Connected: student engagement and community building at business schools

AMBA & BGA Report in association with Cengage

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AMBA Introduction

It's now three years since a wave of lockdowns swept cities across the world as governments tried to slow the spread of Covid-19.

Looking back on the moment when the UK's first lockdown was announced, there was a split feeling in the AMBA & BGA office. Some people were confident that it would last no longer than two weeks, while others were saying life would never be the same again.

It's strange to think that the latter was true. For one, no one at AMBA & BGA has worked the pre-pandemic norm of five days in the office each week. But life doesn't feel irrevocably changed; we have simply adapted quickly and, indeed, we are still adapting to new ways of doing things.

This piece of research shows that we are still in a state of flux and change. As learning has moved to different formats, be that online, hybrid, or whatever your business school is doing now, we must remember that we are still only three years on from one of the biggest shifts to learning that has ever taken place.

The results show that most business school leaders are confident in their school's ability to work online – 73 per cent of leaders rate their online offering as being either 'excellent' or 'good'. However, key concerns remain. For example, 63 per cent of leaders believe their students are struggling with feelings of isolation when working online and a majority believe student engagement is higher when working on campus (88 per cent rate student engagement as very high or high on campus compared to just 44 per cent when online).

The role of the campus and the ability to use it to bring students together has also changed as a result of the pandemic. While business school leaders are confident in the strength of their community (69 per cent rate it as being either 'strong' or 'very strong') there is a worry that this is difficult to replicate in the online space – 82 per cent of respondents believe that creating a strong sense of community is easier when students are on campus than when they are online.

Business schools have done a remarkable job of changing and adapting to evolving circumstances so far. They seem certain to continue doing so as new innovations come to fruition to resolve some of the issues we still face in terms of our new normal.

Cengage Introduction

We are excited to work together with AMBA & BGA on the publication of this new research into MBA education. It offers a timely opportunity to hear the personal experiences of leaders and senior professionals across the sector on how the role of the campus has changed and to learn of inspired new strategies that have been introduced to build student engagement and community.

New approaches to teaching were introduced during the pandemic to respond and adapt to a challenging situation for course leaders and students alike, and this research shows how that innovation has continued. During the pandemic, we saw that the use of digital resources accelerated and the use of these tools and hybrid modes of teaching continues to grow today. Alongside these changes to teaching and learning, student expectations have also evolved.

After this period of rapid change, how are business schools and education providers responding and preparing for the future? Now is a good time to reflect on some of the significant developments that have taken place and what this means for the longer term in MBA education. Important considerations are:

How to create a sense of community and foster inclusivity

As the role of the campus has changed over recent years, creating a sense of community and ensuring all students feel included and supported has become more challenging. In this research, business school leaders share some of the strategies they've explored to address this issue. Through our work with institutions and instructors across the world, we know that access to teaching and learning resources is core to improving inclusivity. Importantly, this research also showed that the shift to hybrid teaching has highlighted other important areas to focus on, including feelings of student isolation and ensuring all students interact and engage.

Innovation to promote engagement in the blended learning environment

With the changing teaching and learning settings there are also opportunities to create more interactive, accessible and personalised learning experiences for students. We know that students expect to have choice and flexibility in how they learn and this research shows that this is an area of investment for business school leaders. However, it is important to ensure that students fully engage with the course – however it is taught – respondents felt that driving engagement with materials when taught online was a challenge to address. Only 37 per cent felt that student engagement was high with learning materials online.

What's clear from this research, is the commitment of business school senior leaders to provide a stand-out student experience that combines innovative teaching, student support and robust academic content – with 97% of respondents rating academic reputation and calibre of content important when working with external organisations like Cengage. The survey reveals many exciting developments, as well as a number of challenges and opportunities to explore, and we hope that the results can help to shape MBA education in the years ahead.

Laura Lichtensteiger
Head of Marketing, Cengage EMEA

Executive summary

Creating a sense of community

- 69 per cent of business school leaders rate the strength of their school's community as being either 'strong' or 'very strong'

- 82 per cent of leaders believe that creating a strong sense of community is easier when students are on campus than when they are online

- 70 per cent of leaders said that creating an inclusive environment is easier when students are on the campus than when they are online

- 80 per cent of respondents cite the need to ensure all students interact and engage when working online as a key challenge in fostering an inclusive environment at their business school

Promoting interaction and engagement

- 88 per cent of leaders rate student engagement with learning material as being either 'high' or 'very high' when students were on campus. The equivalent figure when rating engagement among students working online is just 44 per cent

- Over half of respondents say that logins are a key way in which they track interaction and engagement online

Where are the main changes to new ways of working?

- 80 per cent of business school leaders say their business school has implemented hybrid learning opportunities

- 55 per cent of leaders say their school has invested in employing learning design or technology-enhanced learning experts

- 53 per cent say their school has implemented a virtual learning environment (VLE) or learning management system (LMS)

- 73 per cent rate their business school's online learning offering as being either 'excellent' or 'good'

- The biggest concern over students working online is that they might struggle with feelings of isolation, cited by 63 per cent of respondents

- The biggest concerns over students working on campus are that they might struggle with time management (cited by 58 per cent) and keeping to deadlines (cited by 31 per cent)

How have campus approaches changed in response to the pandemic?

