



**BUSINESS SCHOOL LEADERS RESEARCH:  
OUTWARD-LOOKING STRATEGIES  
IN MANAGEMENT EDUCATION**

## Introducing AMBA & BGA's Business School leaders research

This report explores the strategies that Business School leaders are employing within the management education landscape, assessing their perceptions regarding the future operational direction of Business Schools.

The findings from this report have been generated from AMBA & BGA's Business School leaders research series, which outlines the views, experiences and visions of these senior decision makers. This is the second of three reports that investigates key themes affecting Business Schools and helps to forecast how the next decade may look for Business Schools.

To understand the context behind these results, it is worth discussing the economic environment in which Schools now operate first. The world economy is going through a period of rapid evolution, with businesses progressively more routed in

digitally-based or informed products and services. The digital economy is providing a base for the development of new technologies, which in turn are taking hold and influencing how businesses are operating, as well as the lives of consumers.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that 'the manufacture of ICT goods is one of the most globally integrated industries'. These structural technological shifts are also having a huge influence on future business leaders and students, and so it follows that the Business School sector will have to adapt to these new ideas.

AMBA & BGA's Business School leaders' study into the outward-looking strategies in management education aims to provide fresh insight into how Business Schools are currently operating, as well as their plans to expand and adapt their

offering in today's economic climate. The report covers topics such as perceptions towards their own and competing Business Schools, the sharing of resources and ideas with affiliated universities, corporate partnerships, future mergers and broader adaptations, and the future development of programmes.

The first report in this research series, the future of technology in management education, found that more than three quarter (77%) of leaders believe that the fundamentals of the MBA will change in the next 10 years and two in five (40%) think it is 'very likely'. This report analyses how some of these changes might be shaped by the ways in which Business Schools are run in the future.

We know that AMBA & BGA Business Schools have been resilient, and indeed grown, as the world around them has changed. Our most recent application and enrolment report

has shown that, while during recent global economic and geopolitical uncertainty, AMBA-accredited Business Schools grew their applications and enrolments between 2017 and 2018 (by 9% and 10% respectively).

In light of this growth in MBA cohorts and the anticipated changes to the qualification in the future, the findings from this study indicate that in the next few years a considerable proportion of Business School leaders anticipate significant developments in their institutions.

We would like to thank everyone within AMBA & BGA's network who took the time to complete the survey.

**Will Dawes**  
**Research and Insight Manager**  
**AMBA & BGA**

## Methodology

AMBA & BGA contacted leaders from within its accredited Business School network to invite them to participate in an online survey between 14 August and 30 September 2019.

This study forms a three-part series of reports that seek to understand how Business Schools are planning for the future. In total, 358 of the leading Business School professionals globally participated in this study.

In instances where a survey participant did not complete the full survey, the responses to questions they did complete are included.

In total, there were 222 full participants and 136 partial participants. Where figures do not sum to 100 or to a combined figure, this is due to rounding.

The data is unweighted as the country profile of participants broadly matches that of AMBA & BGA. Participants in the report are referred to as 'Business School leaders' or 'leaders'.





## Profile of Business Schools

The participating Business School leaders work at institutions that serve a range of cohort sizes.

Approximately two in five (41%) are from Schools with 0-500 students and almost a quarter (23%) are from institutions with 501 to 1,000 students. Smaller proportions of leaders are from Schools enrolled at larger institutions, with 16% working at Schools that enrol between 1,001 and 3,000 students and 19% enrolling more than 3,001 students.

The regional composition of participants is broadly comparable with the geographical coverage of AMBA & BGA Schools. More than two in five Business School leaders (46%) are based in Europe,

approximately one in six (16%) are based in the UK and more than one in 10 (12%) are based in Latin America.

Meanwhile, the remaining making up of the sample was from Africa (7%), China (including Hong Kong, China) (6%), Asia and the Middle East (excluding China and India) (5%), India (4%), North America and Caribbean (3%) and Oceania (1%).

