

Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Business, Management, Accountancy and Finance

An Analysis of the Findings from the Summer 2007 Survey of Key Teaching and Learning Issues in UK Business Schools

Background

In late 2005, the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Business, Management, Accountancy and Finance (BMAF) conducted Baseline Surveys of two key stakeholder groups for the Subject Centre: Business School Deans and institutional Key Contacts. It was decided to repeat these surveys in the summer of 2007, to establish both how the Higher Education landscape in Business and Management had changed since 2005, and to establish the current awareness and impact of BMAF (since 2005). It was decided to keep the substance of both 2007 surveys identical to the 2005 surveys, so that comparisons could be drawn. The 2005 survey results are also available at:

<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/business/resources/bmafresources>

Both surveys were conducted online during Summer 2007. The design of the surveys was broadly similar, with some slight differences introduced to reflect the differing roles and responsibilities of our two target groups. The Association of Business Schools (ABS) co-hosted the Deans' survey, which was sent to over 100 UK Business Schools. The BMAF Subject Centre administered the survey of Key Contacts, whilst the ABS administered the survey of Deans. About one hundred and fifty Key Contacts received an email asking them to complete the survey. Twenty-nine completed surveys from the Deans (and Senior Managers) of Business Schools and Departments of Management, and fifty-four completed surveys from institutional Key Contacts were received. In 2005, thirty and sixty-three completed surveys were received (respectively); therefore, these figures are broadly in line with the response rates obtained in the 2005 survey. Responses were made by people across the whole spectrum of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) now engaged in teaching BMAF subjects; from some very old and some very new HEIs. Nine of the returns from the Deans' survey were made by Deans located in pre 1992 Universities. Most, but not all, Business Schools and Departments of Management have at least one identifiable institutional Key Contact for BMAF. Twenty-five of the Key Contacts respondents were based in pre 1992 Universities (or specialist HE institutions). The majority of responses were received from English HEIs, but several responses were received from Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish HEIs.

Key issues in teaching and learning

As in 2005, the first major issue was to ascertain what were perceived to be the most important learning and teaching issues facing Business Schools. Deans and Key Contacts were asked to rate the importance of the following issues on a five-point scale as being either very important, quite important, of some concern, not very important, or not important at all:

Teaching large groups.
 Providing timely and good quality feedback on assessment.
 Designing creative assessment.
 Plagiarism.
 Teaching international students.
 Achieving active learning in classes.
 Using e-learning.
 Using virtual learning environments.
 Addressing issues of recruitment and retention.
 Introducing Personal Development Plans.
 Widening participation.
 Work-based learning.
 Finding reliable evidence-based evaluation to measure the effectiveness of teaching and learning interventions.
 Relating research to teaching.

The results of the surveys found that the key issues were as follows (the actual numbers of respondents are shown in brackets):

Issue	Deans		Key Contacts	
	% Very important	% Quite important	% Very important	% Quite important
Providing timely and good quality feedback on assessment	85 (23)	15 (4)	77 (40)	15 (8)
Teaching international students	56 (15)	37 (10)	52 (27)	39 (20)
Plagiarism	44 (12)	41 (11)	65 (34)	21 (11)
Teaching large groups	52 (14)	22 (6)	41 (20)	25 (12)
Addressing issues of recruitment and retention	59 (16)	26 (7)	37 (19)	28 (4)
Achieving active learning in classes	56 (15)	37 (10)	27 (13)	50 (24)
Designing creative assessment	37 (10)	56 (15)	25 (12)	53 (26)

There are some variations between the views of Deans and Key Contacts, but the degree of consensus is quite discernible. We have included the responses for both Deans and Key Contacts on both 'very important' and 'quite important' to give an indication of the strength of views. The issue of student assessment and feedback stands out from the rest, and there is a broad

consensus that the next three issues (international students, plagiarism and large groups) are highly important. Two closely-related issues then follow – achieving active learning and designing creative assessment. The issue of recruitment and retention of students is given slightly more weight by Deans than it is by Key Contacts, perhaps reflecting the differing roles and responsibilities of these two groups. In general, these results are remarkably similar to those obtained on 2005, however it is worth noting that 100% of the Deans who responded now consider that providing timely and good quality feedback on assessment is a very or quite important issue (up slightly from 94% in 2005). This correlates well with the issues raised in the recent National Student Survey (NSS), where a score of only 59% was obtained for student satisfaction with assessment and feedback in Business subjects (60% was the score for Management subjects). However, the average score for Assessment and Feedback across all forty subject areas reported on in the NSS was 61% - indicating that this problem is not restricted to Business and Management subjects; in fact the lowest scores went to Veterinary sciences (35%) and Medicine and Dentistry (42%). The NSS is available at:

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/students/tables/0,,2167597,00.html>

There was then a drop in the perceptions of the importance of the following set of issues:

