

Can accreditation help a leopard change its spots? Social accountability and stakeholder engagement in Business Schools

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Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal Vol. 27 No. 2, 2014 pp. 234-258 Emerald Group Publishing Limited 0951-3574 DOI 10.1108/AAAJ-07-2012-01062

Abstract

Purpose – Neo-institutional theory suggests that organisations change occurs when institutional contradictions, caused by exogenous and endogenous dynamics, increase over time to the point where change can no longer be resisted. Human praxis will result, but only when sufficiently powerful interests are motivated to act. This paper aims to examine the role that the accreditation of business schools can play in increasing institutional contradictions and hence fostering organisational change towards stakeholder engagement and engagement with social responsibility and sustainability issues. Numerous accreditations are promulgated within the higher education and business school contexts and a number of these relate to, or have aspects that relate to, ethics, social responsibility and sustainability.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper first analyses the take up of accreditations across UK business schools and then uses a case study to illustrate and explore stakeholder engagement and changes related to ethics, social responsibility and sustainability linked to accreditation processes.

Findings – Accreditations are found to be an increasingly common interest for UK business schools. Further, a number of these accreditations have evolved to incorporate issues related to ethics, social responsibility and sustainability that may cause institutional contradictions and may, therefore, have the potential to foster organisational change. Accreditation alone, however, is not sufficient and the authors find that sufficiently powerful interests need to be motivated to act and enable human praxis to affect change.

Research limitations/implications – This paper draws on previous research that considers the role of accreditation in fostering change that has also been carried out in healthcare organisations, public and professional bodies. Its findings stem from an individual case study and as such further research is required to explore whether these findings can be extended and apply more generally in business schools and universities in different contexts.

Practical implications – This paper concludes by recommending that the newly established UK & Ireland Chapter of PRME encourages and supports signatory schools to further embed ethics, social responsibility and sustainability into all aspects of university life in the UK. This also provides an opportunity to engage with the accrediting bodies in order to further support the inclusion of stakeholder engagement and issues related to this agenda in their processes.

Originality/value – This paper contributes by introducing accreditation as an institutional pressure that may lead indirectly to organisational change and supports this with new evidence from an illustrative case study. Further, it draws on the role of institutional contradictions and human praxis that engender organisational change.

Keywords Ethics, Sustainability, Accreditation, Stakeholder engagement, Responsibility, Neo-institutional theory

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

There is considerable debate about the sustainability of industrialisation, population growth, malnutrition and the depletion of natural resources that can be traced back to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (2000, first published in 1962) via the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972). The key messages have remained both vital and significant (Meadows et al., 2004) and the crude accounting for economic activity and growth is problematic (Ball and Milne, 2005). Business, as a powerful component of modern globalised economies, plays a key role in current unsustainable and socially irresponsible practices and the consequences of the well documented economic meltdown in recent years only serves to underline perceptions of business as unethical and untrustworthy. According to the latest Edelman Trust Barometer (2013) less than one fifth of the general public trust business leaders to tell the truth. Large multinational enterprises also make investments in, procure from and operate across many jurisdictions. These massive businesses are argued to have the potential to contribute in many positive ways through Corporate Social Responsibility to economic growth and national welfare (Garriga and Mele, 2004), but also have a 'dark side' that is unsustainable (Eden and Lenway, 2001, p.389). The negative impacts of these businesses can be manifold and have been argued to include the areas of poverty, human and labour rights, environmental degradation and "threats to traditional cultures" (Gallhofer and Haslam, 2006, p. 907). In short, businesses, as the primary polluters and largest users of natural resources, are a major contributor to current unsustainability and some argue will, therefore, also need to be part of any moves towards a more sustainable future (von der Heidt and Lamberton, 2011).

One barrier to businesses contributing to a more sustainable future is the ecological illiteracy of business managers and employees (Ball and Milne, 2005). Moreover, employees and managers in the future will need different knowledge and skills if business is to become less unsustainable (von der Heidt and Lamberton, 2011). As such higher education has a vital role to play (Collison et al., 2007). Over the past twenty or more years a number of international declarations specifically focussing on the role of Higher Education for sustainability have been published. These have included the Taillores Declaration in 1990 focussing on leadership; the COPERNICUS University Charter on Sustainable Development issued by the

Association of European Universities focussing on institutional change, staff development, inter-disciplinarity, technology transfer, continuing education and knowledge dissemination; the Luneberg declaration in 2002 issued by the Global Higher Education for Sustainability Partnership which referred to human rights, peace, environmental protection, poverty alleviation, social justice and lifelong learning; the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development in 2005 and in 2009 UNESCO's World Conference on Higher Education took a wide ranging and inclusive approach to both sustainability and education. Furthermore, in many nation states such as Germany, Canada, Netherlands, Australia, and Sweden education for sustainable development frameworks, strategies and indicators have been debated and published.

As we approach the end of the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development it is worth considering the extent to which Higher Education Institutions have contributed positively to realizing its aims and aspirations.

“A successful UN Decade of ESD would create citizens and leaders who have skills in critical and creative thinking, conflict management, problem solving, problem assessment to actively take part in the life of society, are respectful of the Earth's resources and biodiversity, and are committed to promoting a peaceful and democratic society.”(UNESCO, undated: <http://www.unesco.org/en/esd/esd-e-module/a-worldwide-priority/how-to-implement-esd/>)

In the United Kingdom the various funding, professional and quality assurance bodies have also widely consulted on education for sustainable development. This includes the Quality Assurance Agency identifying education for sustainable development as one of five cross cutting themes and the UK's Higher Education Academy has also published a number of instructive guidance documents on curriculum change and sustainability. The Future Fit Framework makes it clear that education for sustainable development offers relevance and renewal in both curriculum and pedagogy and that this is far more focussed on student dispositions and competences than simply learning more content (Sterling, 2012). In 2005 the Higher Education Academy identified a number of key sustainability competences that would nurture a sustainability literate graduate body (Dawe *et al.* 2005).

As Wals and Jickling (2002: 224-225) write, education for sustainable development will often require a change in existing mental models prevalent among academics

and an overt commitment to an emancipatory rather than instrumentalist or market view of higher education:

“To educate for sustainability is not necessarily educational when sustainability is fixed, pre-and expert determined (i.e. academics) and to be reproduced by novices (i.e. students). We could also take on a more emancipatory approach to relationships between education and sustainability. Such a view would hold that education is to contribute to the creation of a (more?) democratic and environmentally just world – whatever such a world may look like.”