**'The regional composition of participants is broadly comparable with the geographical coverage of AMBA & BGA Schools'**



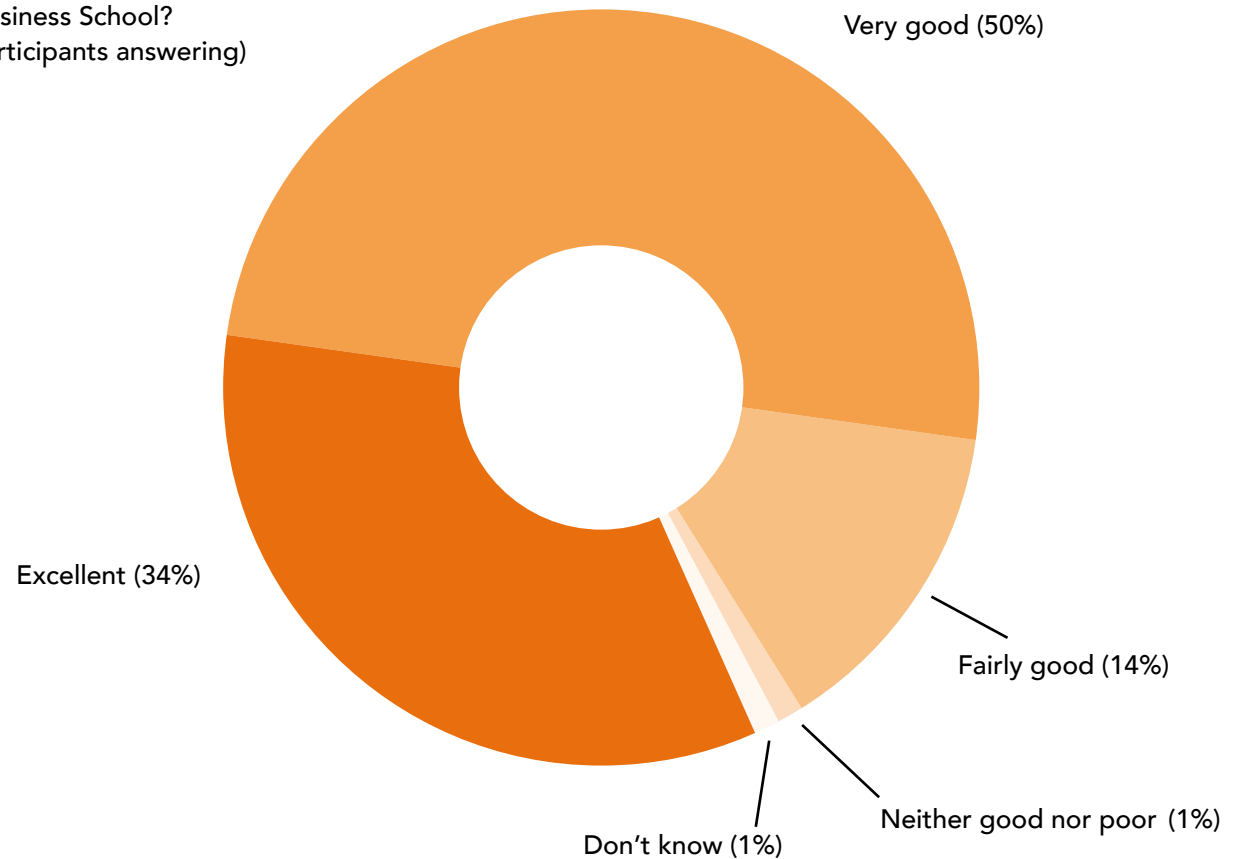
## How do leaders rate their own Business School?

It is worth assessing how leaders rate the performance of their own and competing Business Schools to gauge their perspective on the market in which they operate. Leaders largely believe that their Business School is high-performing with almost nine in 10 (84%) rating it as either 'very good' or 'excellent'. The remaining leaders think their School is either 'fairly good' (14%) or 'neither good nor poor' (1%). None of the leaders rate their School as 'poor' or worse.

Leaders have a similarly positive perception of their School's MBA, with the same proportion rating the programme as being at least 'very good' as the Business School overall (85%). When analysing the ratings within this bracket, a slightly higher proportion rate their School's MBA as 'excellent' than their School overall (40% vs. 34%). Meanwhile, one in seven leaders (14%) rate their MBA programme as 'fairly good'.

**Figure 1: Rating own Business School**

On balance, how would you rate your Business School?  
(319 participants answering)



Leaders were asked how well they believe their Business School is performing in relation to various externally-facing factors. Leaders are most likely to say that their School is doing well at 'communicating the defining elements of your Business School which differentiate it from others to potential students' and delivering 'social media' (77% believe they are doing either 'fairly well' or 'very well' at both). This was closely followed by 'enhancing the reputation of your Business School in the media' (72%).

Ratings are lowest for services related to supporting the employment opportunities of graduates. A lower proportion of leaders believe their School is doing well at 'helping students and graduates find the job they want' (67%) and 'engaging with alumni' (64%).

