and may also reflect the requirements for recognition by particular professional bodies. The particular balance being delivered should be explicit and demonstrated in terms of the specified learning outcomes of particular programmes.

Relevant knowledge and understanding

There is an expectation that degree programmes should provide broad, analytical and integrated study of business and management. Graduates will be able to demonstrate relevant knowledge and understanding of organisations, the external environment in which they operate and how they are managed. There is likely to be an emphasis upon understanding and responding to change and the consideration of the future of organisations and the external environment in which they operate. The inter-relationships among and the integration of these areas are important within the overall student learning experience, and should be demonstrated in the capabilities of successful graduates from all modes of delivery.

"Organisations" - encompasses the internal aspects, functions and processes of organisations including their diverse nature, purposes, structures, governance, operations and management, together with the individual and corporate behaviours and cultures which exist within and between organisations and their influence upon the external environment.

"External environment" - encompasses a wide range of factors, including economic, environmental, ethical, legal, political, sociological and technological, together with their effects at local, national and international levels upon the strategy, behaviour and management of organisations.

"Management" - encompasses the various processes, procedures and practices for effective management of organisations. It includes theories, models, frameworks, tasks and roles of management together with rational analysis and other processes of decision making within organisations and in relation to the external environment (QAA, 2004).

Within the framework of these three main areas, it is expected that graduates will also be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding in the following: markets; customers; finance; people; operations; information systems; communication and information technology; business policy and strategy; contemporary & pervasive issues.

Skills

Graduates are expected to be able to demonstrate a certain range of cognitive and intellectual skills together with specific business techniques. Personal and inter-personal skills are also important. These include:

- a. Cognitive skills of critical thinking, analysis and synthesis. This includes the capability to identify assumptions, evaluate statements in terms of evidence, to detect false logic or reasoning, to identify implicit values, to define terms adequately and generalise appropriately.
- b. Effective problem solving and decision making using appropriate quantitative and qualitative skills including identifying, formulating and solving business problems. The ability to create, evaluate and assess a range of options together with the capacity to apply ideas and knowledge to a range of situations.
- c. Effective communication, oral and in writing, using a range of media which are widely used in business, for example, the preparation and presentation of business reports.
- d. Numeracy and quantitative skills including data analysis, interpretation and extrapolation. The use of models of business problems and phenomena.
- e. Effective use of communication and information technology for business applications.
- f. Effective self-management in terms of time, planning and behaviour, motivation, self-starting, individual initiative and enterprise.
- g. Learning to learn and developing an appetite for learning; reflective, adaptive and collaborative learning.
- h. Self awareness, openness and sensitivity to diversity in terms of people, cultures, business and management issues.

- i. Effective performance, within a team environment including: leadership, team building, influencing and project management skills.
- j. Interpersonal skills of effective listening, negotiating, persuasion and presentation.
- k. Abilities to conduct research into business and management issues, either individually or as part of a team for projects/dissertations/presentations. This requires familiarity with a range of business data, research sources and appropriate methodologies and for such to inform the overall learning process.

It is recognised that all programmes covered by these benchmark standards need to address issues at the European and international levels. Where specific emphasis is placed upon this for example, in the title or in requiring study or work abroad, then appropriate foreign language capability and business and cultural understanding should normally be developed and demonstrated by graduates (QAA, 2004).

Learning, teaching and assessment

There should be a learning and teaching strategy, that makes explicit and demonstrable the appropriateness of the learning and teaching methods used in relation to the anticipated learning outcomes and skills being developed, linked to the mode of delivery and the student profile. There should be integration between theory and practice by a variety of means according to the mode of delivery including: work experience or placement, exposure to business issues, visits, and inputs from visiting practising managers. There should be an assessment strategy which makes explicit and demonstrable the appropriateness of the assessment methods used in relation to the learning and teaching strategy adopted and the anticipated learning outcomes and skills being developed. Overall the assessment methods should aim to assess achievement, both formatively and summatively, over the whole of the degree programme. It is recognised that achievement in certain (skills) components may be difficult to assess. Nevertheless graduates will be expected to have attained appropriate achievement in knowledge, understanding and skills taken as a whole (QAA, 2004).

Standards of achievement

The standards of achievement expected of graduates in business and management are set out below. These relate to the areas of relevant knowledge, understanding and skills, set out above. Three categories which differentiate graduate achievement were identified during the QAA benchmarking process, namely threshold, modal, top. These are based upon the perceived national norms operating across the business and management area. It is expected that the proportion of graduates in each of the three achievement categories may vary over time, within and between institutions.

Threshold graduates: Have knowledge and understanding of the key areas of business and management, the relationships between these, their application and their importance in an integrated framework. Have demonstrated competence within the range of area specific and intellectual skills. Have a view of business and management which is predominantly influenced by guided learning with a bounded critical perspective.

Modal graduates: Have a wide knowledge and understanding of the broad range of areas of business and management and the detailed relationships between these, their application and their importance in an integrated framework. Consistently demonstrate a command of area specific skills including application of knowledge, as well as proficiency in intellectual skills. Have a view of business and management which is influenced by a variety of learning sources including guided learning, team work and independent study. Are distinguished from the threshold category by their enhanced capacity to develop and apply their own grounded and informed perspectives to their studies, deal with uncertainty and complexity, explore alternative solutions, demonstrate critical evaluation and integrate theory and practice in a wide range of situations.

Top graduates: Have comprehensive knowledge and understanding across a wide range, and in depth, of business and management areas and the complex relationships among these, their application and their importance in an integrated framework. Consistently demonstrate excellence in area specific skills and intellectual skills. Are self-aware and have a strong interpersonal focus together with the capability to operate effectively in a variety of team roles including leadership. Have a view of business and management derived from a wide variety of learning sources including independent study, reflection, group activities and guided learning. Are distinguished from the modal category by their additional creativity and adaptability. They bring originality, insight and superior critical and reflective abilities to bear upon their knowledge, and have the capability to evaluate and integrate theory and practice in a comprehensive range of situations (QAA, 2004).

