



# 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY LEADERS

## Nottingham Trent University

Regional event report

NOTTINGHAM  
BUSINESS SCHOOL  
Nottingham Trent University



QAA



# 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY LEADERS

## Reshaping Business and Management Studies

This workshop at Nottingham Trent University was one of a series where employers, academics and management consultants were brought together to share opinion on the current and future business curriculum. Delegates divided into smaller, mixed groups to discuss six key questions. Opinions were captured by a team of reporters, from which this report has been created. It aims to pull together the main viewpoints and conclusion rather than to provide a verbatim commentary of the discussions.

Employers expect graduates to have a strong set of core skills and qualities, whether they come from a Higher Education or Further Education background. Demonstrating the right attitude, having some experience of the business or sector and showing the desire to develop within the role and organisation were identified as differentiators. While recognising that international understanding, finance and data may be covered by the curriculum, employers felt they needed to be given greater focus, with the importance of these skills in the businesses of today and the future made apparent. Both employers and universities need to explore how they can work more effectively together to create worthwhile opportunities which will improve the employability of management graduates.

### Question 1: Describe your ideal management job candidate

- Is there a different skill set required from MBAs compared to Bachelors – or is it just a question of maturity and level of skill?

### Question 2: Describe the candidates you *actually* see

- Where do the 'best ones' come from? (HE/FE/etc?)
- What management and leadership skills do good candidates demonstrate?

The delegates readily focused on three core areas of importance. Initially attendees listed the generic skills and traits that they would want to see in a graduate, but as discussions developed towards experience, stronger statements were made in relation to the knowledge and skills that employers require and the quality of graduates they see. Some Management and Leadership skills were discussed in relation to more senior posts.

### Harder Skills

**An ideal candidate will possess a strong set of general skills, which enables them to be both flexible and versatile.**

Ideal management candidates would already possess the necessary subject area knowledge and skills for the role, such as Marketing or Finance experience, when applying for the post. Paul Silcock, from Lloyd Banking Group, describes this as someone who is a *'technical practitioner'*. The ability to use both generic and more specific skills in the context of the hiring company would come in time through further training.

Ideal candidates should be able to:

- display an ability to solve problems
- analyse situations and information
- think critically
- make decisions
- manage themselves
- manage and help to develop others.

It was indicated in addition that an ideal candidate would possess basic *'financial, operational and strategic skills'*.

## Attitude

**An ideal candidate may have industry knowledge, but for employers it is more important that they display the values and behaviours required to be successful at lower management levels.**

An ideal candidate should possess most, if not all of the following qualities:

- have the right values, are ethical and have an understanding of what is right
- are confident and positive, but self-aware
- are willing to learn and develop, displaying potential for personal growth; but are responsible, willing to admit mistakes and work hard to rectify errors
- are proactive, motivated, tenacious and should demonstrate initiative.

At interview, the following indicators may help to identify attitude traits:

- the candidate is well presented and punctual
- they demonstrate a level of preparedness
- they align with organisational values
- they display a genuine interest in expanding their knowledge
- they ask further questions aside from the role itself.

## Soft Skills

It was indicated that in addition to harder skills and a good attitude an ideal candidate will have a strong set of softer skills, which include;

- good interpersonal skills
- being a good well-rounded communicator and listener
- being able to form and maintain relationships
- working collaboratively, consultatively and inclusively with colleagues.

## Experience

**Better candidates come with experience and a desire to develop further professionally in the role and to progress with the organisation.**

As a candidate *'moves up the qualification tree'* from Bachelor to MBA, the level of skills, experience and maturity are greater. Although a graduate may have the academic *'raw'* knowledge, they may lack the skill and practical experience in applying it - in comparison to an MBA graduate who is usually viewed as a more complete recruit.

However, **MBA graduates differ**. Whereas some delegates felt that MBA students held the greater practical application of skills, others suggested that MBA programmes didn't necessarily provide candidates with great work experience; *'most people would take a candidate with better experience over an MBA'*. These comments may relate to the different levels of MBA that are currently provided; whereas some students may progress immediately from an undergraduate degree, ABS accredited programmes require a set number of years work experience as criteria for enrolling. The perception of the MBA graduate has changed. They're now seen as much younger, as not possessing enough skills or experience and this is *'demeaning the MBA'*.

