

United Kingdom

Demographics for United Kingdom

Population:	60,441,457 (July 2005 est.)
GDP (by PPP method):	US\$1.782 trillion
Currency (inc code):	British Pound (GBP)
Language(s):	English, Welsh, Scottish form of Gaelic
Internet country code:	.uk

Primary and secondary education

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, children start school when they are about five years old. Education is compulsory for 11 years, to the age of 16, and is divided into four key stages, of lengths two, four, three and two years respectively. At the end of key stage four students sit examinations for the General Certificate of Secondary Education. Academically strong students then go on to spend two years studying for the Advanced Level of the General Certificate of Education (A levels), or for the International Baccalaureate or the European Baccalaureate, both of which are becoming more popular as qualifications at the end of secondary education. Although some secondary schools follow the traditional pattern of providing education leading to these qualifications, these studies often take place in different institutions, some specialising in academic courses called sixth-form colleges, or others with a more general scope, called further education colleges.

Primary and secondary educational arrangements in Scotland, while broadly similar to those in the rest of the UK, do display differences, notably that instead of A levels, academically strong students take Scottish Highers at the end of their secondary education, which is after year 12, rather than year 13

as in the rest of the UK. In recent years some students have stayed at school for a 13th year to study for Advanced Highers.

Higher education

Higher education in the UK is more uniform across the four countries than is the case for primary and secondary education, although undergraduate degrees in Scottish universities are usually of four years' duration, rather than the more common three years in the rest of the UK.

By 1960 there were 21 universities in the UK, including the two federated university systems of London and Wales, each containing many colleges of size and esteem. In the period from 1960 to 1992 a further 22 universities were established, and in 1992 the UK government decided to give to the many polytechnics, established to provide professional and vocational education in the metropolitan areas, university status. There are now 95 universities in the UK, and about 40 further institutions granted the powers to award recognized degrees, while not themselves being universities. To add to this complexity, some universities franchise their degree awarding powers to other institutions.

Higher education receives government support from the government funded but independent Funding Councils (separate bodies for England, Scotland and Wales). Higher education in Northern Ireland is funded directly by the relevant government department. Further education on the other hand is funded (in England) through a system of 48 Learning and Skills Councils which cover the country, and have a responsibility for funding all education for people aged 16 to 19. Similar, but subtly different arrangements exist in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Undergraduate education is more specialized in the UK than in many other countries. In most universities the undergraduate course is limited to a specific field of study (say mathematics, English literature or physics) with no requirement to study other subjects. Some universities do require greater breadth of study, particularly in the first year, but there is no widespread use of the major and minor system common in the USA, for example. As a consequence it is possible to get further into a subject at the end of three years than is possible in more general university systems.

The standard undergraduate degree in the UK is of three years in length. As mentioned above, however, Scottish degrees are normally four years long, and this is also the case for a few courses in some universities in the rest of the UK. Over the last 20 years, some three-year undergraduate courses have been lengthened to four, and students have emerged from the four-year process with a Master's degree. Given that these courses are first cycle (in Bologna terms) this is not in keeping with the Bologna requirements, a situation that has yet to be resolved. The standard UK Master's degree is of one year's duration only, but if the course is designed to build on undergraduate specialisms, only one year is needed to reach the frontiers of a subject, given the depth often achieved

in UK undergraduate degrees. Students may go on to a PhD, but unlike in some other countries, the PhD has had a free form in most universities, and only recently have course requirements been required in some institutions.

At the undergraduate level admission is organised by the Universities and Colleges Applications System (UCAS), a centralised system for admissions in the entire UK. Students in year 13 at secondary school make an application to UCAS listing a small number of courses which they wish to consider. The universities make offers of places conditional on performance at A level (or in the IB, EB, Scottish Highers or Advanced Highers), and a student is allowed to firmly accept one offer and conditionally accept a second. A firmly accepted offer must be taken up if the student meets the conditions, while if the conditions are not met, the student has a right to take up the second offer if the conditions for that offer have been met. Normally students will choose a first offer with higher entrance conditions than the second.

Admission to post-graduate courses (at the Master's and Doctorate level) is, however, not centrally organized, and is normally effected through a university's graduate admission office and the decisions of the particular department responsible for the course in question.

Universities in the UK have the right to issue degrees, an authority granted by the government. While the freedom of universities to order their affairs as they think fit has long been a cherished aspect of academic independence in the UK, they have recently set up, in co-operation with the Funding Councils, a body (the Quality Assurance Agency, or QAA) to oversee and guarantee the quality of the education provided.

Business and management education

History

Some teaching of subjects normally considered to be part of the business school syllabus (such as accounting or economics) have been taught in British universities for over a century, but it was not until the end of the Second World War that business and management education started to develop in the UK. There were parallel developments in undergraduate business education and executive education for managers at work.

The latter started first with the independent executive education institutions of Henley (1945) and Ashridge (1957). Undergraduate business education, on the other hand, got going strongly with the rise of the polytechnic movement in the 1960s and also the establishment in that decade of the new universities, eight of which were founded in green field sites by government initiative, and a further eight by the upgrading of professional institutions. Following the pattern of studying single subjects in depth, however, many students took courses in single subjects only, although in recent years the general management and business courses (covering all the standard business subjects) are now the most popular.

