

Emerging Trends in Business School Education

4 trends transforming the industry



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Business Schools Have a Critical Role to Play

In 2022, leaders in business education face new and complex challenges. They're bravely expanding their scope and reach. They're responding to the ever-evolving needs of their students, staff, alumni, and community stakeholders. They're nimbly navigating the climate crisis, Covid-19, and digital disruption. Although the pandemic may have curbed cross-border travel, it has also inspired new possibilities for international study and collaboration.

Amidst those challenges and opportunities, what strategies are institutions applying to both identify their priorities and stay on top of them? How are business education leaders remaining relevant, competitive, and agile? To what degree has digital transformation altered the identities of business schools? Finally, what lies on the horizon?

While the future is still unfolding, four trends have emerged. Firstly, alternative education providers have inspired schools to adopt new methods of delivery and to experiment with new streams of revenue. Secondly, business schools have been integrating an evolving orientation towards lifelong learning. They're recognising that to stay competitive, individuals at all stages of their lives and careers need to relearn, learn, and unlearn. Thirdly, the climate crisis has forced institutions to re-envision the role that business schools play in the modern world. A mandate has emerged to train the leaders of tomorrow in climate consciousness and to reinvent sustainable business practices. Lastly, students' needs, expectations, and priorities now include a growing demand for diversity and inclusion. That trend has steered the course that business schools are taking to recruitment, engagement, and curriculum.



New Models Inspired by Alternative Providers

In the past, anyone seeking expert training in business turned almost exclusively to established schools. The competition that top-tier business schools faced was primarily with each other.

In 2022, a lot has changed.

Now, a smartphone and an internet connection offers nearly universal access to quality skills training. To fill skills' gaps, apps and websites offer quick and creative solutions. Students from myriad backgrounds readily access personalised educational content and tools. Alternative providers are lowering the bar of entry. Innovative startups, non-profits, and private ventures are helping traditional business schools to expand their repertoire, forge partnerships, embrace collaboration, and digitally transform.

Partnerships have long been a facet of higher education, but alternative providers are accelerating the drive to collaborate. Business schools are now partnering with government agencies, NGOs, and leading technology consultancies. They're welcoming new ways to distribute courses and programs to both novel and established audiences and to embrace hybrid and online classrooms. Professors are posting bite-sized lessons on social media; a few are turning into influencers. Professor Greg Whitewell, Dean of the University of Sydney Business School reports that business schools have “reinvented programs, pioneered pedagogies, invested in enabling technologies, built value-creating collaborations, and developed new markets.”¹



¹ Trends Impacting Business Education in 2022, According to Business School Deans

Further, a connected campus welcomes insights and practices from diverse fields. Business schools are working in tandem with internal departments, partnering institutions, and digital providers to introduce interdisciplinary approaches to learning and management. Rigid boundaries among faculties, institutions, continents, languages, and frameworks are disappearing.

Connection and collaboration are helping to narrow the gap between what employers are looking for and what higher education has traditionally offered. Companies founded on a digital-first mindset help business schools navigate the shifting landscape of study and work. New frameworks have emerged to integrate stackable courses and credentials, which accommodate needs and priorities of modern people.

Among the many links now connecting schools more directly with needs of the workplace are micro-credentials. Rather than asking students and professionals to invest years studying towards a diploma or degree, schools are offering condensed coursework that trains students in critical competencies over the course of a few weeks.



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Flexible Learning Pathways and Lifelong Learning

Flexibility appears not only in the models emerging to distribute business credentials and provide revenue. The learner profiles of top business schools are growing more flexible and diverse. A typical influx of registrants at a business school is anything but static and homogenous and between the ages of 18 and 24. In France and Spain, a fifth of all higher education students were following short-cycle tertiary courses.² In the UK, the number of full-time students aged 30 and over has increased every year since 2015.³ Women now make up 33 percent of Executive MBA enrollments, the highest to date.⁴

Recognizing that massive influx of new learner profiles in higher education, well-articulated flexible learning pathways are also a key part of the [United Nations Education 2030 Agenda](#). “Flexible” here means “multiple entry points” to higher education as well as diverse ways to progress through institutions, courses, and programs.

Dr. Barbara Majoor of Nyenrode Business University in the Netherlands points out: “The challenge for us (and everyone) as a business school is to respond quickly and flexibly to the changing environment and needs of our students.” The nature of the workplace is also undergoing a sea change where job titles and responsibilities are endlessly evolving. Lifelong learning is not only a trend, it’s an indispensable facet of modern life, essential for innovation and economic growth.

Further, “front-loading” education in the first-quarter of life is no longer the rule. Employees rarely remain in one position, let alone one profession, until retirement. Business professionals are finding a newfound purpose as they step into newly discovered roles and opportunities.