Issue	Deans		Key Contacts	
	% Very important	% Quite important	% Very important	% Quite important
Using e-learning	30 (8)	48 (13)	10 (5)	62 (32)
Using virtual learning environments	30 (8)	52 (14)	16 (8)	51 (26)
Relating research to teaching	24 (6)	48 (12)	28 (14)	30 (15)
Introducing Personal Development Plans	30 (8)	26 (7)	10 (5)	37 (19)
Finding reliable evidence-based evaluation to measure the effectiveness of teaching and learning interventions	15 (4)	41 (11)	16 (8)	32 (16)
Widening participation	26 (7)	22 (6)	10 (5)	37 (19)
Work-based learning	30 (8)	41 (11)	14 (7)	44 (23)

Again, a general pattern is observable: while broadly still considered as important, they are not the most pressing issues facing either Business School Deans or institutional Key Contacts. The related issues of e-learning and Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) are clearly important. Implementing Personal Development Planning (PDP), widening participation, relating research to teaching and work-based learning are also of importance, as is the issue of finding reliable evidence-based evaluation to measure the effectiveness of teaching and learning interventions. At this (lower) end of the

scale, again there appears to be a broad consensus between the Deans and the BMAF Key Contacts. Also, there is very little variation between these results and those obtained from the 2005 survey.

An open-ended question, allowing respondents to add any concerns not listed (above) was also included. Approximately 40% of respondents added an additional issue of concern. We grouped these according to broad recurring themes. Some of the responses were at least partially covered by the structured questions (above), but generally, these responses varied too widely to draw any firm conclusions, often focussing on the needs of a particular Business School at a particular time. One theme which did recur – in a variety of guises – was the perceived need to value teaching competences equally with research competences.

Support for teaching and learning

Another major area of interest for the two surveys was the extent to which Business Schools and Departments of Management provided their staff with support in learning and teaching. Again, based upon our own knowledge of the different indicators of Business School ‘engagement’ in support for learning and teaching, we drew up a list of questions by which we could gauge the strength of support: starting with the more formal requirements (Heads of Teaching and Learning, committees and strategies), moving through active encouragement, to finally providing resources and taking a proactive stance. Both Deans and Key Contacts were asked to gauge the level of support for teaching and learning in their Business School or Department of Management. Comparative figures from the 2005 survey are given in brackets.

Results from Deans:

Support Provided	%	Response Total
You have a Head/Director of Learning and Teaching.	59 (63)	17 (19)
You have a Learning and Teaching Committee.	90 (87)	26 (26)
You have a written Learning and Teaching Strategy.	90 (90)	25 (27)
You have a Learning and Teaching Strategy that is regularly reviewed.	76 (83)	22 (25)
You hold regular workshops and seminars on learning and teaching issues specifically for your Business School/Department.	90 (80)	26 (24)
You encourage staff to undertake learning and teaching development projects.	90 (97)	26 (29)
You provide remission from workload and funding for this activity.	52 (43)	15 (13)

You offer a career track for staff who specialise in learning and teaching matters (this can include promotion to senior lecturer/principal lecturer, and University teaching fellowships).	69 (63)	20 (19)
You regularly review learning and teaching as part of annual individual performance review.	72 (77)	21 (23)

Results from Key Contacts

Support Provided	%	Response Total
You have a Head/Director of Learning and Teaching.	52 (52)	31 (31)
You have a Learning and Teaching Committee.	60 (87)	31 (52)
You have a written Learning and Teaching Strategy.	71 (77)	37 (46)
You have a Learning and Teaching Strategy that is regularly reviewed.	71 (72)	37 (43)
You hold regular workshops and seminars on learning and teaching issues specifically for your Business School/Department.	65 (73)	34 (44)
You encourage staff to undertake learning and teaching development projects.	73 (82)	38 (49)
You provide remission from workload and funding for this activity.	40 (33)	21 (20)
You offer a career track for staff who specialise in learning and teaching matters (this can include promotion to senior lecturer/principal lecturer, and University teaching fellowships).	46 (38)	24 (23)
You regularly review learning and teaching as part of annual individual performance review.	71 (70)	37 (42)

Discussion

Compared with 2005, the Deans survey produced very similar results, and it should be noted that both in 2005 and 2007, some questions were skipped, rather than answered - e.g. 'You provide remission from workload and funding for this (learning and teaching) activity?' – leading to possibly misleading percentages. Also, compared with 2005, the Key Contacts surveyed produced broadly similar responses and results, but (again) many respondents simply skipped some of the questions. Why this happened is not known.