Such a view would hold that education is to contribute to the creation of a more democratic and environmentally just world. Education is viewed as a means to become self-actualized members of society, looking for meaning, developing their own potential and jointly creating solutions. In this view a sustainable world cannot be created without the full and democratic involvement of all members of society; a sustainable world without participation and democracy is difficult to conceive. It appears, therefore, that in the first years of the 21st century education for sustainability has found a significant place within higher education although it has yet to be mainstreamed (Blewitt & Cullingford, 2004; Jones, Selby & Sterling, 2010).

Following the banking crisis, the media were quick to blame business schools with headlines such as “Did poor teaching lead to crash? – Business Academics are accused of ignoring social and political questions” (Times Higher Education, 2005). Yet, the need for business schools, as part of the higher education sector and educators of future business leaders, to mainstream sustainability has been strongly supported for some time (Springett and Kearins, 2001). Such business education for sustainability has a transformative potential to influence practice and enhance business’ sustainability (Tilbury and Ryan, 2011). Given the nature of traditional ‘business studies curriculum’ and ‘orthodox management theory’, however, this may be particularly challenging (Springett, 2005). Further, the interdisciplinary nature of sustainability, which is an anathema to the discipline specific nature of much business school teaching, can result in ‘institutionalized resistance to the sustainability paradigm’ (Thomas, 2005, p. 187). Students and faculty may resist such moves as it is so different to their respective preconceived expectations for career paths and educational experiences (McKenna and Biloslavo, 2011).

Despite this, empirical studies (such as “Beyond Grey Pinstripes” and Jones Christensen et al. 2007) have shown that there is a growing interest in business

ethics, responsibility and sustainability in business schools' research and (MBA) teaching. The establishment of the UN backed Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) are intended to serve as guidelines for management education providers to better prepare current and future organisational leaders in their dual roles as economic developer and socio-environmental steward. The PRME are aimed at changing some of the traditional mindsets that have dominated business and management education for almost a century (Rasche and Kell, 2010). This provides academics working in this area an opportunity to use their agency through membership of an external organisation to redirect the strategy of their institution. Just as is the case for higher education in general, sustainability "has not yet become embedded in the mainstream of business-related education" (Alcarz and Thiruvattal, 2010). Matten and Moon (2004) found that at the time of their research motivated faculty members with an interest in these issues were the key drivers of the agenda. Moreover, support from school leadership was necessary if such "pioneering" teaching were to become part of a business school's curriculum. Looking to the future their study suggested that "business approval and support", and inclusion in programme accreditation and rankings will be important in order to move from 'the "pioneering" phase to its next stage of "institutionalisation"' (p. 331).

Existing knowledge, therefore, tells us that sustainability has, to date, not become mainstreamed in higher education in general and business-related education more specifically. This is despite numerous international and national declarations and initiatives that identify its importance and target such change. This paper, therefore, seeks to further consider how such change can be actualised. Matten and Moon (2004), as introduced above, point towards a number of actual and potential drivers of institutionalising ethics, social responsibility and sustainability education in business schools including the potential for programme accreditation to play an important role. This paper was motivated to explore whether accreditation schemes may provide pressure that can lead to such change. Accrediting bodies, including AACSB, AMBA and EQUIS, assess business schools through an account (self-assessment document), supporting documentation and through visiting the school to meet with its internal and external stakeholders. 'Successful' business schools are allowed to display the accrediting bodies' logo on their web sites and documents. This, it is presumed, gives stakeholders some confidence as to the business schools

credibility and reputation. As such the accrediting body is an intermediary or facilitator between business schools and their stakeholders. In requiring business schools both to provide an account (Gray, Owen and Adams, 1996) and to engage with stakeholders (Roberts, 1996) we see such accreditations as an accountability mechanism.

Our key research question, therefore, was:

Can accreditation lead business schools to change such that education for ethics, social responsibility and sustainability becomes institutionalised (or mainstreamed)?

Accreditation is but one institutional pressure that may lead to organisational change. We also, therefore, look to advance our understanding of such organisational change through the lens of neo-institutional theory as developed by Greenwood and Hinings (1996) and Seo and Creed (2002). The exogenous and endogenous dynamics identified provide a frame through which to analyse the drivers of change. Accreditation provides an exogenous dynamic for change, but human praxis, interests, power dependencies and capacity for action are identified as important endogenous dynamics. We contend that this provides a more holistic theoretical framework through which to advance our understanding of organisational change. Specifically, both exogenous and endogenous dynamics are required if ethics, responsibility and sustainability are to become mainstreamed within business-related education.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section provides the paper's theoretical framework and also considers the existing literature regarding accreditation as a driver of change. In the third section of the paper we explain our three main research methods, which include an evaluation of Business School accreditation standards, a case study and reflexivity. The analysis sections of our paper relate to the evaluation of Business School accreditations and our case study respectively. Finally, the paper concludes with reflections on our findings with regard to our key research question articulated in this introduction.

Organisational change, accreditation and theory

First, this section considers literature that has specifically considered accreditation as a driver for change. Then it considers theoretical insights into organisational

change primarily from neo-institutional theory. Within neo-institutional theory accreditation has been identified as a key normative mechanism to initiate change (Scott, 1995), but more recent writings provide a broader framework through which to consider drivers of organisational change.

Accreditation as a driver of change

Accreditation can be seen as either a mandatory or voluntary external pressure that can influence the internal operations of an organisation (Morest, 2009). Writing with regard to medical education, Boelen and Woollard (2009) suggest that medical schools need to become accountable to society through a process that identifies and addresses societal needs. They suggest that a properly designed and mandated accreditation system could well “be a powerful force for quality and change in any complex system” (p. 893). This is to say that accreditation can guide organisations’ development and hence make them more accountable and with a “higher social impact”.

Accreditation is an external evaluation undertaken by a “designated authority” (Greenfield et al., 2011). Typically there are a number of steps in the accreditation process and these include self-assessment against the accrediting body’s standards and a site visit followed by a report, which may well include recommendations (Pomey et al., 2010). It is through this process of self-assessment, evaluation, dialogue and recommendations that organisational changes can occur. Pomey et al. (2004, 2010) found evidence within Canadian healthcare organisations that the self-assessment process helped to identify ‘problem areas’ and to refocus the organisation on important issues, whilst the accreditation report and related recommendations require a response and, perhaps, the need for changes to be made. An important aspect of many accreditations is that processes and activities are required to be documented and in so doing the institution is seen to be making itself accountable to these external parties (Julian and Ofori-Dankwa, 2006). Documentation is an important part of the process, as it assists the review process and reinscribes key principles and values. The accreditation bodies also tend to favour formal processes, measurable outcomes and processes based upon the concept of continuous improvement. Similarly Regnier et al. (2005) suggest that it is the dialogue between the organisation and the accrediting body and through the

standards encapsulated in the accreditation process that can influence and change organisations. The final outcome will be the award, or refusal to award, the accreditation status and when accreditation is awarded the accrediting body is declaring that the organisation has achieved the standards required by that body (Greenfield et al., 2011).

