



Business Schools Association of Canada  Association des écoles de gestion du Canada

Leading the way in the Covid-19 recovery

Results from the 2021 Canadian Business School Survey



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Introductory comment



Manuel Peinado
VP of Client Partnerships –
QS Americas

It is with great pleasure that we introduce *Leading the Way in the COVID-19 Recovery – Results from the 2021 Canadian Business School Survey*, a collaboration between QS Quacquarelli Symonds and the Business Schools Association of Canada. We are proud to have collaborated with BSAC on what we believe is a vital piece of research to help understand what Canada's business schools have been through over the last two years, and where we can go to from here.

Canada's business schools have clearly shown a great deal of resilience to continue teaching without interruption throughout the academic year, while in many cases managing to maintain or even improve student satisfaction and achievement levels. This performance is a credit to the administrators, academics, teachers and students who persevered throughout the darkest days of the pandemic.

As we look towards the future, we remain hopeful that a return to normalcy is on the horizon. Canada appears to be particularly well-equipped for a general 're-opening' of campuses, though we are mindful that the promise of a fully on-campus academic year has been jeopardised somewhat by the recent outbreak of the Delta variant, and that there may still be future setbacks in the recovery process. Whatever the coming months may hold, I am confident that the experience of 2020/2021 has equipped Canada's business school staff and faculty with the experience and skills they need to continue running world-class academic operations, despite what external conditions may prevail.

Once again, I thank BSAC for agreeing to collaborate with us on this project, the deans who were interviewed as part of our data collection, and everyone who completed the online survey. I hope that you find this report to be informative and insightful, and that it may provide some assistance in evaluating your own experience of the past 18 months and what the future may hold for the business school community.

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Introductory comment



Anne-Marie Croteau
BSAC Chair and Dean, John Molson
School of Business, Concordia University

The Business Schools Association of Canada (BSAC) is delighted to present *Leading the Way in the COVID-19 Recovery – Results from the 2021 Canadian Business School Survey*. This important piece of research – a collaboration between BSAC and QS Quacquarelli Symonds – serves a vital reflection on the turbulent 18 months we have experienced as a business school community, and what the future might hold as we look towards the future beyond the current pandemic.

Encompassing the collective wisdom of 15 deans who volunteered to take part in an interview, as well as the results of an online survey to which all BSAC member schools were invited to participate, the report paints a picture of initial struggles in the early stages of the pandemic, which were met with resilience, ingenuity and entrepreneurship by teaching staff, administrators, and students alike.

I was proud to read of the creative and innovative methods employed by the various schools to not just maintain ordinary school operations throughout the worst moments of the pandemic, but to take advantage of the unique opportunities presented by the necessary technological ‘pivot’ towards online and remote study. I was inspired by the school-led initiatives to use their academic programs to assist their local communities, connecting students with struggling businesses to help adjust and respond to the challenges presented to them by the pandemic. I was heartened to read of the robust welfare and outreach programs instituted by schools to protect and maintain the well-being of both staff and students during a uniformly difficult period for us all.

The effects of the pandemic were clearly experienced unequally by different cohorts of staff and students. Reflecting the dynamics of our wider society, we saw academics and staff with child-caring responsibilities – generally women – struggle with the added burden of caring and home-schooling while maintaining their professional workload, as well as some evidence of a ‘digital divide’ disadvantaging staff without the requisite equipment or skillset to adopt remote teaching as quickly as others. On the student side, we saw the struggles of the pandemic amplified for international students, in particular, who were required to either study from their home country in often inhospitable time-zones, or in-country but confined to their home without access to the social, networking and employment opportunities that they would otherwise have had. The resilience shown by these cohorts particularly was remarkable, and I was pleased to read of the assistance mechanisms put in place by schools to help manage these difficult situations as well as possible.

While the early and middle months of 2021 showed promise for a ‘return to campus’ and the resumption of ordinary campus operations, we continue to see setbacks like the emergence of the Delta variant pose questions for our future planning. While we hope that we can continue along our path to a post-pandemic future, further hurdles will necessitate that we continue to draw on the resilience we have displayed over the previous year.

What exactly a 'post-pandemic future' looks like is also up for debate. This research has shown a variety of diverging views on the role that online and remote learning will play in the future for different schools, as well as how longer-term remote working arrangement can best be accommodated in an environment where students generally want to be on-campus with their teachers. We also continue to see a growing number of competitors from outside our business school community, such as online international universities and non-degree training providers. Given these growing challenges, we must continue to make a strong and unique value proposition for a traditional undergraduate and postgraduate university education.

Though we will likely continue to see ups and downs over the coming months, the insights in this report have bolstered my confidence that we as a business school community have the capacity to continue to deal with whatever the future may hold, while continuing to deliver a world-class business education for local and international students alike.



The resilience shown by these cohorts particularly was remarkable, and I was pleased to read of the assistance mechanisms put in place by schools to help manage these difficult situations as well as possible.

Key findings



Most schools report generally positive views regarding their ability to manage ordinary school operations throughout the pandemic

Despite the obvious difficulties presented by the pandemic, Canada's business school community broadly reported a belief that they were able to adapt and endure, delivering a year of teaching and research, and managing a rapid pivot to a remote workforce. Schools demonstrated resilience, ingenuity and entrepreneurship in not only surviving throughout the pandemic but taking advantage of the opportunities it presented for online delivery, pandemic-related research and funding, and applying the skills of its faculty and student body to address some of the biggest challenges facing Canadian business throughout the pandemic. There is a widely held belief that the learnings and experience of the past 18 months has made Canada's business school community more resilient, forward-thinking, and better equipped to deal with any unforeseen challenges that may arise in the future.

International students faced greater challenges in 2020, but a changing travel environment has created optimism for the future

The heavy international travel restrictions which have been in place since early in 2020 have disrupted the flow of international students to-and-from Canada, stranding some students in their home countries, and creating a difficult learning environment for those who had made it to Canada before the restrictions were implemented. The former were required to learn remotely in an environment that they reported to be difficult and often isolating, while the latter had the additional difficulty of being isolated from their friends and family, and without the ability to seek stable and safe work during the pandemic. Schools attempted to accommodate these students with a range of methods, such as duplicating lessons to take place in different time zones and establishing support networks for students living in isolation or outside of the country.