Leaders were then asked to rate their Business School in terms of

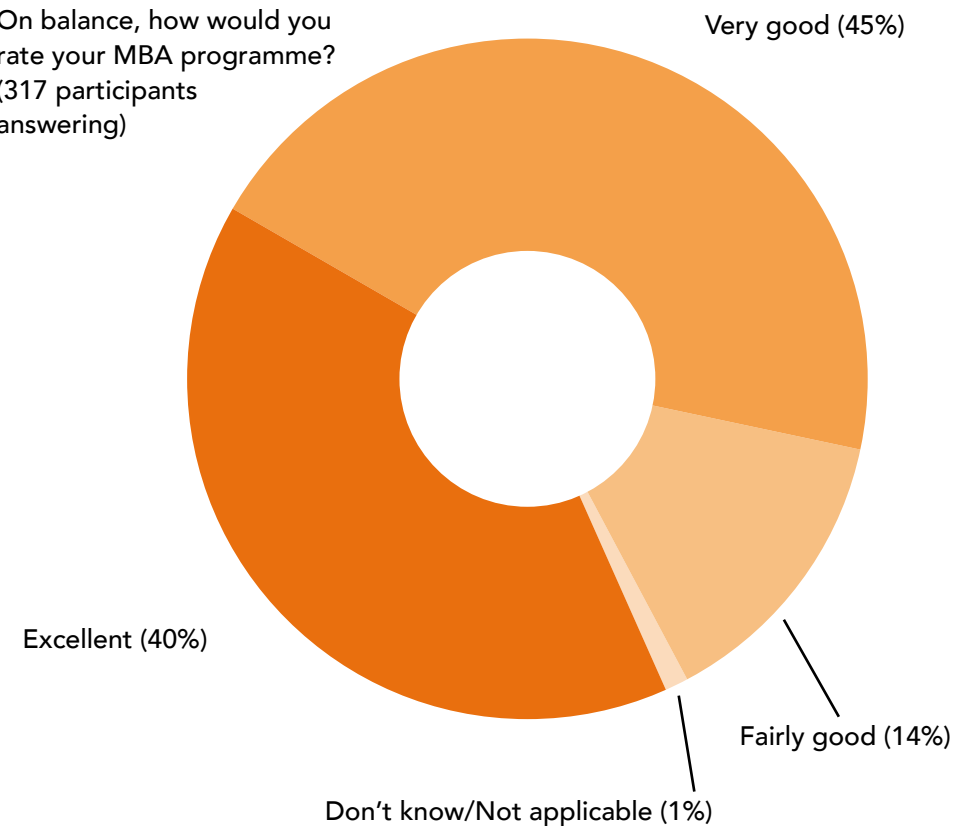
the impact it delivers on a range of measures. They were asked to consider the impact of each on a scale of zero to 10, where 10 reflects the maximum perceived impact and zero the least. The features which leaders believe their Business School delivers the greatest level of impact is related to interpersonal development.

Almost two thirds of leaders (65%) give an impact rating of at least eight out of 10 for 'delivering networking opportunities' and 'improving confidence'. A similar proportion of leaders (64%) also provide a rating of at least eight out of 10 for 'improving people management skills'. This rating was also given by approximately half of leaders (51%) for 'improving technical skills' and 'improving mental resilience' (45%).

The latter two features may shine a light on areas where Schools can improve their delivery.

**Figure 2: Rating own MBA programme**

On balance, how would you rate your MBA programme?  
(317 participants answering)



# Rating competing Business Schools and programmes

Leaders were then asked to rate the Business Schools and MBA programmes with which they compete.

While ratings given for competing Schools are lower than the Schools in which they work, the differences are relatively marginal. Seven in 10 leaders (71%) say that the Business Schools with which they compete are 'very good' or 'excellent', while a quarter (25%) say they 'fairly good'.

These results are mirrored in perceptions towards MBA programmes with which they compete. Seven in 10 (71%) think these programmes are 'very good' or 'excellent' and almost a quarter (23%) think they are 'fairly good'.

Just 3% think competing MBA programmes are neither good

nor poor and 1% say that they are 'fairly poor'. These findings illustrate several aspects about perceptions leaders hold towards management education provision.

First, it demonstrates that leaders rate both their own institutions and programmes, as well their competitors, highly.