Much of the empirical research into the effects of accreditation has been undertaken within the health care sector in general and hospitals in particular. The overall findings within this field suggest that in this organisational field “there is evidence from many countries and settings that organizations and systems change in preparation for hospital accreditation” (Shaw et al., 2010, p. 446). There is relatively less evidence from higher education (although see Boelen and Woollard, 2009 referred to earlier that considers education in medical schools). There are, however, two specific studies (Casile and Davis-Blake, 2002 and Julian and Ofori-Dankwa, 2006) that refer to the accreditation of US Business Schools and we will now consider the insights that these papers offer us.

Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (2006) suggest that in the context of the US Business School sector the “scope and influence” of the accrediting agencies is “profound”. They suggest that in order to comply with “the standards stipulated by accrediting agencies, business schools have changed their staffing, research and curriculum policies (Gore, Steven & Bailey, 1998; Henninger, 1994)” (p.225). They go further in coining the term “accreditocracy” in order to reflect the “powerful influence” that these accrediting bodies have over the strategies and operations of US business schools. Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (2006) also suggest that accreditation has the potential to enhance the accountability of these organisations. In undertaking these accreditations the business schools are forced into interactions that can penetrate the “buffers” which separate them from the ‘real world’.

In a similar vein, Casile and Davis-Blake (2002) consider how US business schools respond “to a change in accreditation standards”, as occurred with changes to AACSB accreditation standards in 1991. They argue that state-owned business schools are likely to “be particularly responsive to forces that encourage them to gain legitimacy by complying with socially determined evaluation criteria such as accreditation standards” (p. 186). This is related to their need to “depend on public

opinion for legitimacy and resources” (Dobbin et al., 1993, p. 408). Casile and Davis-Blake (2002) suggest that accreditation with the AACSB in the US is “likely to confer legitimacy on a business school” (p. 182) due, in part, to the fact that prestigious business schools are accredited. They further suggest that business school administrators will decide whether or not to accredit, or re-accredit, on the basis of whether or not key constituents (for example students) “place a significant value on AACSB accreditation” (p. 183) and as such that the accreditation will improve the school’s resources. They further suggest that accreditation will be more valuable to those schools that are competing for resources against other schools that are accredited.

Both of the Casile and Davis-Blake (2002) and the Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (2006) studies refer to the importance of accreditation within US Business Schools. Moreover, they recognise that as accrediting bodies gain prominence and more and more organisations choose to become accredited, so accreditation processes become institutionalised. Both of these papers recognise the institutional nature of accreditation and so we now turn to consider the potential for neo-institutional theory to further explain organisational change.

A theory of organisational change

Organisational stability and change are key concerns of neo-institutional theory (DiMaggio, 1988). When institutionalisation is perceived as an outcome then it is often considered a hindrance to change and innovation (Dillard et al., 2004). Institutionalised norms are barriers to change, but change will occur when these ‘taken for granted’ rules are questioned and considered to be inappropriate (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). The drivers of such organisational change have been one of the key areas of empirical research. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) asked why organisations “become more and more homogeneous” and argued that it was due to institutional isomorphism. The three drivers of institutional isomorphism were identified as coercive, normative and mimetic pressures. Coercive pressures motivate organisations to change in order to conform and remain legitimate in the eyes of a powerful constituent demanding change (Tuttle and Dillard, 2007). The source of mimetic pressure is often argued to be uncertainty and in such circumstances organisations may choose to copy innovations or practices

undertaken by other organisations within their sector so as to enhance, or not to risk losing, their legitimacy (Unerman and Bennett, 2004; Ashworth et al., 2009). Normative pressures are often associated with professionalization and formal education systems (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

Isomorphism is change albeit towards a norm (Greenwood et al., 2002), but neo-institutional theory has also questioned why organisations within an institutional field may deinstitutionalise (Oliver, 1992) or may undertake heterogeneous change. Casile and Davis-Blake (2002) noted that heterogeneous responses are created where organisations within an institutional field are influenced to varying degrees by different institutional logics. Therefore a business school's decision to undertake accreditation will depend upon the importance of competition, economic benefit and customer/student perceptions in the eyes of administrators.

Greenwood and Hinings (1996, p. 1023) proposed that the incidence and pace of change "will vary within sectors because organizations vary in their internal organizational dynamics". Further, they developed a framework including "exogenous (market context, institutional context) and endogenous dynamics (interests, values, power dependencies, and capacities for action)" (p. 1033) to understand organisational change. Within this model external market and institutional pressures, which have been traditionally emphasised as drivers of change, are still apparent, but internal pressures for change are also recognised. It is argued that 'interest dissatisfaction' is the primary internal driver of change, but for change to occur it must be associated with a competitive or reformative value commitment and needs enabling power dependencies and capacity for action. 'Performance problems', 'normative fragmentation' (i.e. through increasing workplace diversity), and 'redistribution of power dependencies' (i.e. through a change in CEO) are all identified as factors that could erode commitment to existing arrangements and therefore increase commitment to organisational change (see also Oliver, 1992; and Dacin et al., 2002)

Seo and Creed (2002) use a 'dialectical perspective' to understand change. They argue that organisational change is "the outcome of two institutional by-products: institutional contradictions and human praxis" (p. 222). They identify four potential sources of institutional contradictions (p. 226):

1. Legitimacy that undermines functional efficiency;
2. Adaptation that undermines adaptability;
3. Intrainstitutional conformity that creates interinstitutional incompatibilities; and
4. Isomorphism that conflicts with divergent interests.

In short, increasing performance problems, an increasing inability to adapt, an increasing exposure to contradictory institutional arrangements and (some) interests' increasing dissatisfaction with existing arrangements are all sources of institutional contradictions, but human praxis is required if change is to occur. Human praxis "has both a reflective moment, involving the critique of existing social patterns and the search for alternatives, and an active moment, involving mobilization and collective action (Benson, 1977)" (Seo and Creed, 2002, p. 230). They continue that the alternatives are likely to consist of existing institutional logics that "legitimize and mobilize political action" (p. 237) against the existing institutional arrangements. Similarly, the process model of Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) suggests that change agents are motivated by institutional contradictions, are aware of alternatives and are open to new ideas. Dillard et al.'s (2004) development of institutional theory, through incorporating "Weber's notions of rationality and power" (p. 517) and structuration theory, is useful here. It provides theoretical support for the importance of power dependencies and the actions of 'knowledgeable, reflexive agents' to affect change.

