



Setting the direction for Saïd Business School to compete with the best in the global executive education market

Executive Summary

Deloitte was appointed by Saïd Business School (SBS), part of the world-famous University of Oxford, to develop a strategy for accelerating the growth and enhancing the quality of its Executive Education programme. The firm was selected for its unique combination of Higher Education insight and experience; and the specialised methodology it employs to support strategic decision making.

SBS’s vision is to be a “world-class business school, embedded in a world-class university, solving world-class problems.” The school has a leading reputation and had delivered outstanding growth in recent years. However, growing interest and demand threatened to overwhelm an already strained operating model.

Recent successes and rapid growth meant that the SBS leadership were faced with a clear strategic choice: to ‘hold steady’ and remain a small

boutique or to set an ambitious growth target and more fully support the vision for the School as a whole. The leadership of the school had an appetite to grow further, and to bring together a number of business development activities happening in entrepreneurial silos under a single strategy. They knew however that expansion would expose resource gaps in terms of faculty and staff, and wanted to analyse the likely consequences of this approach both strategically and financially, as well as to understand more about how they arrived at their current position and how these givens would impact their options for development moving forwards.

Through a series of structured and facilitated workshops, Deloitte engaged SBS’s leadership and key faculty members – including a number of professors in management and strategy – in challenging and refining the strategic plan. The seniority, expertise and disparate viewpoints of the

stakeholder group made it a significant challenge to lead these workshops and build acceptance and consensus around a plan.

The resulting five-year strategy, which included a detailed financial model, clearly articulated the choices made by SBS leadership to grow further. It set out a vision for a significantly enhanced and expanded Executive Education offer at SBS. Since the project completed, revenues at SBS have increased by 12% and its Open Programmes are now ranked #1 in the UK and #10 in the world.

SBS’s ambition is to be a “world-class business school, embedded in a world-class university, solving world-class problems.”

“Outstanding commitment to the project by the team. They went over and above what was expected and brought excellent skills to the project. This has had a major positive impact on SBS. [Of particular value was] the experience the team had with working with our culture; the balance between respecting this – but also bringing a new perspective. Also, the way the team worked with my team – this taught them new things as well. I did not expect this – it was great to see it. The effort and capability of the team was excellent and was a real credit to Deloitte from my point of view.”

Andrew White, Associate Dean for Executive Education, Saïd Business School – University of Oxford

Project overview



The challenge

Despite being one of Europe's youngest business schools, SBS has a leading reputation and as an integral part of the University of Oxford, it benefits significantly from its association with its brand and experience. Its Executive Education arm focuses on delivering high-impact education to participants in individual Open and Accredited programmes, and to major organisations through customised leadership programmes. A successful and highly ranked Executive Education programme is a hallmark of a world-class business school, and for SBS it was also an increasingly important source of revenue.

SBS had shown incredible growth in recent years, however, to some extent it had become a victim of its own success; its growth had spawned a number of challenges that threatened its capacity to sustain and improve the quality of its programmes, particularly Executive Education.

At their strategic cross roads of whether to expand or remain a boutique, SBS needed to understand if it was genuinely possible to upscale their finances and operations to support their vision without losing the tailored feeling of the programme; whether it would be supported with faculty given the competitive environment for recruitment, and which direction, specialism and area of teaching they should move towards.

To add to the complexity, SBS itself is one of only a few significant revenue generators for the University as a whole, outside of core teaching and research income. Its growth was and is integral to the continuing success of the most ancient university in the English-speaking world.

Objectives

Deloitte was appointed to provide expert, objective guidance to the SBS's own senior management and faculty as they sought to address and overcome these challenges. SBS needed to find a way to assimilate and harness the disparate views of stakeholders across the University in order to deliver a five-year plan that would support its ambitions. It also needed to draw in knowledge and experience of market trends and an objective assessment of SBS's strengths and weaknesses compared to its major competitors – all globally respected academic institutions.

Overall the Deloitte's objective was to deliver a strategy that would allow SBS to compete effectively on the global stage of Executive Education, building on its close ties to major corporates and leveraging its University heritage.

Approach

The Deloitte team, comprising a blend of experts in the Higher Education sector and new-to-the-field junior resource took up residence on campus at Egrove Park. They worked hand-in-glove with the senior stakeholders of the business school, including the Associate Dean for Executive Education and a number of senior faculty members, to develop a strategy that utilised their own expertise and external perspectives and achieved client buy-in from the outset.