- Three-quarters of respondents say that the pandemic has changed the way that they use their business school campus

- Campuses still hold sway over online initiatives in terms of investment – 33 per cent of business school leaders say that the majority of their funds will be allocated to on-campus initiatives in the next five years while 52 per cent say that funding will be split equally between campus and online initiatives. Just 14 per cent say the majority of the funds will be allocated to online initiatives

What are schools looking for in their work with external organisations?

- 66 per cent of responding leaders say that their business school has worked with external organisations to supply learning resources to students

- Academic reputation and calibre of content are what respondents are looking for most when working with external organisations – 97 per cent say these factors are either 'important' or 'very important'

Methodology and participant demographics

Between November 2022 and February 2023, AMBA & BGA circulated an online questionnaire on the topic of creating communities in business schools to the leaders of their institutions. A total of 155 business school decision-makers participated in this quantitative survey.
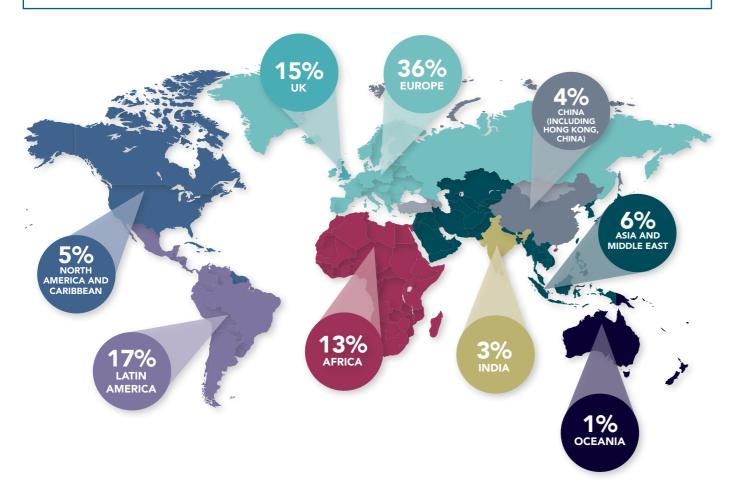
Throughout the following report, the terms 'participants', 'survey respondents', 'business school leaders', and 'leaders' are used interchangeably when describing the research sample.

Of those surveyed, 36 per cent represent business schools in Europe (excluding the UK); 17 per cent represent schools in Latin America; 15 per cent represent schools in the UK; 13 per cent represent schools in Africa; six per cent represent schools in Asia and the Middle East (excluding India and China); five per cent represent schools in North America and the Caribbean; four per cent represent schools in China; three per cent represent schools in India; and one per cent represent schools in Oceania.

In terms of their role, 39 per cent of respondents classify themselves as deans and directors at business schools; 10 per cent are management academics; eight per cent work in designing or delivering business school programmes; eight per cent work with management students and graduates (for example, as careers and alumni staff); eight per cent work in another role within a business school; three per cent work in a technology-enhanced learning team to support business schools; and 25 per cent work within another capacity at a business school.

Three-quarters of those surveyed (75 per cent) say they work at a business school that offers the blended/hybrid mode of learning that combines in-person instruction and online instruction; 18 per cent say their school has only in-person instruction; four per cent say their school offers distance-enhanced learning which primarily offers online instruction enhanced by some in-person events; and three per cent say their school offers distance/fully virtual learning that is offered completely online with no in-person learning.

FIGURE 1: REGIONAL COMPOSITION OF RESPONDENTS

15% UK

36% EUROPE

4% CHINA (INCLUDING HONG KONG, CHINA)

6% ASIA AND MIDDLE EAST

5% NORTH AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN

17% LATIN AMERICA
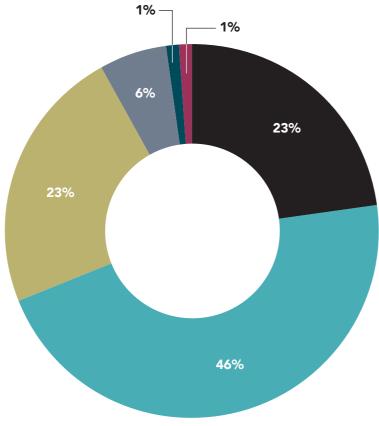
13% AFRICA

3% INDIA

1% OCEANIA

Part 1.
How can business schools create a sense of community and foster an inclusive environment?

How do business school leaders view the current state of their institution's community?

Nearly half of respondents (46 per cent) rate the strength of their business school's community for students as 'strong', with a further quarter of respondents rating it as 'very strong'. Another quarter (23 per cent) of respondents rate the community at their business school for students as 'medium'. Few respondents said it is 'weak' or 'very weak' (seven per cent).

FIGURE 2: HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE STRENGTH OF COMMUNITY AT YOUR BUSINESS SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS?

- Very Strong
- Strong
- Medium
- Weak
- Very Weak
- Don't know

Building a sense of community

In terms of building a sense of community, the vast majority of responding leaders (83 per cent) believe it is easier when students are on campus. Only two per cent of the respondents think that it is easier to create this strength of feeling when students are joining classes or other activities virtually or online. However, 14 per cent of respondents say it doesn't make a difference if students are online or on campus when building a sense of community (the remaining two per cent do not know).