From this discussion we can conclude that whilst institutional arrangements may well hinder organisational change they cannot do so indefinitely. Institutional contradictions, caused by exogenous and endogenous dynamics, will increase over time to the point where change can no longer be resisted. Human praxis will result, but only when sufficiently powerful interests are motivated to act. In this conception, therefore, accreditation, as a potential institutional pressure for change, could increase institutional contradictions and therefore play some part in enabling change. The models of organisational change discussed here, however, suggest that for such pressure to result in change, power dependencies and the actions of 'knowledgeable, reflexive agents' are also necessary. This paper provides a very first consideration of the role of accreditation in UK business schools¹ in general and then

¹ We are using the terms loosely to also include management schools and faculties of business.

further provides a unique case study of how it has influenced and fostered change towards stakeholder engagement and ethics, social responsibility and sustainability in this case. The next section details our research methods.

Research Methods

Three main research methods were used in this inquiry. First, we undertook an evaluation of the accrediting bodies and their standards. The accrediting bodies considered are AMBA, EQUIS and AACSB. We consider the accrediting bodies' significance in terms of their global and UK membership. In addition, all of the criteria and standards employed by each of these bodies were evaluated with the aim of identifying aspects relating to stakeholder engagement and the key issues of ethics, social responsibility and sustainability. The main concern here was to understand how these had been articulated within the accrediting bodies' values and standards and what related requirements were placed upon Business Schools seeking accreditation. In addition to these three accrediting bodies we similarly evaluate the UN's PRME (Principles of Responsible Management Education) initiative, as this has become the key international body specifically promoting the integration of ethics, responsibility and sustainability into all areas of business and management schools activity. This part of our study was informed by data collected from the websites and standards from the different accrediting bodies and the UN PRME initiative.

The second method related to our aim of developing a case study (Flyvberg, 2006) around Aston Business School as both an illustration and example of how a major Business School may or may not respond to the perceived nature of quality business education as coded, endorsed and branded by these accrediting bodies. Documents produced by Aston Business School were analysed and in addition eight semi-structured interviews were undertaken with key actors from Aston Business School faculty and staff. Each of the interviewees was heavily involved in the accreditation processes and with one exception, held management or equivalent roles. The interviews lasted an average of one-hour. Detailed notes were taken and their accuracy confirmed with interviewees. The interview data was analysed with reference to the key notions of accreditation and neo-institutional theory. Our case study approach is necessarily exploratory and this aspect of our research does not provide evidence at the level of the institutional field. It does, however, provide

evidence of how exogenous and endogenous dynamics may combine to effect organisational change as identified in our neo-institutional theoretical framework. We conclude our paper by identifying potential avenues for future research including those at the level of the institutional field.

The third method employed was one relating to reflexivity. During the period of research activity itself we have been closely engaged with Aston University's drive to more firmly embed ethics, social responsibility and sustainability within the university, its undergraduate and post graduate curriculum and the attendant quality assurance processes that is expected to help affirm, shape and reinforce a sustainable learning culture for the organization as a whole. Clearly, given our commitment to this change agenda, a reflexive approach has been essential to building and maintaining a mindfulness in regards to our relationship to the 'object' of this research. We attempted to engage in a continuous conversation with our research, and with each other, in order to establish a hermeneutic relationship to the reality of which we were and are a part. This involved a form of self-confrontation and epistemologically what Ulrich Beck refers to as a 'reflexive realism' (Beck, 1996). Some time ago Management Studies, like a number of other social scientific disciplines, experienced its own reflexive turn. In this context, recalling Kant, Karl Weick (1999: 803) remarked that as social actors, researchers need to be able to move back and forth between perception and conception for 'perception without conception is blind' and 'conception without perception is empty'. As Johnson and Duberley (2003) show in their discussion of reflexivity in management research, reflexivity may take different forms. It may be applied to ensure objectivity, to invoke alternative voices or reclaim control over specific discursive practices. Given this, we recognize that we cannot, and so have not tried to stand outside of our own ontological and epistemological assumptions, cultural habitus or educational aspirations. As academic researchers, we are hopefully agents of change whose actions are helping to create the grounds for a dialogic learning that will nurture organizational innovation and a transformative curricula change integral to the evolution of a sustainable university and a sustainable future.

The influence of Business School Accreditations

To our knowledge AACSB, AMBA and EQUIS are the three accrediting bodies that are of most relevance in the UK business school sector. Whilst not an accreditation

body in the same way, the UN backed PRME initiative is also gathering support as more and more Business Schools and Universities sign up to its principles and both AACSB and EFMD (EQUIS) were co convenors in establishing PRME in 2007/8. AMBA became a signatory and supporter of PRME in 2009 As of 2012, each of these bodies count business schools from many (AACSB: 43; EQUIS: 38; AMBA: more than 70; and UN PRME: 80) countries including the UK amongst its membership. Table 1 below summarises the size of the UK and total membership of each of these bodies (as detailed on the respective bodies' web sites):

Table 1: Membership of each body in 2012

	AACSB	AMBA	EQUIS	PRME
UK Business Schools	16	43	24	45
Other	632	157+	115	229
Total	648	200+	139	184

Whilst this represents a minority of global and UK Business Schools (the UK Association of Business Schools has 117 full members), it does suggest that there is a significant number that are accredited. Each of these bodies has standards and criteria which are required to be met by its members and these may well be influential. Next, we will consider the criteria for each of these bodies with particular regard to the requirements for stakeholder engagement and for engaging with the issues of ethics, social responsibility and sustainability.

Stakeholder engagement

Our analysis of these standards shows that each body requires its members to engage with its stakeholders. AACSB suggest that stakeholders should participate in the reviewing of a school's mission statement (Standard 1) and stakeholders should input into the development and revision of curricula (Standard 15). Similarly AMBA expects stakeholders (with emphasis on the corporate community, employers and alumni) to participate in developing programmes and policies of governance. Whilst included, reference to stakeholder engagement is rather limited within the AACSB and AMBA standards.

EQUIS standards refer much more to stakeholder engagement. A School seeking EQUIS accreditation must provide a self-assessment document that is required to

cover a number of key areas. Chapter 1 of the self-assessment document must refer to the “Context, Governance and Strategy” of the School. In this chapter the “School’s principal stakeholders” must be identified and “their impact on major issues such as strategic planning, autonomy and funding” assessed. Particular reference is given to students, alumni, national education authorities, government agencies, companies and business leaders. The chapter is expected to detail how these stakeholders are involved in the governance of the School. One particular question is as to whether the School has an “Advisory Body that is external both to the School and the University”. A particular emphasis within EQUIS is “internationalisation” and therefore it questions the extent to which there is international representation in Governing and Advisory Boards. External and internal stakeholders are also expected to be involved in the School’s ‘quality assurance processes’. Students are specifically expected to be involved and represented in the School’s ‘decision-making committees’ and in preparing the material for the EQUIS accreditation.