Richard Brewell, Rolls Royce PLC, suggested that the ideal candidate has relevant experience in a similar/direct role and of functional business knowledge (See Appendix 1). Others, however, state that the skills and experience developed outside of direct study and business are just as important. Candidates need to be able to **articulate the skills learned/developed elsewhere**, through their involvement in volunteer work, sports and charity activities, for example. Senior Lecturer Simon Gee, University of Derby, stated that some of the best candidates had been through University and hadn't been able to get a graduate level job and were working in McDonalds and similar roles. These candidates had a rounded skill set, life and work experience and were prepared to be flexible.

People who have **suffered adversity** can make stronger leaders, because of the skills they've developed to cope in difficult life situations. Historically, those from Higher Education have not perhaps faced as many challenges as those from Further Education, but this is considered an increasingly dated trend. Educational background does not necessarily dictate who the best leaders are.

In some instances **the ideal candidate is the person that best fits the team** as well as the role, regardless of what it says on the paper in terms of the qualifications they possess. The emphasis on attitude and work ethic was reiterated further with comments that suggested *'sometimes what is fantastic on paper & what you get are very different'* and that it was more the case that an ideal candidate will be able to *'pick up the ball and run with it'*.

**Cross-functionality** is a key attribute for an ideal candidate - somebody who has an understanding and/or experience of the wider business - which allows for *'joined up thinking'*. **In-company training schemes** in particular succeed best in developing cross-functionality, with organisations preferring *'to grow people up through the organisation'* from lower level roles. In turn, **In-company programmes produce the best candidates for lower level posts**; with higher level positions more varied. Whereas a good degree would form the foundation for lower level candidates, **external recognition**, such as an MBA, or another professional qualification is ideal **for higher level posts**.

James Fry, Senior Partner of Eversheds LLP indicated that within the **law sector** the ideal candidates hold an undergraduate first degree in the technical discipline and an MA in management. He stated that **the best candidates are practitioners**, who have the technical ability with wider attributes and show the **potential to grow** into management. He added that the firm *'recruits exclusively from the Higher Education and/or legal background'*.

An ideal candidate is expected to display some **international and cross-cultural experience**, although this was considered largely dependent on the context of the hiring company. **Education arrangements in the UK** are considered an obstacle, as serial education (from school to college to university) and the 3 year undergraduate degree system can be restrictive in comparison to European institutions, which on the other hand, provide good opportunities for placements, work experience and importantly, international study.

Frequently, **graduates expect to enter organisations at a higher level than organisations intend to recruit them into**, as employers want to train graduates up through the company ranks. MBA graduates from accredited programmes possess better experience suited for higher level positions, referred to as the '*MBA – pre-cursor to a higher level*' by Paul Silcock, Lloyds Banking Group.

## Management and Leadership Skills

Paul Silcock, Lloyds Banking Group, stated that it is difficult to define leadership skills; as there has been a redefinition of areas such as '*nurturing skills*' for example, in recent times – and these often seem idealistic. He argued that **business leaders need to be very specific to their sector** and added that leadership skills can vary by function.

An ideal candidate will display the following management and leadership traits:

- thinks strategically rather than operationally
- makes productive use of team member strengths
- has values in relation to organisational needs and knows how to apply these
- can think on their feet
- copes under pressure and acts productively when something goes wrong for the first time
- shows a willingness for self-development; recognising their own strengths and weaknesses
- has a real-world understanding.

### Question 3: What is being taught?

- What are the knowledge and skills you expect a business school to teach?  
Assign a rating 1-10.

**Academics listed the management course content from the Open University and Nottingham Trent University. Current taught content is considered largely appropriate, but there are gaps where the current provision can be enhanced. Internationalisation is one example of this and managing project, managing finance, and data and information analysis featured heavily in the discussions. It was felt that MBA programmes offered greater opportunities to students to gain practical experience, when compared with undergraduate programmes.**

### What is currently taught?

Discussions focused on both undergraduate and MBA qualifications. Some of the comments were difficult to attribute to a particular qualification level.

The areas almost every group highlighted as currently being taught:

- are generalist, covering the basics of management and leadership
- allow for more specialist/bespoke options, such as accountancy or marketing
- soft skills, such as communication, self-awareness, collaboration/teamwork
- are more academic/theory based, covering management theories and thinkers, managing change, human resources, strategy, leadership, critical thinking and economics.