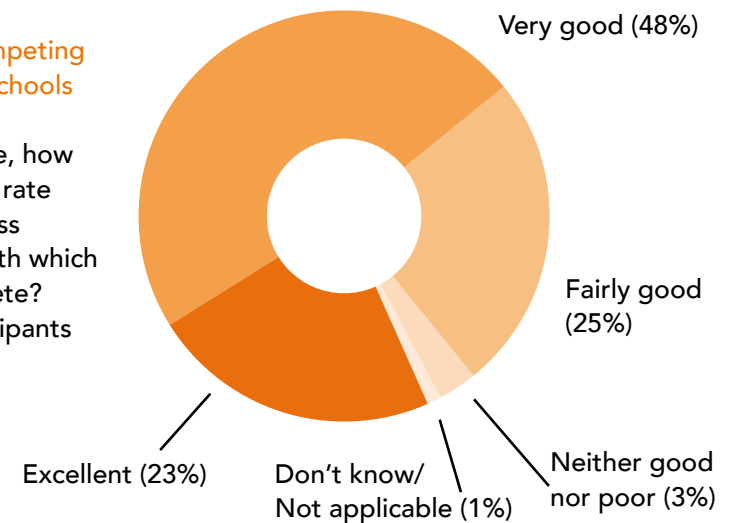
It also shows they rate their own School's delivery slightly more highly than they do their competitors.

While this indicates that leaders perceive their competitors as high performers, whether they are or not in reality, it suggests that there is mutual admiration for Business Schools among leaders at different institutions.

It could also indicate that competition between Schools for students is strong.

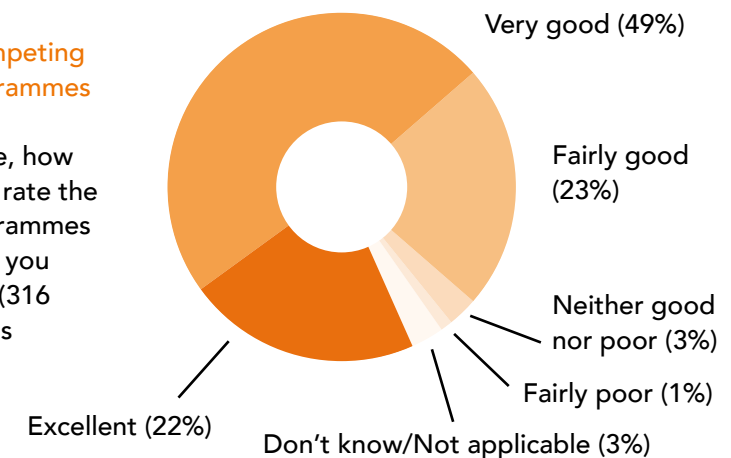
**Figure 3:**  
Rating competing Business Schools

On balance, how would you rate the Business Schools with which you compete? (316 participants answering)



**Figure 4:**  
Rating competing MBA programmes

On balance, how would you rate the MBA programmes with which you compete? (316 participants answering)



# Optimism about the future of Business Schools

The finding which perhaps underpins the remainder of this report is the very high levels of optimism about the future of Business Schools. More than nine in 10 leaders (95%) are optimistic about the future of Business Schools in their own country. Two fifths of leaders are 'very optimistic' (41%) and more than half are 'fairly optimistic' (54%). Just 4% of leaders are 'not very optimistic', while none of the leaders are 'not at all optimistic'.

This optimism is reinforced by a strong belief that Business Schools are well positioned to grow capacity in the next three years. More than eight in 10 leaders (84%) are confident, while just over one in ten (13%) are not confident. This finding should provide confidence for Business Schools to develop the strategies they are planning to implement. The remainder of this report will explore some of these plans, in order to understand the possible developments of Business Schools in the future.

## Current corporate partnerships

Seven in 10 leaders (68%) report that their Business Schools have formal corporate partnerships with other organisations, while a quarter (24%) say they do not. Meanwhile, almost one in 10 (8%) do not know whether their Business School has a formal arrangement with another company. A wide range of partnership types are reported by leaders to be taking place. These include initiatives such as corporate qualifications, joint branding, graduate placements, academic and research alliances, and shared programme and training delivery.

Leaders were asked to rate the impact of four kinds of corporate partnerships into which their institution has entered. Corporate partnerships related to the image of the Business School are seen to have the greatest impact.

On average, leaders think the impact corporate partnerships have on 'the image of your Business School' is

7.5 out of 10 and two thirds (66%) rate the impact of these corporate partnerships as at least eight out of 10. The next highest average ratings are attributed to 'corporate partnerships involving networking opportunities for students' (6.8), 'career opportunities for students' (6.7), 'developing capacity within the Business School such as implementation of technology' and to 'research capability and intellectual property within my Business School' (both 6.6). Research and technology therefore appear to be areas where corporate partnerships could perhaps deliver greater impact and effectiveness in the future.