However, with international travel restrictions continuing to lift in some circumstances, and some optimism around campuses reopening for the Fall semester (though this has been tempered by the recent Delta variant spread), there is hope that the most challenging times for international students are in the past, and the coming academic year could see a beginning of the return to the traditional, rich and rewarding international study experience that Canada has become known for.

Research funding was not significantly affected by the pandemic, although research outputs sometimes suffered in a remote working environment

Pleasingly, there was little evidence of substantial adverse impacts on business school research funding as a result of the pandemic – indeed, many schools reporting an increase in funding, taking advantage of a range of grant programs to fund COVID-19 related research on subjects like workplace transformation and staff wellbeing. However, the reported impact on research outputs was mixed, with some researchers – most commonly those who were also burdened with child-care and home-schooling responsibilities – found it challenging to produce the expected outputs in a home working environment. Some also found it difficult to manage their research loads with the added labour of remote teaching, while others were impacted by an inability to collaborate as closely with their international peers as they would have liked. Conversely, those with fewer household responsibilities often found that they were able to produce more research than they previously had. This experience has highlighted the additional needs and accommodations which need to be made for staff with caring responsibilities in a remote work environment.

Some level of hybrid teaching is here to stay, but schools are likely to differ in the extent to which they balance online and face-to-face instruction

One of the most notable changes to business schools in 2020 and 2021 was the rapid and largely unplanned transition of face-to-face instruction to entirely online teaching, necessitated by the widespread enactment of COVID-19 emergency measures. While the Fall semester will hopefully see the beginning of the return to face-to-face teaching, online learning is likely to continue for the foreseeable future for students who are unwilling or unable to return to class. In a more long-term perspective, there is a general belief that some level of hybrid teaching is going to be in place permanently, and schools are already moving to equip themselves with the technology that will allow them to deliver innovative, high-quality, hybrid learning experiences. However, there is some disagreement over the potential of online-only instruction as a model for teaching in the future. While some schools were already heavily investing in online curriculums and found the transition relatively painless, others are only beginning to develop their online teaching capabilities. For the latter group, they will need to decide over the coming months whether they choose to expand these offerings into permanent, standalone, online teaching programs, or return to primarily face-to-face institutions with some level of hybrid teaching.

The structure of the post-pandemic business school working environment will be a major debate in the coming months

As schools plan towards re-opening for some level of face-to-face teaching 2021-22 academic year, attention is likely to turn to what type of working environments schools will be providing, specifically regarding the extent to which they allow staff the ability to work 'flexibly' or primarily from home. A return to face-to-face teaching will necessitate academic staff being on-campus for much of the academic term, although it is less clear how often professional, administrative, and other non-academic staff will need to be on campus in order to perform their role. The distinction between these two classes of employee, as well as differing preferences regarding remote work, could potentially cause difficulties in establishing a suitable flexible working policy. Schools will likely be experimenting with different models of working, in 2021 and beyond, to determine what structure can best meet the needs of staff, students, and the wider school.

With growing competition from a variety of sources, business schools must continue working to maintain their competitive advantage

One of the long-term challenges which emerged through the project was the ongoing need for business schools to remain competitive in an increasingly crowded educational marketplace. With alternative and often low-cost education providers continuing to fill the online learning space, an increased footprint of international universities offering courses to offshore students, the continued rise of private vocational colleges, and increased competition from other faculties within each university, it is vital that Canadian business schools continue to refine and promote their unique value proposition. This will help them not only stand out from their fellow business schools, but from the variety of other competitors aiming to secure their share of the business education market.

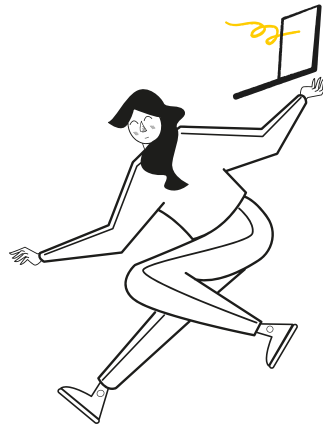
Detailed findings

This section of the report highlights the information gathered from 15 interviews with Canadian business school deans, and from 37 online survey responses from selected business school staff from around Canada. It has been separated into five key topics which were identified through the process:

- Remote teaching and the student experience
- International education and collaboration
- Research funding and outputs
- Staff welfare
- Questions for 2022 and beyond



Remote teaching and the student experience

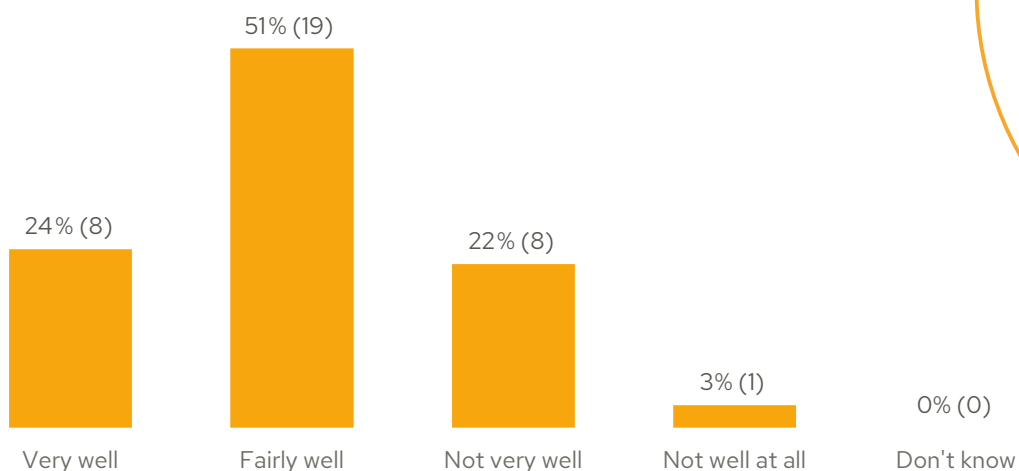


Business schools performed admirably to quickly pivot to remote learning.