Summary of benchmark statements

The benchmark statements above set a challenging standard and really describe the ideal institution. The balance of how different departments meet these statements will obviously vary a great deal considering the many constraints imposed by financial and situational limits. For the SOMUL project the statements provide one way to compare one institution against another. To this end it is worthwhile to break all the statements down into a simplified core ethic. After reading the statements it is clear that the initial three main aims of a business management programme laid out at the start of the section are in fact key to the type of study the QAA wishes to see provided: An understanding of organisations, their management and the environmental setting; preparation for a career in business; the enhancement of overall learning skills and personal development. As already suggested, the way in which each of these is provided is likely to vary across institutions.

Considering student attainment, it seems that what differentiates between the three classes of attainment (threshold, modal and top) is the level of critical evaluation and theory application. This is interesting as there is some evidence that the level of critical analysis and theory taught may be influenced by the background of the core lecturers (Macfarlane, 1998). The weight put on critical understanding will impact both the balance of provision outlined in the three key aims and the level of student attainment, a point to return to later.

Core Scope of Undergraduate Study

As outlined above there are possibly three main aims in providing a Business Management degree, but the method by which they may be achieved is very diverse. This must make it somewhat difficult for both employers and students to realise what such a degree will generally encompass. While some students and employers will be looking for specifics such as marketing, other will want a broader scope of understanding that may be more widely useful. Discovering what core elements could be present is therefore useful in general and especial for this project when trying to compare courses. Fortunately the CRAC (Careers Research and Advisory Centre) handbook has attempted to do just this (Smith, 2003). This is not to say all the following areas will be included in all courses - Business Studies is too diverse for that - rather it is a taxonomy of the general areas that can be selected to make up courses.

Strategic management

Strategic management evaluates the purpose of a business, where it has strengths and weaknesses, where additional resources should be employed. Strategy also has to integrate other business functions such as personnel and project planning. So this course should cut across other more specific courses. Sometimes this is formalised as corporate planning.

Human resource management

Historically the management of staff welfare and selection, this area has now expanded to include industrial relations and the improvement of organisational effectiveness in technical and managerial skills.

Manufacturing management/Operations management

Quality control is the central aspect of manufacturing management. Following a Japanese model, high-quality goods with no defects are the aim, and many of the Japanese ideals are still contemporary. Knowledge gained in this area will be applicable beyond manufacturing. Operations management is more the overall study of the main activity of the company that results in profit, perhaps operations of the factory floor or even a solicitor giving advice to clients and preparing paperwork, but it is still the management of the fundamental activity of the business.

Marketing

This is the link between the company and its customers, covering everything from market research and product design to distribution and analysis of sales results. To include marketing analysis; understanding the market environment, understanding customers and buyers behaviour. Also e-marketing, marketing research and marketing communication

Financial services/ Financial management

Financial services is simply the study of banking and insurance; financial management goes beyond this to an understanding of the general financial situation: profit, cash flow and funding. More generally the understanding of concepts and principles that underlie the investment and decision process.

Business information systems

This is an understanding of complex computer applications in information technology and the general use of computers in business. This has become especially important with the advent of distributed systems, so that most courses include some elements of 'information systems' as a subject area.

Statistics and operational research

This is the use of computers and mathematics for the precise analysis of complex business problems, an increasingly important area as numerical data become more widely available and complex. Specifically it includes the use of probability, tests of significance, correlation and quantitative methods. When the quantitative methods are developed especially for management, they often form a separate subject called operational research.

Economics

This studies the flow of goods, services and money between industries, countries and people. It includes the theoretical and practical understanding of how technological, social and political changes affect these flows and also of course the effect of pricing. Economics is often a core compulsory part of many courses and normally in the first year takes the following pattern:

- Study of microeconomic theory – Individual industries and their supply demand production and resource factors.
- Study of macroeconomic theory – National level income, money, banking and growth.
- Often historical and comparative aspects of economics

Law

This usually covers basic elements of the legal system, but may sometimes focus on commercial law only. It may lead to further study in specialist aspect of legal principles.

Modern languages

As companies become increasingly international, there is a corresponding increase in the need to become multilingual. Subsequently many courses offer a language module; sometimes this is integrated into business studies or may just be taken from an unrelated programme. Such modules are particularly important for sandwich courses that have placements abroad.

Summary

It would seem when considering the above areas that most modern Business Studies degrees should contain some elements of all to be complete, and it is quite an extensive list. A scan of available options (Smith 2003/04 pp31-36) across universities, though, indicates that some are mostly optional, such as Manufacturing Management and Financial Services, while Strategic Management, Marketing, Financial Management, Information Systems, Statistics and Economics seem most often compulsory. This again suggests that the emphasis on each course is likely to differ significantly between institutions, so determining what 'Business Studies' looks like is not an easy task. However there are now some pointers towards what a Business Studies degree should teach: the benchmark statements indicate

that the general aim should be to teach an understanding of organisations, their management and setting and a general preparation for a career in business including an enhancement of learning skills and personal development. This, it would seem, is taught specifically through a number of core subjects such as Strategic Management, Marketing, Financial Management, Information Systems, Statistics and Economics.

Many companies now also require high-level personal abilities, and so communication, time management and team working skills are now also increasingly part of a business studies degree. How these and 'learning skills' and 'personal development' are taught is not really that well specified, however, and is perhaps the most open to the teaching approach of individual institutions. It is, though, perhaps this aspect that will have a large effect on what a degree 'looks like' to a student. Therefore it may be worthwhile to have some idea about the origin of the subject.

Historical Overview

In the United States, the Harvard Business School (HBS) was founded in 1908 and so is perhaps as old as the concept of management education itself. HBS played a particularly significant role in the history of business education, as it both invented and was the first to implement the 'case study' method in 1925. Not only did this method provide a cornerstone for the Schools management program, but also has become widely accepted and used in most other business schools. In fact nearly 80% of 'cases' used at other institutions were developed at the HBS facility. In the UK before 1939 there appears to have been little formal education in management techniques: rather the gifted individual was promoted who had learned by experience or innately possessed the required skills. However, in older universities, BS can be traced back through to the emergence of economics and accounting. The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) was chartered as early as 1880 and Edinburgh University can claim to have started teaching economics as early as 1801. The Edinburgh school growing slowly until there was an immense increase in student numbers in the 1990's. MBA degrees were offered there in 1985. A separate entity, the Edinburgh Business School was established in 1985. The huge amount of advertising that went into promoting MBA's helped to also promote BS in general and partly explains the increase in student numbers. Also though, there must have been a perceived need for such a qualification by middle management, particularly since there were much lower participation rates in HE at the time. Perhaps the oldest school specifically to focus on management techniques is the Birmingham Business School, dating from 1902, making it equivalent in age to the HBS. So, it would seem the seeds of business education were sown very early, even if significant formal schemes came a little later.