When asked for ways in which their business schools built a sense of community leaders gave many strategies. One of the most popular ways identified was hosting events. Interestingly the ways these events are run is evolving: "We used to offer many live events, then moved to a dedicated website, now we are developing a dedicated smartphone application and recruiting a community manager".

The following list is taken from leaders' responses to being asked for more details of how their business schools seek to build a sense of community:

- Organising events that promote a sense of belonging for instance "memory maker events"

- Networking activities and mixing different groups in electives

- In-class group work with groups changing and students rotating between groups

- Team-building events, in particular an introductory weekend before the programme starts

- Extracurricular seminars and events together with alumni

- Career days organised with the alumni association and with the presence of recruiting companies

- Social media, especially LinkedIn

- Frequent personal contact, clear expectations, a consistent pattern of activities and visible leadership

- Recruiting a community manager

Here are some more examples of current community building initiatives and approaches from individual business school leaders:

"We have a very active student life team. We also have sector-focussed, regional-focussed and EDI-focussed student groups"

"Life on campus is full of extra academic programmes, mostly co-organised between the school and students, such as trips to see firms and their production as well as other events designed to teach them about the local culture."

"We have a community engagement function operating at all levels in the institution to engage with students, alumni and employers as well as other education providers and the wider community"

Building inclusivity

The survey went on to ask about creating inclusive environments at business schools.

A majority of respondents (70 per cent) believe that creating an inclusive environment when students are attending on campus is easier than when they are online. However, 15 per cent think it is easier to create these environments when students are attending the business school in a hybrid mode. Only three per cent of respondents feel it is easier to create an inclusive environment when students are attending a business school online. A further nine per cent don't think that study format make a difference when it comes to creating an inclusive environment, while three per cent of business school leaders are unsure.

> WHAT ARE SOME OF THE KEY TOOLS AND STRATEGIES USED BY BUSINESS SCHOOLS TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVITY?

Answers here show a wide array of different approaches, including the following:

- Formal policy for inclusion and non-discrimination, with

- Scholarships for women and those with financial needs or from underrepresented backgrounds

- Gender balance targets

- International recruitment targets that pay particular attention to lower-income countries

- Visible diversity in recruitment and staffing

- Committees on inclusivity that convene students, staff and faculty members to discuss matters on this topic

- Provision of inclusive and user-friendly learning technology to aid learning

- Adaptation for those with disabilities

- The use of teams in case study work. Each team member is encouraged to participate through shared roles and online presentation

- Policies, training, reporting systems: Student EDI strategy, EDI position on student leadership council

"We have an associate dean for equality, diversity and inclusion who ensures the EDI action plan is embedded and delivered across five areas: learning and teaching; people and organisational development; internationalisation; research; and business and community engagement activities."

Online learning

Looking specifically at online delivery, the survey then sought to find where business school leaders are currently experiencing challenges in their efforts to create an inclusive environment for students.

Ensuring all students interact and engage is the most commonly faced challenge highlighted here. This was selected by 80 per cent of respondents.

Other key challenges respondents identify include understanding individual needs (54 per cent). All students are different and require different amounts of support. Some students are returning to study after a significant gap, so understanding and responding to their needs is very important. Other areas that are challenging include ensuring learners have access to the necessary software and technology (20 per cent); providing specialist equipment to allow for learning (18 per cent); and ensuring every learner has access to the internet (16 per cent).

FIGURE 3: WHEN TRYING TO CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS WORKING ONLINE, DO YOU FIND ANY OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS TO BE CHALLENGING?
MULTIPLE SELECTIONS WERE ALLOWED