MBA qualifications provide; more specialism; elements of cross-functionality; an international dimension; and an examination of current and perceived trends. It was noted that MBAs offer greater opportunities for practical application than undergraduate programmes.

**Internationalisation** was noted to be taught to an extent by some delegates, with a larger emphasis placed on its importance in discussions about what *should* be taught. This may display the differences in course content between undergraduate programmes and MBAs.

**Combination degrees** are becoming increasingly popular; already noticeable in the undergraduate portfolio, where Business and/or Management Studies is often combined with a related subject such as Accountancy, Marketing, Economics or Psychology, or one of these subjects in combination with another e.g. Accountancy and Economics.

Despite an acknowledgement of the role that graduate training schemes and in-house programmes play in how graduates are recruited and trained to organisational function, they were not specifically mentioned within this exercise and this may be particularly insightful.

### Course content at the Open University

It was indicated by Devendra Kodwani, Masters Programme Director at the Open University, that their undergraduate course contains the following content/modules:

- Marketing
- Finance
- HR
- Internationalisation
- Change
- Project Management
- Foundation Strategy
- Foundation Finance
- Specialist Entrepreneurship Management
- Intercultural Management
- Creativity
- Sustainability
- a project – offering application within organisations and experience of report writing.

He added that their MBA includes:

- Critical engagement with Theory in the work context
- Global Perspectives
- Application in practice
- Becoming a reflective practitioner.

### Course content at Nottingham Trent University

Academics from the Nottingham Trent University indicated that their management qualification includes:

- Leadership
- Employability
- Finance
- Business Value
- Managing Information
- Corporate Strategy
- Creativity
- an academic research project.

## What is expected to be taught?

Employers indicated that business schools need to do more to support their students in the development of core skills and qualities as well as the supporting knowledge that allows the skills to put taught theory into practice. Internationalisation, Finance and Data were frequently suggested as being the largest gaps in the curriculum.

**Business Schools should have a responsibility for teaching core skills and qualities** as an essential part of the curriculum, with a focus on:

- communication, collaboration and interpersonal skills
- critical thinking
- creativity
- problem solving
- self-development, a willingness to learn, reflecting upon decisions and rectifying mistakes
- adaptability
- influence and negotiation

Equally, it is just as important that business schools deliver the right knowledge that will best prepare their graduates for the world of work.

All aspects of **internationalisation**, including business globalisation, management and leadership in a complex global environment, global citizenship, business language and cross-cultural understanding should be taught in greater detail due to its importance as a skill for the future.

Ian Bates, Chamber of Commerce and Industry for Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire indicated that he expected that students should be gaining experience of **managing projects** and becoming more aware of **finance**, with others agreeing that an appropriate level of **finance** should be taught, as well as numerical analysis and report writing. **Data and information analysis** is important, especially a focus on data/information management and effective use of this information in the digital era.

Performance management, psychological insight; with a focus on supporting and developing others, change leadership and change management were frequently suggested, with an emphasis on leadership qualities, leading teams and developing others.

Additional suggestions of what should be taught included:

- the business environment from skills to theory
- developing entrepreneurialism
- investment appraisal
- ethics
- commercial awareness
- understanding standards and excellence
- understanding business vision
- cross-functional impact
- understanding the value of time and resource.
- economics and strategy.

#### Question 4: Are there any skills specific for you region/sector?

- What are the top 5 skills required now, and in the future?

#### Region/sector specific skills

It was noted by that the region is predominantly made up of SMEs, with some exceptions, such as Rolls Royce, Boots, Bombardier, Toyota and Higher Education.

#### The top skills required now and in the future

Returning to the **core skills and qualities**; working with people, organisation and personal development was seen as crucial, including; being a reflective practitioner; team leadership; collaborative working; ethics; and communication.

A mix of generic and specific business, management and leadership skills emerged from discussions:

- human resources – retention, reward and improving performance
- negotiation
- cross-functionality
- internationality and cultural awareness, with focus on globalisation, and business language
- commercial awareness
- managing the growing influence and use of social media
- engaging employees into the business vision and standards of excellence.

A good understanding of the wider **business environment** is a key attribute now and moving forward. Presenting **business case**, although not suggested as a subject area that should be taught, was raised as a top skill, as well as **understanding governance** and corporate structures. **Sustainability** was suggested by De Montfort University Programme Director Alison Bragg.

An understanding of **business marketing** is useful, specifically brand and reputation management.