There is also early evidence that a number of governing bodies were formed to drive an understanding of management issues, one of which was of course education. In 1945 Sir Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade (to become the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) by 1970), appointed a Committee, under the chairmanship of Sir Clive Baillieu, President of the Federation of British Industries (forerunner of the CBI), to formulate detailed proposals for the setting up of a central institute for all questions relating to management. One of the reasons behind this move was the realisation that, although there were professional bodies representing functional activities, there was no comparable body for general management thinking and for the development and promotion of better management. This led in 1947 to the formation of the British Institute of Management (BIM). By 1951 the UK's first Diploma in Management Studies was introduced by the BIM and the Ministry of Education. In an attempt to adopt the American model here by the late 60's early 70's both the London School for Business and the Manchester school for Business had been set up.

Staying with the BIM for a moment, in 1987, it, in conjunction with other bodies, issued two pivotal reports, the making of British managers (John Constable and Roger McCormick), and The making of managers (Charles Handy). These reports led to the formation of the National Forum for Management Education and Development (NFMED) and, subsequently, the Management Charter Initiative (MCI), which spearheaded the issue of the world's first competency-based national management standards. The BIM later became the Institute for Management (IM) acquiring awarding body status and by 2000 the Institute accredited its 250th approved centre to deliver management qualifications. 2002 saw a Royal charter awarded and a name change to the Chartered Management Institute (CMI). So historically both the DTI and CMI can be seen as playing a role in the shape of business education in Britain. The idea of business schools was also underpinned earlier by the European Foundation for Management Development. This led to the production of the European Quality Improvement Scheme (EQUIS). This has now emerged as a mark of institutional excellence amongst business schools and again was prompted by what was happening in the States. The contribution of the Association of Business Studies (ABS) in 1992 should also be noted, and again is perhaps a significant pointer to the acceptance of the American model.

Taking a step back, we can also examine the influence of another accrediting body, the CNAAB. By the 1940's Business Management was starting to be taught in a number of Further Education institutions and soon gained popularity as the scope of available courses widened. The setting-up of a first degree in Business Studies was recommended by the Crick (1964)

committee and overseen by the now defunct Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) which existed from 1965 to 1992. The CNAA was the largest single degree-awarding body in the UK. There were over 140 institutions offering first degrees and postgraduate courses, validated by the CNAA. The institutions included polytechnics, institutions of higher education, Scottish central institutions, colleges of art and various other colleges, and the awards were comparable to those of universities and recognised as such. There is little doubt that at this time such degree schemes were seen as highly vocational. In a HEF (Higher Education Foundation) report (1982) a survey of students found that 53% of those asked chose a Business Studies degree as they wanted a career in commerce, while a further 23% chose the course as they thought it would increase their employment prospects. So great was the popularity of these courses that by 1980 no polytechnic in the UK was without a Business Studies degree (Vaughn, 1982). Of course during the 80's there was also a political shift in approach towards entrepreneurship instigated by the Thatcher government. Not surprisingly, then, a four year Business Studies sandwich degree became regarded as a symbol of the major goals of a polytechnic education (McKenna, 1983). It has to be pointed out though that the CNAA had much less influence, if any, on older universities and by and large these institutions did not offer sandwich courses. At the time this was one of the major differences between these two types of organisations.

With the advent of the 1992 UK Further and Higher Education Act, and the subsequent dissolution of the CNAA and conversion of polytechnics to universities, this was however to change, and Business Studies would need to develop in a broader higher education setting (Macfarlane, 1997b). There is some evidence that such a change has occurred and that popularity for the area continues to increase. Business and Management Studies was the most popular subject at degree level for full-time students starting university in Autumn 2001. New enrolments increased 6.9% on 2000 (Source: ABS (Association of Business Schools) website <http://www.the-abs.org.uk/>). UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) admission applications for 2001 were higher for Business Management studies than the next most chosen subject which was Computer Science. In 2003 Business Studies and Management Studies combined still received more UCAS application than the next most popular, which in this case was Design Studies (Source: web site <http://www.ucas.ac.uk/>). However the trend in Business and Management numbers is at best static now. It can be concluded that this area of study is well represented at university level and continues to be popular.

A further later 'snapshot' of BS is provided by an in-depth report commissioned by the Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership (CEML) and Foundation for Management Education (FME) (Williams, 2000). This report aims to provide an analysis of present trends and future demands for management teaching and provides some insight into more current issues facing BS. However things change quickly and so some of the suggestions may already be out of date. What the report does highlight are the extensive restrictions within which management teaching and course provision have to operate. Increased accountability with the QAA and RAE exercises mean that significant resources have to be aimed at meeting such targets. In addition to this, there is overall university policy to contend with, which further constricts flexibility. Such things as pay schemes and 'quality of life' packages may not be freely set, which makes attracting high calibre staff difficult. Further outside influences come from government institutions and the demands of industry. It is not just the student that has a voice, but also other 'public's' which Universities seek to serve; commerce, government, employers and even the civil service and NHS. The latter having some influence on management education trends as their recruitment from these courses is very high.

The report suggests that management schools were already closely involved with the business community. However interviews with top companies found some admitting to looking to the States for the best people and resources. Also, there seemed a trend at the time towards forming 'Corporate Universities': where employees are taught in-house. Again this infers some dissatisfaction with the schemes available at institutions around 2000, and some reported that they felt business schools still did not cater for key managerial competencies. This may point to some break down in communication between business and academic communities. Though it is probably not always that clear what business wants, particularly when it comes to the type of knowledge they would like students to have. The report makes

the distinction between *mode-1* and *mode-2* knowledge. Mode-1 knowledge is theoretically based, whereas mode-2 knowledge is knowledge as it works in practice (Gibbons et al, 1994). The suggestion was in order to reduce the 'relevance gap' there was a move towards teaching mode-2 knowledge. This is a somewhat similar argument to the 'critical evaluators' and 'pragmatic synthesisers' approaches talked about a little later. Though these different approaches are perhaps less likely a split than inferred; universities are sought by business to undertake studies with a level of rigour and theoretical investigation they themselves cannot achieve. So some level of mode-1 knowledge must still be relevant. In addition, since many teachers come into BS from other disciplines such as sociology and psychology, it is more than likely they will retain the ethic of these areas for theory and rigour. So on balance the gap between what businesses want and what institutions provide may not be as wide as reported at the time.

