

# DIVERSITY LEADERSHIP:

Business Schools don't have ALL the answers either, they are trying to figure it out too.

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**Wo+Men's  
Leadership  
Centre**



**UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE**  
Judge Business School

## The Wo+Men's Leadership Centre

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The Wo+Men's Leadership Centre (WLC) is a centre committed to help women realise and embrace their potential in order to become successful leaders. Part of Cambridge Judge Business School, the WLC achieves meaningful impact globally, across a wide range of organisations: from large companies to small startups; within for-profit to non-profit sectors, from corporations to government agencies.

By generating support for gender diversity in senior leadership positions, we will foster the next generation of women leaders and expand the pool of women with the requisite leadership skills.

### **How will we achieve our mission?**

**Impactful Research** – The WLC undertakes cutting-edge Research to discover the challenges within the work environment and use it to generate practical solutions into the issues. Such Research will enable us to make a meaningful difference in gender equality and women's empowerment globally.

**Innovative Programmes** – Research findings are used to create the basis of our women's leadership programmes, aimed at inspiring prospective female leaders and employers.

**Multi-faceted Approach** – Throughout the year, in addition to our Research, we offer a wide variety of panel events, workshops and our flagship annual conference to foster thought leadership, dialogue and action. We do so to engage as many people as possible to increase the support base for gender diversity in the work environment.

**Inclusivity Policy** – The WLC is open to everyone, no matter their gender, age or position. We invite everyone to be a part of our community to help spread our message of diversity and create networks to promote open dialogue and offer successful solutions. This inclusive bottom-up platform is an important cornerstone of the WLC.

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The global concerted efforts towards gender equality, recent discourse on inequalities from the pandemic, and discussion of racial matters have increased attention towards Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives (DIIs). Business schools, being strategically positioned to bring lasting change to the global corporate environment, have led the call for change. However, there is a dearth of literature evidence on DIIs specific to business schools. This research therefore aimed to understand the diversity baseline and existing initiatives; identify barriers preventing business school DIIs achieving their intended objectives; document unintended consequences arising from DIIs; and explore opportunities to either amplify positive, or suppress negative, unintended consequences.

### **Methods**

Mixed method research was conducted via comparative [analysis of diversity trends](#) from 2013-2020; qualitative content analysis of twenty-two business schools' diversity websites and thirty-two interviews of business school representatives involved in DIIs and independent experts who specialise in diversity research and have published on the topic. The scope of the analysis was limited to top-ranking UK and US business schools as identified via Financial Times Business School Rankings.

### **Results**

Gender diversity is gradually improving over time. UK business schools had higher gender and international diversity than US schools. Neither had achieved gender parity for staff or students. Barriers to implementing effective DIIs range from process-related issues such as bureaucracy, lack of data, lack of structure and poor communication, to cultural issues such as transparency, accountability and communication. Unintended consequences include perceptions of unfairness and tensions between groups. Lived experiences, as described by interviewees, highlighted the need for support for those involved in DIIs.

### **Implications for practice**

The most effective means for achieving a successful DII is to establish a dedicated DII office, empowered by Business School Leadership, with appropriate authority structures and a clear remit. Monitoring and measuring of diversity metrics, as well as assessing and reflecting on progress are important for impact and understanding where to focus resources. Transparency, accountability, clear communication and buy-in are important for business school culture, in order to drive impactful DIIs. Additional effort is required to integrate diversity into teaching through the curriculum and to communicate clearly inclusive values.

In light of global concerted efforts towards gender equality, the emerging evidence of health inequalities and socio-demographic implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as recent racial discourse, the calls to action for Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives (DIIs) have increased significantly.

Organisations are making pledges and raising quotas for DII targets globally. In the past year, many of these renewed pledges have been led by academic institutions, and in particular business schools.

Business schools are strategically positioned to bring lasting change to the global corporate environment. They train students who, as change agents, enter the global talent market, providing employers with the widest possible range of skills and thoughts. Moreover, as they rise through corporations, business school graduates set the agenda for DIIs through strategic and tactical action. Diversity programmes have been promoted for decades and can boast innumerable success stories emphasising their importance. More recently, however, evidence is showing that DIIs can be ineffective, or even produce worse outcomes for intended groups, if not well implemented. Some scholarly work has documented the increasing DIIs within academic institutions, but few studies have assessed their impact and consequences. It is important to explore positive and negative consequences of DIIs to promote positive outcomes whilst mitigating negative ones.

While diversity in business schools has improved over time, gender parity and ethnic diversity are still lagging. **The study explored DIIs across leading UK and US business schools in order to understand what is happening, what is working, and what lessons can be learned.**

To achieve the breadth and depth of insight required to enable research questions to be comprehensively answered, a mixed methods approach was applied to this research study. Quantitative data from Business Education Ranking Sites were used to discern trends in diversity, while data from the qualitative content analysis and interviews were used to gain further insights and perspectives.