80%
Ensuring all students interact and engage

54%
Understanding individual needs

20%
Ensuring learners have access to the necessary software and technology

18%
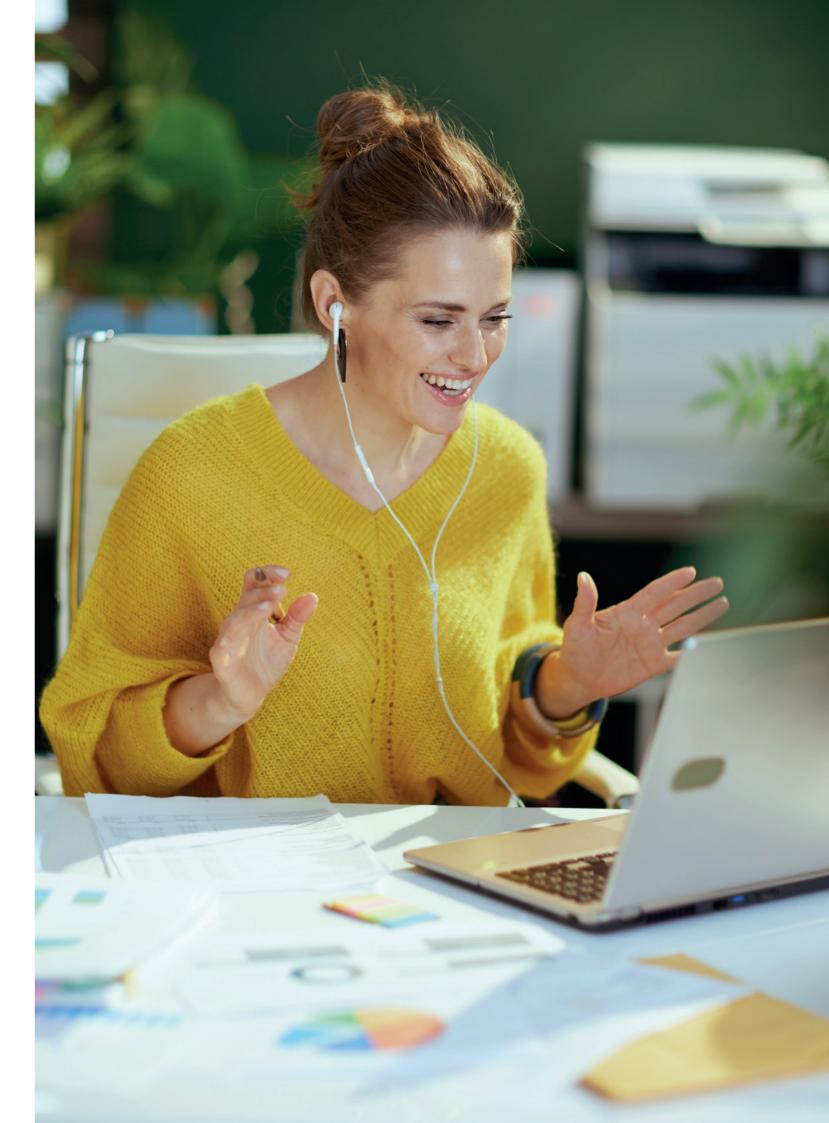Providing specialist equipment to allow for learning

16%
Ensuring every learner has access to the internet

5%
Other (please specify)

Part 2:
How can lecturers promote interaction and engagement?

Part one of this report demonstrates the importance of interaction and engagement to business school leaders. So, the survey went on to investigate the difference between levels of interaction and engagement for students attending on campus and online.
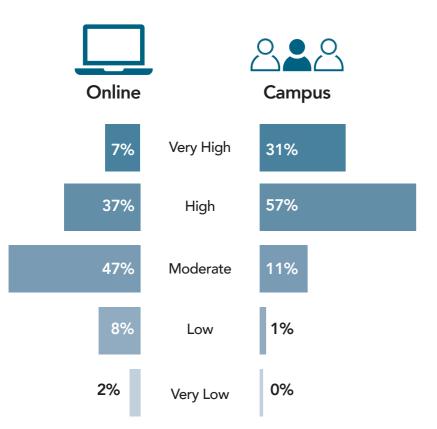
Student engagement with learning materials

Respondents give higher ratings for student engagement with learning material when students are working on campus, as opposed to when they are working online.

A total of 31 per cent of respondents rate the engagement of students with learning materials as 'very high' when on campus. The equivalent figure for students working online is just seven per cent. Furthermore, while 57 per cent rate student engagement with learning materials as 'high' when on campus, the equivalent figure for those being taught online is significantly lower, at 37 per cent.

This finding does identify a challenge facing business schools, but there is also an opportunity to take advantage of new online resources. Adaptive online course materials can be used to provide a more personalised learning experience. This is particularly helpful in areas that students are struggling with or where they are learning brand new skills for their career, so that they are able to achieve specific career goals.

FIGURE 4: HOW WOULD YOU RATE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH LEARNING MATERIAL WHEN TEACHING ONLINE VS. ON CAMPUS

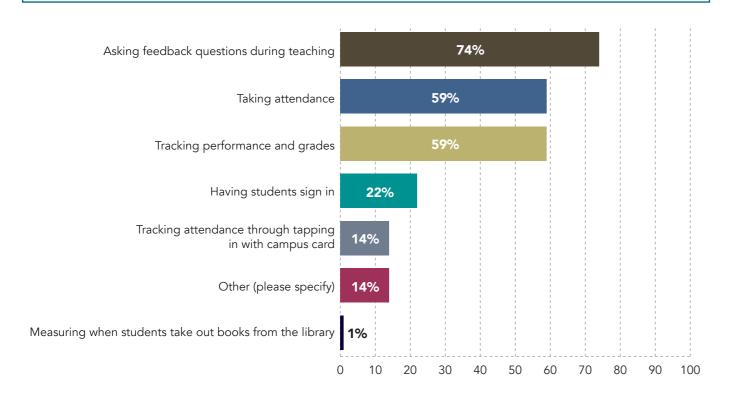| Online		Campus
7%	Very High	31%
37%	High	57%
47%	Moderate	11%
8%	Low	1%
2%	Very Low	0%

Monitoring student interaction and engagement

The survey also enquired how business schools are tracking and measuring student interaction and engagement for both on-campus and online activities.

Asking feedback questions during teaching	74%
Taking attendance	59%
Tracking performance and grades	59%
Having students sign in	22%
Tracking attendance through tapping in with campus card	14%
Other (please specify)	14%
Measuring when students take out books from the library	1%

Looking at on-campus activities, nearly three quarters (74 per cent) of respondents say that they monitor student interaction and engagement by asking feedback questions during teaching. Other popular answers include taking attendance from students and tracking performance and grades (cited by 59 per cent in each case).