Another point that emerges from the report is that there will be a continuing increase in demand for executive education (from 2000), but also increasing competition for students and the need to provide schemes to meet ever more sophisticated and critical stake holders. Porras (2000) suggests there will be a particular need to provide conceptual underpinnings, which will carry across their relevance as best practices constantly change. Again, this suggests the move to mode-2 knowledge may be tempered. Additionally, one could argue that near-market work holds less standing in RAE terms than published academic papers, this suggests a pull towards a more theoretical emphasis, but again this may not serve the 'publics universities seek to serve. Overall there seems to be a need for both theoretical and practical knowledge and the teaching of same. Historically, this seems to provide a continuing challenge for business education.

In a DTI (2000) paper of the time, the need for partnerships between business and academic institutions was seen as central to the drive for high quality provision. The need to respond to industry and remain flexible to provide relevant and up to date education is stressed in this report. It is likely these types of outside influences and reports have played a role in shaping BS, especially since competition for students and resources are so high. This would suggest a move towards teaching very practical knowledge and current best practices. However, as already intimated, other influences such as the RAE and QAA exercise pull in the other direction, requiring more research active staff. Considering that the 'new' universities are in competition with old established institutions this is becoming a stronger influence. Old institutions have by and large more staff with PhD's and do more research. To compete with these, post-1992 schools will need to increase the number with PhD's who are research active. Consequently there should always remain a significant theoretical base, even in the newer schools.

Table 1a: Staff qualifications (taken from Williams, 2000)

% of staff with PhD	Old Uni	New Uni	Total
90+	3		3
70-89			
50-69	2		2
30-49	1	4	5
<30		2	2
Total	6	6	12

Table 1b: and % who are RAE active

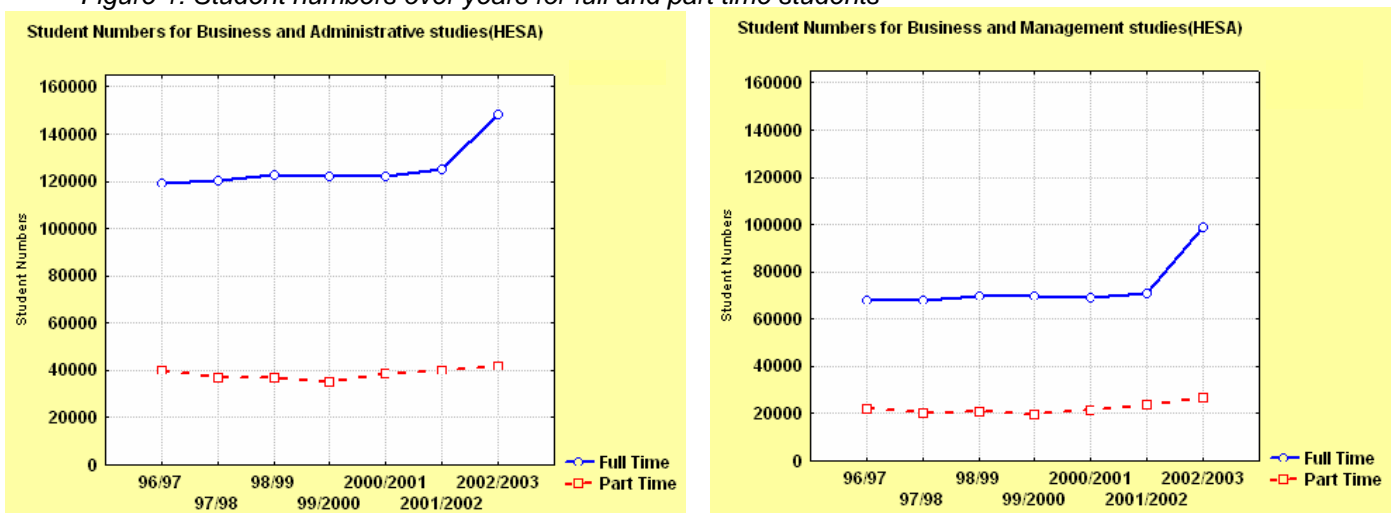
% who are RAE active	Old Uni	New Uni	Total
90+	4		4
70-89			
50-69	2	2	4
30-49			
<30		4	4
Total	6	6	12

In summary the report (Williams, 2000) predicts a number of trends and needs for BS for the new millennium. More staff with PhD's need to be recruited, and this trend certainly seems apparent in the older universities. However, this is constrained by falling academic kudos; low wages, long hours, burgeoning regulations and performance accountability. Balanced against this, top people can earn six figure salaries in consultancies. So staffing is likely to be a continuing problem. Most likely this will lead to the recruitment of more part-time lecturers and 'brought-in' visiting speakers from outside the institution. At the time of the report there is seen to be a need for more research and better communication with business, a trend that will no doubt continue. The use of IT, distance learning and embracing e-commerce were also seen as challenges to be met. It seems that BS will be in increasing demand and both constrained and led from a number of directions.

Statistics

Figure 1 shows the change in student numbers for the total across all subjects subsumed by HESA under the heading **Business and administrative studies** and also the less general **Business and Management studies**. The Business and Management data is a sub-set of the overall Business and Administrative student numbers.

Figure 1: Student numbers over years for full and part time students



As can be seen in Figure 1, for full time students the numbers increase very gradually over years from 1996/97 to 2001/02 then take a sudden increase for years 2002/03. For part time students there is almost no similar increase, any increment in the later years is relatively slight. One caveat here though is that this trend may be an artefact of the way HESA data collection and categorisation changes over time, and so should be viewed with caution.