### 2.1 Quantitative analysis

Quantitative analysis was used to obtain independent, external, neutral data on business schools, understand diversity trends in recent years and evaluate the performance of selected top-ranking business schools in specific diversity metrics. The business school sample population was derived from the 2020 FT ranking as outlined in Table 1.

*Table 1: List of Business Schools included in research*

| United Kingdom   | United States                                 |
|--|---|
| University of Oxford: Said   | Harvard Business School                       |
| Warwick Business School  | University of Pennsylvania: Wharton           |
| Imperial College Business School                                   | Stanford Graduate School of Business          |
| University of Cambridge: Judge                                     | MIT: Sloan                                    |
| Cranfield School of Management                                     | Columbia Business School                      |
| Henley Business School   | University of Chicago: Booth                  |
| London Business School   | Northwestern University: Kellogg              |
| City, University of London,<br>The Business School (formerly Cass) | University of California at Berkeley:<br>Haas |
| Alliance Manchester Business School                                | Yale School of Management                     |
| Durham University Business School                                  | Dartmouth College: Tuck                       |
| University of Edinburgh<br>Business School                         | Duke University: Fuqua                        |

The scope of the analysis was limited to 10 top-ranking business schools. However, 11 schools were included in the final analysis as some business schools either do not offer an EMBA programme but rank high on the Global (regular) MBA programme or vice versa. To analyse diversity trends, the FT ranking was reviewed to determine top-ranking Business Schools in the UK and US for Global and Executive MBA programmes. These were selected as they remain the most sought-after business education courses by individuals and employers globally. Data for Global MBA programmes was available from 2013 through 2020 and from 2014 through 2020 for Executive MBA programmes. The only diversity data available are for gender and international representation.

<sup>1</sup>Business School diversity data tends to focus on gender and country of origin, with limited information on ethnicity, which is important, and even less on other characteristics such as disability, sexual orientation or religion. Other elements of diversity in education such as neurodiversity is not covered in this research.

<sup>2</sup>At this time of this write-up, the latest 2021 FT data for Global MBA programmes has recently been published; however, analysis has already been completed and there no Executive MBA data is available.

The following diversity data was analysed to investigate trends:

- a) Female faculty: the percentage of female faculty members.
- b) Female students: the percentage of female students on the full-time (E)MBA
- c) Women on board: the percentage of female members on the school's advisory board
- d) International faculty: calculated according to the diversity of faculty by citizenship and the percentage whose nationality differs from their country of employment
- e) International students: calculated according to the diversity of current (E)MBA students by citizenship and percentage from the country in which they study
- f) International board: percentage of the board whose citizenship differs from the country in which the school is based.

FT data was collected from FT Business Education rankings and concatenated over the Study Period using Tableau.

## 2.2 Qualitative Content analysis

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A review of business-school-specific websites (separate from their wider university's) was conducted using Google search (business school name + "diversity") to identify the nature of and details of DII's based on the following:

- a) A dedicated diversity website, subsite, or page collection
- b) Information on any diversity office
- c) Any strategic / action plan relating to DII's
- d) DII mission statement / values
- e) Any presentation of DII metrics



### 2.3 Interviews

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All business schools outlined in Table 1 were approached. Nine UK and seven US business schools accepted our invitation to participate: London Business School, University of Cambridge: Judge, University of Oxford: Saïd, Imperial College Business School, Warwick Business School, City, University of London, The Business School (formerly Cass), Cranfield School of Management, Henley Business School, Alliance Manchester Business School, University of Pennsylvania: Wharton, Harvard Business School, Stanford Graduate School of Business, MIT: Sloan, Columbia Business School, University of Chicago: Booth and Duke University: Fuqua.

Some business schools had more than one participant. Interviewees included faculty members, professional staff (non-academic staff), board members who specialise in diversity research and have published on the topic. 32 participants were included, interviews were conducted via Zoom and lasted 35-75 minutes (~50 minutes on average).

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded electronically using the NVivo Pro version 12 software. Data analysis was conducted using the Thematic Framework Methodology.

