

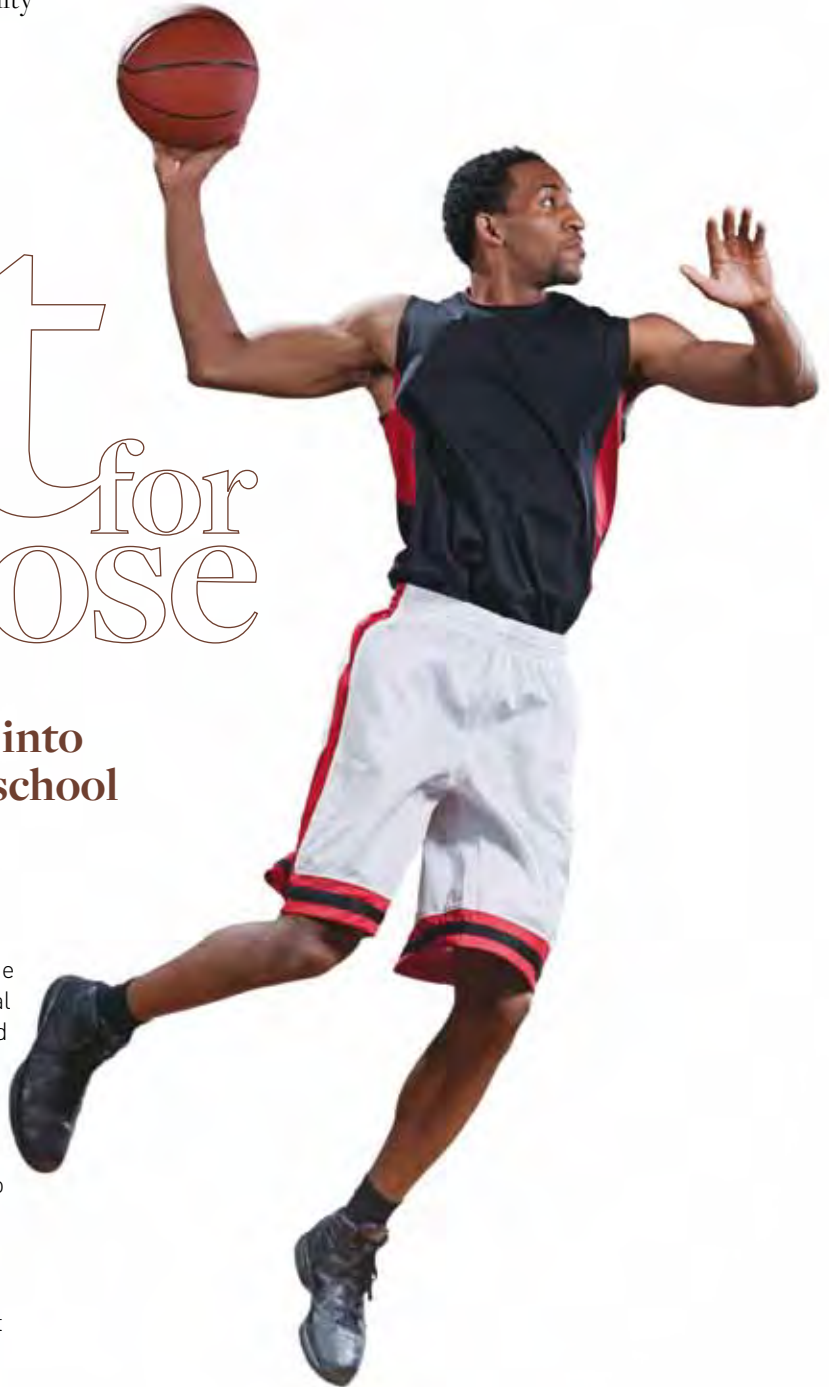
**David Grayson** provides more detail on how Cranfield School of Management in Britain is incorporating sustainability

# Fit for Purpose

## Putting sustainability into practice in a business school

**T**here has been an increasingly vocal debate in recent years about whether management education is fit for purpose. The publication of the *50plus20* report in June 2012 by an international group of business school academics published under the auspices of the UN PRME, the Global Responsible Leadership Initiative and the World Business School Council for Sustainable Development represents a particularly challenging reform manifesto for business schools.

In 2007, in my early fifties, I found myself joining academia, by becoming part of the faculty of the Cranfield School of Management in Britain. The official brief was to establish a newly endowed centre for Corporate Responsibility. Only in the last couple of years has it become clearer that this also means supporting change-management at Cranfield to embed sustainability and corporate responsibility within research, teaching, consulting and Cranfield's own organisational practices.



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This reflects the arguments of the *50plus20* report. Our Cranfield experiences (positive and negative) may help some other schools that are also seeking to journey towards sustainability and responsibility.

### **Business schools need to prioritise sustainability**

The plethora of reports published around the Rio+20 meeting provides ample evidence of the worsening global sustainability crisis; and the business logic for business to embrace sustainability.

Business cannot and should not try to solve these challenges alone: governments, international institutions, civil society, individuals as citizens and as consumers all have to engage. Business, however, has a crucial role in finding the products and services and new ways of operating that will ensure that nine billion people can live reasonably well by mid-century within the constraints of one planet.