Respondents were less likely to say that students had to sign in (only 22 per cent cited this measure) or that they tracked attendance through tapping in with a campus card (14 per cent).

The following list gives a few examples from a further question, in which respondents were asked for more details of how business schools monitor student interaction and engagement on campus:

- Facilitating discussions and workshops in smaller groups where the individual has to participate to be valued as a classmate

- Programme coordinators sitting in on sessions to monitor engagement, absenteeism and so on

- Promoting interactions during sessions, experiential learning and activities that promote learning transfer

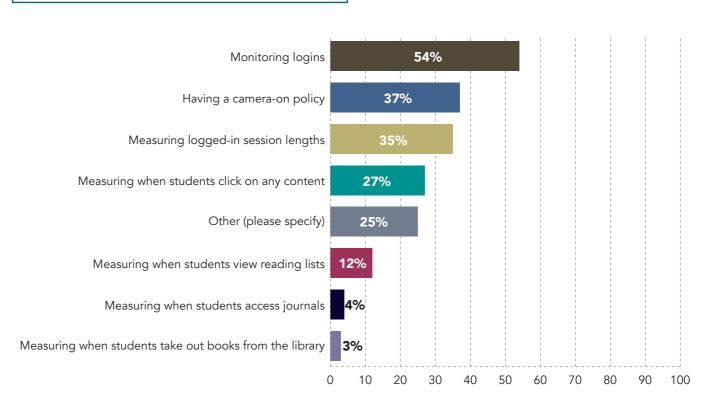# Monitoring student interaction online

Looking at online activities, 54 per cent of business school leaders say they monitor logins to track interaction and engagement. Meanwhile, 37 per cent of respondents say their institution has a camera-on policy, 35 per cent say they measure the logged-in session lengths of students and 27 per cent say they measure when students click on any content.

A quarter of respondents say they use other options, with the survey asking for details of these. Answers here include:

- No tracking of online engagement

- Encouraging the need for students/learners to take personal responsibility

- Faculty reports

- Student participation in breakout groups, project work and case discussions

- Learning management system (LMS) reports showing interaction percentages between students and the LMS

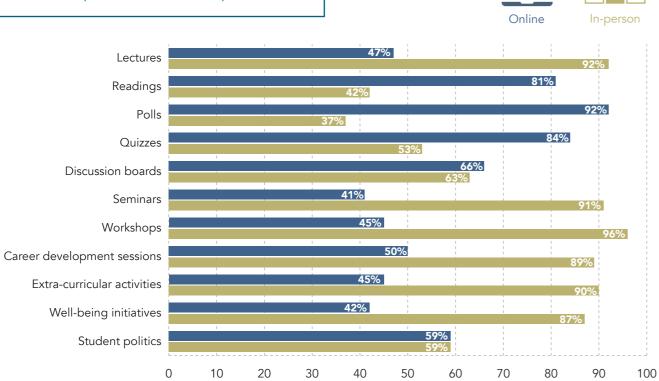|	
Monitoring logins	54%
Having a camera-on policy	37%
Measuring logged-in session lengths	35%
Measuring when students click on any content	27%
Other (please specify)	25%
Measuring when students view reading lists	12%
Measuring when students access journals	4%
Measuring when students take out books from the library	3%

Respondents were then given a list of activities and asked to indicate which they find effective in promoting student interaction and participation, both online and on campus. When students are working online, polls (92 per cent), quizzes (84 per cent) and readings (81 per cent) are the most popular answers. When students are working in person, however, the most popular answers are workshops (96 per cent), lectures (92 per cent) and seminars (91 per cent).

With the widespread adoption of a hybrid teaching identified at the beginning of the report, it is vital to make sure that courses are delivering a balance of activities that are engaging and that students are interacting with resources in all learning settings. Online group assignments, collaborative case studies and simulations of problems in real-world settings are some approaches that can be adopted to increase engagement online. Using some of these more interactive methods in in the lecture room too is a way that participation levels can increase overall.

FIGURE 7: WHAT TYPES OF ACTIVITIES AND TEACHING METHODS ARE MOST EFFECTIVE IN PROMOTING STUDENT INTERACTION AND PARTICIPATION (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)?

Online   In-person

Part 3:
Innovations for a new way of working

Nobody can deny that the pandemic changed the way we worked. Some things have slowly crept back to normal, but others are seemingly forever changed, with many enforced innovations making a last impression. Things have settled into a new normal, where flux and change are considered the standard.
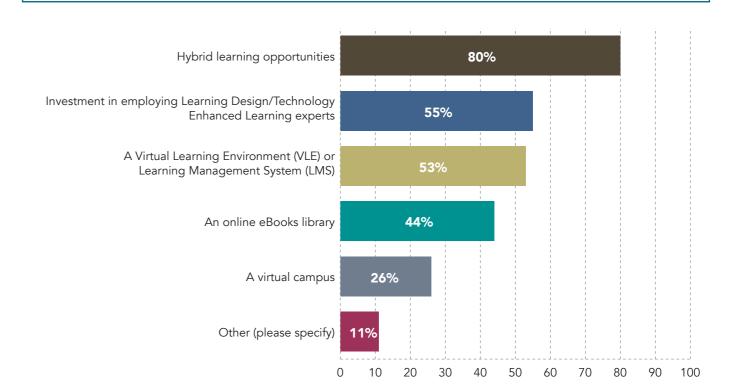
The next section of the report looked at how business schools have been creating and adapting to their own new normal.