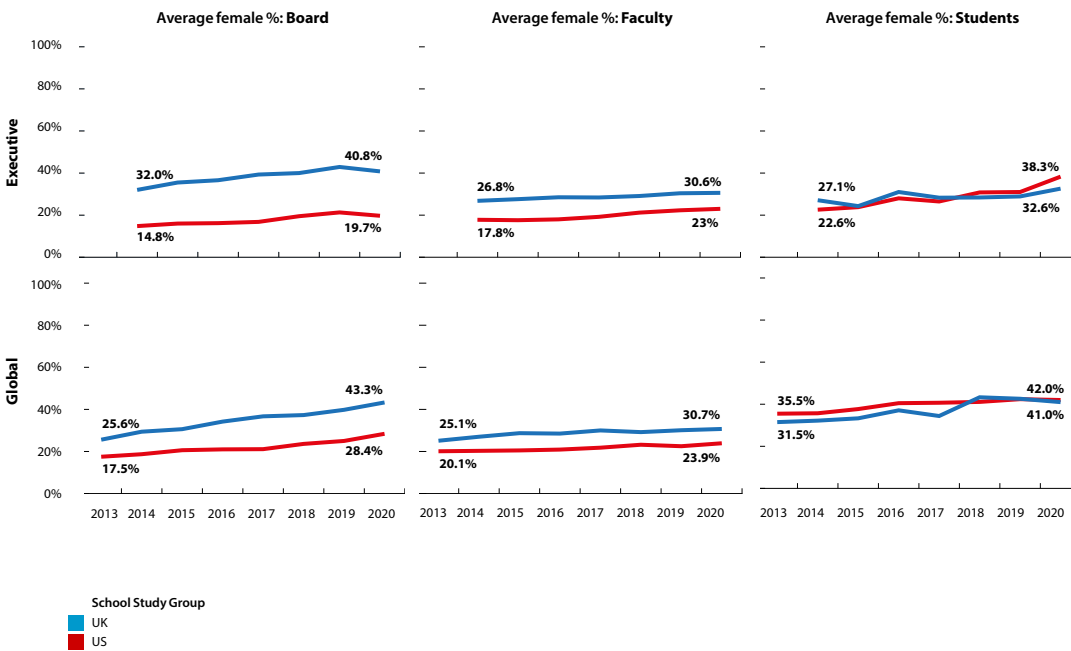
The study was conducted in accordance with the University of Cambridge Research Ethics Requirements.

3. Quantitative trends

**Diversity is improving over time, but we have not achieved gender parity.** Comparative analysis of business school diversity trends over the Study Period revealed that, on average, UK business schools have markedly higher female board representation, and higher faculty representation, than their US counterparts but show similar trends for female students. In all cases, the general trend over the Study Period is a gradual increase in female representation. All figures in the section are linked to interactive data visualisations. [Click on any figure to explore further.](#)

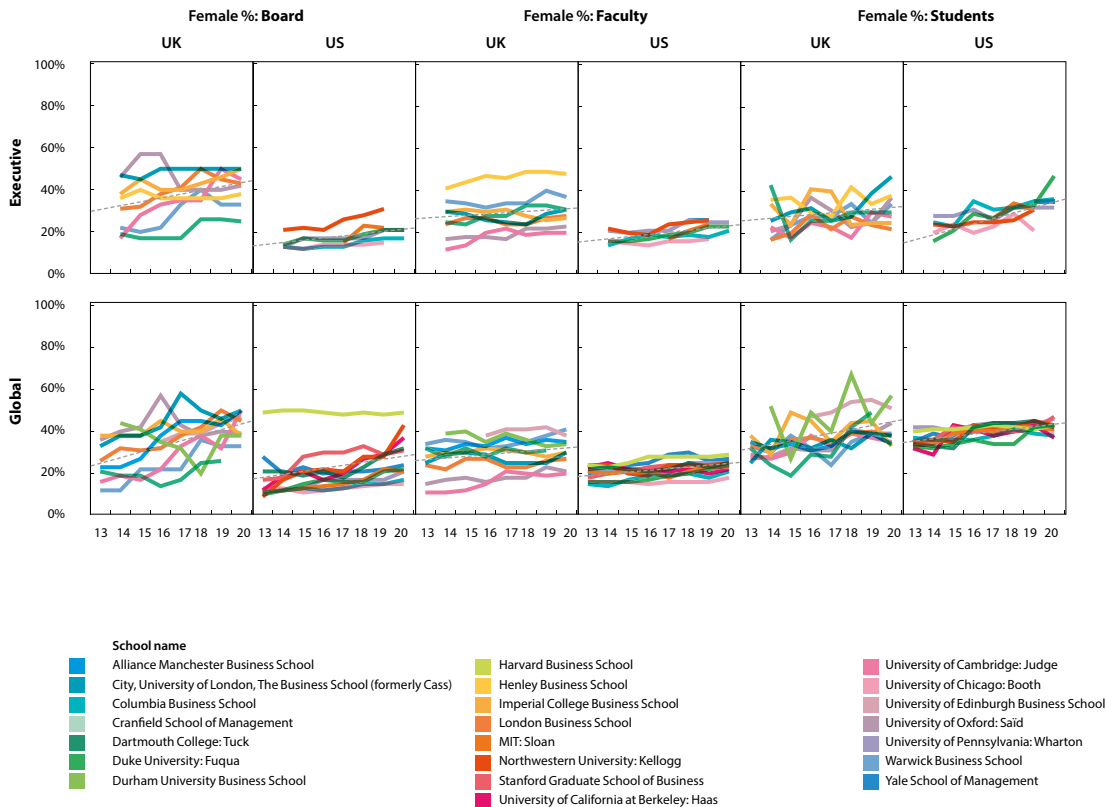
Gender diversity average for top ranked UK/US (2013/14-2020)

[Figure 1: Average gender diversity trends for board, faculty and students at Study Group UK \(blue\) and US \(red\) business schools, \(E\)MBA, over the study period](#)