A critical part of Deloitte's initial work was developing the role of the faculty members who delivered SBS's programmes. The strength of the research portfolio at the heart of Executive Education programme was a core opportunity for the school, and it was vital to connect with the faculty on critical executive education topics in order to shape their work for a wide range of public and private sector clients reflecting the trends in the market and the issues being faced by SBS clients. Organisations are less likely to send their executives to a University in which key staff are not conducting relevant research or thought leadership and who are seen as being capable of delivering

transformational outcomes. Deloitte's work supported wider initiatives to define new career paths in Executive Education for staff, where their work would be tied to the success of the Executive Education programmes and vice versa.

Deloitte's team facilitated a series of structured workshops that took the stakeholders through a range of strategic choices about their aspirations regarding:

- the shape of their offer – breadth of programmes and international footprint
- the future size of Executive Education – relationships with major clients and links across the University
- the delivery model – investment in digital delivery and engagement and back-office capabilities.

At the same time, Deloitte conducted a rigorous analysis of trends within the business education market, and a number of interviews and deep dives with client stakeholders to develop a better understanding of the internal issues, harvest opinions and build trust.

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Deloitte's set piece workshops were a core element of the project delivery, gathering decision makers in one place, accelerating their thinking and driving key decisions on the strategic choices facing SBS. These choices included shrinking the size of the Executive Education organisation to focus on quality; maximising revenues through increasing class sizes; and launching international campuses to increase course capacity. Given the breadth and scope of the choices, Deloitte's team had to manage these all-day workshops with great care and preparation.

Having facilitated SBS's strategy development for Executive Education, Deloitte developed a new financial model for the whole business school, incorporating the requirements and projected financial benefits that the new Executive Education strategy

would bring. Working closely with SBS's Finance team, Deloitte delivered a model that covered all SBS activity and enabled the school to both validate and refine the choices made in the earlier phase, and to begin making the investments necessary to execute the new strategy. The work highlighted the importance of exploring new, more flexible staffing models to support future growth, and the need for further investment to grow SBS's physical footprint in Oxford. This was an extremely intense project for both the client and the Deloitte team; the significance of the strategic challenges facing SBS and the need to bring together diverse perspectives – both from the Deloitte team and the client stakeholders – resulted in a lot of late-night and weekend working in the on-campus project room; a level of commitment that attracted the attention of many executive participants at the Business School. A key strength of the engagement was the high level of collaboration across the client/consulting team. It was the joint commitment of both parties to the exercise that made it successful.

"The excellent results that Deloitte delivered in Phase 1 of our project, were the key reasons why SBS returned to Deloitte for the second phase: they established high standards, coupled with reliability and quality, and we were extremely keen to work with them again.

Throughout the second phase of our project, Deloitte gave customer care of a very high order, checking in regularly with me – as Project Sponsor – and ensuring at all turns that we were receiving the service we expected and needed.

From a personal point of view, my colleagues and I have enjoyed working with the Deloitte team immensely. They are more than able to keep pace with and win the trust of senior Oxford academics who are working on our projects, and their analysis greatly helped to simplify the complexity of some challenges."

Catherine Quinn, Chief Operating Officer, Saïd Business School – University of Oxford

Outcomes

Completed in 2014, Deloitte's work was extremely well received by the client and the key stakeholders with feedback focusing on the quality of the final output and the team's collaborative approach and commitment to developing and enhancing the skills of SBS's in-house team.

The impact of the firm's close collaborative working with the client is clear and demonstrable:

- 12% increase in revenues
- SBS is ranked 1st in the UK and 10th in the world in the FT Executive Education rankings for Open Programmes, up two places from 2013. These rankings are a key indicator for business schools and have a significant impact on the clients and candidates that a University can attract

- SBS has introduced a new career path for faculty members at the University, including a 'Professor of Management' title, which means that professionals can continue advancing their own careers while delivering research that is aligned with the Executive Education programmes. This idea, which originated from the SBS leadership before the Deloitte engagement and which was endorsed by the development of the strategy, is a significant innovation in the faculty model for SBS, where the faculty and the "Oxford style" of personal teaching is a key differentiator for the school.

- Deloitte's revised financial model demonstrated to stakeholders the necessity of investing in SBS's physical estate. Since the project completed, SBS has taken ownership of an additional site and committed to investing in regenerating its existing facilities.

Deloitte continues to work closely with SBS, supporting the development and implementation of multiple aspects of its new strategy, as well as through the long standing partnership to deliver the highly successful Major Programmes Leadership Academy (MPLA) to senior civil servants from across UK government.

Deloitte remains in contact with SBS, supporting the development and implementation of multiple aspects of its new strategy.

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Designed and produced by The Creative Studio at Deloitte, London. J3579

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12% revenue increase for the school,



#1 ranked open programmes in the UK,



#10 ranked open programmes in the world,



▲2 places since 2013.

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