² [Tertiary Education Statistics](#)

³ [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2017/18 - Student numbers and characteristics](#)

⁴ [What Trends Are Shaping Business Education?](#)



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Climate Consciousness and Responsible Leadership

Severe weather patterns are threatening lives and livelihoods globally. Business schools are adapting their curricula to find and act on solutions. Embedding topics such as sustainability, ethics and responsible leadership is essential within business school education today and critical when educating the leaders of tomorrow. They're training leaders to act responsibly. Alexandra Gerbasi, Executive Dean at the University of Exeter Business School, writes that students and companies are "looking to business schools to help translate climate science into action."⁵ Stuart Robinson, Program Director of the Exeter MBA notes: "The creation of sustainable practice is now in the mainstream of industrial, societal, and technological progress globally." Fittingly, Exeter's MBA program "focuses on sustainability, purposeful leadership, innovation and technology, so graduates will transform not only themselves, but the world around them."⁶

Tricia Bisoux, editor of Insights at the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), reports that while applicants to MBA programs may be decreasing, prospective students are achieving clarity in what they're seeking. "A majority of students," she writes, "want business curricula to address global challenges; responsible management; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and ethical leadership."⁷

When asked to predict how business education will change in the year ahead, deans almost unilaterally put the climate crisis at the top of their agendas. In France, ESSEC Business School is aiming to reduce its program-related emissions by 25 percent in 2022. INSEAD, a non-profit business school that maintains campuses in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and North America, is incorporating sustainability into their MBA curriculum. The program encourages students to analyse, improve, and create innovative business models to make them as sustainable as they are profitable.⁸

⁵ [Trends Impacting Business Education in 2022, According to Business School Deans](#)

⁶ [What Sustainability Means in an MBA curriculum](#)

⁷ [What Trends Are Shaping Business Education?](#)

⁸ [INSEAD To Cut Greenhouse Gas Emissions By 2035](#)



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Growing Practices for Diversity, Inclusion, and Internationalisation

With growing attention to and demand for diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the workplace, business schools are well-positioned to contribute to a more equitable world.

“D&I” initiatives have evolved to incorporate “DEIB” – diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Schools and organisations are championing a diverse and inclusive campus and workforce, and it’s standard practice to find ways for employees and students to feel a sense of belonging and to embrace truly equitable opportunities.

While the pandemic has closed international borders, it has also opened us to deeper insight into how, at an international level, we’re all connected. Technology has enabled a greater appreciation of that connection. The European business school consists of 165 faculty serving 1.300 students and 11.000 executives across 41 countries. As Simon Mercado and Julie Perrin-Halot write: “In an increasingly globalised market, the world’s top business schools are taking a strategic approach to institutional brands and missions.

Marion Debruyne, Dean of Vlerick Business School urges business schools to redefine what they mean by internationalisation. International students may be hesitant to attend campuses in person, but opportunities to cross borders virtually abound. Asynchronous learning, VR and AI conferencing, and online global seminars are expanding the impact and reach of business education. Those opportunities are enabling schools to more fully embrace a truly global culture.



Stories of Success: Turning Ideas Into Actions

INSEAD, a global business school with 165 faculty serving 1.300 students and 11.000 executives across 41 countries, was one of the first institutions to adopt a CRM platform. Recently migrating to Salesforce's user-friendly Sales Cloud, INSEAD now streamlines the customer experience and transforms engagement. That gives the marketing team a better understanding of the impact of their campaigns based on metrics feedback of the sales team.

"With Salesforce, we can create smoother customer journeys with a personal touch to create an efficient, blended experience."

Séverine Guilloux
Executive Director of Open Programmes
and Online Learning Innovation
INSEAD



Imperial College Business School, located in the heart of London, U.K., uses Education Cloud across their MBA and Executive Education programmes. The Executive Education department rolled out Sales Cloud and Pardot in 2018 to support the learner journey from prospect to enrolment. Helping the team to connect systems and provide real-time visibility of prospects and learners while personalising every touchpoint is critical to building scale.

"Imperial College Business School is all about innovation, technology, and engagement. That's what makes our partnership with Salesforce so perfect."

Joel McConnell
Executive Director of Marketing, Recruitment,
and Admissions
Imperial College Business School



Columbia Business School utilised Sales Cloud when it needed a flexible solution to track student information and help build relationships with executives and the companies that sponsor their continuing education programmes. The business school wanted to track which of their 60+ program offerings best meet student expectations and needs. The ability to analyse data helps the institution continuously improve and more effectively prepare proposals for custom programs.

"One of the reasons we started using Salesforce was to track what topics landed well with our audience so we could better understand the needs of our customers and customise our program offerings. It helps us track and learn from the data."

Demetrius Mossaidis
Sr. Director, Database and Web Initiatives
Columbia Business School





A Positive Future for Business Education: Putting People First

In 2022, all business leaders can learn to act on a truly “people-first philosophy.” Digital disruption and new modes of data management may appear intimidating amidst the massive societal upheavals we’ve witnessed across the globe over the past couple of years. Ultimately, digital transformation is a movement to put people first. Integrative solutions, like [Salesforce.org’s Education Cloud](#), ease administrative burdens, personalise student experiences, enable flexible learning journeys, diversify and expand what’s possible, increase a feeling of belonging, and bring students, alumni, staff, stakeholders, administrators, and faculty closer together – not just within the university, but across the globe.



Salesforce.org powers the purpose of people dedicated to solving our world's biggest problems. A global community of nonprofits and educational institutions relies on our technology to help them operate effectively, raise funds, and build more meaningful relationships with those they serve.

Education Cloud empowers Business School Leaders globally.

[Learn more](#)