Gender diversity for top ranked UK/US (2013/14-2020)

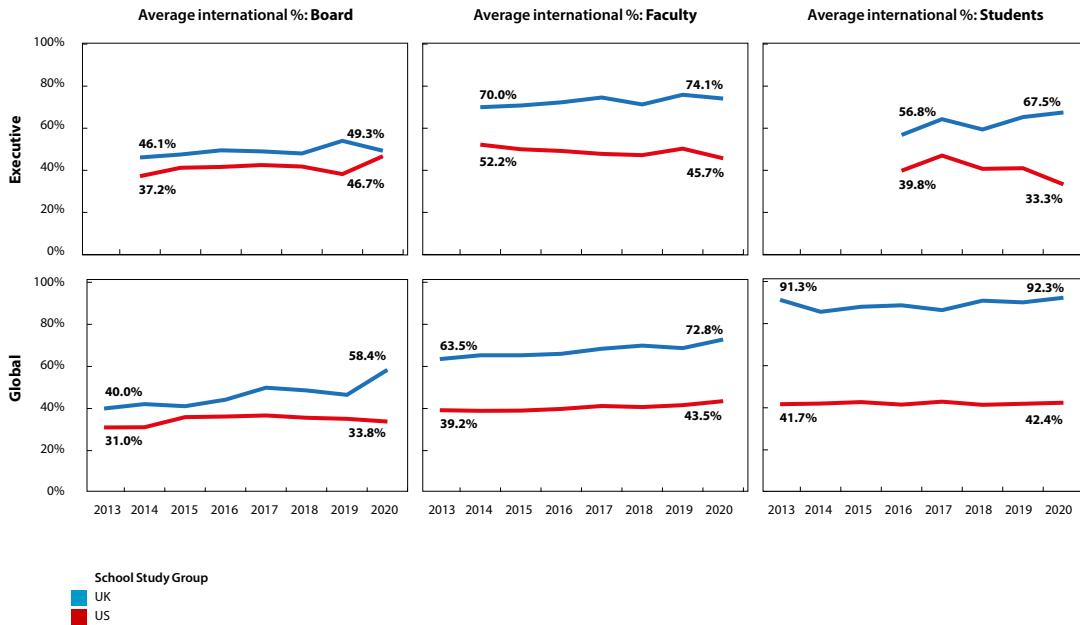
Figure 2: Gender diversity trends for board, faculty and students at Study Group UK and US business schools, (E)MBA, 2013-2020



Across the study group, gender diversity – in terms of female representation on the board, in faculty staff and in the student population – has increased over the Study Period. US Study Group schools show much less variation than their UK counterparts (the lines above are more tightly grouped for US Study Group schools) with a few notable exceptions: Harvard Business School (US) has maintained unusually high female board representation (roughly 50%) over the duration of the Study Period; Henley Business School (UK) has unusually high female representation in its faculty; and, Oxford Saïd and Cambridge Judge (UK) have the lowest female faculty representation.

International diversity average for top ranked UK/US (2013/14-2020)

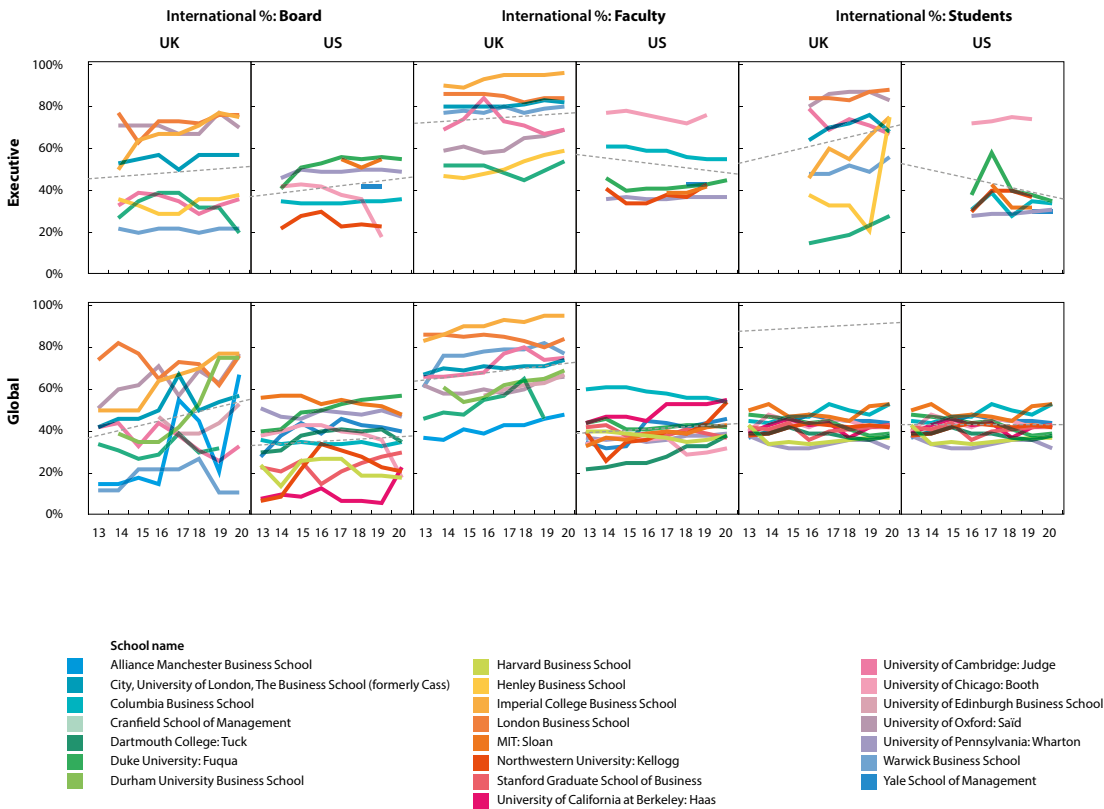
Figure 3: International diversity average for board, faculty and students at Study Group business schools, (E)MBA, over the Study Period.



