Chartered ABS International Students Taskforce 2024

Terms of reference

Background to International Students taskforce

The Chartered ABS periodically forms a taskforce to conduct an in-depth exploration of a specific challenge facing the UK business school sector. This involves proactively gathering and analysing evidence from a variety of sources and proposing recommendations for the sector to take forward. It is crucial that the outputs and key messages of the taskforce resonate with external stakeholders and have impact within the wider public discourse.

The market for international students is faced with multiple challenges and is expected to remain under pressure. After years of increased enrolments to UK universities and business schools, there are clear signs of a trend reversal. The 2023 Chartered ABS Annual Membership survey found that 31% of responding schools saw a decline in postgraduate enrolments from non-EU students in 2023/24, up from 26% in 2022/23.

The attractiveness of the UK as a study destination has been adversely affected by hostile rhetoric from the government, the ban on visas for dependents of students, and uncertainty over the future of the post-study work visa. Increases in the cost of living and intense competition for international students from countries such as Australia and Canada only add to the challenging environment.

UK business schools account for 1 in 3 of all international students in the UK. The financial health of UK business schools and their parent universities is dependent on their ability to attract international students. The Chartered ABS has therefore decided to form a taskforce to understand and address the competitive and policy issues affecting the market for international students and UK business schools.

Objectives and possible activities

1) To understand how the UK policy environment is impacting upon the UK’s competitiveness in the international student market and how we can lobby for change

   ➢ Develop an evidence-based comparison of the policy environment for international students in the UK compared to competitor countries
   ➢ Modeling of adverse potential scenarios for recruitment due to policy changes

2) To ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of the UK’s brand for Business & Management education

   ➢ How do prospective international students perceive the UK as a study destination? How do they perceive the competitor countries as study destinations?
   ➢ What activities are competitor countries (e.g. Canada, Australia, etc) undertaking to recruit international students?
   ➢ What are the specific decision-making factors for international students and how do these vary for the respective competitor countries?
3) To determine the impact of UK business schools and Business & Management education

➢ What do we know about the career pathways of business schools’ international alumni? How do they contribute to the UK’s soft power and economic power?
➢ How do international Business & Management students contribute to the national and regional economy? Gather hard quantitative data.

Taskforce membership

The taskforce will have two co-chairs: one academic and one non-academic. The taskforce will have representation from a breadth of academic and non-academic colleagues to ensure it can draw upon a wide range of expertise and leverage its findings with government and other stakeholders. The Chartered ABS will provide research and administrative support.

Deliverables and timescales

It is envisioned that the taskforce will produce a range of outputs of varying size over a period of 12 to 18 months. Given the speed at which the policy environment for international students is changing and the imminent general election, the taskforce will be expected to produce impactful policy outputs as soon as possible. The work on brand perception and the impact of UK Business & Management education will be a longer-term activity.

The work of the taskforce will also be publicised through events, and taskforce members will help to develop these and serve as panelists or chairs. Any research involving Chartered ABS members must reflect our diverse membership and involve schools from each UK nation.