## Formal alliances between Business Schools

Leaders were asked if their institution has any formal alliances with other Business Schools, for example through systematically sharing resources or intellectual property. Two thirds of leaders (65%) say their Schools currently has formal alliances

**'More than nine out of 10 leaders (94%) are optimistic about the future of Business Schools in their own country'**

**'Research and technology appear to be areas where corporate partnerships could perhaps deliver greater impact and effectiveness in the future'**

with others, while more than a quarter do not (27%) and almost one in 10 (8%) do not know. The alliances that exist vary in size. Approximately half of leaders (51%) say that their School's alliances comprise of two to five Schools, more than a third (35%) say they have alliances with 10



or more other Schools and one in 10 (10%) between six and nine Schools. The remaining leaders (4%) were unsure of how many Schools with which they have an alliance. Leaders who indicated that their School did not have any formal alliances with other Business Schools were asked if they are likely or unlikely to forge any in the next three years.

On balance, marginally more leaders say that this is more likely than unlikely. Three in 10 leaders (30%) say that new alliances are likely, while almost a quarter (23%) say they are unlikely. Meanwhile, almost half (46%) say that they are either unsure or that it is neither likely nor unlikely.

### Relationships with affiliated universities

Approximately three quarters of leaders (76%) report that their Business School is closely affiliated to a university. More than a fifth (22%) indicate that their School is not affiliated with another higher education institution, presumably meaning their School operates as a single entity. The remaining 2% are unsure.

The majority of leaders are satisfied with the relationship their School has with its affiliated university. Four in five leaders (80%) are satisfied, which includes a third (33%) who are 'very satisfied'.

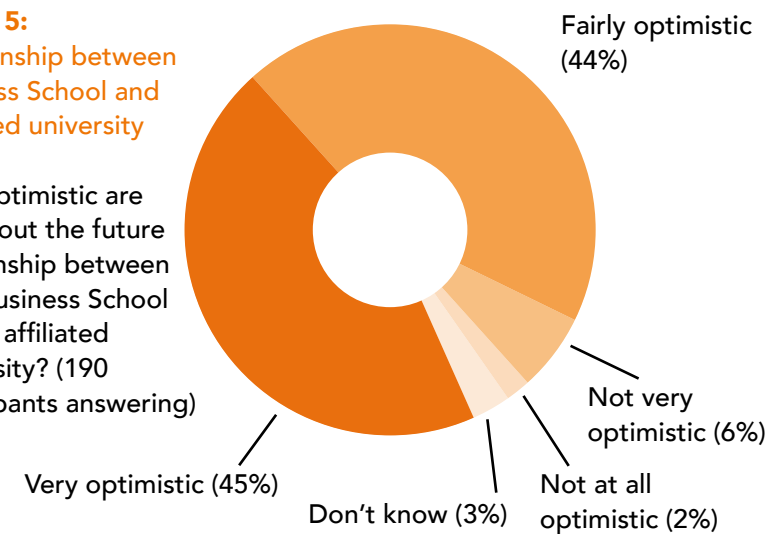
Meanwhile, approximately one in 10 leaders (9%) are dissatisfied. The main reason leaders gave for their dissatisfaction with the relationship between their own institution and its affiliated university is lower levels of Business School autonomy. This perception is linked to a feeling that their Business School is treated more like another department within the institution, rather than a separate entity.

A further reason cited was that the university's decision-making process is too slow compared to the more dynamic Business School.

The levels of satisfaction held by leaders regarding their School's relationship with its affiliated university is more than matched by the proportion of leaders who are optimistic about their future relationship with the university. Almost nine in 10 (89%) are optimistic.

**Figure 5:**  
Relationship between Business School and affiliated university

How optimistic are you about the future relationship between your Business School and its affiliated University? (190 participants answering)



**'The majority of leaders are satisfied with the relationship their School has with its affiliated university'**

**'35% of participants say they have alliances with 10 or more Schools and one in 10 (10%) between six and nine Schools'**

Leaders were then asked how well they believe their Business School is collaborating with their affiliated university. They are most likely to think that their Business School collaborates successfully on 'issues of governance which impact both institutions' (87% report it is something their School does 'very well' or 'fairly well').

The perception that strategic, big-picture, initiatives are the best performing collaborations is a continuing theme. The next most highly rated collaborations are the 'strategic decisions relating to the commercial strategy of both institutions' (79% say they are doing well at this), followed by 'utilising the combined physical capital resources of both institutions' (77%) and 'utilising the combined intellectual property of both institutions' (73%).

Collaborations with affiliated universities in terms of 'sharing teaching staff' (70%), 'marketing of programmes' (66%), 'sharing research staff' (65%) and 'sharing operational staff' (59%) are less likely to be cited as areas in which partnerships are yielding positive feedback, although the majority

reflect positively on the benefits in each of these areas.