**Financial skill, information analysis and report writing** were again seen as key skills, with Richard Brewell stating that the **effective use of digital information is 'top of the agenda'**.

**Cross-functionality** is a skill that will continue to be valued, particularly with the growth of more specialist combined degrees and with the focus from employers on training managers up through the levels of the company.

#### Question 5: How can employers help?

- Suggest a list of potential interventions: work placements, employer lecturers, events etc.

#### Question 6: What have you seen work well in practice?

- What activities are most beneficial to the candidate?

Delegates were asked to consider the role of employers and how they could be involved in helping to develop good management graduates and to contribute to the curriculum. Examples of structured work placements, short-term projects and mentoring were outlined. The need for universities and employers to work closer together was emphasised.



## Placements

**Placements that provide 'real hands-on work' with real 'associated responsibilities' are an extremely beneficial work-based learning experience.**

Although work placements from universities were **featuring less** at Lloyds Banking Group, they frequently received requests from students for work experience. Placements are of **fantastic benefit** to students regardless of length, with delegates suggesting longer placements would allow for continued progression and open opportunities for mentoring and skill development, with suggestions that shorter placements would be more appropriate for SMEs. It was suggested that there could be **more credit-bearing content** for modular learning whilst working on placement.

Sponsorship and **incentives for business to provide sponsorship** (particularly senior sponsorship) was regularly suggested with a few groups offering paid internships/apprenticeships/placements as an option.

**Sandwich degrees** continue to grow in popularity and delegates suggested shorter 16 week internships and **collaboration with in-company programs** would benefit students in terms of practical application and further recognition. Volunteering and community projects were raised as an idea, with suggestions encouraging entrepreneurship and business start-up support for students and opportunities for **social enterprise**. A similar idea to emerge from other discussions was the development of links with a '3<sup>rd</sup> sector' with 'Enactus', a not-for-profit enterprise organisation, given as an example.

**International experiences** and placements were again seen as having worked well for students previously.

## Projects

Shorter, relevant, **real business projects linked with organisation aims and supported by employers** were suggested. The idea of utilising '*lower risk*' projects but '*with a tangible delivery*' was proposed by all groups; giving students the experience of problem solving and also providing insight into overcoming barriers faced in real situations. Good opportunities to undertake projects had given students a **greater understanding of resource, time and people**. It was proposed that **MBA students could lead small consultancy projects**. James Fry from Eversheds LLP supported this idea, giving an example of how law school students could run supervised law clinics with the provision of supportive, productive mentoring from practicing managers.

## Mentorship

Having a point of contact with somebody currently active in the business environment or a 'buddy' system both/either within and outside of placements provides opportunities for students to access invaluable **insight, support and guidance** aside from which they would usually receive from their academic tutor. Buddies were suggested as consisting of alumni, managers, or experienced workers if on placement.

## Additional Interventions

There were many further points that explored the possibilities for **better interaction** between students, employers and academics. It was indicated that it was best if employers '*don't send anyone from HR to talk to students*'; there is a consensus that the practicing managers themselves need to be **actively engaged** with students as they give the most beneficial insights and guidance.

There is an equal feeling that employers and universities themselves need to work closer together. Suggestions included:

- All round better communication and constructive feedback.
- 'An Audience with... experienced manager'; informal and interactive sessions to share experience with students and for networking.
- A 'Dragon's Den' event for a number of graduates.
- Case studies from employers that experience successful placements should be created to promote the benefits of placements to other employers. (Ian Bates, Employability and Skills Manager at the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry)
- Employer guest lectures, speakers and webinars.
- Employers being less risk averse in using students (Dr Martin Elliot-White, Lincoln University) with this being applied particularly to SMEs (Prof. Emmanuel Haven, University of Leicester).
- Employer led CV workshops.
- Employers encouraged to recognise the value of students and how they can be utilised best within placements.
- Improving the ease of employer/university communication, with Universities needing to invest in better systems for managing placements. It was noted that the University of Loughborough do this really well. David Russell, De Montfort University indicated a hotline for employers and a separate e-mail feed had worked well, particularly as this reduced the amount of enquires that were lost in transmission.
- Knowledge transfer sessions between employers and academics.
- Lecturers and Academics sharing experiences, working closer together, collaborating, looking at developing projects, placements and interventions together, as well as looking at jointly 'health checking' course content involving professional bodies and alumni.
- More awareness provided for SMEs and a greater interaction with them; it was noted by that what had worked well in practice was overseas students in SMEs and good scholarships for SME engagement.
- Smaller careers fairs with greater businesses diversity, speed networking.
- Social media interaction.
- Strategic benchmarking – recognising where other industries and other organisations are succeeding. *Why did some contributors find internal programmes more effective?*
- That the College/School/University provides a framework for the employer (this could be for placements, to give an insight into the course and assessment, or for feedback?)
- Ian Bates, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, suggested that lecturers should spend time in business.

