

Spotlight

Research Takes the Lead

Aston Business School
Birmingham, United Kingdom

The war between research and teaching has long been waged in higher education. At Aston Business School, however, there has been not only a truce but a genuine alliance between the two. Quality research and pedagogy are given “symmetrical treatment” and are rewarded equally, says John Saunders, head of the school.

“This leads to an honest belief in research-led teaching,” Saunders notes. Students interested in research careers can pursue three research-oriented degrees, including a master, master of philosophy, or doctoral degree in management research.

The Aston Academy for Research in Management, headed by Professor Michael West, encompasses seven research groups: technology and operations management, marketing, management science, strategic management and innovation, work and organizational psychology, financial performance and accountability, and public management and sociology. The Academy also includes five research centers for Asian business and management, innovation, e-business, voluntary action, and effective organizations.

“In a research environment where ‘top’ research is often esoteric, Aston wants to combine academic rigor and policy relevance,” says Saunders. For example, professors Mike West and Carol Borrill have looked at the health care system, finding a link between the processes of health care teams and patient survival rate. Likewise, professors Felix Brodbeck



and Nick Lee have studied multicultural team performance. They found that multicultural team performance often isn't as good initially as that of unicultural teams; however, as team members learn to work together, multicultural teams soon outperform their unicultural counterparts.

Aston's research-based mission has contributed to its increased visibility worldwide. Previously ranked 45th in the world by *The Economist*, Aston Business School has moved to 26th. The prominent chancellor of Aston University, Sir Adrian Cadbury, also contributes to the school's knowledge base. He recently was awarded the International Academy of Management's Distinguished Award.

Aston, which just celebrated its 50th anniversary, serves a community of 2,000 undergraduates and 500 postgraduates. Its location in the center of Birmingham puts it close to industry and culture, providing students access to a vibrant city and a wide range of job opportunities, says Saunders.

Birmingham no longer is the “dowdy industrial town” some people may remember, says Saunders. Known as a center for automobile manufacturing, Birmingham also



Top, left: Aston University campus. Above: Victoria Square, a central meeting place for students and residents near campus. Left: Sir Adrian Cadbury, chancellor of Aston University, and his wife, Lady Susan Cadbury, at an unconventional black-tie event.

now has a strong base for science and technology. All Aston students spend time working locally with companies such as Mobil, Ford, and IBM. Even undergraduates spend a year in industry, says Saunders. Birmingham also is undergoing an extensive renaissance. It's now home to one of Europe's largest retail centers in the heart of the city, as well as entertainment and restaurant districts.

Saunders believes Aston Business School is well-positioned to meet the growing demand for graduates already equipped with exposure to and experience in business. He hopes that as the school works to expand and enhance its research base, it will form what he calls a “cycle of virtue” that will keep Aston on an upward path. “Excellent research attracts excellent students,” says Saunders. “And if you attract excellent students, they expect to be taught excellently.”

Aston Business School is accredited by AACSB International and EQUIS. 