The growth in hybrid learning

Among innovations implemented in pursuit of new ways of working, hybrid learning opportunities are by far the most common – 80 per cent of respondents say their business school has brought in this format. A further 55 per cent say their school has invested in employing learning design/technology enhanced learning experts and 53 per cent say it has implemented a virtual learning environment (VLE) or learning management system (LMS). Meanwhile, more than a quarter (26%) of respondents say their business school has implemented a virtual campus.

FIGURE 8: REFLECTING ON HOW YOUR BUSINESS SCHOOL HAS CREATED AND ADAPTED TO ITS OWN 'NEW NORMAL' AND VISION FOR THE FUTURE, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING INNOVATIONS HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED AT YOUR SCHOOL?
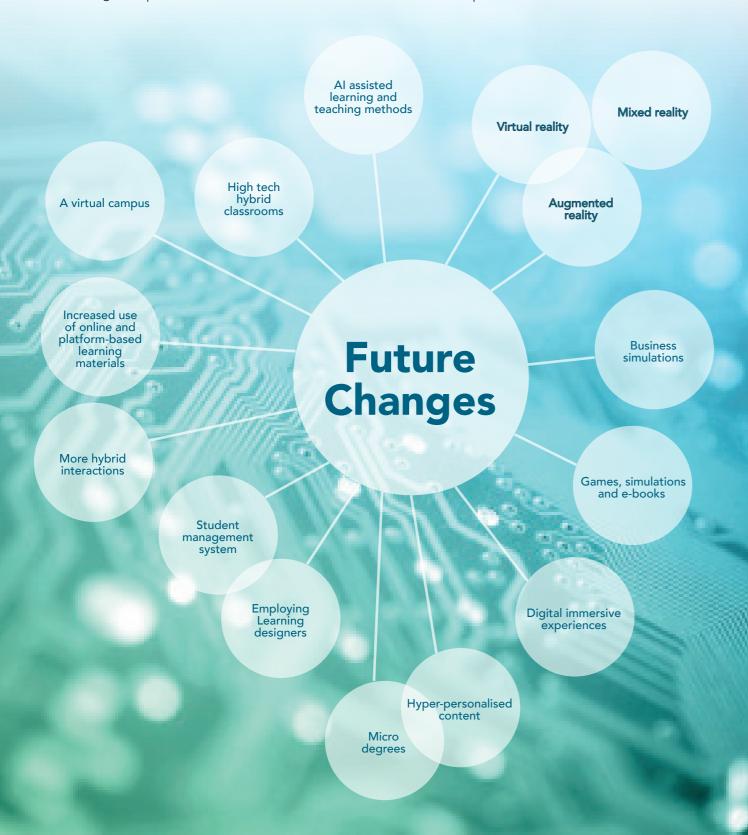MULTIPLE SELECTIONS WERE ALLOWED

Shaping the Future of MBA Education

The following examples are innovations leaders believe their school will implement in the future:

AI assisted learning and teaching methods

Virtual reality

Mixed reality

High tech hybrid classrooms

A virtual campus

Augmented reality

Increased use of online and platform-based learning materials

Future Changes

Business simulations

More hybrid interactions

Games, simulations and e-books

Student management system

Employing Learning designers

Digital immersive experiences

Hyper-personalised content

Micro degrees

Online learning provision

Turning specifically to business schools' existing online provision, leaders are generally positive about their offerings. Nearly half (49 per cent) think their school's current provision is 'good', while 24 per cent think that it is 'excellent'. There is, however, clear room for improvement at some schools – 20 percent of responding leaders describe their current online provision as 'fair' while six per cent rate it as 'poor'.

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Very Poor

0%

24%

6%

20%

49%

Diving deeper into business schools' online provision, respondents were asked about the tools that they use to facilitate online learning.

Live online lectures — 72%
ebooks — 67%
Online journal articles — 66%
Online assignments and assessments platform (created internally) — 64%
Online video links — 64%
Surveys — 56%
Pre-recorded lectures — 55%
Collaboration tools — 55%
Online case study banks — 52%
Online assignments and assessments platform (from external providers) — 48%
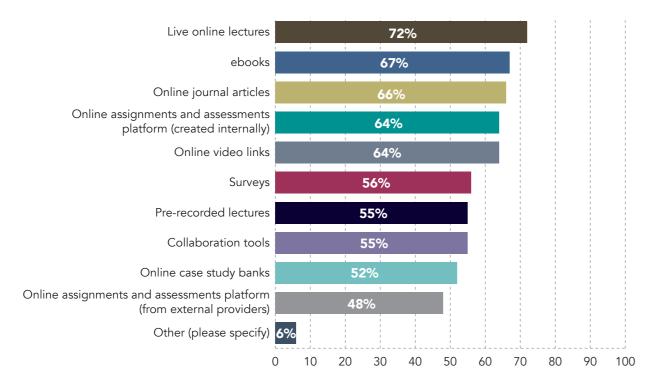Other (please specify) — 6%

