

THE PATH TO BECOMING A VICE-CHANCELLOR

Guidance for Business & Management Academics

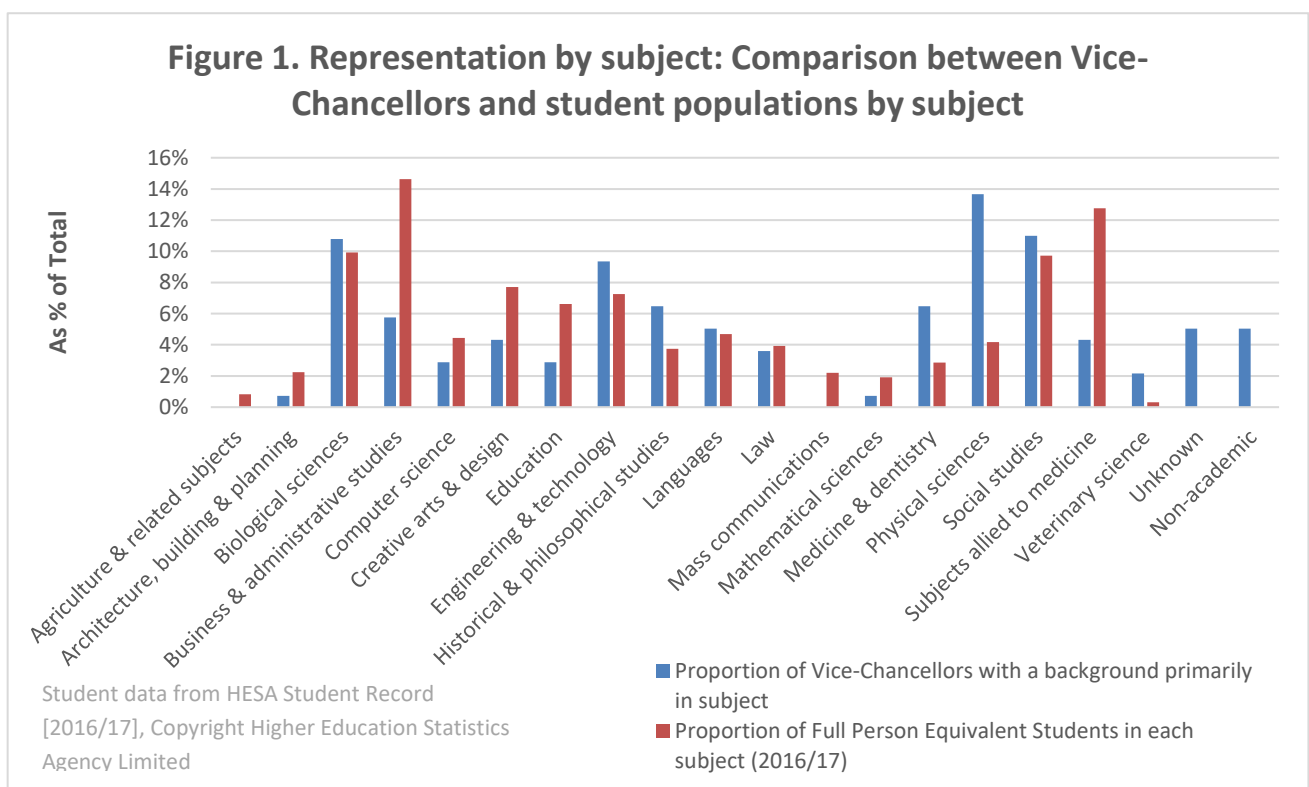
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INTRODUCTION

Most UK university Vice-Chancellors have a background in subjects such as science, medicine, engineering, and social studies. By comparison there is a proportionately smaller number of Vice-Chancellors who previously taught business or management, or managed a business school.

Given the large scale operations and complexity of leading a business school, this paper explores the reasons why there are comparatively few Vice-Chancellors who have come through the business and management route, and suggests strategies for senior business school staff who aspire to roles such as Vice-Chancellor. These solutions are partly informed by individuals with experience in recruiting for Vice-Chancellor positions and have specialist knowledge in the factors that influence recruitment decisions. The paper also offers ideas as to how the leadership capacity of business academics can be deployed to the benefit of the wider university sector.

Academic context



UK business schools teach the most popular subject areas across our universities, with 15% of all students enrolled on a business course which is the highest proportion for any subject¹. Yet based on our research

¹ HESA Student Record 2016/17, using the Heidi Plus Online Analytics service. Copyright Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited. Neither the Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited nor HESA Services Limited can accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived by third parties from data or other information obtained from Heidi Plus.