EQUIS standards also expect that the School’s programmes will be “evaluated through feedback from students and other stakeholders.” Evidence is required to show that programmes are designed and delivered in a way that satisfies ‘key stakeholder groups’. Furthermore, it is necessary for the School to show how programme design has been changed “in light of feedback from programme teams and key stakeholders”. Corporate connections and the corporate perspective is emphasised in this part of the standards and in fact it is suggested that ‘corporate stakeholders’ should be involved in the formal processes related to programme design and monitoring. In fact, ‘corporate connections’ is a key component of the EQUIS standards and Chapter 10 of the self-assessment document needs to articulate the School’s “strategy and policy” in this regard. Corporate links through research, consultancy and executive education are all expected. Finally, the visit of the EQUIS review team will expect to engage with internal and external stakeholders from the School. In particular meetings with the Advisory Board, alumni and corporate connections are arranged within the time of the visit. This engagement with key stakeholders is seen as an important part of the accreditation process and enables stakeholders’ perspectives to be heard and considered.

Stakeholder engagement is also central to the PRME initiative. This is most tellingly apparent within PRME’s six guiding principles two of which, principles 5

and 6, are particularly relevant in terms of stakeholder engagement. They are:

“Principle 5 | Partnership: We will interact with managers of business corporations to extend our knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly effective approaches to meeting these challenges.”

“Principle 6 | Dialogue: We will facilitate and support dialogue and debate among educators, students, business, government, consumers, media, civil society organisations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability.” (<http://www.unprme.org/the-6-principles/index.php>) We find, therefore, that each of these bodies requires varying degrees of stakeholder engagement. Our analysis suggests that stakeholder engagement is more central to the EQUIS standards and PRME principles and so members of these bodies are more likely to be under pressure to engage more with their stakeholders. We would further suggest that PRME’s principle 6 identifies a broader and more diverse range of stakeholders, including for example civil society organisations, to engage with. In contrast the accrediting bodies tend to focus upon a relatively narrower set of business oriented stakeholders.

Engaging with ethics, social responsibility and sustainability

The “learning goals” for the AACSB standards do not particularly require social responsibility or sustainability to be included. This is partly explained because AACSB take a different approach to the other bodies in that their starting point is the institution’s own strategy. Thus, the institution is judged on the extent to which it carries out its intended strategy. The learning goals do include, however, requirements for students to acquire ethical understanding and reasoning skills and to incorporate ethical considerations and responsibilities in to their decision making. AMBA’s criteria are more specific as they require the content of member’s MBA programme to develop the students’ understanding of “the environmental, social and governance impacts of business”; “how they are managed from a sustainable and long term perspective”; and “the impact of sustainability, ethics and risk management on business decisions and performance”.

EQUIS standards, again, appear to be more detailed in terms of their requirement for members to engage with the issues of social responsibility and sustainability. EQUIS’s evaluation of its members, as part of the accreditation process, includes:

“Do the School’s core values include an explicit commitment to ethically and socially responsible behaviour in the management profession?”

Moreover, members are expected to understand its role as a good citizen and this is expected to be documented through “policy statements regarding ethics and corporate responsibility”. Within this part of the standards it is suggested that:

“The School should proactively promote ethical behaviour and corporate responsibility as fundamental values underpinning its educational objectives and its own internal and external operations.”

Ethics, responsibility and sustainable development are referred to as ‘main challenges in business and society’. As such the EQUIS standards consider the extent to which these issues are integrated in to the School’s ‘educational curricula’, programmes and course syllabi. Descriptions of research projects in these areas are also expected to be part of the self-assessment document.

All our interviewees saw that the accreditation bodies influenced the School strategy in some way and had similar perceptions about the differences between the accreditation bodies.

“EQUIS is leading the way but has a quite mechanistic approach that can lead to a tick box mentality. AACSB is more about looking at what your priorities are and how you address these”. Interviewee 3

“With AACSB, these issues tend to be somewhat stand alone rather than integrated. It is not compulsory but that is because they follow the institution’s strategy. AMBA seem to be catching up and less influential. EQUIS always have been different and have more substantial requirements on these issues. That may be because EQUIS is more about ethos and they have always been strongest of the accreditation bodies in this regard.” Interviewee 4.

PRME explicitly aims to inspire and champion responsible management education, research and thought leadership globally. It calls for business schools and universities worldwide to gradually adapt their curricula (principle 2), research (principle 4), teaching methodologies (principle 3) and institutional strategies to the new business challenges and opportunities. Such changes are undertaken with a

view to re-orientating the education of future global business leaders towards responsibility and sustainability.

The issues of ethics, social responsibility and sustainability are core to the PRME initiative and also relatively more prominent in the EQUIS standards and so these two bodies appear the most likely to influence members to engage with stakeholders and engage with ethics, social responsibility and sustainability issues. We suggest that the members of EQUIS and PRME are most likely to face institutional contradictions if they do not engage with stakeholders and exclude ethics, social responsibility and sustainability issues from their curriculum. If members of EQUIS and PRME do not change in these ways they face losing their membership or having to decouple their actual practice from their symbolic representation to these bodies. If these institutional contradictions are to lead to organizational change, however, sufficiently powerful interests will need to be motivated to act and enable human praxis. The next section of this paper considers the drivers of organizational change towards greater stakeholder engagement and increased engagement with issues of social responsibility and sustainability in the case of a specific UK Business School.

The Aston Case

This case study explores the role that accreditation bodies and other key stakeholders played in the development of Aston Business School and importantly the way in which they influenced the stakeholder engagement and the more recent shift in the Aston agenda towards ethics, social responsibility and sustainability.

Today, as one of the largest business schools in Europe, Aston Business School is triple accredited by AACSB, EQUIS and AMBA and has over 4,000 students on various programmes. This includes an annual intake of over 800 undergraduate students on general and specialist undergraduate programmes, over 900 postgraduate students on a variety of general, specialist and professional master's and MBA programmes. Aston also offers executive development programmes. Aston's strategy is committed to influencing organisations and their leaders worldwide through world-leading research, inspirational learning and teaching, and business engagement. Aston aims to make a sustainable contribution to businesses, economies and societies worldwide and equip students to become responsible

business leaders.