Starting towards the end of the 2019/20 academic year and in most cases continuing through the entirety of the 2020/21 academic year, online teaching has become the de facto default mode of instruction for business schools in Canada over the past 18 months. Those schools which operate on a two-semester term model had the advantage of a substantial non-teaching period in the middle of the year in which to refine their online learning approaches after a brief experience at the end of the 2019/20 academic year, while those operating on a trimester model or offering summer courses had limited opportunity for refinement, needing to develop and implement their offerings 'on-the-fly'.

Despite the rapid and forced nature of the shift to an entirely online learning model – in some cases doing so with as little as a few days' notice – business schools in Canada tended to feel positively about their ability to deliver remote teaching at short notice, with 75% of survey respondents believing their institution was 'very' or 'fairly' well equipped.

How well do you think your school was equipped to deliver remote teaching in 2020?



This sentiment was reinforced throughout the interviews, with most interviewees believing their school did a good job of quickly pivoting to online, and in managing to not only complete an interrupted term, but to maintain student satisfaction and safeguard their health and safety while doing so.

“We employed a high touch engagement model for our students”

Dean

Not all schools were starting on the same level when building up an online learning model, with some having little to no experience in online instruction, while others already had robust online programs and staff with substantial experience in online teaching tools and methodologies.

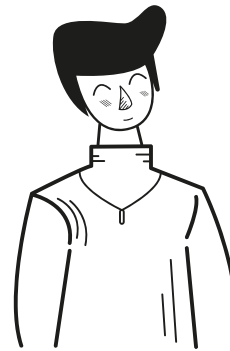
Those with experience in delivering online education found the initial stages of online learning to be simpler, those without significant online learning experience found that they were to quickly catch up with the relevant platforms and technologies. However, even within institutions the staff reception provided to be uneven, with younger ‘digital native’ teaching staff quickly familiarising themselves with the tools to effectively deliver online learning, while older and less technologically savvy staff found the transition more difficult.



“Better fluency and experience in delivering classes in a virtual environment would have been useful. It was a rapid transition from in-person to virtual with many of our faculty being unfamiliar with running a class virtually.”

Administrative staff

Students were resilient and handled online learning well, though there were challenges to be overcome



In order to maintain engagement and maximise student experience while studying online, schools reported implementing a variety of initiatives, such as:

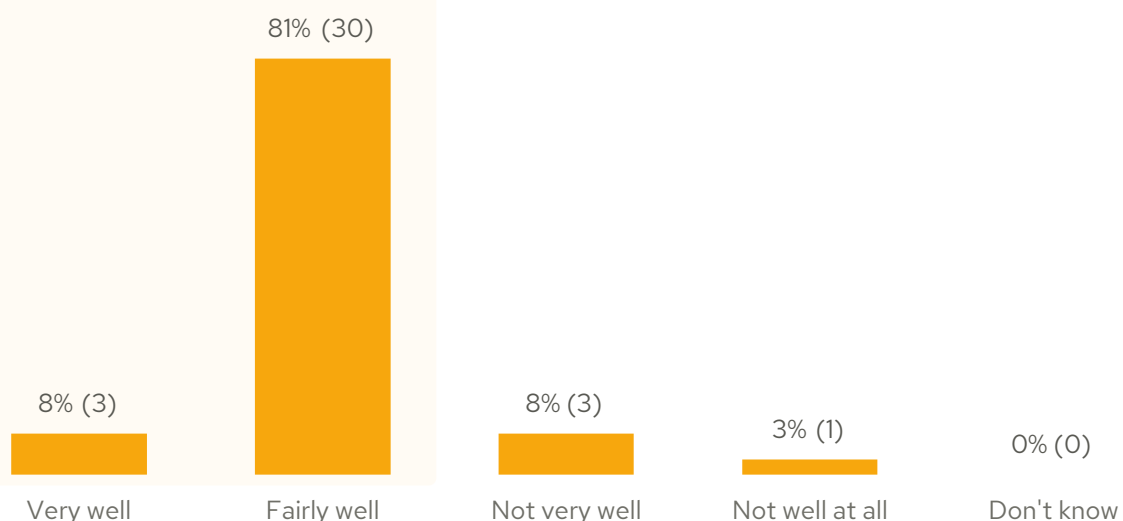
- Organising distinguished alumni and other relevant speakers – including those based overseas – to deliver guest lectures
- Establishing student-led consultation groups to provide feedback to faculty on what is working and what needs to be improved in their online teaching programs
- Delivering synchronous learning across a range of time zones in order to accommodate students who were not able to enter Canada due to travel restrictions

In terms of the student experience throughout this period, schools were generally of the belief that they were able to deliver an online learning program which met the needs of their student population, with 33 out of 37 survey respondents reporting that their student body had adapted ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ well.

“We were able to engage more students remotely than in-person”

Dean

To the best of your knowledge, how well has your overall student body adapted to online learning in 2020?

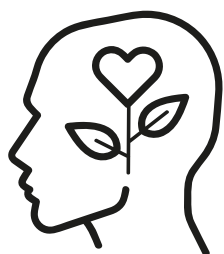


Despite the belief that students generally adapted well to online learning, some clear challenges with this mode of teaching presented themselves.

While most students appeared to generally be satisfied with the quality of the online learning that was provided to them (reflected by improved average levels of achievement in some schools), they often reported missing the social aspects of studying on-campus. This feeling was particularly acute for MBA students, for whom the ability to network with their peers and faculty is a major component of the overall student experience. It was also often the case for first year undergraduate students, who did not have prior experience with university study and sometimes did not feel that they were getting the university experience that they had expected.