The Path to Becoming a Vice-Chancellor

only 6% of current Vice-Chancellors have a teaching or research background in business and management. The proportion is 8% if we include those who do not have a teaching or research background in business and management, but who have been a business school dean. Vice-Chancellors with backgrounds in the sciences, social studies, engineering and medicine (including subjects allied to medicine) account for 55% of the total.

Table 1. Breakdown of current University Vice-Chancellors by HESA JACS subject area

Subject (HESA JACS)	Vice-Chancellors: primary teaching/research area	As % of Total
Physical Sciences	19	14%
Biological Sciences	15	11%
Social Studies	15	11%
Engineering & Technology	13	9%
Medicine & Dentistry	9	6%
Historical & Philosophical Studies	9	6%
Business & Administrative Studies	8	6%
Non-academic background	7	5%
Languages	7	5%
Unknown	7	5%
Creative Arts & Design	6	4%
Subjects allied to medicine	6	4%
Law	5	4%
Computer Science	4	3%
Education	4	3%
Veterinary Science	3	2%
Mathematical Sciences	1	1%
Architecture, Building & Planning	1	1%
Mass Communications & Documentation	0	0%
Agriculture & related subjects	0	0%
Total	139	100%

EXPLORING THE REPRESENTATION OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT ACADEMICS WITHIN VICE-CHANCELLOR POSITIONS

Perception of business schools

The perception that the field of business and management is more practical than academic still lingers despite the fact that some of the UK's oldest institutions have introduced business schools since the 1990s. The relatively late development of business and management as an academic subject has been a factor in limiting the progression of business academics to senior leadership positions within universities. Although many business academics have published best-selling books this doesn't automatically gain the same kudos as publishing in certain academic journals.

However with impact, internationalisation and corporate interaction becoming more important than pure academic research for publication in journals, senior business school staff are well-placed to take a leading role in initiatives such as REF, TEF and KEF. This has the potential to increase their standing within the academic community and lead to a wider range of career opportunities.

University structures

Within some of the older, more research-intensive institutions the business school Dean often operates at a departmental level and reports to an Executive Dean or Pro-Vice-Chancellor, thereby limiting the opportunity to gain senior managerial experience which could enhance their future career prospects. In contrast flat institutional structures are more helpful to progression and these are often found in smaller and/or newer universities.

Indeed business schools are sometimes perceived as almost autonomous and therefore sitting outside of the faculty structure. Whilst this can help business schools be nimble, innovative and competitive, it isn't always helpful in facilitating the progression from business school Dean to other senior roles. Furthermore, business schools are often seen as somehow separate from the rest of the university and as having a narrower remit than other academic departments. Business academics may be less likely to be considered for cross-functional leadership roles if they are perceived as doing something discrete from the main activities of the institution.

Research funding

The pool of research council funding available for business is arguably smaller than for most other subjects which can affect the reputation of business academics and thus inhibit the potential for career progression. The Vice-Chancellor role often requires a level of credibility with faculty members which explains why it is usually filled by those who have spent their career in academia. Tightly managed research groups working under the leadership of a principal investigator are also less common in Business and Management which means that business school Deans often struggle to maintain their research output due to being unable to delegate activities to colleagues. The increasing use of deputy and associate Deans may help to mitigate this issue.

Choice

Some business school Deans may not want to become a Vice-Chancellor even if the opportunity arose, as there are arguably more non-academic career avenues open to them than is the case for academics from other fields. Consultancy opportunities, for example, may represent a more appealing balance of financial reward to effort. The PVC role is increasingly seen as the preparatory step to becoming a Vice-Chancellor but these roles vary from institution to institution and might not carry much weight if there is no line management and no budget.

WHAT APPROACHES CAN BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT ACADEMICS ADOPT TO IMPROVE THEIR PROSPECTS FOR SENIOR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS?

This paper has outlined a number of barriers that Business and Management academics face in pursuing senior leadership roles within universities. The good news is that the changes that have occurred within the university sector over the last decade have created a more favourable climate for business school Deans to transition to Vice-Chancellor.

The role of Dean is essential for the effective running of any faculty and requires a strong and varied skillset which may be valuable for the role of Vice-Chancellor. These skills encompass collaboration, financial management, communication skills and consensus building across stakeholders with divergent views. Business school Deans accumulate these experiences within an environment that is both international and commercially aware and therefore represent a strong pool of talent capable of assuming the most senior university positions. The Deans of business schools often have multidisciplinary backgrounds, including engineering, sciences and the arts, and thus have a unique insight into other academic areas.