A number of key universities were suggested by the Business Education Support Team (BEST) which is itself part of the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) that would be of interest to the Business Studies thread of the SOMUL project. Sixteen institutions in all were recommended as initial contacts from which five specific case studies would be selected. Table 2 below gives some indication of the student numbers for these institutions and gives some idea of the size of cohort generally expected for this discipline. The table is taken from the CRAC 2003/4 handbook (Smith, 2003) and is intended as a guide to expected number on a course considering previous intakes.

Table 2: Estimated (CRAC 2003/04) student numbers for possible SOMUL Business Studies case studies

(Bracketed numbers indicates other students from combined degrees added to total. Busi = Business Studies, Mark = Marketing, Mana = Management, Ops = Operational, Eco = Economics, Comp = Computer & Management Science, Lang = Languages)

University of Abertay		Northumbria University		Bournemouth University		University College Northampton	
Busi	80	Busi	120	Busi	94	?	
Mark	60	Mark	60	Mark	45	?	

Bolton Institute		Sheffield Hallam University		University of Edinburgh		University of Bradford	
Busi	100	Busi Comp Lang & Mark	150	Busi	165	Busi & Law	(160)
Mark	15			Comp	19	& French Mark	45 (160)

University of Ulster		University of East London		University of Kent		Lancaster University	
Busi Mana Mark	120	Busi Mark	100	Busi Admin Mana	40	Mana	50
						Mana Sci	15
						Mark	(65)
						Op Mana	15

University of Cardiff		University of Essex		University of Stirling		University of Glasgow	
Busi Admin	150	Busi Mana	40	Busi	(400)	Busi Mana	(350)
& Japane se	10			Mana	(400)		
Eco & Mana	30			Mana Sci	(400)		
				Mark	(400)		

Pedagogic Challenges to Business and Management Studies

In the early HEF (1982) report, the question is raised about underlying curriculum values in Business Studies courses. While this report was written some time ago, some of the issues raised are still pertinent to a discussion of current practice. Specifically, there seemed to be some concern over whether Business Studies courses were a *study of* business or *study for* business. Considering that Business Studies is such a vocational course this is a very interesting question that could impact both on teaching practice and on student expectations. A second question raised concerned the integration of the courses, Business Studies brings together a number of disciplines in an intentional integration, but the context of this combination is open to question. Again this is an interesting issue when the form of Business Studies is considered. Finally, sandwich work placement can be seen as a declining requirement in contemporary courses, although historically it was regarded as very important under CNAAG guidelines, specifically for the new universities. So the purpose of placements again needs some clarification. Overall, these questions suggest that underlying values may differ across institutions, and there is some evidence that such differences are still endemic in current schemes.

What is learned

Macfarlane (1997b, 1998) investigates both the first question of curriculum purpose and that of integration. In his (1997) paper the concern is with pedagogic context, what exactly are Business Studies students learning? The paper suggests that either there could be a focus on abstract critical skills or alternatively teaching could aim at providing sets of specific contemporary business skills that are directly applicable to current business trends. This maps onto the initial question: is a Business Studies degree a study of business or for business? If a course aims to be a study of business, then general learning and evaluation skills will be of prime importance, whereas, if the curriculum is directed by business needs, a toolkit of skills useful for the current business environment may take precedence. Macfarlane (1997b) has termed these two different approaches 'critical evaluators' and 'pragmatic synthesisers', respectively. It is important to highlight at this point that both approaches can be viewed as highly vocational since both will have as a goal the preparation of students for a future in business.

To explain the two approaches a little more, 'critical evaluators' would include those lecturers that have as a principal aim the production of students as critical thinkers. Such schemes will teach students how to evaluate claims rather than just acquiring technical knowledge and skills. This view could be taken further suggesting a degree as learning for life, acquiring knowledge and general skills that are applicable beyond just business. Personal growth is perhaps as important as the vocational content of the degree. Still, though, this is not to say that this approach is not vocational, as there is little doubt that critical thinkers with a high level of vision and personal confidence are likely to be highly in demand. This approach, however, would not wish to see a complete emphasis on functional techniques, take for example, 'Japanese Management'; a management technique pioneered by the Japanese after WWII. This is a philosophy of management encapsulating an understanding of human action and systems control to an extraordinary extent. However, even within this philosophy some of the underlying techniques such as quality control could change, relegating some knowledge as obsolete. It would be difficult to deny though, that having knowledge of contemporary techniques, even if they can become outdated, would increase the employment chances of graduates.

It is this focus on specific 'contemporary' skills for vocational reasons that forms what Macfarlane (1997b) distinguishes as 'pragmatic synthesisers'. From this perspective it is important for the student to acquire a range of skills specific to the business setting. While

some of these skills may be more generic such as computer literacy, communication and literacy, they would still be tailored specifically for the business situation. From this approach the use of knowledge or evaluation will mean selecting the correct tool from a pool for the job. It could be said that this type of knowledge is more 'real world' and therefore more vocational and immediately useful. As already hinted, the downside of this type of knowledge is that its usefulness can be very short term as trends change in a dynamic business environment. A course taught entirely from this view would really be 'Business Studies for business' with the curriculum changing constantly to stay in line with business trends. In an ever more competitive job market this type of course is likely to meet the short term expectations of both students and employers. Students will receive the credentials that give them a passport to a job, while employers will receive students that already have the skills necessary to begin work with less additional training.

Although no longer a universal requirement, sandwich placements would obviously figure strongly in this type of ethic which focuses specifically on learning 'real world' skills. Seen as part of a vocational course, placements give students a taste of real working practices and a 'foot in the door' of employment, especially as often employers recruit previous placement students. For this reason some universities see the placement as vital for any Business Studies degree. Climbing student numbers and the formation of new universities has made quality placements more difficult to obtain however, often only 'higher quality' students go on placement and as a result some universities have relaxed this requirement as part of their degree course. Balanced against this, many of the older universities do not offer placements. Rather such experience is brought in and projects usually involve interviewing industry. Partly this is the point of the case-study approach; analysis of real world situations. To this extent, the provision of placement schemes does not define a particular approach to teaching.