In terms of international diversity, the average for UK Study Group business schools is considerably higher than the US. This may be due to UK proximity to Europe and Middle East, compared to the US. Additionally, tuition and expenses for US business schools are in some cases 3-4 times higher than the UK business schools in the Study Group.

International diversity average for top ranked UK/US (2013/14-2020)

Figure 4: International diversity for board, faculty and students at Study Group UK and US business schools, (EMBA, over the Study Period.



Top-ranking UK business schools have higher international diversity than the US with considerably higher proportions of international MBA students.

For additional analysis and interactive chat, visit:  
<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/dr.bola.grace./viz/Diversityinbusinessschools/ResearchOverview>

#### 4. Qualitative content analysis results

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Business school websites were reviewed to establish the accessibility, relevance and completeness of DII programmes as described in Section 2. Top-ranking US business schools tend to have dedicated diversity websites, describing formal diversity offices with faculty and professional staff representatives, clear strategic plans and detailed performance metrics. Their websites also include mission statements, well-articulated values and goals, with visible community engagement and diversity initiatives for veterans, disabled communities and religious groups. [Wharton Business School](#) and [Stanford Graduate School of Business](#), for example, have clear action plans for racial equality with detailed metrics. In addition to the diversity office, they have detailed statements on their commitment to diversity and statements from the Provost. Websites are regularly updated to discuss topical issues – comprehensive websites like these were rated ‘high’.

In the UK however, many of the business schools did not have dedicated websites, or at least relevant webpages did not appear on the first three results pages of Google searches and further review of business school specific webpages. In these cases, they were rated ‘low’. This is not to say that these business schools do not have diversity initiatives as interview data from the next section will show. However, poor public visibility of these initiatives indicates a low level of commitment or at the very least limited promotion, resulting in a low score.

In the UK, [London Business School](#) stands out for their diversity communication; clear diversity-centric values, mission statements, metrics and an annually published diversity report signals a strong commitment to diversity and was rated ‘high’. Interestingly, UK business schools such as Warwick, Imperial and Cranfield, which participate in external awards such as [The Athena Swan Charter](#), have clearer strategic plans, more detailed information on diversity, tend to publish detailed diversity metrics and provide more information on commitment and progress than those that don’t participate in these initiatives.

Cranfield Business School is a smaller business school compared to the others and therefore does not have specific initiatives; rather, their programmes are linked to the wider Cranfield University initiatives. Continuous improvement is evident: a November 2020 search of the University of Oxford Saïd Business School website did not return a page dedicated to diversity. However at the time of analysis in 2021, Oxford Saïd had announced the appointment of a diversity dean and [web pages](#) had been created with additional information on what was coming next, highlighting a marked improvement in external engagement.

## 5. Interview results

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Key themes identified include types of diversity initiatives and associated roles; the barriers experienced in implementing effective diversity changes; triggers or catalysts for change; any positive or negative unintended consequences which have arisen from DII; best practises for having the most effective DIIs and personal experiences of interview participants.

### 5.1. Diversity initiatives

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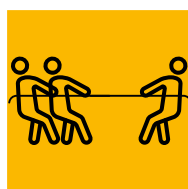
Three broad types of diversity initiatives were identified. These ranged from **Grassroots efforts** typically led by individuals who are passionate about diversity; to **Decentralised initiatives** with several streams of programmes without a central office or consolidation of initiatives; to **Centralised initiatives** with formal diversity offices, clear reporting structures and clear reporting line to the Business School Lead. Although grassroots efforts can be effective and provide good starting points, centralised initiatives provide structure and longer terms continuity and sustainability for effective and impactful initiatives.

*Figure 6 : Types of Diversity Initiatives*



#### Grassroots

- DIIs led by people who are passionate about diversity from personal interest and a strong desire for change.
- Roles are **usually informal and are not compensated**. Activities are disjointed and tracking is minimal. However, in some cases impact is still evident.



