

PRME Steering Committee  
c/o Dr. Manuel Escudero, Head PRME Secretariat at  
United Nations Global Compact Office  
DC2-612  
2 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017, USA.

1<sup>st</sup> September 2010

Dear Dr Escudero,

### **Renewal of the commitment to Principles for Responsible Management Education**

As an institution of higher learning involved in the education of current and future leaders, **Aston Business School** is committed to upholding the UN Global Compact Principles of Responsible Management Education and to engaging in a continuous process of improvement in the application of the Principles for Responsible Management Education. We undertake to report on progress to all stakeholders and to exchange effective practices with other academic institutions.

As a signatory to the principles, we believe that the values of social responsibility and sustainability are important in all areas of the School's activities. This includes the areas identified in the principles: the business school curricula, programme design, courses and learning, research as well as in partnerships and dialogue with all our stakeholders. We understand that our own organizational practices should serve as examples of the values and



stitutions, and associations to adopt and support



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# Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) Report Summer 2010

## Achievements in relation to the implementation of the Principles in the last 18 months.

### A. Curricula, Programme Design, Courses and Learning

In relation to the first 3 principles that relate to the 'developing the capabilities of students', 'incorporating global social responsibility values into our curricula' and creating educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments, the following achievements are reported;

#### 1. Strategy

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Sustainability (including related issues) are of concern for businesses locally, nationally and internationally and its importance for the global economy is likely to increase. It is important therefore that Aston Business School (ABS) students are equipped with the relevant knowledge and understanding of the current and future implications for business. As managers/leaders of the future, ABS graduates will be required to directly address, and make decisions regarding societal challenges in these areas. This is highlighted in the school Strategy (to 2012) as follows -

"Our curricula must reflect the increasing emphasis on services, knowledge management and specialisation in the global economy. We must prepare students for the organisations and economies of today and particularly tomorrow and not the business of yesterday ..... Our curricula and our own processes must reflect our own commitment to social responsibility and sustainability in organisational and public life." (ABS Strategy, p.6) In addition, ABS ensures that the students "sense of social responsibility, commitment to contributing in their communities, safeguarding the environment and appreciation of the ethics of business and leadership is embedded in this transformation". (ABS Strategy. P.9)

#### 2. Curriculum Report

In Autumn 2008, a complete review of the Undergraduate and Postgraduate programmes was undertaken with the aim of 'providing an overview of the extent to which Ethics, Social Responsibility and Sustainability (and related topics) is currently included in the curricula at Aston Business School and to make recommendations for the future'.

The report found that in the undergraduate programme, whilst there were a number of related elective modules in the final year, there was very little in the early years of the programme. Therefore, the recommendations aimed to create 'social responsibility and sustainability literate' graduates and to this end the following recommendations were made;

- i) **there should be a core module in this area in the early years of the UG programme**
- ii) **Social Responsibility and Sustainability should be included in the issues investigated as part of the placement year.**

**Both these recommendations are to be implemented in the 2010/2011 academic year.**

In the postgraduate programme the recommendations aimed to ensure that all MSc courses should include core content that address Social Responsibility and Sustainability issues in the context of the specialism of the individual MSc. To this end the following recommendations were made;

- i) **all MSc Course Directors should report on where these issues relate to and are incorporated into the specialist MSc programmes.**
- ii) **consideration be given to the introduction of an MSc in Social Responsibility and Sustainability.**

**Both these recommendations have now been implemented and a new MSc in Social Responsibility & Sustainability has been developed as an interdisciplinary course for implementation in 2011.**

In the MBA programme, BHM305, Business, Ethics & Responsibility became a core module for all MBA students seven years ago. The module is interdisciplinary in nature and has contributors from across ABS and from external organisations. The module encourages students to wrestle seriously with ethical quandaries, difficult disagreeable tradeoffs between efficiency and justice and moral contradictions encountered in everyday life. It uses experiential learning to make students aware of ethical and social dimensions of the business making process and enable students to understand the ethical components of managerial decision-making. Students submit a reflective account of their own values and comment upon whether their future decision-making and actions may be influenced by their studies. An analysis of these reflections is undertaken each year. The module had been developed since it first started and the curriculum report recommended that

- i) **the MBA core module should include more on Sustainability.**

**This has been implemented in the academic year 2009/2010**

## **B. Research**

In relation to Principle 4 'engaging in conceptual and empirical research that advances our understanding about the role, dynamics and impact of corporation in the creation of sustainable social, environmental and economic value', the following achievements are reported;

ABS is committed to implementing a strategy for Social Responsibility and Sustainability (SRS) during the period 2008-2012. (ABS Strategy, p.21). As part of this strategy, **Ethics, Governance and Sustainability are emerging areas of research for the school. (ABS Strategy, p.17).**

Since 2008, a research group has been established (entitled Ethics, Governance and Sustainability). The group has developed a working document of interest areas and publications of academics that has led to collaborations across the School and University.