To some degree the distinction between 'critical evaluators' and 'pragmatic synthesisers' could be re-cast as the levels of processing debate (Marton, 1976, Marton & Saljo 1984). Students taught as critical evaluators may be more likely to process information at a deeper level, seeking to understand the meaning of the course content so as to allow a deeper critical evaluation of the information presented. On the other hand students taught as pragmatic synthesisers may adopt a 'surface-level' approach, learning a toolbox of methods that are reproduced without deep understanding, particularly since this approach will appear instrumental towards academic success in the assessments likely in this type of course. The studies in this area (Marton, 1976, Marton & Saljo 1984, Van Rossum & Schenk, 1984), do seem to suggest that students levels of processing can be moderated by both intrinsic motivation and the type of assessment expected. If this parallel is accepted, it suggests that the context of a course may not just affect the type of material disseminated, but also the level of understanding of that information adopted by the students themselves. Overall, it is likely then, that there may be wide variation in both the way material is delivered to students and also how the students internalise that knowledge.

In interviews with academics involved with the provision of BS education, a view was expressed that the dichotomy of teaching approaches suggested above is too simplistic. Many of the older institutions such as Edinburgh, see themselves as a 'school of thinking', critical evaluation is the strap-line approach, with marketing as a case in point. Though even under such pedagogy, there are some courses which require just regurgitating fact, while others force evaluation. So even within one institution, critical or evaluative styles may be two points on a continuum. Neither, have sandwich placements ever featured prominently at this institution, again suggesting a purely vocational perspective on course provision does not occur there. Though, the case-study method is employed, indicating practical provision is also evident. Further evidence of such diversity is found in the States; while Harvard is 80% a case study school, down the road MIT is purely a 'principles' school. Again this points to the diversity inherent in the area. BS is of course a very popular subject, provided in most universities. Numerically then, there may be a significant number that do provide just a 'tool-kit' of skills approach. However this is still not a true generalisation of the whole field. Certainly, an acceptance of BS as just a pragmatic discipline would be prejudiced; certainly it is developing a theoretical base. Once again it appears that in such a diverse subject area as BS and Management, a modal view is not possible.

Integration

Business studies brings together a number of disciplines, such as sociology, economics and marketing, the context of this integration in the most part may be influenced by the background of the lecturers within Business Studies (Ottewill & Macfarlane, 2003). In an earlier paper Macfarlane (1998) unpacks this, discovering that business departments consist of academics that have their roots in more traditional areas of H.E., rather than a first degree in business management. It is this diversification of backgrounds amongst lecturers that leads to a constant difficulty when the integration of course material is endeavoured. Avoiding compartmentalisation of such a diverse mix of perspectives and subjects and methodologies must remain a challenge for business and management programmes (Macfarlane, 2003). Lecturer's self-identity may play a role in this diversity, as while they may come from traditional areas such as sociology, geography or economics; the degree to which they identify themselves with their original or new Business Studies departments remains open to individual difference. Considering this and the number of constantly changing multi-disciplinary courses, there is likely to be some diversification in the teaching of a Business Studies degree. Perhaps one of the most current challenges is the development of management science. A whole field of pure math, but actually a whole arena driven by management issues like logistics problems, a crucial core, that draws on sociology & applied math. Integration is a definite challenge to be met in this area. One thing that interviews with BS practitioners has emphasised though, is that when considering integration, BS should not be regarded as an indistinct discipline that is just a collection of ideas from elsewhere. Rather it is a specific field that *draws* on other areas such a psychology and sociology.

Student expectations/the student as the customer

As new universities appear, retaining student numbers becomes ever more competitive. Such a change has prompted a number of schools to adopt a 'business' model for their departments. As in any other business, a product or a consumer driven approach may be adopted (Zhongqi Jin, 2000). Under this ethic, provision is *product driven* if change occurs when a better product to both guide and improve students develops and is adopted. Alternatively, provision is *consumer driven* if student demand promotes change to give the students what they 'think' they need or want. While there is probably always an element product driven change, some change is certainly consumer driven. A number of prospectuses explicitly state the attractiveness of the surrounding environments and thriving student life, have very pleasant entrances and range of quality cafes and meeting places. Particularly in Business Studies, the prospectus seem to imply a great deal of choice and scope within courses described as modular, however, actual choice to 'build your own degree' is usually more limited. Implying a choice of topics may make the scheme more attractive to some students, even if in reality core modules are compulsory. Added to this, unpopular schemes such as placements and statistics are often softened or completely removed. So to some extent it could be suggested that students are 'instrumental' in shaping the development of courses by 'voting with their feet'.

Whatever the reason, as Freeman and Capper (2000) report, there is rising pressure to change business education. The traditional model where students attend lectures and listen passively while the academic imparts knowledge is becoming less the rule, replaced by newer more engaging methods. Technology-supported learning promises to both introduce students to the high levels of computer proficiency needed for industry and also allow the realisation of new teaching methods. Benefits can range from quicker feedback and greater student/teacher interaction to greater opportunities for hands-on provision (Freeman and Capper, 2000). Other recent trends of new teaching methodologies have included case-method and problem-based learning (Booth et al., 2000, Crabtree, 2004). Large increases in student intake have raised problems in the implementation of case-based teaching, a method where groups of students are given real-world case studies to analyse.

Specifically, it is suggested problems are caused by the tightening of copyright laws which make sufficient cases for ever increasing student numbers difficult to find. Increasing student diversity also makes matching suitable cases to such large diverse groups difficult. Tutoring such group sizes becomes a problem, and guidance may not be sufficient to allow the student to gain the required insight from the subject. Crabtree (2004) suggests problem based learning (PBL) may overcome some of these problems, real-world cases do not have to be sourced, since abstract problems can be generated, and less is required of the tutor. While it is true that PBL requires less from the tutor – as tutorless groups can explore the puzzles set up there are still resource issues that are not resolved. While it seems that the case-method is becoming compromised by ever increasing student numbers and financial constraints, this may not be an entirely eclectic view. One academic when interviewed, saw the case-study method as a way of dealing with large numbers. Using group teaching in this context meant that large numbers of students could be split into a manageable number of groups, and then only one spokesperson for each group had to be dealt with. It was also suggested that student diversity is advantageous when analysing a case. There are obviously a number of competing views on this topic, so the developments of alternative teaching methods in Business Studies are likely to continue apace. Perhaps now more than ever the student has some influence on how these methods are developed.