#### Decentralised

- Several streams of DIIs **without a central office or consolidation of initiatives**.
- Tracking of metrics may not be present.
- DII roles can be formal or informal, communication methods are similar to those found in centralised initiatives.



#### Centralised

- **Formal diversity offices and diversity roles.**
- **Mixture of faculty and professional staff with official DII titles** e.g. Dean of Diversity or Associate Diversity Director.
- **Reporting line to Dean/ Head of the Business School**
- Faculty members 'wearing dual hats' are compensated via teaching/workload reduction, extra pay or other means.
- Communication methods: websites, internal mail, newsletters, email and full exploitation of social media.

## 5.2. Triggers for change

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Key reasons cited for recent concerted effort on Diversity Initiatives were the impact of the **global pandemic**, highlighting social, gender and health inequalities on the business school and wider community and the **'Events of last summer'**.<sup>3</sup>

*"So in the last year, following the fallout from the George Floyd incident, there was an introspection, I think, within the business school, to discuss these issues and to see to what extent the issues that were being raised in the wider environment applied to the business school. And there was an initiative setup, driven in part by faculty and professional staff, to set up a consulting group made up of BAME members of faculty and professional staff, to investigate issues of diversity, or race related frictions within the business school, if they exist. And also, to find out from people affected, what could be done about it."*

**UKBS003**

Other triggers for change identified include: **student feedback**; internal business school **recognition of poor progress**; **external recognition** for awards, accreditations and grants such as the Athena Swan Programme;

*"Athena Swan provides the vehicle for us around which we can work. It's useful learning to go, "Where are we at, right what stats do we need to collect, what's it looking like over time, what do we look like against our benchmark compared to us, right how can we improve this, let's get people working on this". So that and the cycle of Athena Swan accreditation"* **UKBS020**.

## 5.3. Issues and barriers

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Several issues and barriers impacting DII, centred on two broad areas, as summarised in Figure 7 opposite:

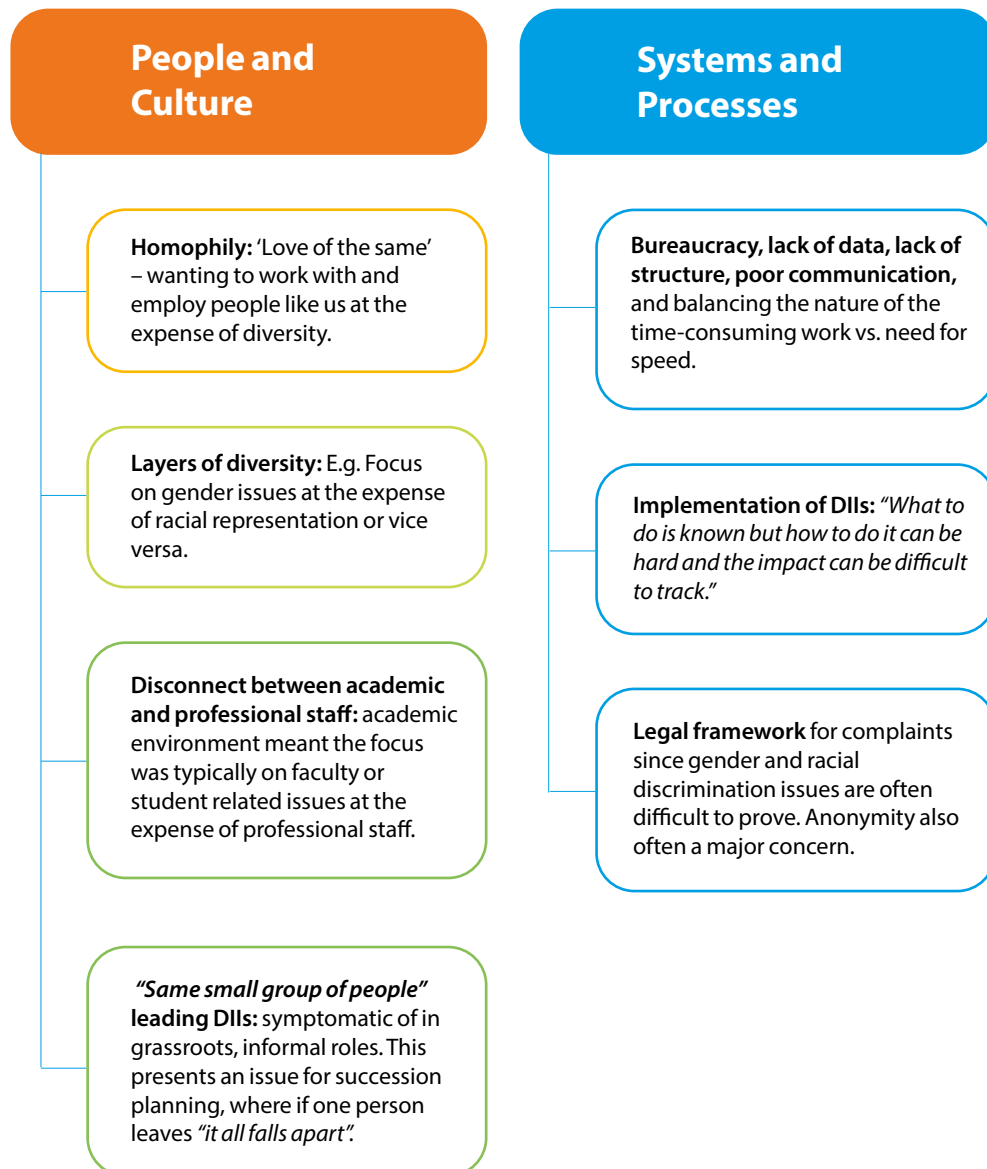
- 1) **People and culture issues such as homophily**, ignoring **layers of diversity** such as focus on gender issues at the expense of racial representation and vice versa. Another key issue cited is **the disconnect between academic and professional staff** – academic environment meant the focus was typically on faculty or student related issues at the expense of professional staff. Poor succession planning and 'same small group of people' leading DII were symptomatic of grassroots initiatives.
- 2) **Systems and processes** raised highlighted include administrative issues such as **bureaucracy, lack of data, lack of structure, poor communication**, and balancing the nature of the **time-consuming work vs. need for speed**. **Implementation of DII** was also discussed where 'What to do is known but how to do it can be hard and the impact can be difficult to track.' There were concerns around legal framework for complaints.