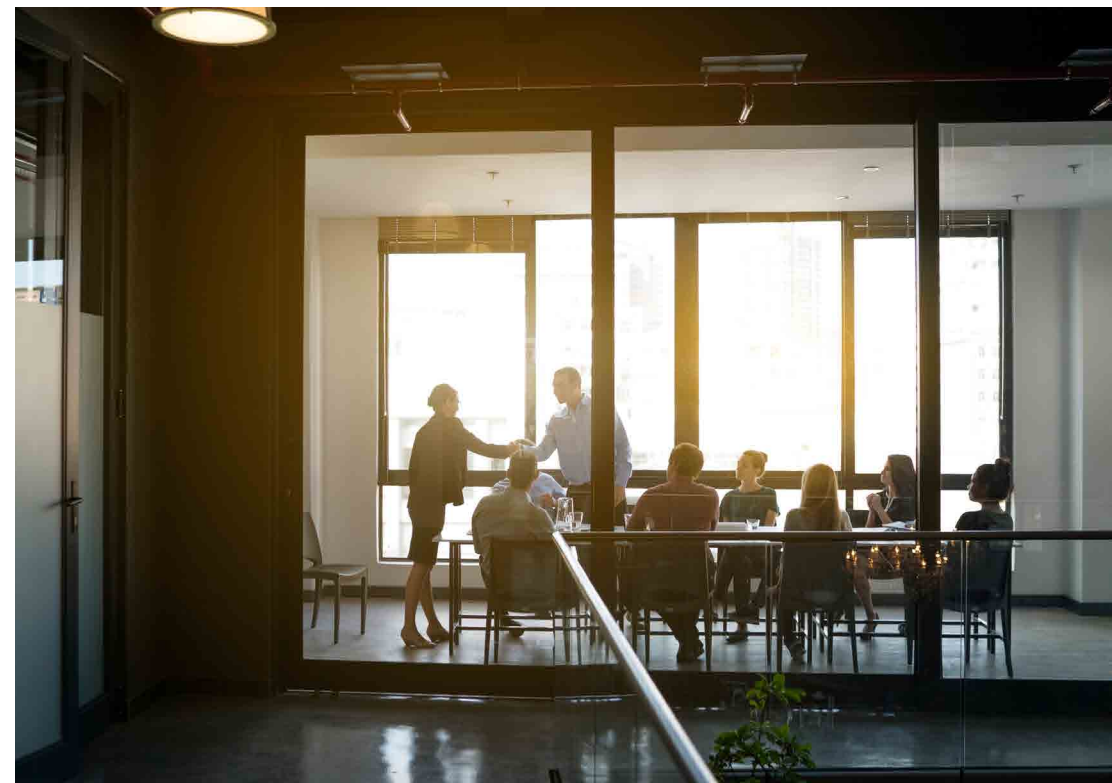
When asked what could improve how well leaders worked with their affiliated university, many cited that they want their Business School to have more control over their staff, for example in recruitment and promotion decisions.

The desire for greater levels of autonomy from the university also stood out as a theme, illustrating the importance of striking a balance in alliances between independence and cooperation. Some participants suggested that any profit from the Business Schools should be fed back into the School, rather than going into a central fund at the university.

The survey then asked leaders whether their Business School regularly uses faculty from other institutions. More than half (56%) say they do, while almost two in five (38%) say they do not. Leaders are most likely to cite that external faculty is used to teach elements of modules (75%), while more than half (56%) say that they provide complete modules and just under half (46%) state that they supervise dissertations.

**'Participants are most likely to think that their Business School collaborates successfully on issues of governance'**

**'The perception that strategic, big-picture, initiatives are best performing collaborations is a continuing theme'**



## Future mergers and international expansion

The study explored the external priorities of Business Schools, including how they are forging links and relationships with other organisations and Business Schools. This helps provide some understanding about the strategic direction of Business Schools, and the extent to which they are looking to collaborate.

Leaders were asked whether it is likely that their Business School will merge with another one in the next few three years. The great majority do not think a merger is very likely. Almost seven in 10 leaders (68%) think it is 'not at all likely' and a fifth (19%) 'not very likely'. Meanwhile, just 3% think it is 'very likely' and 3% 'fairly likely'. On one level this is

unsurprising given the potentially significant operational implications of a merger, however it also underlines how leaders are confident that the existing structure of their organisation will remain.

Leaders were then asked how likely it is that their Business School will open an overseas campus within the next three years. Almost a fifth (17%) say it is likely that this will occur, and this is an important finding. Setting up an international campus is a large commitment, both operationally and financially. Reports of this being likely to happen in the near future, even by a substantial minority of leaders, is therefore potentially significant, and reflects the international outlook of many Business Schools.