Figure 2. below shows expected first destinations of students six months following their degree. As can be seen, over 60% are in full time employment, while less than 10% undertake further study. While a similar pattern is probably true of other disciplines, it does not dissuade the view that BS is primarily a vocational undergraduate degree.

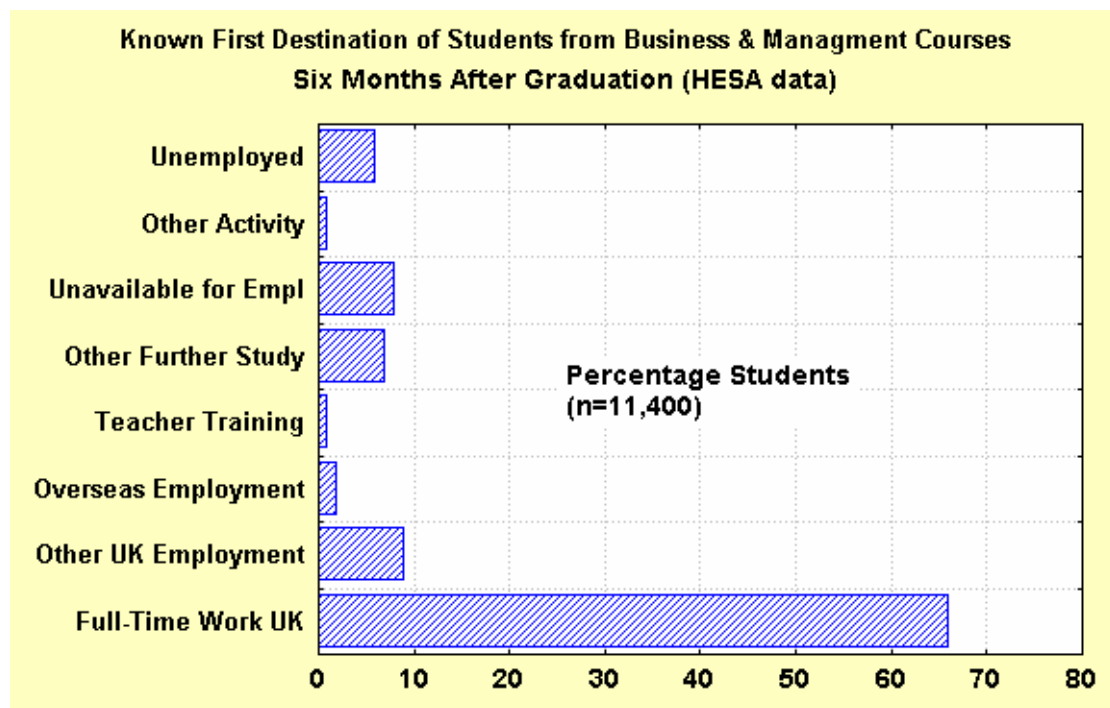


Figure 2. First destination of students six months after their degree, HESA data 2002

Institutional Visits

In additions to the impressions gained above from the literature and official sources, six institutions teaching Business Studies have also been visited in connection with the SOMUL project. The following is an overall account of these visits which covered institutions across the country over a period of two months in 2004. Each visit lasted about an hour and a half and typically involved two members from the SOMUL team and 1–4 staff members. Usually one of the latter had some interest in learning as a research interest and often the Head of Department was also present. The rationale for the visits was to assess the suitability of each school for inclusion into the SOMUL project and to introduce ourselves and our goals. The main areas of interest were the structure of the courses and also the ethnic and social heterogeneity of the student mix.

At the beginning of this report it was indicated that there was great diversity in Business Studies programmes, some prospectuses list many options, and there is the impression that the courses offered are modular. On visiting a number of the universities, Business Studies departments did begin by describing their courses as modular. 'Modular' may refer to courses that are developed as discrete units, but may also infer that these units part of a modular *scheme*, a scheme that allows students to mix and match their own options depending on preference. All but one of the departments when asked directly about this point, reported that their courses while modular, did contain a strong core of compulsory elements. In actuality, at stage one most of the courses were very tightly structured and gave a common experience to students. These core elements while having different titles do seem mostly to cover a similar set of key subjects from one institution to the next. This suggests that Business Studies may not be as fundamentally diverse in the make-up of its courses as first thought. This is not to say that truly modular schemes do not exist. One visited department did offer considerable choice to students in stage1, 2 & 3, and there do seem to be a few Business Studies schools following this model. However, it does seem that the largest proportion is likely to have programmes with strong core elements.

Of the universities sampled, most were post-1992 institutions; this is not really that surprising as Business Studies is a creation of the CNAA and became widespread in the polytechnics. Two schools were pre-1992, and one has yet to achieve university status. All the schools were very enthusiastic about the subject and progressive in their teaching methods, a number mentioning e-learning and business simulations. A number of cases had large numbers of distance-learning students, while two had large numbers of international students. These two in particular attracted mostly local students with low ethnic diversity; of course this, situation is dramatically reversed by the introduction of the international intake. For the remaining cases ethnic diversity was very much in-line with that of the surrounding area.

CNAA influence is apparent in most Business Studies courses: after all it is and was seen as a vocational course leading directly to employment in industry. Perhaps the most obvious instantiation of this is the provision of placements or sandwich years. It is undeniable that such placements are beneficial to the student both from the experience gained and the increased potential for future employment. Considering these points it would seem likely that placement schemes would be universal, though experience of the visits suggests some trend away from this. There seems to be a spectrum of opinions here: one case offered no placements, one offered placements to only those that were of suitable ability. Some institutions offered placements entirely as an option, with no differing value placed on the choice, while another case awarded different named degrees depending on whether a placement had been undertaken or not. Sometimes the reasons for the provision of placements were pedagogical, one person suggesting that business expects someone with a Business Studies degree to have some work experience and this experience develops the student greatly. This school showed great commitment to its placement scheme and all students on a BABS or BABS L degree would undertake high quality placements. Sometimes the provision or not of placements is more pragmatic: one commented that with growing student numbers and an economically depressed surrounding area, placements have

become too difficult to set up. While these are two ends of the spectrum, within this range there do seem to be a growing number of institutions offering placements as optional rather than compulsory.