<sup>3</sup>'Events of last summer'

Events of last summer refers to the wave of civil unrest across many countries, which was triggered by the murder of George Floyd in the United States in the summer of 2020.



Figure 7: Issues and barriers identified



#### 5.4. Unintended consequences

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Linked to the issues and barriers discussed, unintended consequences of DIIS were revealed. Although not experienced first-hand, **perception of unfairness and meritocracy** were commonly cited as some unintended consequences of DIIs.

*“Especially in a business school, you know, we have some strong personalities, a lot of people who are very you know, believe in free markets and free will and I was kind of expecting the argument I guess that the whole essence of D&I is essentially an attack on meritocracy.” UKBS022*

**Penalties** e.g. men feeling penalised for the gender pay gap, whereby their salaries are stagnated to reduce the gap, rather than women’s salaries being increased. Others include **payback mentality and compensating behaviour**, for example, having to work harder or putting in extra hours to compensate for receiving a ‘diversity benefit’. Although not a ubiquitous theme, another unintended consequence experienced by those looking to implement DIIS is that those who are passionate about change can **become adversarial, militant, or oversensitive** with a **myopic single focus** on a rush for action; a result of the **‘temper of the times’**.

*“... a bit of a problem at the moment ... the tempers of the times is and sometimes, our colleagues who are working in this area it’s the big issue for them. So sometimes they’re a little bit adversarial and ... and I understand why it’s happening in terms of wider societal discourse, so it’s part of the discourse at the moment, and people are feeling strongly about it.” UKBS024*

In some cases, innocuous but deeply entrenched administrative processes – seemingly with no impact on diversity at all – can act as barriers that work against DIIs, causing further unintended consequences.

### 5.5. Best practice recommendations

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Improvement opportunities were extensively discussed. Findings are broadly categorised to address some of the systems/process and people/cultural and issues previously highlighted, as well as new emergent themes including external recognition, effective training, community engagement, teaching and curriculum best practices.

As part of effective **Systems and Processes**, having a centralised **diversity office** with 'support from the top', where officers are in **recognised roles** with **formal job titles** and resources have been effective for business schools that ranked high in the qualitative content analysis. Where there are limited resources, a **distributed leadership approach** with a mix of academic and non-academic staff was effective; professional staff spoke of clout from faculty members. Clear strategy and action plans, with **defined metrics**, were perceived to be more effective as it's difficult to track progress and impact in decentralised, grassroots initiatives.

*"The provost makes it clear to the business school how important these goals are, so it's been in our focus in terms of our hiring ... there are various forms of support at the university level as well in terms of in the provost office someone who is responsible for looking out for diversity, so that's been around."*

USBS019

**Targets and quotas** were viewed as 'inevitable until equality' is achieved. However, supporting data, and reasons for implementing these, should be clearly communicated to all stakeholders. **Student-led initiatives** were also encouraged but it was felt that these should feed into a central diversity office. **Benchmarking performance** against other business schools could also help highlight gaps and areas for improvement. For example, a respondent spoke of a scheme for **automatic salary adjustment** whereby a female faculty member receives a raise if her male colleague gets a competing offer. In general, **marketing, advertising and recruitment practices** have significant impact on improving **representation**.

In terms of **People and Culture**, **Allyship** was cited as important for successful DIs i.e. involving men in female initiatives, other races in black discussions, but it was important to minority groups that they take the lead in these schemes. It was also seen as important to get buy-in from staff. In terms of **motivation**, amplifying good work is seen to make a difference with behavioural change, tracking and communicating what's been working helping to foster positive change. **Communication and consultation** on what works and what doesn't, with input from underrepresented groups was seen as critical, as was **buy-in** from stakeholders. The importance of **transparency and accountability** across the board was discussed. **Role models** were cited as important in driving change and making a positive impact on pipelined issues.