This is a long way from its early roots as the School of Commerce in 1916 and the Department of Industrial Administration established in 1947. The focus at that time was on being a local provider of business education. This changed in 1966 with the granting of University status to Aston and the years that followed saw Aston Business School gain national and then international recognition for its ground breaking organisational research known as the 'Aston Studies'. It was not until the mid-1990's that the University redefined its mission (away from its national profile as a 'leading UK University') to be 'an international centre' of excellence in teaching research and consultancy focused on its origins in subjects of professional and vocational relevance. The move towards internationalization mirrors the changes in the sector and is an example of mimetic pressure, very much driven by the uncertainty in the sector. The growth of 'new Universities' and added competition saw a growth in international activity and established Universities like Aston sought to enhance their legitimacy and status by following other Universities with developments in this area. The drive towards internationalization gained momentum following an EQUIS visit,

"Accreditations help to focus the organizational strategy. The 2010 EQUIS visit left us with much to do on international agenda and Aston's committed to doing it" Interviewee 7

As referred to earlier, neo institutional theory suggests that change will occur when the 'taken-for-granted rules' are challenged (Di Maggio and Powell, 1991). This happened at Aston in the late 1990's as the appointment of a new Dean led to the strategy of Aston Business School being firmly fixed on gaining the 'Triple Crown' of accreditations. This change of Dean saw a 'redistribution of power dependencies' and a subsequent increased commitment to organisational change.

Aston was already AMBA accredited but saw acquiring approval of EQUIS and then AACSB as the key to what was referred to as the 'breakout strategy'. The aim was to take Aston higher in the key league tables and the way to achieve this was seen to be through accreditation. At that time, there were only 2 other Business Schools that had the triple accreditation.

“Dean ‘X’ wanted to be one of the first UK Business Schools to be accredited by Equis and by AACSB. He really wanted to be part of the 1% club, which were triple accredited schools... He was a reviewer and travelled internationally ... saw it as a positive (perhaps a marketing tool) that would help with rankings”. Interviewee 1

EQUIS accreditation was achieved in 2001 but there were conditions attached, specifically related to ‘internationalisation’. It was clear that in order to achieve reaccreditation significant changes would have to be made. All activity in the school then became focused on the specific requirements of the accreditation bodies with the Quality Unit at its heart. Specific examples of policies and practices that followed to orientate the School towards fulfilling the EQUIS requirements included; the launch of a new European degree with partners in France and Germany and the inclusion of the two cross cutting issues required by EQUIS into all module outlines (namely Internationalisation and Corporate Connections). The EQUIS requirements for issues of ‘responsibility’ at this time were focused mainly on ‘Ethics’ and so emphasis was given to instances of the topics particularly in the curriculum but this was quite limited at that time.

EQUIS accreditation standards also encouraged stakeholder engagement through questioning whether the School has an “Advisory Body that is external both to the School and the University”. Aston did not have such an Advisory Body and it was the desire to achieve EQUIS accreditation that led to the initiation of this by the School.

“The Advisory Board is now very much part of the School, as members we are involved in key areas of School strategy”. Interviewee 8.

The original membership of the Advisory Board drew primarily on existing local, national and international corporate connections, but also included representatives from AMBA, Birmingham City Council and another educational institution. The membership of the Advisory Board has evolved over time and now includes a representative from the student body and two MEPs. The influence of the EQUIS standards remains evident in the increasing internationalisation of the Advisory Board with nearly half of its current membership being designated as “International”.

Over half of the current members of the Advisory Board are also Alumni of Aston University and in this way another key stakeholder can be seen to be represented in the overall governance of the School.

Once EQUIS accreditation was secured, attention in the school turned to the requirements of AACSB. AACSB's first standard relates to the school's stated mission and goals and the extent to which the school fulfils these. A key part of this is the engagement with stakeholders because of the different perspectives they bring to the school's mission and goals. Within the school there was a noticeable emphasis on 'strategy and mission' with school meetings emphasizing the importance of this.

In the Aston case it is clear that specific levels of stakeholder engagement have been influenced by EQUIS and AACSB accreditation visits. Internally, where members of academic and administrative staff are perceived as having relevant experience they are engaged in helping to prepare the self-assessment document . Specifically the authors of this paper have been engaged in order to help write sections on the ethics, social responsibility and sustainability aspects of Aston's activities. Input is not restricted to internal stakeholders, however, and key external stakeholders are also asked to contribute. More broadly, in preparation for the AACSB and EQUIS visits the annual "staff away day" is dedicated to engaging staff in the preparations for the accreditation visit.

"It is always important to ensure that everyone is familiar with the key points and to have enough staff who are able to talk about the detail". Interviewee 4

As mentioned earlier, the visiting accreditation panels not only read the self-assessment document and supporting documentation, but also discuss it with both internal and external stakeholders. These meetings relate to the accreditation standards, but its exact nature is at the discretion of the visiting panel. AACSB and EQUIS panels that have visited Aston have met with a wide range of stakeholders including Business School and University academic and administrative staff, advisory board members, students, alumni and corporate connections. In Aston's case these accreditation visits have been "successful" in that the accreditation has

been awarded, but often this accreditation has been accompanied by recommendations in terms of strategy and operations that the School has felt it necessary to address. In this way the accreditation process is a factor that is, in part, shaping the strategy and operations of Aston Business School.

“Accreditation forces you to look at what you do and does make us look at our strategy on a continuous basis. We then do make changes if it’s sensible.... the external reviewers look at what you’re good at and where you’re not. They’re usually spot on”. Interviewee 1

Although the influence of AMBA has, perhaps, not been as significant, integrating ethics, responsibility and sustainability started in 2003 when a review of the Aston MBA resulted in its inclusion as a transdisciplinary core module in the programme. Not all academics agreed but the support of the Dean helped. Again, there were sufficient powerful interests in support of these proposals for them to bring about change. The role of the Dean (and later the Vice Chancellor) also certainly contributed to the integration of ethics, social responsibility and sustainability at Aston.

“Individual champions have made a significant difference. The fact that the VC is committed to it also has a positive impact”. Interviewee 4

In 2006, the appointment of a new Vice Chancellor at Aston with specific interests in sustainability led to the establishment of the ‘Sustainable Aston Working Group’ and to significant changes in estates and campus based activities. These changes were recognised by the Times Higher League of UK Universities ‘People and Planet Awards’ with a 5th place position in 2010 (compared to a position of 93rd in 2007). 2007 saw the appointment of a new Dean in the business school. The interest in ethics, social responsibility and sustainability within the School gained ground with the new Dean and the Executive Team formalising School roles (Co Directors of Social Responsibility and Sustainability) and the development of a strategy in this area. At a School ‘away day’, staff contributed to sessions on social responsibility and sustainability and the discussions were, to some extent, guided by the requirements of accreditation bodies and influenced by the interests of the new Vice Chancellor.

It was at this time that Aston Business School became an early signatory to PRME and set out plans under each of the Principles. This was proposed by the Co Directors of Social Responsibility and Sustainability but strongly supported by the new Dean. In light of the school's adherence to the requirements of accreditation bodies, PRME was seen as a 'strategic lever' for top management support and internal credibility. As reported earlier in this case, Aston Business School values accreditations and whilst PRME is not an accrediting body, it places a framework for responsibility firmly on the agenda. PRME also provides 'legitimacy' for responsibility to be at the heart of business education and a direct pressure for changing curriculum and *culture*.