## Case studies

There were a few examples that could be followed up to provide relevant case studies:

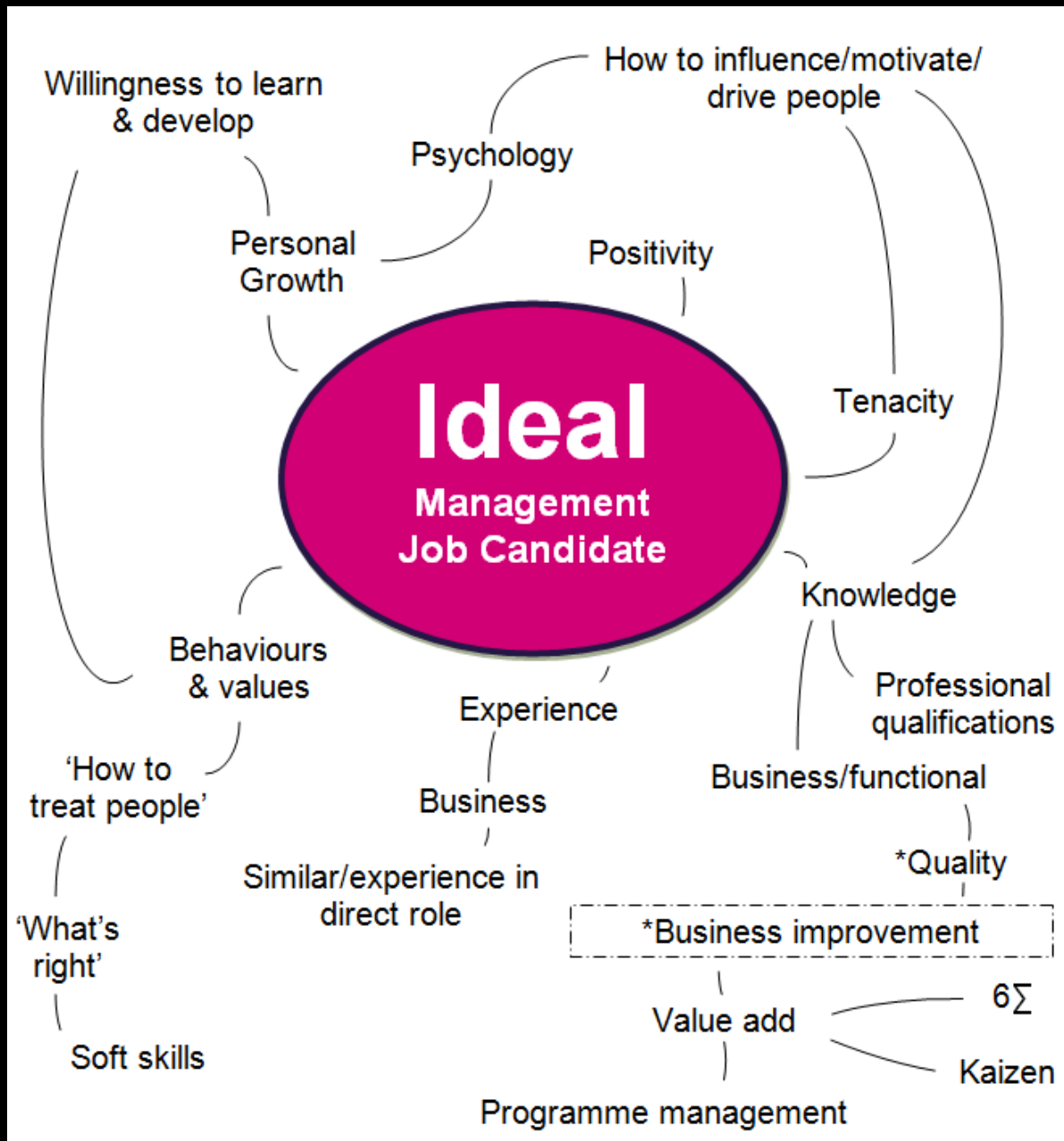
- Honeywell's research venture with Glasgow University
- Professor Yazdani's 'thinkubator'
- NTU's matched funding for SMEs
- University of Derby and Toyota's partnership as raised by Ian Bates, Chamber of Commerce and Industry for Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.