The London and Manchester Business Schools were also established in the early 1960s, starting for the first time (in the UK) MBA courses on the US pattern. These were full-time and took two years as in the USA. Over time, however, MBA courses moved to a one-year pattern, which is now the more common mode for the MBA in Britain.

Degree structures

Most UK undergraduate degrees have the title of Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BSc). Sometimes words are attached to indicate the subject of study as well (e.g. BA Business Studies, BSc Marketing). The degree title Bachelor of Commerce has been used for many years in some universities, while recent innovations such as Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) have also become more popular. To learn what is in any particular course it is now increasingly possible to find the programme specifications of courses on a university's web site since this is now an expectation of the QAA.

Business and management degrees conform to the standard practice of UK higher education described above. The undergraduate degree is usually three years in length, although some courses have a fourth year either for an internship in commerce or industry or in another country, where the student takes courses at another business school. General undergraduate degrees usually cover all the standard business subjects (accounting, finance, economics, marketing, organizational behavior, human resource management, information management and quantitative methods) but specialist degrees (e.g. in accounting or marketing) will only touch on the other subjects lightly.

Master's degrees in the UK are of three types: specialist courses which typically take subjects further than is possible in an undergraduate degree and where students will need to have studied certain subjects as undergraduates in order to gain admission; general pre-experience courses designed for students who have not studied business at the undergraduate level but who wish to have a general education in this area following on from their undergraduate programme; and general post-experience courses, i.e. the MBA, designed for people with at least three years, but ideally more, of management experience. Most Master's degrees in the UK last for one year.

The Doctorate degree in business studies still normally follows the pattern of three years of unstructured study guided by a supervisor. But many institutions have in recent years introduced course work requirements, at least for the first year. In addition, many schools in the UK have introduced the Doctor of Business Administration degree, which is designed to be more applied than the traditional PhD degree and is designed for reflective practitioners who wish to study some aspect of their own management experience in some depth. Over 30 of these programmes now exist in the UK business schools.

Business studies has, over the past decades become an increasingly popular area of study in the UK. In the academic year 2003/2004 about 220,000 or 14 percent of all registered students in the UK were on business and management courses.

Providers of business education in the UK

Business and management education is provided in the UK in many different ways. First, almost all universities now have a business school, including the most conservative and ancient institutions, Oxford and Cambridge. The Association of Business Schools, which provides support services for business schools and represents the sector to government and the media, now has 102 members. These include the few business schools independent of universities and focussing on the executive education of the working community of managers such as Henley and Ashridge. Management education is also provided in the further education sector, particularly at the supervisory level.

The typical university business school is an integral part of the parent university and has to abide by the policies and practices of that institution. There are, however, varying degrees of autonomy. At one end of the spectrum, all personnel decisions are taken by central university committees, and the business school has little latitude for discretionary spending outside of this framework. At the other end of the spectrum almost all decisions are taken by the senior management of the business school within a framework of budgetary accountability set up by the central university authorities.

As mentioned above authority to award degrees is given by the government to the parent university, and the business school has to conform to the procedures for course definition and teaching set down by its central university. The QAA also oversees the educational programmes of the business schools when it reviews university provision.

There are three accreditation systems which are used by business schools in the UK. The Association of MBAs, a UK member organisation, accredits MBA programmes and currently 40 UK business schools have one or more of their MBA programmes so accredited. Some business schools have further accreditation from EQUIS and AACSB (currently 16 and nine respectively).

A considerable part of executive education for practising managers is carried out by training companies, management consultancies and independent educators. Perhaps only 10 percent at most of executive education is carried out in the business schools.

Issues facing the business schools

Future demand

Perhaps the most significant challenge for business schools is to read the likely direction of future demand. In recent years there have been some quite significant changes in demand patterns, and this differs between UK students

and the very large numbers of students who come to the UK for management education. For example, very few UK students now do a full-time MBA at a UK institution; there has been a switch to part-time and distance learning models. There has also been a rise in demand for pre-experience generalist and specialist Master's programmes. The strong rise in demand for undergraduate business degrees has now levelled off. Demand from Asian students, which saw a very large rise in the last decade, is now showing signs of declining. The challenge for business schools is to forecast whether these changes will continue or be reversed.

Accountability

The quality control regime which has been in place in the UK for the last decade now puts considerably more pressure on schools to be explicit about the details of courses and quality control processes than was the case hitherto. It is not only teaching for which business schools are accountable; all publicly funded business schools in the UK have to take part in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which takes place about every five years, and which assesses the quality of the research taking place within the school. The results of this exercise determine the size of the government grant to the school; increasingly they are also being used as a general measure of the overall quality of the school, and this in turn affects both student and staff choice of institution. In some business schools the RAE overshadows almost everything that the school does.

Resources

The state funding of undergraduate education has diminished severely in the last twenty years. The real value of the resource per student paid by the government has declined by more than 50 percent since 1980. Schools have responded by becoming more efficient, by teaching in larger classes, diminishing the student contact hours of each student, and ensuring that academic staff do not spend too much time on work that can be done by other (cheaper) colleagues. Nonetheless, schools still face severe financial challenges. Until recently the expansion of demand for business education meant that universities could support fixed costs in other declining subjects by transferring income from their business schools to other parts of the university. This means that the demands of the business schools to teach more efficiently was even more substantial than for other parts of academe. The extent to which this is now happening may be limited however.

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