“Our MBAs had relocated to study, paid \$100k and had nothing to do”

Dean



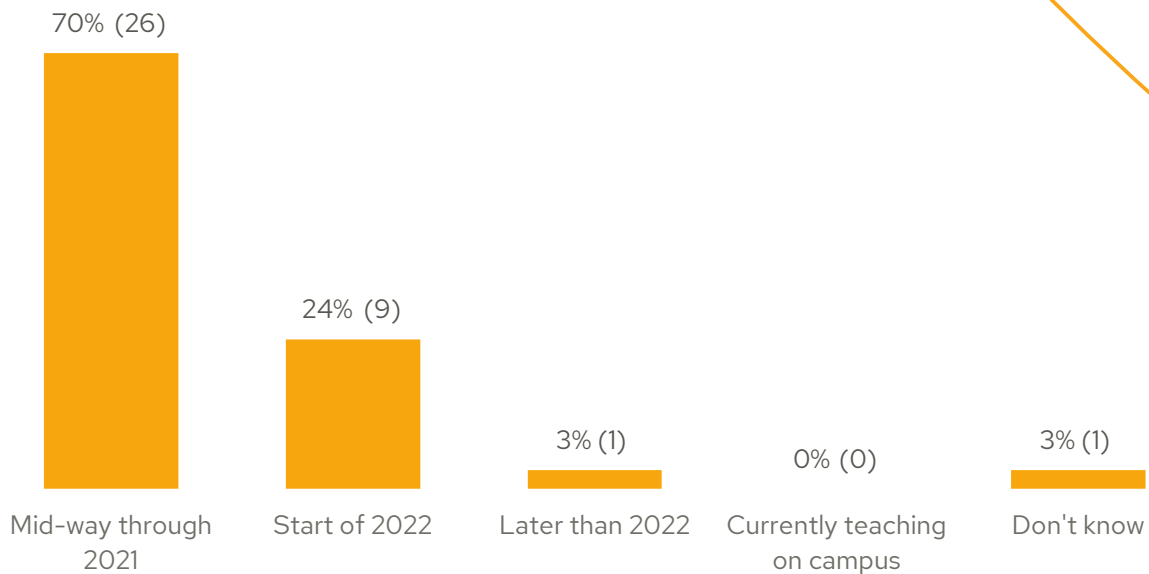
“Our student performance went up, but experience went down”

Dean

Some students were in home environments which were not suited for learning. In some of these cases, schools allowed the students to live in on-campus accommodation even while the main campus was closed. Others also faced privacy challenges, not being comfortable with sharing the inside of their home with their fellow students and teachers via a webcam. In order to maintain engagement with this cohort, some schools made webcams optional for meetings or required background ‘filters’ to be used.

International students who were based offshore and unable to travel to Canada experienced significantly more difficulty in engaging with their studies and were more likely to report feeling isolated and express low satisfaction levels. Schools attempted to accommodate these students by providing duplicated class times so that they could engage in synchronous learning in their local time zones, and by helping them to establish connections with fellow students in their own country or nearby countries with similar time zones.

When do you expect your school's teaching to return to primarily 'on-campus'?



Some schools used the pandemic as a 'teachable moment'

Many interviewees reported using the conditions presented by the pandemic as an opportunity to apply their teachings to real-world experiences through initiatives like:

- Pairing MBA students with local businesses to help them establish and build an online e-commerce presence, allowing them to continue trading during pandemic-related lockdowns
- Allowing businesses to seek free consulting services from business school students to address workplace challenges that had emerged during the pandemic

In all cases, such initiatives were reported to be highly successful, and are likely to form a model for practical and 'experiential' learning into the future – even when the pandemic has passed.

"Businesses are facing big challenges. How can we help?"

Dean

"Businesses are suffering, do we have any relevance?"

Dean

International education and collaboration



International students were greatly affected by the pandemic

International students have felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic greater than most. Many have found themselves locked out of the country of study, requiring them to study remotely from their home country and often from a different time zone – an experience they have commonly found isolating and challenging. Those international students who were already inside the Canadian border when it was closed at the beginning of March 2020 also faced difficulties. While they had the advantage of studying from a local time zone, they also experienced limited contact with their fellow classmates, were separated from their friends and family in their home country, and often struggled to find safe and secure employment due to the economic impact of the pandemic.

“A number of our students were stuck here – they feared for their jobs, couldn’t work or go home”

Dean)

“International students suffered the most. Isolation is hard, and for the graduates, there were no jobs”

Dean

Business schools also faced challenges in managing their international student recruitment. 2020 saw limited opportunity for face-to-face marketing and recruitment activities, such as university fairs and open days, which contributed to the recruitment challenge of not being able to offer the traditional on-campus learning experience that most prospective international students are looking for. As a result, many schools saw decreases in their new international student intakes for the 2020/21 academic year. Nation-wide, Canada saw a 17% drop in international enrolments between 2019 and 2020¹. Some schools have been investigating branching into new ‘diversification markets’ to address some of this shortfall.

¹ <https://monitor.icef.com/2021/03/canadas-foreign-enrolment-fell-nearly-20-in-2020/>

We are diversifying our international admissions by focussing less on SE Asia and more on Central/South America and Africa.

Administrative staff)

However, with the new academic year likely to feature a large-scale return to campus and a relaxation of border restrictions which have kept international students out much of the previous 18 months, there is optimism that the Fall semester will see a return to the status quo for Canadian business schools, while an extension of the post-study work permit program to encompass offshore online study will have helped to maintain interest in Canada as a study destination while international travel was unavailable. Others believe that their new online executive MBA programs will allow them to reach greater numbers of international students than they had before the pandemic.

“Canada has been a more welcoming destination so far – but that may change”

Dean

Though a return to campus is not yet feasible for some international students, such as those located in India, which is still subject to travel restrictions into Canada as of August 2021.

“While we are planning a return to campus (F2F/Hybrid) we have also planned for some virtual (online) first semester cohorts for new international students who cannot yet travel due to travel/border restrictions and/or delay in visa processing.”