**An interdisciplinary and cross-university research centre (CSI - Centre for Sustainability and Innovation) has also been set up.** Academics from ABS have taken the lead on a number of the projects in the centre. These projects include; Corporate climate change reporting and the media in BRICS; Engaging different communities with sustainability; Encouraging sustainable behaviours using information processing and behaviour change techniques; Tackling Climate Change at the Sub-National Level and Green Wash or Green Progress.

A CSI research seminar series has also been conducted during 2010 a range of speakers on issues relating to sustainability.

## **C. Partnership**

In relation to Principle 5 'interacting 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', the following achievements are reported;

Contribution to the Community: "Reaching out, raising aspirations and achievement"  
Community engagement forms one of the three pillars to the mission of Aston Business School (ABS). ABS wants to contribute to the development and regeneration of the region,

organisations and communities at a local and global level through knowledge transfer, innovation and inspiration. Contribution to the community at ABS can be seen through three channels; widening participation initiatives, voluntary activities and outreach work. Aston Business School regularly host events and conferences for business leaders and anyone who is interested in learning more about the business world. There is a wealth of opportunity for students and staff to be involved with the local community at both an academic and extra-curricular level

The following are examples of this activity;

Locally, ABS works with 'Business in the Community' for example a business breakfast event in November 2009, 'Business in a new climate reputation or profit'. Workshops are run each year in conjunction with 'The Birmingham Centre for Business Ethics'

ABS are active members of the Sustainable Aston Working Group and sustainability initiatives across the University have led to Aston University being ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in the People and Planet published by the Times Higher from a position of 93<sup>rd</sup> in 2007.

The list, published in The Times Higher, is the only league table ranking 133 UK universities by environmental performance.

## **D. Dialogue**

In relation to principle 6, 'we will facilitate and support dialogue and debate among educators, business government, consumers, media, civil society organisations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability'.

During 2009 and 2010, ABS took part in the first and second Global Forums for PRME at the UN in New York, the UNPRME Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen and the 10th Anniversary UN Global Compact Business Leaders Summit.

Aston has also organised and hosted UK-Universities events for the UN PRME (supported by BAM, ABS and AMBA). The aims of these events were to encourage UK Universities to become signatories to PRME and to share ideas/practice in teaching, learning and research. These have been well attended by academics from around the UK and Europe and helped to develop collaborative relationships between colleagues and Institutions. In addition, ABS hosted an ESRC Seminar as part of a series on 'Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainability, Government and Civil Society, a Business Education Event for the Equalities & Human Rights Commission and a public lecture by Will Hutton on 'Business Schools and the Global Financial Crisis'. ABS was also invited to address a plenary session at the AACSB 2010 Sustainability Conference on PRME initiatives in the UK, a PRME event for Universities in Scotland and a European Business Ethics Network (EBEN UK) PRME event.

**Finally, the final section of the PRME principles states; 'We understand that our own organisational practices should serve as examples of the values and attitudes we convey to our students'**

These are a few examples of our commitment to this;

**Aston's 5<sup>th</sup> place in the UK People and Planet awards** is an example of this commitment. One of Aston's strongest categories was staff and student engagement. Activities have included a Sustainability Week on campus, Go Green Awards, and a wealth of staff and student committees including a Fairtrade group, Wildlife Group, Sustainable Working group and opportunities for staff and students to volunteer in the local community. Aston also won the Bronze EcoCampus award and is on track to gain the Silver award this summer. Recent initiatives currently on Aston's campus include; the installation of wind turbines, grass

roofs to encourage biodiversity, and rainwater collection units in new halls of residences; a combined heat and power plant on campus, which is drastically reducing carbon emissions; increasing the use of electric vehicles both on and off campus; student switch off campaign where students were encouraged to turn off electronic power in the halls of residences; several additional recycling posts, to allow for batteries, books and mobile phones to be recycled.

ABS has committed to a 15% reduction in carbon emissions in 2010 as part of the national 10:10 campaign ([www.1010uk.org](http://www.1010uk.org)). In order to achieve this commitment a number of initiatives have been recommended in the areas of energy and transport.

**Aston First – Aston’s culture transformation programme.** Launched in February 2010, this is one of the most important initiatives that Aston University has ever undertaken. As part of this initiative, the programme promotes responsibility and sustainability, fairness, equality and respect, and engagement within the University and externally in the wider community.

## **Key objectives for the next 18 month period with regard to the implementation of the Principles**

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1. Enable ABS graduates to be Social Responsibility and Sustainability literate through further integration and development of these areas in the curriculum
2. Be recognised locally, nationally and internationally as a credible institution in Social Responsibility and Sustainability through research activities, publications, community engagement and will continue to encourage other academic institutions, and associations to adopt and support these Principles.

Finally, we understand that our own organizational practices should serve as examples of the values and attitudes we seek to convey to our students and will continue to review and revise our policies and practices to achieve this.