Generally, similar results were received from both the Deans and BMAF Key Contacts. It is clear that, unsurprisingly, most Business Schools complied with the formal requirements (such as having a learning and teaching committee) although it was clear from the responses of both Deans and Key Contacts that

only about 60% had a designated Head or Director of teaching and learning (up from around 50% in 2005). However, there are some areas of discrepancy between the responses from Deans and Key Contacts, which are highlighted in the tables. These relate to perceptions of the resources provided to support staff in learning and teaching activity. These indicate that while there is a formal strong acknowledgment of the importance of encouraging staff to undertake teaching and learning projects, both the resources to do so, and the rewards for such achievement in terms of career opportunities are not always available. So while 90% of Deans claim to encourage their staff to undertake learning and development projects, only 52% provide resources for staff to do so - and the Key Contacts' perceptions of such support were less favourable (40%). Similarly in the area of career prospects for staff specialising in teaching and learning 69% of the Deans indicated that a career track is available for staff specialising in teaching and learning, whilst only 46% of the Key Contacts perceive this to be the case. It is possible that the Deans who found the time to complete our survey are generally more supportive of teaching and learning than those who did not. However, it may be that Key Contacts simply do not perceive that Deans value good teaching as much as the Deans themselves would claim. One notable difference from the results received in 2005 was the extent to which Key Contacts believed that the formal mechanisms for managing teaching and learning actually exist. While 90% of Deans stated that they had both a learning and teaching committee and a written learning and teaching strategy, only 60% of the Key Contacts answered affirmatively to the first of these questions (a learning and teaching committee exists) and 71% of the Key Contacts answered affirmatively to the second of these questions (a learning and teaching strategy exists). Whilst this may indicate a problem of communication within Business Schools, it is a rather puzzling result, and may be one issue to be explored at future BMAF Key Contact meetings.

The value of the activities of the BMAF Subject Centre

A major objective of both the 2005 and 2007 Baseline Surveys was to gauge the awareness of, and satisfaction with, the activities and services provided by the BMAF Subject Centre. The overarching questions were designed differently for Deans and Key Contacts, although the same activities were named. Deans were asked if they were *aware* of BMAF activities, whilst Key Contacts were asked to rate the *usefulness* of these activities. One important finding of the 2007 survey is that there appears to be considerably more awareness as to the activities of BMAF by Deans. The 2005 results are also shown below for comparison:

Deans' Awareness of Subject Centre activities and services

Activity or service	% Aware of BMAF in 2005	% Aware of BMAF in 2007	Response total (2005 figures in brackets)

Responses to e-communications	33	39	10 (8)
Monthly e-Bulletin	54	85	22 (13)
Intl.Journal of Management Education	63	92	24 (15)
BMAF website	75	85	22 (18)
External Examiner Database	46	62	16 (11)
National workshop programme	54	58	15 (13)
Regional Meetings Key Contacts	29	65	17 (7)
Annual Subject Centre Conference	42	77	20 (10)
Small grants for projects	38	58	15 (9)

One caveat worth mentioning here is that the response totals above are often far short of the 29 Deans who responded to several other questions in the survey. However, most of the response totals above are still considerably higher than they were in 2005.

Key Contacts' perceptions of the value of current Subject Centre

6. In the past, how useful have the following services and activities, provided by the Business Management Accountancy and Finance Subject Centre, been to you? (figures have been rounded)						
	% Very useful	% Quite useful	% Of some use	% Not very useful	% Not useful at all	Response Count
Responses to e-communications.	14	31	43	10	3	42
Monthly e-Bulletin.	14	47	29	8	2	49
International Journal of Management Education.	20	35	31	12	2	51
Higher Education Academy Subject Centre website.	19	34	30	13	4	47
External Examiner Database.	2	14	48	25	11	44
National workshop programme.	19	32	30	11	9	47
Regional Meetings for Institutional Key Contacts.	26	38	21	9	6	47
Annual Subject Centre Conference.	27	36	18	5	14	44
Small grants for Teaching Research and Development Projects.	33	24	16	9	18	45
	answered question					51
	skipped question					3

Generally, these results are quite encouraging, with all but the External Examiner database yielding a result of over 50% of Key Contacts rating the activities as very or quite useful. A new External Examiner Database is currently under development. The results are also broadly similar to those obtained from the 2005 survey.

An open-ended question for both Deans and Key Contacts, requesting further guidance on what future activities by the Subject Centre would be most useful, was included at this point in the survey. Up to three potential future activities could be listed by respondents. Nearly all of the respondents (who added one or more activities in this section) were keen to see more workshops developed to help them cope with the key issues in teaching and learning. Also, there was a strong desire for these workshops to be available locally, and repeated to provide different dates and locations etc. There was a broad range of other suggestions, but in particular, there was also a strong desire for the development and dissemination of resources – e.g. case studies and innovative teaching ideas - to support teaching and learning (seven respondents); the dissemination of best practices (four respondents), and making better use of the website - e.g. wikis, blogs and online conferences (four respondents).

Conclusion

The results from these surveys will enable the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Business, Management, Accountancy and Finance to focus its efforts on the areas that Deans and Key Contacts alike perceive to be important, and it is heartening to see that the awareness of the BMAF Subject Centre amongst Deans has improved markedly since 2005. There is much more that could be investigated, and the issues raised in this report will be followed up by presentations of these findings of at regional Key Contact meetings, at the next annual Subject Centre Conference, and to the appropriate committees of the Association of Business Schools. We also welcome further feedback on this paper.

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