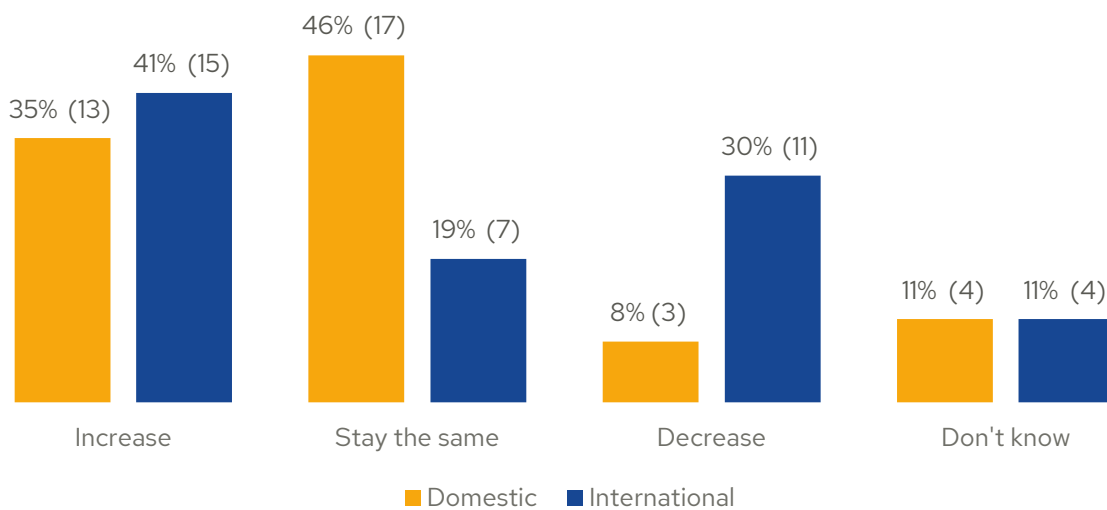
Senior Leadership

Survey respondents express a cautious optimism in a growth of international enrolments, with 41% expecting enrolment numbers for the 2021/22 academic year to be higher than the previous year, while 19% believe that numbers will stay the same.





What impact do you think COVID-19 will have on next year's intake of the following types of students?

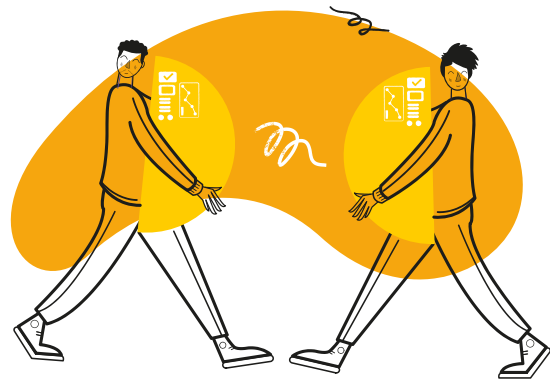


While the 2020/21 academic year has proved challenging for business schools in accommodating their international student population, Canada's advanced vaccine rollout and progressive policies regarding an easing of

travel restrictions has positioned the country well to rebound strongly – and even to potentially draw enrolments away from other nations where more restrictive travel policies remain in place.

Schools have been endeavouring to maintain and advance international partnerships during the pandemic

With international travel being severely limited well into 2020 and the early parts of 2021, most schools were required to look for novel and creative ways to establish international partnerships with other business schools and universities around the world.



Will your school be looking to establish

more international partnerships with other business school around the world as a result of current travel restrictions?



■ Yes ■ No

Note: Don't know excluded

Some of the innovative methods mentioned by school staff to foster these partnerships included:

- Joint teaching programs and 'virtual exchanges' in collaboration with overseas universities
- '2+2' programs, which allow students to complete a professional work experience program before commencing an MBA
- Partnerships which allow international students to commence their studies in their home country and then travel to Canada when able to.
- Integrated courses which allow students in different countries to collaborate on practical projects

We are still engaged in exploring some 2+2 partnerships but have a larger focus on short-term study abroad opportunities for our students

Senior Leadership

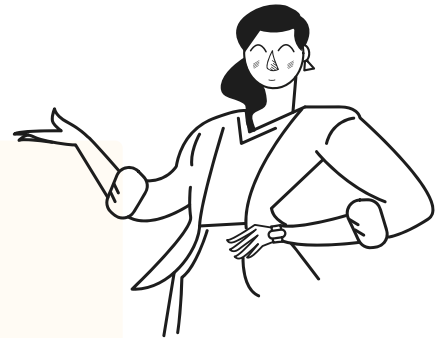
Exchanges (more specifically virtual exchanges), course sharing and joint degree opportunities

Senior Leadership

Double Degree and exchange partnerships for both in-person and virtual exchanges.

Administrative staff

Research funding and outputs

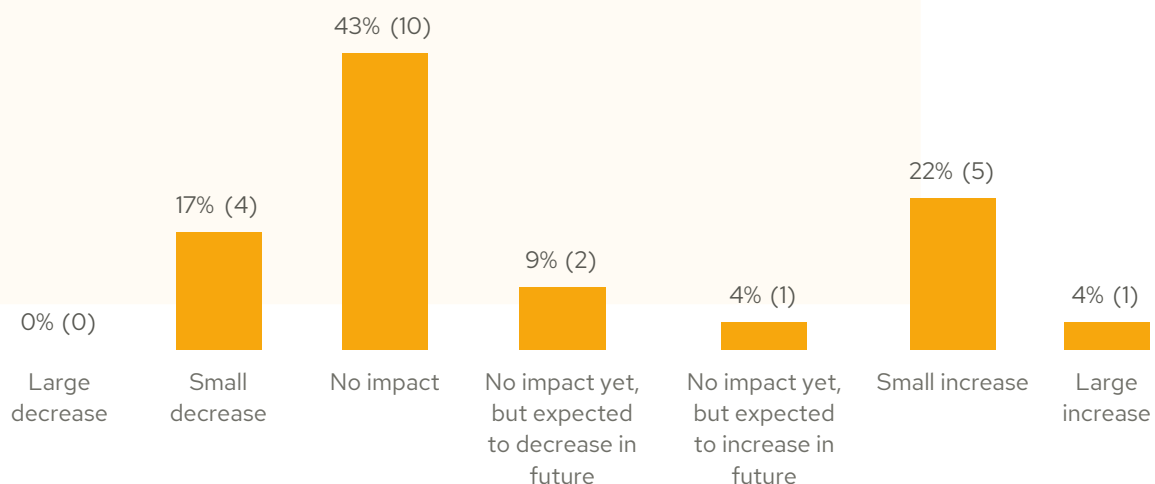


Pleasingly, research funding availability has not been significantly impacted by the pandemic

COVID-19 has had a demonstrable impact of the academic research programs within Canadian business schools, although most schools report being able to capitalise on some of the research opportunities presented by the pandemic.