FIGURE 11: WHAT TOOLS DO YOU CURRENTLY USE TO FACILITATE ONLINE LEARNING?
MULTIPLE SELECTIONS WERE ALLOWED

Respondents are most likely to use live online lectures (72 per cent), ebooks (67 per cent) and online journal articles (66 per cent). Other popular tools include internal online assignments and assessment platforms (64 per cent), online video links (64 per cent) and surveys (56 per cent). Less popular are online assignment and assessment platforms from external providers (48 per cent) and online case study banks (52 per cent).

Course assessment

Assessment is a fundamental part of any learning course and respondents were therefore asked how they use online assignment and assessment platforms. A total of 80 per cent of business school leaders say that they use online assignment and assessment platforms to carry out case studies, while 75 per cent use say they use them to ask critical-thinking questions. Other popular uses are to ask open-ended essay questions (cited by 68 per cent), to ask multiple choice questions (54 per cent) and to facilitate additional reading (33 per cent).

Respondents were then asked where they believe their students struggle when working online.

Challenges for students when working online

FIGURE 12: WHEN WORKING ONLINE, WHERE DO YOU BELIEVE STUDENTS STRUGGLE?
MULTIPLE SELECTIONS WERE ALLOWED

63% Feeling isolated

56% Working without distraction

52% Interacting with the lectures

46% Creating peer-learning opportunities

39% Time management

27% Asking for help

26% Application of studies to professional context and career ambitions

26% Interacting with the resources

22% Keeping to deadlines

The top answer here is thought-provoking – 63 per cent of business school leaders believe students struggle with feelings of isolation when they work online. This issue comes out ahead of working without distraction (cited by 56 per cent), interacting with lectures (52 per cent) and creating peer-learning opportunities (46 per cent).

Areas where fewer respondents identify problems for students working online include finding resources (cited by just 16 per cent), keeping to deadlines (22 per cent) and interacting with resources (26 per cent).

Challenges for students working on campus

58%
Time management

31%
Keeping to deadlines

30%
Application of studies to professional context and career ambitions

28%
Working without distraction

14%
Finding resources

11%
Asking for help

In comparison, time management tops the list of areas where respondents believe their students struggle when working on campus. In this instance, it is cited by 58 per cent – a proportion that is 19 percentage points higher than the equivalent for students working online. Keeping to deadlines (cited by 31 per cent) is the next most common problem respondents identify for students working on campus. This is nine percentage points higher than the equivalent for students working online.

Unsurprisingly, students feeling isolated and accessing opportunities for peer learning are less likely to be an area of concern where teaching and learning is being delivered on campus (with only five per cent and one percent selecting these options, respectively). However, with 80% of respondents acknowledging the implementation of hybrid course elements at their institution, along with a similar majority citing student interaction as the most commonly faced online challenge, these important issues around social interaction must remain an area of focus.

The results prompt questions around what activities could be done in-person to address the challenges faced when working online and vice versa to ensure that students have a sense of belonging whilst studying on their course and can expand their skills to be successful whether working online or on campus.

Part 4:
How has in-person teaching changed in response to the pandemic?

When the pandemic compelled most people to work and study from home, offices, schools and universities were left empty. The role of offices has now changed, with many organisations switching to a hybrid working pattern where employees come in on certain days and work from home the rest of the week. But how have things changed with regards to the use of physical university and business school campuses?

Three quarters (75 per cent) of responding business school leaders say that the pandemic has changed the way they now use their campus now, while 22 per cent says it has not and three per cent are unsure.

Those who had answered that the pandemic has changed the way their campus is used were then given the opportunity to provide some more details. Examples from their subsequent responses are given below:

- Students expect to have more technological tools

- Increased space for student and staff interaction with reduced office space due to hot desking

- Increased support for student wellbeing

- Shift from use as a teaching materials repository to use as an interactive tool

- Greater need for interactive teaching and learning, with more breakout sessions and group work

Here are some more examples of campus experiences from individual business school leaders:

> "Many staff members still work remotely, only coming into the campus for specific days or meetings/tasks. The campus is therefore much quieter than pre-pandemic."

> "We have added electronic resources, ceiling microphones and speakers and reoriented classrooms towards a smartboard. All courses as hybrid and are recorded to ensure that those not able to be present (for health reasons or due to extreme time zone differences) are able to catch up."

> "Staff usage has completely changed. Professional staff are only attending between 40 and 60 per cent of the time. We have therefore moved to open plan offices with booking systems. We have also brought lots of extra hardware into all of our lecture theatres to help with hybrid teaching."