Many of our interviewees saw ethics, social responsibility and more recently sustainability as consistent with the underlying ethos of Aston and gave examples particularly relating to ethics and social responsibility from earlier times.

"In the past the accreditation bodies may not have been such an influence and I would like to believe that Aston was ahead. However, going forward there is more of a push from them on these issues and this helps to legitimize what we are doing and provides reinforcement but importantly - what we need to do in the future". Interviewee 4.

In 2008, a curriculum review of all undergraduate and post graduate programmes was undertaken aimed at creating 'social responsibility and sustainability literate' graduates. This included an audit of all course documentation and discussions to provide an overview of the social responsibility and sustainability content in the existing curricula and to make recommendations for the future. The review highlighted that whilst there were some final year specialist electives, there was very little in the early years.

One graduate had commented; "during my time at Aston, I never had a lecture on any of this". Students are key stakeholders when considering the future planning of Higher Education. In an era of higher fees and student choice, (to paraphrase the UN Bruntland Report, 1987) it is important to provide education that meets the needs of future generations.

“Worldwide people can see you’ve got the standard. It (accreditation) enables you to work with partners with the same standard. Students begin to know and check this out”. Interviewee 1.

“Students are ahead of us on this agenda (Ethics, responsibility and sustainability) and they do want us to do more.” Interviewee 6.

The recommendations of the review included; the introduction of a new core undergraduate module on social responsibility and sustainability in the early years for all business undergraduates to provide underpinning knowledge; the requirement for all placement students (80% of business students at Aston) to report on their placement company’s social responsibility and sustainability policies and practices (theory into practice); a review of MSc courses to identify inclusion of relevant materials and the introduction of a new MSc in Social Responsibility and Sustainability. Following careful negotiations, all the undergraduate recommendations of the curriculum report were implemented in 2009/2010, including the requirement for placement students to investigate the organisation’s policies on social responsibility and sustainability as part of their company report. At postgraduate level, all MSc’s were reviewed to highlight social responsibility and sustainability content and the new MSc in Social Responsibility and Sustainability started in 2011. This programme follows the philosophy of the MBA teaching, taking a transdisciplinary and reflexive approach (Parkes and Blewitt, 2011).

Whilst, the ‘adherence to accreditation requirements’ culture at Aston and the appointment of key leaders and champions significantly assisted the integration of ethics, social responsibility and sustainability at Aston, there were challenges with barriers that are common in other Schools and it is worth highlighting some of the difficulties encountered.

The challenges included; discipline based resource allocation systems for teaching, research and recruitment. Introducing ‘new’ modules met with conflicts about ‘space’ in the curriculum. Most colleagues were broadly supportive of the initiatives relating to responsible management education, but not all; one example of this was the comment; “this has no relevance for teaching finance”.

In research, developing publications is restricted by the spectre of the UK REF – Research Excellence Framework (dominated by discipline based journals). As one colleague stated, “ I’d love to publish in this area, but I have my career to think about”. This issue has been recognised by the Association of Business Schools (responsible for the widely followed Journal Guide) but as the outgoing CEO of the Association, Jonathan Slack, commented in 2011, “this will not be changed in time for the REF”.

One particular barrier for the development of the new MSc in Social Responsibility and Sustainability was the recruitment processes that were subject based. When vacancies occurred, priority would be given by Heads of Groups to subject based needs, where as the new MSc needed faculty with interests in transdisciplinary teaching and research. Fortunately at Aston, the Dean facilitated a new appointment specifically for the new MSc with a focus on interests in social responsibility and sustainability (regardless of discipline). This did not change the systems but it enabled appointments that significantly helped develop the integration of social responsibility and sustainability and the new MSc. This is further evidence of the need for the support of powerful interests within the organisation without which the ‘institutionalized resistance’ (Thomas, 2005) of faculty and students (McKenna and Biloslavo, 2011) may have proven too strong.

In 2011, the University Executive sought advice from the Business School Co Directors of social responsibility and sustainability for the University 2020 strategy. As a result, the University have now included two key requirements for students (across all Schools in the University) in this area. The first is requiring all students to have, “Social Responsibility and Sustainability literacy” and the second is in relation to “Global Citizenship”. In order to fulfil these requirements, a curriculum review, using the methodology used by the business school in 2008, is being rolled out across all schools in the University with the aim of identifying where these issues are currently being addressed to assist schools to make plans for further integration of social responsibility and sustainability in their programmes.

Within Aston Business School, changes continue with a new first year undergraduate module on skills and personal development focused on ‘Responsible Management’. There is also a requirement for all post graduate module outlines for 2012/13 to

include a section headed, 'Ethics, Responsibility & Sustainability' to highlight how the module addresses any of these issues in relation to the subject area of the module (the module outlines already include sections on Internationalisation and Corporate Connections). This has been extended to include all undergraduate modules from 2013/14. This is partly in response to the changes EQUIS will be bringing forward in 2013 (and announced at the Rio +20 PRME Global Forum) to include 'Ethics, Responsibility & Sustainability' as a transversal issue. Currently EQUIS require business schools to report on 3 transversal issues. They are Internationalisation, Corporate Connections and Contribution to the Community. It was reported at the Rio forum that the first two (Internationalisation and Corporate Connections) have changed the schools that have gone through EQUIS in these areas but Contribution to Community has not really been mentioned or explored. This is partly because of a lack of understanding by panel members and lack of priority on this for schools. As a result EQUIS set up a task force to review this and the requirement for the new transversal issue is the outcome from the taskforce.

Finally, there are plans to include prizes/awards for students and staff in the area of social responsibility and sustainability to build recognition for achievements in this area into the culture of Aston Business School.

"The key to making progress on these issues is that it has to be in the core cultural values and part of the way the organization is run. At Aston, it was also about a passionate belief in these issues and the role of education in promoting them. Part of the society we shape". Interviewee 2.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper examines the role that accreditation processes can play in fostering organisational change towards stakeholder engagement and engagement with issues of ethics, social responsibility and sustainability in Higher Education. We draw upon neo-institutional theory and the concepts of institutional contradictions and human praxis (Seo and Creed, 2002); and the exogenous and endogenous dynamics that engender change (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996). In particular we draw upon interest dissatisfaction, power dependencies and capacities for action as endogenous dynamics to inform our study. Our evaluation of the accrediting bodies and the UN PRME initiative suggests that they have a significant presence in the UK

and globally. The number of organisations accredited by these bodies is growing and so the influence that their standards and principles have will also increase. Moreover, to varying degrees, these bodies require their members to engage with stakeholders and with the issues of ethics, social responsibility and sustainability. As such accreditation may raise institutional contradictions if a member does not engage with its stakeholders or with the issues of ethics, social responsibility and sustainability.