Survey respondents report generally positive outcomes regarding the availability of research funding since the start of the pandemic, with just 26% reporting an observed or anticipated decrease in funding, while 30% reported an observed or anticipated increase, and 43% reported no change. These results compare favourably to other countries where research funding had been closely tied to revenue streams generated from tuition, which had been negatively impacted by the pandemic.

How has research funding been affected for your school by the COVID-19 pandemic?



Note: Don't know excluded





Rather than harm the availability of research funding, the pandemic has presented opportunities for forward-thinking schools to take a leadership role in addressing the challenges presented by the pandemic through their research. Several schools reported an increase in the number of research grants they received, specifically relating to their research on COVID-19 related issues, such as the changing nature of the workplace, management of remote workforces, and maintenance of staff well-being during periods of organisational uncertainty.

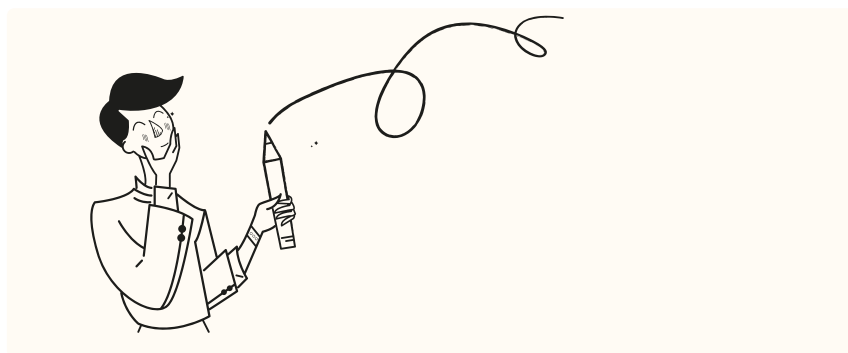
“The school has received a lot of grants over the past 18 months”

Dean

“There’s more funding available. More government grants”

Dean

The ability to apply business school research to such real-world problems is a pleasing aspect of the sector’s COVID-19 response and has demonstrated the relevancy of business schools in addressing contemporary business challenges.

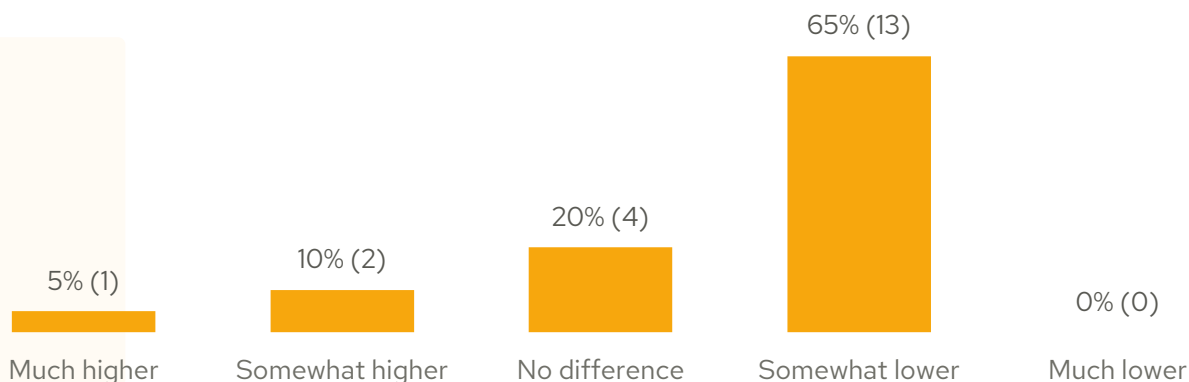


Many researchers found it difficult to maintain their expected outputs in 2020

However, while research funding did not appear to be significantly affected at most schools, there did appear to be an impact on research outputs, with 13 out of 20 respondents reporting a reduced quantity of research outputs in 2020, and only 3 said their school's research outputs had increased.



In terms of quantity, how was your school's research output in 2020 compared to previous years?



Note: 16 'don't know' responses excluded

Interviews indicated three major causes of a drop in research productivity:

- An inability to establish partnerships and collaborate with overseas researchers due to travel restrictions and cancellations of conferences
- Working from home having a negative productivity impact on some staff – particularly those with school-aged children who needed to juggle their teaching and research commitments with childcare and home schooling
- Remote teaching leading to additional workloads for staff who had both teaching and research responsibilities

“Our researchers were either very productive or in despair”

(Dean)



In order to address these challenges and assist staff to meet their obligations, schools variously employed a range of interventions, including:

- Pausing tenure clocks for researchers to reduce pressure to publish
- Reducing teaching commitments for some researchers – particularly those with child-caring responsibilities
- Reducing administrative workloads, and in particular, meetings

However, there was also a concession that things were simply going to be more difficult for everyone to meet their obligations throughout the pandemic:

“The only way it will work is if [staff] take on more work”

