



## ***CBS' Research Base: strength in breadth?***

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### *Introduction*

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One very important strategic issue for CBS when considering both research development and also the research-teaching relationship concerns the best balance between the *'classical' core competences* of business schools and a wider vision of *cross-disciplinarity and breadth*. Of course, this is not an either/or question since fields such as accounting, marketing, and finance are essential to CBS and should be maintained as such (not least for the external credibility of our programmes but also for their academic importance). It is therefore very clear that we should maintain our strength in 'core' areas. However, the issue of focus is significant in shaping CBS' future direction, in defining our global niche and in considering our relationship to international competitors. Our approach to this issue is also likely to have a strong impact on the development of research and related activities (including recruitment) within the School.

### *Background*

Some immediate (if superficial) measure of the breadth of our coverage can be taken from the titles of our departments. Thus, we certainly include the 'classical' areas of accounting and auditing, economics, finance, operations management, law, strategic management and marketing. However, we also feature areas such as intercultural communication, international culture, informatics, language and linguistics, politics and philosophy. This breadth is even clearer when we consider the range of centres at CBS – including business history, business and politics, art and leadership, IT in policy settings, study of the Americas, and the study of Europe.

If we compare this range with (for example) the London Business School, we see that LBS offers expertise in eight 'core' subject areas (Accounting, Economics, Entrepreneurship, Finance, Management Science and Operations, Marketing, Organisational Behaviour, Strategic and International Management). Now this is just one crude comparison and issues of presentation are very important here (CBS could cluster its research areas similarly if we so chose – although some areas would need to be squeezed in or out to fit such a categorisation).

If we take instead the example of the fast-developing Saïd Business School at the University of Oxford, we find a greater breadth of topics and centres than at LBS – including the James Martin Institute for Science and Civilization (can one get any broader than that?). Equally, closer scrutiny of research activities

suggests that apparently 'classical' areas such as marketing can take researchers into a diverse range of research topics so that the apparently-conservative label can be highly misleading.

The point of course is that LBS and Saïd have strong research reputations but have chosen different strategic paths. LBS has an established reputation as a mainstream institution and plays on this conservative image. Saïd was a late-developer (although Oxford has a very established reputation in the management area) and deliberately decided to build something new, innovative and distinctive. Thus, the James Martin Institute was established following a very large external donation (from James Martin, a successful business man) and is designed to be innovative and 'undisciplined' (ie the very opposite of 'classical'). Indeed, the whole purpose of the JMI is to cross (and indeed challenge) disciplinary boundaries (especially between science and the social sciences), to ask big questions which generally 'fall through the cracks' and to stimulate new ways of thinking.

If we consider this issue of breadth from a practitioner and educational perspective, there are very good arguments to suggest that both strength in core areas and research breadth are required – and are likely to be more necessary in future. At the everyday level, matters of longer-term financial planning or strategic management are unlikely to fall into neat and tidy boxes but rather call (at least at times) for broader knowledge and understanding (for example, when working across national boundaries or dealing with change and uncertainty). At a grander level, it is unlikely that single disciplines alone will be able to deal with the larger challenges of international competitiveness, shifting demographics, cross-cultural governance, innovation of new technologies or climate change. The broader path therefore may also be the more relevant to the needs of business.

This discussion should also take account of our current research portfolio. The current procedure for establishing world-class research areas should provide us with further information on our areas of current strength. Certainly, we need to make an informed judgement about the international excellence of our research activities. However, the strategic issue for CBS *may be less a matter of whether to maintain research breadth than how to manage this, to gain the maximum synergies and competitive advantages from our research portfolio, and to present this both internally and externally.* Very importantly, this should be viewed in the context of a wider strategy for research-led growth.

#### *Issues for discussion*

1. How can we best present CBS' broad research mix externally? How can this specifically contribute to the development of a unique global niche? Are there ways in which we can build thematic links across our research activities in order to strengthen both internal coherence and external impact?
2. Are there certain characteristics which we especially wish to associate with our research activities: international standards of excellence, relevance to business and management (perhaps in the widest sense), innovation and entrepreneurship?
3. What new opportunities might be presented for income generation and new research partnerships? More specifically, how can we employ

research breadth in order to strengthen our international research standing?

4. How do we achieve a balance between an 'emergent' and a 'designed' approach to these questions? How do we balance world-class research with cross-disciplinarity?
5. What should be the relationship between the CBS research strategy and our educational portfolio? What for example are the consequences for our 'research-based education'?
6. How do we take these arguments outside CBS and into the domain of practitioners, strategic partners and potential funders? It is not enough to convince ourselves about the merits of our chosen path, we also need to learn from, engage with and influence business leaders, government and wider stakeholders at a national and international level.