Partly driving this must be an increase in the number of full-time students that already work part-time to support themselves. Again this was a recurrent theme mentioned at visits and was most predominant when the student body was largely local; often students choose a local university if they have family or financial commitments that make moving difficult. Somewhat surprisingly considering increasing student financial problems, only one institution had a part-time course in which student numbers exceeded their full-time course, although there was evidence of growing popularity of distance learning. Trying to provide options suitable for changing student diversity and demands was uppermost in the departments. Attracting increasing numbers of students was of course very important, and modules and options were being designed to maximise this, as were the entrance requirements. By and large most of the institutions visited had pleasant environments, particularly in student meeting areas: some buildings were very modern, while others retained the 60's style of large concrete structures and rubberised flooring. There is little doubt though that Business Studies is a very competitive area and students are instrumental in changing course provision.

The students

Again, while it is not reliable to generalise from so few cases, the institutions visited do cross most of the possible boundary types, some are pre-1992 others post, some have high entry requirements some less so. Some are city central while others are in a rural setting. The types of courses range from a strictly specified core curriculum to one where there is extensive choice. Accepting this, a reasonable sample of students has been encountered and a number of characteristics are emerging. Particularly it seems that taking paid employment whilst undertaking study is more and more common. To some extent even full-time students are in some sense part-time because of outside employment. This obviously differs between institutions. In one, most of the students are from out of the region and tend to be more affluent. The entry requirement is higher for this university. In contrast for another we found students to be mostly local, less affluent and reliant on a subsidiary income; entry requirements were also lower. Ethnic diversity also varies, for the latter institution there was a wide ethnic mix and high numbers of ethnic students, which really reflects the surrounding population rather than any positive recruitment policy. In the other institution, ethnic diversity was less prominent even though students were entering from further a field.

It is true though, that there are now large numbers of international students entering some of the institutions. Many are Asian and join the courses at different stages, some coming just for the final year. Large numbers of students are also engaged in distance learning, and one institution extended this to an international level, tutors taking regular trips abroad to facilitate the programmes. Two universities had a significant part-time cohort, not surprisingly these were the ones that also attracted less affluent students for the full-time courses. Again this reflects the local financial pressures on potential students. Those that have commitments or insufficient funds have to study locally or just part-time. For the same reason age range is seen to vary on our visits, with more mature students present on part-time courses and courses that can be studied without moving away from home.

There was some suggestion from staff that the standard of students may be falling. The reason proffered for this was that more and more students are taking university education because other routes to employment are not open to them. Consequently many students arrive not because they have a specific interest in the subject, but because it is an available option: normally they would not have entered university. It is perhaps, because of this, that less academic issues such as social life, campus setting and cafeteria are stressed in prospectus, in order to attract this type of student in a competitive market. The SOMUL project should add to this student profile, especially highlighting what students feel they are obtaining from higher education under the changes indicated above.

Supplementary Academic Interviews

To avoid a prejudiced view of the field, a number of additional academic opinions were sought. These academics, all with extensive experience in the area of BS were given this report and asked to reflect on how well it mirrors BS 'as is'. A number of important points were raised and these have been included in the report. To highlight their main points, a number of additions to the historical overview were suggested. Particularly, some pointer was suggested to highlight the influence of governing bodies during the development of BS. The role of the CNAAs, particularly for older universities, was also questioned, and this view has been taken into account. Again there was also the suggestion that for older institutions, the sandwich course was not as common as thought, and in fact was never really that prominent. Taking a view from the literature indicating a distinction in knowledge provision, along the lines of pragmatic synthesisers or critical evaluators, was seen as too simplistic. It was suggested that a whole range of pedagogic experimentation was likely, even within one institution. So rather the dichotomy should be seen as the ends of a continuum, with most schools offering a mixture. One thing that was universally agreed was that BS covers a broad area, so broad that a modal view cannot be achieved.

Conclusion

Business Studies is foremost a vocational course: developed from the polytechnics and old universities, it followed the changes in H.E. and is now prevalent in most modern universities. The general aim is to teach an understanding of organisations, their management and settings and provide a general preparation for a career in business. While additionally, provision should include an enhancement of learning skills and personal development. The role of the placement, while still seen as important, is becoming optional in some institutions (and not that ever that prevalent in some ancient universities), normally for the pragmatic reasons of large student numbers and restricted opportunities in industry. While courses appear modular, this does not in most cases extend to a wide student choice of options. Mostly, there is a strong core of essential subjects that are taught with just some variation. Student numbers are ever increasing and new teaching methods are developing to accommodate this. Business Studies as seen in the institutions visited seems far from 'put together' from different disciplines, but does seem subject to constant changing demands to keep apace with industry and student diversification. From a student perspective it remains a very popular course of study at a time when employment is at a premium. Overall, as illustrated just by this short conclusion, Business Studies and Management is so diverse a subject area that any modal view of the discipline as a whole is not achievable.

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Appendix

CENTRE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH AND INFORMATION

Economic and Social Research Council: Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) - Phase III Research Project

What is learned at university? The social and organisational mediation of university learning (SOMUL)

Project Applicants: Prof John Brennan (Open University)
Prof David Jary (University of Birmingham)
Prof Mike Osborne (University of Stirling)
Prof John Richardson (Open University)

Project Summary

The aim of the project is to increase our understanding of the range of learning outcomes of an increasingly diverse higher education system. We are particularly interested in how these are socially and organisationally mediated. Social mediation refers primarily to the social mix of students and the characteristics of the student culture and lifestyle. Organisational mediation refers primarily to curriculum organisation (for example, the boundaries between different subjects and the links – formal and informal - between academic knowledge and workplace and other sources of knowledge).

The study will concentrate on students and graduates in three contrasting subjects – biochemistry, business studies and sociology. For each subject, five study programmes will be selected to represent the different social and organisational features in which the project is interested. Students from these programmes will be investigated at various stages during and following their undergraduate careers focusing on their conceptions of learning and personal and professional identity. The results will be set within the context of subject benchmark statements and programme specifications.

The wider applicability of findings from the initial three subjects will be assessed in relation to a further group of subjects, again taking a range of programmes with different social and organisational characteristics.

The project team will work closely with the new Higher Education Academy and with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in order to ensure close links with policy and practice. Employer inputs to the project will be secured through regular presentations to the policy forum of the Council for Industry and Higher Education.