Dean

Staff welfare



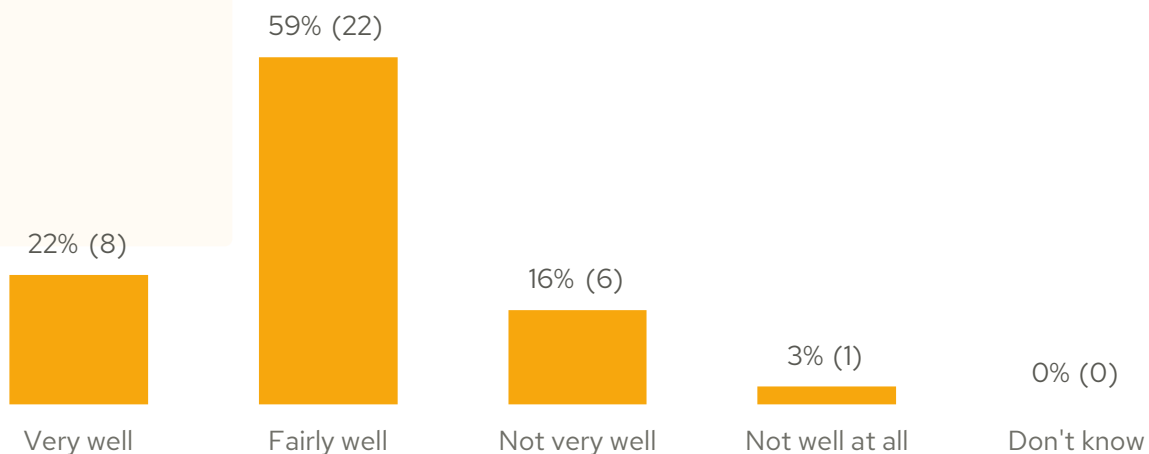
Despite technological and workload challenges, staff have managed to maintain ordinary operations throughout the pandemic.

Along with maintaining student welfare, the maintenance of staff welfare has been a significant challenge for business schools throughout 2020 and 2021.

Like students, staff have had to manage a rapid transition from face-to-face to online learning (often without experience in this mode of delivery), and have dealt with increasing workloads, difficulties in conducting research without access to campus facilities and collaborative networks, as well as the added stress of living through a pandemic.

Despite the difficulties presented by the pandemic, most respondents reported being able to manage their professional responsibilities well during this time – 30 out of 37 survey respondents said that their university had managed their non-teaching tasks 'very' or 'fairly' well.

How well do you feel your school was equipped to perform non-teaching tasks (e.g. marketing, admissions, administration) remotely in 2020?



Some of the biggest staff challenges related to technology – not just delivering online teaching, but in replacing ordinary face-to-face meetings and workflows with digital equivalents.

“I think we would have been better prepared if we had been using remote services regularly to hold meetings prior to Covid (e.g. Teams or Zoom). We had to learn from home fully online – how to use MS Teams and conduct meetings, hold conferences and faculty interviews and online events. There was not much time for training as things were happening so quickly.”

Administrative Staff

“Staff had been using Teams before the pandemic hit, but not faculty. We added all faculty (and grad students) to Teams in the spring of 2020, but most faculty still do not use Teams to its full capacity because they had never used it before.”

Senior Leadership



As well as hardware challenges – some universities were still set up with desktop computers, and therefore faced challenges in re-locating their staff to a home-based working environment.

“Many faculty and staff had desktop computers. All computers should have been laptops some time ago.”

Senior Leadership

Prior to Covid, our staff conducted work primarily from their desks on campus and did not work off laptops at home very often. Our staff quickly were assigned laptops and created workstations at home to continue to service our dept.

Administrative staff

Leadership has implanted a variety of interventions to maintain staff well-being during the pandemic

Constant and continual engagement between management, faculty and staff was a focus for senior school leadership, who highlighted several strategies to help maintain staff confidence and wellbeing throughout the year as part of a ‘big picture’ leadership strategy, including:

- Offering tenure track pauses for researchers
- Providing teaching relief for researchers with childcare and home-schooling responsibilities
- Periodic employee engagement surveys to assess mood and identify problems

In some cases, the approach to workforce management was summed up with a motto or ethos which governed interactions and decision-making:

“We fostered a culture of forgiveness”

(Dean)

“It was about compassionate adoption”

(Dean)

Questions for 2022 and beyond

The last 18 months has raised many questions for business schools about their future operations and the changes they must make to remain globally relevant into the future. This section outlines some of the commonly raised considerations that schools will be confronted with in the coming years:

Is online learning here to stay?

Most schools are preparing for a return to primarily in-person teaching for the start of the Fall semester and will be addressing how best to manage a teaching program which must accommodate not only those who are able to study on-campus, but those who are still unable to enter Canada and must continue studying online for the start of the new academic year.

For some institutions, the expectation is that large-format lectures will remain online indefinitely – either due to continued social



distancing requirements, or because of a belief that online delivery is a more suitable, modern approach for a large lecture.

“We will be having a mix of modalities. More online options, online credentials, executive and continuing educational focus”

SL

“We are seriously looking at which programs and courses could/should stay online, not for business purposes but because of increased learner success”

Administration



Where this is the case, further resources will need to be invested into ensuring that such a model meets the needs of both online and on-campus students, as well as teaching staff. Some schools are implementing an initiative attempting to address this is by restructuring existing physical spaces to be suitable for remote students to 'dial in' to, allowing them to learn synchronously with on-campus students.

"We will also trial domestic collaborative graduate program offerings where students will be online and in the class simultaneously – High Flex"

Senior Leadership

"We will create an experiential learning hub that will have physical as well as advanced virtual components to make sure that it can continue to work if we need to go back to

teleworking and online only teaching."

Senior Leadership

"We are looking at ways to improve the student online learning experience. We are configuring some classroom spaces to accommodate a hybrid classroom (students in-person and online at the same time)"

Administration

However, not all schools share the view that a transition to a 'blended' mode of study as the default is inevitable. Some see the pandemic as a temporary interruption to normal operations and expect to return to solely face-to-face instruction when regulations permit them to do so.

“We will never be an online school”

Dean

There is also the potential for some schools who did not previously offer online programs to expand their online teaching into a standalone offering on its own. While several universities already offered online MBA programs, and sometimes online undergraduate degrees, other schools who have only recently developed their online teaching capacity may be looking to run fully online programs in a permanent fashion, alongside their traditional face-to-face programs.

However, this is not without risk – while a well-regarded online program could boost enrolments, a low-quality program could cause reputational damage to a school.

“Everyone is getting into online learning. It can be a cash cow or a reputational disaster”

Dean

“It’s harder to differentiate because everyone is doing it”

Dean

As classrooms around Canada re-open over the coming months, schools are likely to diverge in their approaches to online study, with some dramatically expanding their online offerings, and others returning to a predominantly face-to-face model or adopting something in-between.