How can the campus experience be improved for students

The survey went on to ask how respondents feel the campus experience could be improved for students. Here are some of business school leaders' answers:

- More group activities and visiting speakers/employers on campus as well as more visits to companies

- More interactive classrooms

- More areas for socialising and related activities, such as networking events and clubs

- Increase high-tech space that facilitates smooth transitions between face-to-face and online environments

- Re-engineering traditional lectures to be far more engaging and to create an on-campus 'wow' factor

- More video resources and greater interaction with teachers and other students

Future investment plans

A subsequent question on where business schools will be allocating their funding over the next five years sought to ascertain the future of the campus.

In reply, 33 per cent of business school leaders say a majority of funding will be allocated to on-campus initiatives. This compares to 14 per cent who say that the majority of the funds will be allocated to online initiatives. However, more than half (52 per cent) of respondents say that the majority of their business school's funds will be allocated equally between campus and online initiatives.

Part 5:
Working with external organisations

In which areas do business schools currently work with external organisations and which aspects of these relationships are going well?

The respondents were asked if their business school worked with external organisations to supply learning resources to students.

A majority of the survey's responding business school leaders (66 per cent) say that their business school has worked with external organisations to supply learning resources to students. Only 20 per cent say that they have not, while a further 14 per cent are unsure.

Delving further, 71 per cent of those who say they have worked with external organisations on supplying learning resources indicate that this relationship relates to providing students with access to content and learning resources. A learning management system is a focus of these external relationships for 56 per cent of respondents, while 42 per cent work with them for hybrid learning capabilities.

Less common areas of collaboration between business schools and external organisations currently lie in the provision of career and skill-related resources (39 per cent of respondents cite existing projects) and in designing programmes (22 per cent cite existing projects).

The survey then looked at factors that might influence the success of relationships between external organisations and business schools.

What are the key factors for building good relationships with external partners?

Respondents deem academic reputation and calibre of content as the most important factor in developing a good relationship with an external organisation – 97 per cent say this is either 'very important' or 'important'.
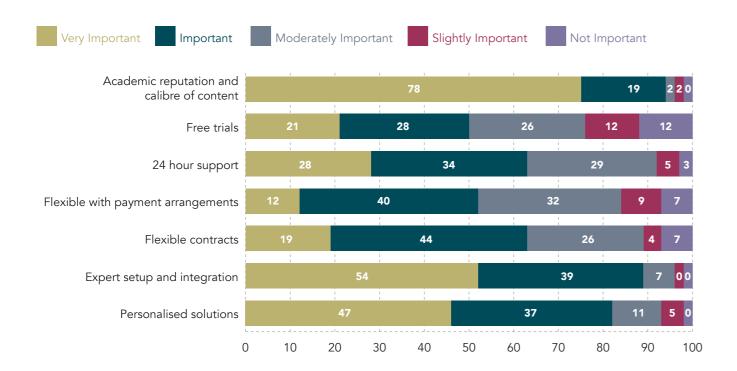
This is closely followed by supplied expertise in setup and integration – 93 per cent of respondents say this is either 'very important' or 'important'. Personalised solutions, meanwhile, are regarded as being 'very important' or 'important' by 84 per cent.

Free trials and flexible payment arrangements are deemed to be less important factors. Only 49 per cent and 53 per cent say these are either 'very important' or 'important', respectively.

Respondents were then asked to give details of where they usually encounter difficulties or challenges in their work with external organisations. Some key themes emerged here, including:

- Confidentiality of practices and policies
- Personalisation
- Budgeting
- An understanding of the higher education sector
- Lack of adaption available for smaller business schools
- Integration to existing systems
- Integration with different regions
- Alignment with values and cultures

Conclusion

This report shows that that, all in all, business school leaders are confident in their business schools' ability to create a sense of community, develop inclusive spaces, offer a valuable online experience and foster student engagement.

However, there is still come way to go on this last point, particularly when it comes to engagement for students working online. Our results reveal that while 88 per cent of leaders rate student engagement with learning material as 'very high' or 'high' when students are on campus, this falls to just 44 per cent when students are working online.

Other key concerns for business school leaders are the potential loneliness of students when working online, with 63 per cent of leaders identifying feelings of isolation as an issue among their student body.

Elsewhere, business school leaders are very much invested in the campus experience, as well as the online experience – while 33 per cent of business school leaders say they will allocate the majority of their school's funds towards campus initiatives in the next five years, 52 per cent say that the majority of their business school's funds will be allocated equally between campus and online initiatives.

Furthermore, based on the results of this survey, business school leaders are generally happy with the changes their business school has made in response to the pandemic. While they have adjusted to the new normal alongside their students with a great deal of success, there certainly seems to be scope for business schools themselves, or external providers, to develop new initiatives and tools to help solve ongoing challenges as they seek continuous improvement.

FIGURE 13: WHEN WORKING WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS, PLEASE RANK THE FOLLOWING IN TERMS OF IMPORTANCE IN CREATING A GOOD RELATIONSHIP? (%)

Legend: Very Important | Important | Moderately Important | Slightly Important | Not Important

	Very Important	Important	Moderately Important	Slightly Important	Not Important
Academic reputation and calibre of content	78	19	2	2	0
Free trials	21	28	26	12	12
24 hour support	28	34	29	5	3
Flexible with payment arrangements	12	40	32	9	7
Flexible contracts	19	44	26	4	7
Expert setup and integration	54	39	7	0	0
Personalised solutions	47	37	11	5	0