Business school Deans have been in leadership positions that have overseen innovation within the sector and tend to be responsible for large budgets and staff groups. They have extensive experience of competing in a genuinely global market for students and staff and of working closely with industry. Several appointments made in 2018 suggest that the experience of business school Deans may be increasingly suited to the role of Vice-Chancellor. For example, Professor George Boyne, previously Dean of the business school at Cardiff University, has been appointed as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Aberdeen, and Professor Amanda Broderick, the founding Executive Dean of the College of Business & Law at the University of Salford, has been appointed as Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of East London. Most recently, Professor Jean-Noël Ezingard, previously Executive Dean at Kingston Business School, has been appointed as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Roehampton (see full list in Appendix A).

We will now look in more detail at some career strategies available to business academics.

Demonstrate value to the rest of the university

Business schools should be more vocal in demonstrating the value that they bring to their university since in most cases there is a very positive story to tell. The most obvious example perhaps being the large amount of revenue they typically generate in comparison to other academic disciplines. Beyond financial subsidies, business schools can and should interact with the whole university to build collaborations in teaching and learning. This would demonstrate a propensity to consider the whole institution; a necessary requirement for a Vice-Chancellor.

Integrate more closely with the wider university

We have already noted that business academics are less likely to be considered for cross-functional leadership roles if they are perceived as doing something discrete from the main activities of the institution. It is therefore important that business schools find ways of reaching out to the wider community.

The trend towards challenge-led, interdisciplinary research creates many opportunities to combine technical and organisational solutions on a financially sustainable basis. Research conducted primarily within other parts of the university's portfolio of schools will have commercial and organisational dimensions that create opportunities for business schools to develop connections and social capital across the whole of their university. Given the constraints on external research funding, individuals with a proven ability to attract large research grants will be sought for appointment to senior university roles.

Those aspiring to become a Vice-Chancellor may find it useful to take on leadership responsibilities with external projects, governance roles within research councils and relationship building roles as their university seeks to deliver its civic mission. In so doing, there is the opportunity to demonstrate that business school academics can operate outside their own area of specific expertise.

Become a Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Pro-Vice-Chancellor

A useful first step to transition from business school Dean to Vice-Chancellor is to become a Pro-Vice-Chancellor or Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

Business schools tend to be, by their very nature, international in outlook and due to this there are increasing opportunities for business school Deans in Pro-Vice-Chancellor (international) roles. Also, there is a relatively new role becoming more common at PVC/DVC level that is usually titled Corporate Engagement or Corporate Affairs. This position requires business experience and is a very good fit for a business school Dean looking for career progression.

It may also be worth considering a post overseas. For example, newer universities in the Far East appear eager to recruit business school expertise into their most senior roles. Such opportunities play to the experience business school Deans have in transnational education and relationship building across geographic boundaries. A senior university post abroad would allow individuals to apply their skills and develop their experience in central university leadership, which might subsequently provide a stepping stone to a Vice-Chancellor role back in the UK.

Appendix A

The table below lists current Vice-Chancellors at UK universities with a background in business and management based on primary teaching/research field, or having previously led a business school. It is perhaps worth noting that four of the individuals were appointed Vice-Chancellor in the last year.

If we consider that BPP and London Business School are subject specialist institutions where it would be natural for the Vice-Chancellor to have a business school background, then there are only nine multi-disciplinary UK universities with a Vice-Chancellor with an academic background in business or experience as a business school Dean.

Of the eleven Vice-Chancellors eight have a research or teaching background in business and management.

Table 2. List of University Vice-Chancellors with a background in Business & Management Studies or experience as business school Dean.

Vice-Chancellor	University	Primary Field: Business & Management Studies?	Previously head of a business school?	Year Appointed as V-C
Professor Andrew Atherton	University of Dundee	✓	✓	2019
Professor George Boyne	University of Aberdeen	✓	✓	2018
Professor Amanda Broderick	University of East London	✓	✓	2018
Professor Jean-Noel Ezingard	University of Roehampton	✓	✓	2018
Professor François Ortalo-Magné*	London Business School		✓	2017
Professor Alec Cameron	Aston University	✓	✓	2016
Professor Maria Hinfelaar	Wrexham Glyndwr University		✓	2016
Professor Tim Stewart	BPP University	✓	✓	2016
Professor Paul Croney	Teesside University	✓	✓	2015
Professor Julie Lydon OBE†	University of South Wales	✓		2010
Professor David Green	University of Worcester		✓	2003

*The head of London Business School holds the title of 'Dean' but it is considered the equivalent position to Vice-Chancellor

†Previously Associate Dean within a business school