How can business schools stay competitive?

The expansion of online study offerings presents not only an opportunity for business schools, but also a potential risk. Online study has opened the market for universities from all over the world to offer their programs to students located anywhere in the world, and hence increased the competition in an already competitive global business school market.

Currently, Canada’s post-study work rights programs serves as an enticing drawcard for many students to study in Canada, and this has been bolstered by the temporary application of the program to study undertaken online and offshore. However, if other nations with well-credentialed business schools, such as the United States and United Kingdom, were to offer similar arrangements on an ongoing basis, this competitive advantage may be undercut.

This dynamic could work similarly for the domestic student market – an increase in online study programs will open students to a greater number of schools to choose from, and those schools with a heavy reliance on the local population for enrolments could face increasing competition.

Challenges may not necessarily come from other universities, either. There is an expectation of increased competition between schools – particularly at an undergraduate level, as business schools compete to secure enrolments with other faculties, with STEM programs identified as the biggest internal competitor to business schools.

Potential competition could also come from:

- Low-cost online content providers like Coursera, edX and LinkedIn Learning
- Large companies choosing in-house education programs over formal MBAs
- Private colleges providing vocational education and training programs in fields like accounting

With competition expected to continue increasing in the coming years, business schools will need to create brand differentiation in order to stand out from a crowded field and clearly demonstrate the value of a formal university business program over the growing range of non-university competitors.

“The question is how do we stay relevant?”

Dean



What does the workplace of the future look like?

The Fall semester is likely to see a return to large-scale classroom teaching, with online and hybrid options remaining in place for those who would prefer to study online or cannot attend campus. While this will necessitate a return to campus for teaching staff for at least part of the academic year, questions remain over the degree to which non-teaching staff who do not have face-to-face teaching responsibilities will be permitted to work flexibly, and what schools will do to accommodate flexible working environments in an ongoing fashion.

Most schools are seemingly open to the idea of at least some level of flexible working for staff even after pandemic restrictions have lifted.

[Investigating] the opportunity to work remotely, even on a part-time basis moving forward. The mixing of virtual and in-person events. (Administrative)

A greater degree of remote work completed by administration and staff

Administrative



Remote work structures upon a physical return - University wide high flex classroom technology

Senior Leadership

“Student, faculty and staff attendance practices will be adapted to allow for short term absences. Faculty will have alternative learning experiences available for those who have symptoms or are otherwise self-isolating.”

Senior Leadership



“Leveraging experience gained in online education to provide a greater relative roster of courses delivered in the online mode; a greater degree of remote work completed by administration and staff, changing space usage on-campus to create a greater sense of student community.”

(Administration)

Though there is likely to be some resistance to large-scale working-from-home, particularly in situations where teaching staff are required to be on campus most of the time.

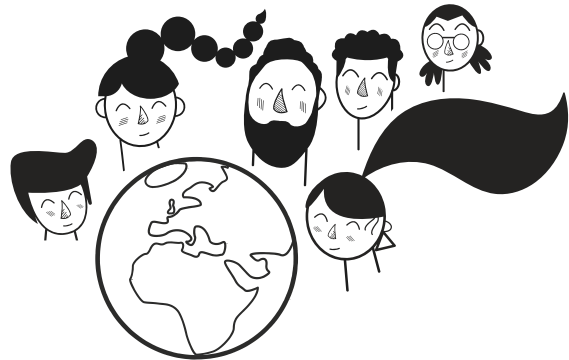
“We’re not giving the option of working permanently [remotely]”

Dean

“We are aware that there is a large experiential component of our education that requires students to be on-site. This will lead to “open for business” messaging as we pivot from distance-heavy hybrid in the fall to on-site heavy hybrid in the winter.”

Senior Leadership

The divergence of opinions of this matter have made it clear that the nature of the future workplace within Canada’s business schools will be hotly debated, and there will likely be divergence between schools as conditions begin to return to normal.



Acknowledgements

This project could not have been completed without the cooperation of the Business Schools Association of Canada (BSAC) and their membership. Special thanks to the fifteen deans who volunteered to be interviewed, as well as the 37 staff members who completed the online survey.

Methodology

This research project consisted of two components – a series of semi-structured video interviews with 15 Deans from BSAC-AEGC, and an online survey distributed to selected staff from 18 Canadian business schools.

The report was compiled by Chris Strods (QS), with input from Manuel Peinado (QS), Mark McCoy (QS), Timothy Daus (BSAC-AEGC) and Pierre-Jean Darres (BSAC-AEGC).

Stage 1: Semi-structured interviews	Stage 2: Online survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 67 business school Deans invited to interview• 15 x 30-minute interviews conducted• Interviews were conducted in June and July 2021• Surveys were conducted in English only	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10-minute online survey distributed to selected contacts from business schools who agreed to participate• Mixture of quantitative and text response questions• 37 completed responses received• 18 universities represented• Survey hosted on Qualtrics platform• Survey was in the field from June 1st – July 20th 2021• The survey was offered in both English and French

Interviews were sourced from business schools in the following locations:

- Ontario (5)
- Nova Scotia (2)
- British Columbia (2)
- New Brunswick (1)
- Quebec (2)
- Others (3)



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To continue empowering motivated individuals and institutions across the world alike during the coronavirus outbreak, QS's response has included:

- Moving its [student recruitment events online](#), ensuring that universities and talented potential applicants across the world are still able to achieve high-quality personalized engagement.
- Expanding its range of digital marketing offerings, empowering student recruitment teams as they seek to maintain outreach and enrolment efforts.
- Launching a webinar series designed to enable university faculty and administrators alike to share best practices as they transition their educational offerings into the virtual classroom.
- Ongoing surveys of prospective students and institutions globally to analyze how the COVID-19 crisis is impacting them.

In 2019, as part of our commitment to sustainability, [QS became a certified CarbonNeutral® Company](#), reflecting our efforts to reduce our impact on the environment through a range of efficiency initiatives and offsetting unavoidable emissions through a verified carbon offset forestry project in Brazil.