## Appendix 1

Contributed by Richard Brewell CMgr MCMI, Rolls Royce PLC.

Potential case study.

'Good management and leadership delivers growth'



# REGISTERED GUESTS

Name	Company
<b>Ms Sue Alcock</b> Senior Lecturer	Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University
<b>Mr Dean Anderson MCMI</b> Commercial Director	Blue Castle
<b>Mr Ian Bates</b> Employability & Skills Manager	Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce & Industry
<b>Mr Stephen Beard MCMI</b> Partner	Optimalist
<b>Ms Sharon Bell CMgr MCMI</b> Associate Director (Careers & Employability)	Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University
<b>Mr Asif Bhana MCMI</b> National Key Accounts Manager	Chartered Management Institute
<b>Ms Alison Bragg</b> Programme Director	De Montfort University
<b>Mr Richard Brewell CMgr MCMI</b> Head of Operations Management - Engineering	Rolls-Royce Plc
<b>Mr Piers Cain CMgr MCMI</b> Head of Customer Insight and Knowledge	Chartered Management Institute
<b>Dr Yvonne Carlisle</b> Ass Head of UG Courses, Leader, International Business Courses	Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University
<b>Dr Iqtidar Karamat Cheema FCMI</b> Director	City Hasanat College
<b>Mr Darren Clark</b> CEO / Board Director	Medilink East Midlands Ltd / Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce
<b>Mr Joe Clark</b> Assistant Director (Research and Development)	Association of Business Schools

<b>Mr John Cox CMC FIC</b> Managing Director	SCA Limited
<b>Ms Ruth Ding</b> Product Manager	Chartered Management Institute
<b>Ms Dawn Edwards</b> Managing Director / Board Director	Challenge Consulting / Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce
<b>Dr Martin Elliott-White</b> Head of International Business, Leadership & Strategy/Head of Undergraduate Programmes & Tourism Subject	Lincoln Business School, Lincoln University
<b>Mr Joe Forster CMC FCMI FIC</b> Managing Director	Bizzy Bee Training Limited
<b>Ms Ann Francke CMgr CCMI FIC</b> CEO	Chartered Management Institute
<b>Mr Gino Franco MCMI</b> Programme Leader, Part-Time MBA	University of Derby
<b>Mr James Fry</b> Senior Partner / Board Director	Eversheds LLP / Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce
<b>Mr Simon Gee</b> Senior Lecturer in Enterprise and Entrepreneurship	University of Derby
<b>Mr Nigel Girling CMgr FCMI</b> Chief Executive	National Centre for Strategic Leadership (The)
<b>Professor Roulla Hagen</b> Head of MBA Programmes and Prof Global strategic Management	Nottingham Business School
<b>Mr Jeremy Hague</b> Head of Business Development	Nottingham Trent University
<b>Mr Jonathan Hamblett FCMI</b> Director	University Of Nottingham
<b>Ms Anita Hancock CMgr MCMI</b> Account Director	Williams Lea Group
<b>Mrs Christine Harrop-Griffiths CMgr MCMI</b> Programme Leader	University of Derby
<b>Professor Emmanuel Haven</b>	University of Leicester

Professor

**Mr Adrian Higdon CMgr MCMI**  
Head of Systems Management

Fujitsu

**Mrs Azalina Hinson MCMI**  
Solicitor/HR consultant

HR Solicitor

**Mr Colin Howes**  
Director

Synergy Tech Limited

**Mr Frank Kerr FCMI**  
Owner

BDC

**Mr Devendra Kodwani FCMI**  
Masters Programme Director

The Open University Business School

**Mr Jitesh Makwana MCMI**  
Pre-Production Controller

Rolls-Royce PLC

**Mr David Martin**  
Student

Nottingham Trent University

**Mr Robert Mayo**  
Development Director / Board Director

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Senior Bank Manager

Lloyds Banking Group

**Mr Jonathan Sims MCMI**

Shepherd Group

Strategic Business Projects Manager

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