From our own case study we can see evidence of the desire to attain such accreditations leading the case organisation to implement a number of specific changes. In this paper we have focused most on the changes that relate to stakeholder engagement and the integration of issues relating to social responsibility and sustainability, but their influence does not stop there. Further, our case study evidence is consistent with prior empirical research, primarily from the health care sector, that organisations do change in preparation for and as a result of accreditation (Shaw et al., 2010). As such we provide some evidence to support Scott's (1995) contention that accreditation is an important 'normative mechanism' that can lead to institutional change and isomorphism.

"External bodies role has been to help us see how these things are perceived and calibrate how we are doing. They have certainly helped us focus on what we are doing". Interviewee 3

Having said this, however, it must be kept in mind that there are many Business Schools, both within the UK and globally, that have failed to become accredited or have chosen to not attempt such accreditation. There are also different drivers in different contexts. For example, in the US, AACSB is particularly important and perhaps even more so for those who may not be in the 'top flight' of rankings.

"I can see that for the lower ranked US schools AACSB is so critical that standards would be a key driver and if AACSB were to come out strongly on these issues (ethics, responsibility and sustainability) it could change the landscape overnight". Interviewee 3.

"the fact that the School (Aston) was doing well and expanding led to innovations (that may not be possible in other circumstances)" Interviewee 2.

Given the voluntary nature of these accreditations, it is clearly possible for some Business Schools to ignore them. We could speculate that for these organisations the institutional pressures to accredit have not yet reached a sufficient level to demand action or that those at the very top of the league tables, may not see a need to be involved. From our case study, however, we see that the support of powerful interests for accreditation was important. A new Dean targeted the “Triple Crown” of accreditations and this made a difference to how the school was perceived.

“Dean ‘X’ led us to see accreditation as important and it has given us a lot of security. We are looked up to by other schools (and students) because of this”. Interviewee 7

In this case, the role played by a number of powerful interests within both the Business School and the University has been of fundamental importance. The support of these powerful interests enabled those committed to and championing these issues to instigate change. At this time, and in this instance, accreditation alone may not be a sufficient lever to ensure change. This was a comment made by a number of our interviewees and this quote is typical of their responses.

“It is really the way you (those with social responsibility and sustainability roles) have taken this on board and the developments that would not have happened without all that work”. Interviewee 3.

We, therefore, contend that in this case the changes were a result of exogenous institutional pressures from accreditation combined with human praxis. A number of ‘reflexive agents’ (Dillard et al., 2004) within the school were dissatisfied with the existing institutional arrangements with respect to ethics, social responsibility and sustainability and were keen to act. To reiterate, however, change was only possible with the support of powerful interests within the School and University that provided the capacity for action.

There are also a number of institutional barriers discussed in the case study that may mitigate against changes towards the integration of ethics, social responsibility and sustainability. In particular the discipline/subject based nature of teaching and research when it is clear that social responsibility and sustainability require more transdisciplinary approaches. This influences the allocation of resources and the

politics that go with this and the reluctance of faculty to move into this area partly because of the problems of publication in key outlets.

“Other institutions may not accredit, as it is a lot of work. They may need to change a lot of what they do to meet the criteria. If this is not already embedded then they would need to implement it. I know of a UK-based institution that acknowledged that it was not ready for AACSB”. Interviewee 1.

On a more positive note, Interviewee 1 went on to comment, *“if the accreditation report makes recommendations then you can take action. These external reviews have credibility within the University and so help to get resources to do things”*. Looking forward we foresee that the accreditation bodies are including more criteria that relate to ethics, social responsibility and sustainability. Each of the traditional accrediting bodies (AACSB, AMBA and EQUIS) took part in the Rio + 20 PRME Global forum in 2012 (AACSB and EFMD (EQUIS) are co convenors of PRME and AMBA became a signatory in 2009). They have all signalled their intent to further integrate ethics, social responsibility and sustainability into their standards in the future and given these developments it is not unreasonable to anticipate that the UN backed PRME principles of partnership, dialogue and more responsible management education could become further embedded in the accreditation standards.

This is particularly relevant in the UK context because with almost half of all business and management schools (at the time of writing) now signatories to PRME, a recent development has been the formation of a UK and Ireland Regional PRME Chapter. The Chapter aims to develop initiatives to encourage and support signatory schools to further embed ethics, social responsibility and sustainability into all aspects of University life in the UK. This also provides a potential opportunity to engage with the accrediting bodies in order to further support the inclusion of stakeholder engagement and issues related to ethics, social responsibility and sustainability in their processes.

“My impression from other schools is that this agenda is increasingly important and that this is genuine (they believe it is the right thing to do). This is not only in UK but across Europe and beyond. All the accreditation bodies are promoting it”. Interviewee 5

It would be remiss of us to conclude without recognising the potential for organisations to pay lip service to, or decouple, these issues in order to gain accreditation, whilst not fully embracing the underlying principles.

“The key issue with all these things is the extent to which it is embedded, so if we are talking about it, we need to do it in a genuine way”. Interviewee 7

In support of neo-institutional theory, we would again point to the importance of these institutional pressures alongside the support of powerful interests and strong leadership through high-level internal champions as key drivers of change. Alongside the six UN PRME principles is the expectation that the signatories should “understand that our own organisational practices should serve as example of the values and attitudes we convey to our students” (<http://www.unprme.org/the-6-principles/index.php>). We see this understanding as a critical aspect of the UN backed PRME and is essential if a Business School is to genuinely become more socially accountable and better engaged with the issues of ethics, social responsibility and sustainability.

Finally, we suggest that there are two key avenues for further research². First, there is significant scope for further research studying the institutional pressures for accreditation and the implications this has for business schools. This paper presents evidence from a single case study, but there is a need for further case studies and opportunities to undertake broader studies that could contrast accredited and non-accredited business schools. For example, it could be hypothesised that EQUIS accredited and PRME signatory business schools will be more likely to actively pursuing ethics, responsibility and sustainability initiatives. Alternatively, it could be that non-accredited business schools have more room to incorporate such transdisciplinarity into their programmes. Moreover, there is the potential for longitudinal studies of how the PRME principles are enacted and institutionalised within signatory schools and with what outcomes. Second, there is potential to investigate whether business/management faculty act as change agents and institutional enablers for ethics, responsibility and sustainability strategies both within business schools and the wider university communities.

² We would like to acknowledge the constructive suggestions of one of the reviewers of this paper in helping us to articulate these avenues for further research.

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