That means business schools need to be much smarter at helping business to embrace sustainability. In particular, rather than positioning corporate sustainability in opposition to markets, it means helping business to use its entrepreneurial vitality and innovation to drive sustainability.

Managers in all sectors need to be equipped with the mindset, behaviours and skills for sustainability. Frank Horwitz, Cranfield's director, and I described some of our school's initiatives to embed sustainability in an earlier *Global Focus* article (EFMD *Global Focus* | Volume 04 | Issue 02 2010. "Putting PRME into practice in a business school"). We have continued to develop these over the last two years.

### **Cranfield on corporate sustainability**

We have, for example, published *Cranfield on Corporate Sustainability* (Greenleaf Publishing 2012), in which 30 of our faculty and doctoral students write about sustainability from their particular management disciplines.

As far as we can establish, this is the first time that a cross-section of faculty from one school have produced a book on corporate sustainability. Our objective was to engage with more of our faculty, beyond those already working on corporate sustainability, to create a platform for further reflection about just how sustainability will change theory and practice in their particular disciplines and to "nudge" faculty into further projects around the subject.

Lead authors for each of the book's 13 chapters also summarise the key messages of their chapter in short film interviews that are freely accessible on the school's website along with an executive summary of the book:

<http://www.som.cranfield.ac.uk/som/dinamic-content/media/knowledgeinterchange/booksummaries/Cranfield%20on%20Corporate%20Sustainability/Summary.pdf>

### Extending planned initiatives

Similarly, an already scheduled overhaul of the School of Management website and the establishment of “management themes” to present the school’s cross-disciplinary work in key thematic areas has become a vehicle for helping to show the implicit as well as the explicit sustainability connections among more of the faculty’s work.

We are also experimenting with the development of a suite of teaching cases, exploring how one company’s approach to embedding sustainability leads to fundamental changes in sourcing, manufacturing, innovation, marketing and sales, human resources, strategy and even product “servitisation”.

Each case is being written by faculty and/or doctoral students from that particular management discipline under the overall project management of the Doughty Centre for Corporate Responsibility. The initial idea for this project, as with the *Cranfield on Corporate Sustainability* book, came from faculty members who had not previously been involved with sustainability and corporate responsibility but who recognised the synergies with their own fields.

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### Involving business people

Even before the recommendations of *50plus20*, we have been involving experienced corporate responsibility practitioners in leading companies and corporate sustainability experts in helping us to design and shape research projects related to corporate responsibility. We are also working with business-led CR coalitions, as well as individual businesses, as routes to market in order to increase relevance, speed up the dissemination of results and to help to frame further relevant research questions.

Another *50plus200* recommendation is to increase the use by business schools of reflective practitioners from business and civil society – again, something which we are trying to do. More controversial is the question of professors by practice.

Schools like Cranfield have long welcomed business people in mid or even late career who want to retrain and work their way up the academic hierarchy. Going straight into a professorship from outside academia is altogether scarier and more challenging – even when, as in my case, I enjoyed strong support from the school director and his predecessor and, until his tragically early death in 2012, an engaged and thoughtful centre sponsor.

If *50plus20* is to be implemented, there will need to be a good number of professors by practice appointed by business schools across the world. There is an opportunity for a well-respected organisation, like the EFMD, to champion a fast-track development programme, to fill some of the more gaping and critical gaps for about-to-be and recently appointed professors.

Something akin, for example, to the long-established and well-regarded International Teachers Programme run for younger, high-flyer academics. An equivalent for new professors by practice might be linked to an international mentoring programme.

### Remember Deep Throat's advice: follow the money

Older readers will recall the Watergate whistleblower, nick-named Deep Throat, who famously advised the Washington Post investigative reporters Woodward and Bernstein to "follow the money!"

Interestingly, an autumn 2012 survey by professional services firm Deloitte found that two-thirds of chief financial officers (CFOs) say they are involved in leading sustainability strategies within their organisations and more than half say their involvement has increased over the last year.

The report, *Sustainability: CFOs come to the table*, collected the views of 250 chief financial officers in companies with an average revenue of \$12 billion (£7.4 billion) in 14 countries. Deloitte's sustainability leader, Dave Pearson, explains that: "Companies are sitting up and taking notice that sustainability is not just a brand or a corporate responsibility element - it is becoming a key driver of financial performance and the future of business."

Interestingly, at Cranfield, the school's own sustainability strategy has been championed and led by the school's finance director, Neil Wilson, from the outset.

While still early days, there are visible changes such as investment in energy-saving hardware and software (eg new lighting, audiovisual equipment and an air handling plant) to reduce the amount of electricity consumed; removal of bottled water and paper towels; new, more energy efficient toilets; and increased recycling. Other environmental impacts like reducing air travel remain to be tackled.

### Signs of progress

A major review of the Cranfield MBA has led to corporate responsibility and ethics becoming compulsory courses. New MScs in Strategic Leadership and in Management will be launched and, from the outset, sustainability and corporate responsibility will be core (required) courses. In a 2012 *Financial Times* Soapbox article Professor George Yip argues that business schools need a new business model to be relevant and advises: "Start with action and let the mindset follow." That has very much been our Cranfield approach. **gf**



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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Grayson CBE is director of the Doughty Centre for Corporate Responsibility at the Cranfield School of Management. Further information on the Cranfield approach can be found in the school's 2012 PRME Communication on Progress.