**External recognition, awards and accreditations** were seen to make a difference in terms of tracking performance and impact of DILs. Accreditations, such as the UK Chartered Association for Business Schools, also provide a 'good sounding board' for sharing best practice. The use of experts and consultants to drive change where there are skill set gaps was raised. Other impactful schemes include **social mobility schemes**, such as Wharton's which goes beyond 'numbers' and 'improving percentages' to actively supporting minority groups in order to help them thrive in new roles, positions or studentships

**Teaching and curriculum** were extensively discussed. While many saw this a missed opportunity to drive lasting societal change, many also discussed best practice approaches, such as weaving diversity into the curriculum rather than teaching standalone courses. Other suggestions include more diverse protagonists in case studies, diverse guest lectures, decolonisation, and student feedback.

*"So you have to nudge and say "Hey, you know, have you noticed that your guest speakers are all men or your guest speakers are all white from that particular industry?" And then people, I think, most people will be like "Oh, yeah, we actually haven't noticed, like, we should have noticed." EXP012*

**Lived experiences.** It was important to capture participants' own experiences. There were several accounts of DILs leading to transformational experiences and positive outcomes for intended groups. Several of those who shared **personal experiences** in informal DIL roles or grassroots initiatives explained that most of what they have done has come out of **personal commitment** to diversity. In sharing experiences, some cited that it has been an **emotional or lonely journey**, highlighting the importance of authority structures and support from leadership.

*"So it has been a very lonely experience. And the business school in particular is a very collegial place to be honest. But it doesn't mean that it's not without its own problems... There are instances when obviously I felt that certain treatments were race related. So whether it's the way you are assessed in class by students or the way other colleagues, may engage with you even in terms of body language." UKBS003*

**At their heart, diversity initiatives are about people.** Data is crucial but it must be noted that

*"all the systems, processes and data analyses in the world will not keep people in an environment which is not inclusive and supportive."*

## 6. Conclusions

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Although business schools as beacons of knowledge are strategically positioned to bring lasting change to the global corporate environment, they still face their own challenges when it comes to increasing diversity. Whilst improvements have been made, and they are on the same trajectory as the corporate world, a lack of gender parity persists. There is, however, encouraging news. For example, at the point of publication of this study, The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania [announced](#) that 52% of its 2023 MBA graduates will be women, the first MBA class in the school's 140-year history with more women than men.

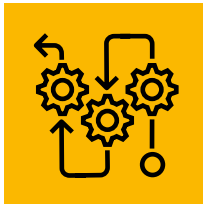
Top-ranking UK and US business schools have considerable international diversity, but this cannot be used as proxy for racial or ethnic diversity. Ethnicity data is central to effective diversity analysis, but it is not reported by leading ranking sites. Further, lived experiences are largely absent from the literature when the provision of role models is a key factor in driving effective change. Crucially, alongside targeted recruitment to increase diversity statistics, effort must be put into creating an inclusive and supportive environment for under-represented groups in order to ensure progress in this area.

In terms of implications for practice, the most effective means for achieving a successful DII is to establish dedicated DII personnel empowered by Business School Leadership, with appropriate authority structures and a clear remit. Review, measurement and monitoring of diversity metrics, as well as assessing and reflecting on progress, are vital for determining impact and for understanding where optimally to focus resources. Further, transparency, accountability, clear communication and buy-in are all important components of business school culture necessary to drive impactful DIIs. Additional effort is required to integrate diversity into the curriculum and to clearly communicate inclusive values to students, staff and wider business school community.

A summary of key recommendations are as follows:

**Diversity office:**

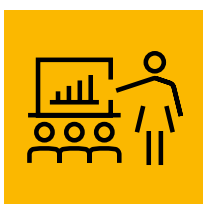
- Implement a dedicated diversity office, with appropriate authority structures and a clear remit, reporting to senior leadership.
- Ensure a distributed leadership approach, with a mixture of faculty and professional staff, operating under official DII titles, with student-led initiatives, to achieve maximum impact.
- Ensure that faculty members who ‘wear dual hats’ are appropriately compensated.

**Systems and Processes:**

- Collect, track and report on diversity metrics; this is important for impact and to understand where to focus resources.
- Communicate DII progress internally and externally. Communication methods, such as a website describing DIIs, should be visible and accessible; they need to clearly communicate DII vision, strategies, any action plans and their ongoing impact.

**People and Culture:**

- Strive for transparency, accountability, clear communication and broad stakeholder buy-in; these are critical to business school culture in order to drive impactful DIIs.
- Employ the services of diversity consultants where the resources to establish a DII are not available to drive change for impact.
- Improve awareness of DIIs to all stakeholders through accreditations and effective training practices.

**Teaching:**

- Embed diversity into teaching and curriculum and clearly communicate inclusive values.

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