**'Almost a fifth say it is likely their Business School will open an overseas campus within the next three years... Reports of this being likely to happen in the near future is significant and reflects the international outlook of many Business Schools'**



# Perceptions of students and graduates

To understand the trajectory of business education it is worth exploring perceptions about the quality of applicants to Business Schools compared with five years ago.

The questionnaire asked leaders whether they felt the calibre of graduates, across a suite of qualifications, had increased or

decreased in this period. Leaders are more likely to think that the standard of applicants has increased across each of the qualifications available at Business Schools, rather than decreased or stayed the same. They are most likely to say that the calibre of applicants has increased for MBAs (60%), followed by masters and undergraduate degrees (55% for both).

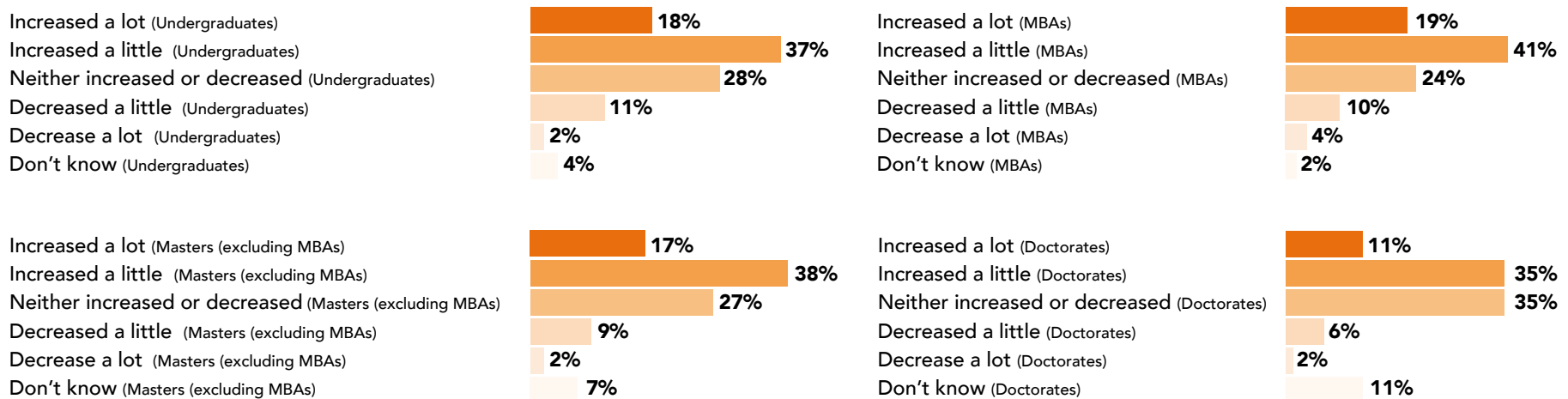
A slightly smaller proportion state that the calibre of doctorate applicants has increased in the past five years (46%), however this is likely due to a higher proportion of 'don't know' responses compared to other qualifications (11%).

Indeed, just 8% say the calibre of doctorate applicants has decreased, the smallest proportion who feel this

way about applicants of all the qualifications.

A very small proportion of the leaders feel that the calibre of applicants has decreased for each of the qualifications. The remaining leaders typically think that the calibre of students have neither increased nor decreased (between 23% - 32%).

**Figure 6: Perceptions of the calibre of student applicants** For each of the following groups of programmes, do you think the calibre of applicants has decreased, increased or stayed the same compared with five years ago?





## Adaptation of programme content

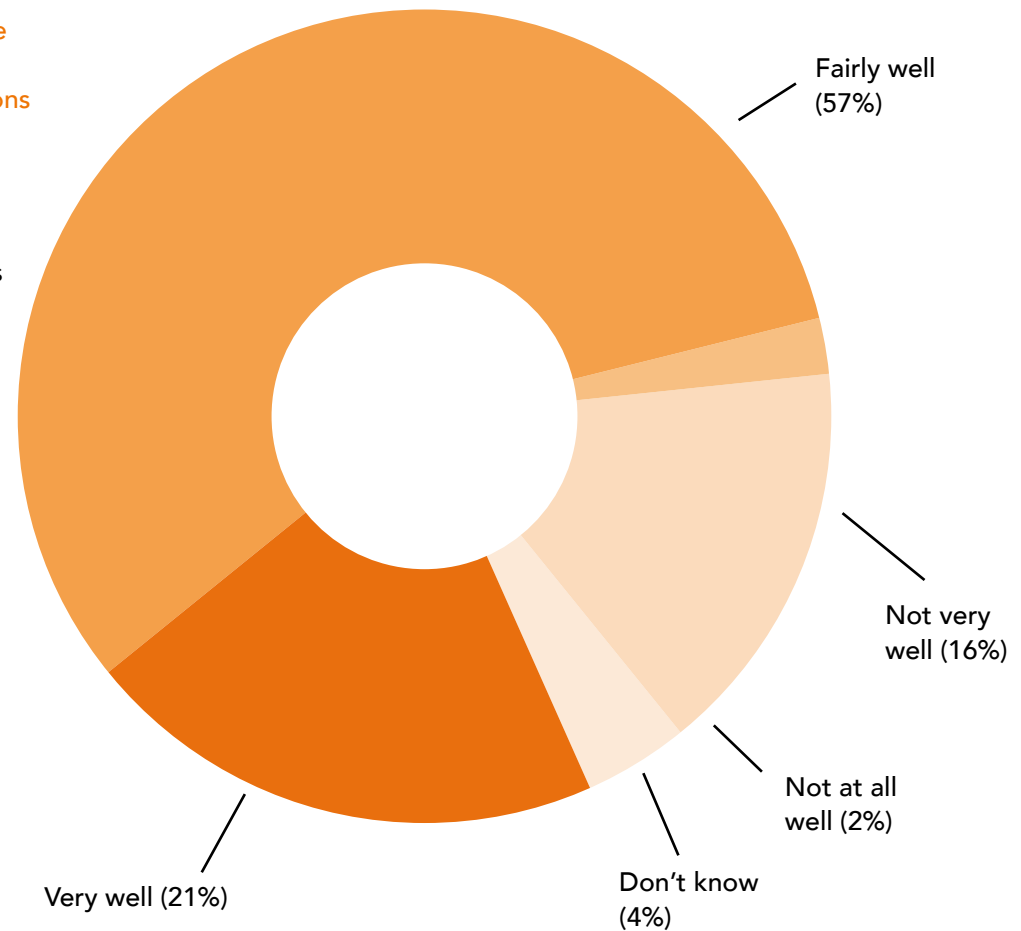
There is a responsibility for Business Schools to adapt their programmes to ensure they are relevant, so that not only is the content aligned to industry trends, but also so they are suitable for different generations. Leaders were asked specifically how well their School is at taking into consideration the needs of different generations when designing programmes.

Almost four in five leaders (78%) think Schools do take into consideration the facets of different age groups when designing programmes, although overall just a fifth (21%) think Schools do this 'very well'. It should also be noted that a significant minority (16%) say their School does not consider generational differences very well.

**'78% think Schools take into consideration the facets of different age groups when designing programmes'**

**Figure 7: How well Business Schools take into account facets of different generations when designing programmes**

How well do you believe your Business School takes into consideration the facets of different age group generations when designing programmes?



## Summary

This report sets out the strategic thinking of Business School leaders across key organisational themes. The study finds that Business School leaders typically feel optimistic about the future of their institution and the sector in which they work, as well as those with whom they compete.

This is underpinned by leaders rating Schools highly across a range of factors and in the belief that the calibre of applications to a range of programmes is increasing. It is also underpinned by a wider optimism in the future of Business Schools. These positive perceptions show that leaders foresee opportunities

for growth and development, despite the challenging global economic climate.

The study has also shone a light on areas where more can be done, even when perceptions are generally positive. For example, most Business Schools are affiliated with a university, and while the great majority are satisfied with these partnerships, there appears to be an appetite to balance the power dynamic between the institutions more evenly.

Perhaps there is more impact Schools can deliver on the student outcomes. For example, could

more be done to ensure institutions improve the technical skills and mental resilience of students?

But we should also celebrate the areas where Schools are seen to be making a big difference, in terms of the interpersonal development of students and the strategic partnerships which enable Schools to enhance their offer.

Looking outside their institutions, most leaders have a positive view of the value corporate partnerships have had on their Business School, especially concerning their image, and the positive impact that these partnerships have on their students.

This is important, as it suggests that well thought through strategic partnerships with organisations can make a real difference to the experiences of Business Schools.

It is also noteworthy that a significant minority of leaders believe it is likely that Schools will open overseas campuses soon, something that could have a profound impact of their student coverage, as well as their international reputation and brand.

The study demonstrates that leaders at Business Schools believe the sector to be both robust in an uncertain world economy and open to expansive strategies.

The management education community and beyond should take confidence from the conviction Business School leaders have about the perceived positive future of the higher education sector.

**‘The study demonstrates that leaders at Business Schools believe the sector to be both robust in an uncertain world economy and open to expansive strategies’**



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