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Former Shell executive appointed as new Dean

Bradford University School of Management has appointed a former international strategist from Shell as its new dean. Dr Sarah Dixon, currently head of MSc programmes at the University of Bath, will join the School in September 2010 when Professor Arthur Francis retires.

Her appointment is seen as a public commitment to ensure the business relevance of the School – which ranks among the UK's top ten business schools, as well as its continuing academic excellence and high ranking research.

Arthur Francis said: "Sarah Dixon has that rare mix of first rate business experience with a successful transition into academia. Her career represents exactly what many bodies, including the Economic and Social Research Council and the Foundation for Management Education espouse, but so few have actually achieved. We are certain it will continue to strengthen our business relationships as well as encourage business people to look at developing academic careers."

Dr Dixon was first attracted to an academic career when she completed her MBA at Kingston University, subsequently joining them where she held a variety of roles, culminating in director of postgraduate programmes for the Faculty of Business and Law. Having gained a DBA from Henley Business School in the interim, she went on to intensify her research activity at the University of Bath where she took on the role of head of MSc programmes.

Her business career at Royal Dutch Shell Group included petrochemicals business management in Vienna and Moscow and later positions in strategic planning and mergers & acquisitions in London. She moved into business consulting as director of the strategy consultancy, Albany Dixon Ltd.

Sarah Dixon said: "I am excited to be joining this top-ranking business school with its established reputation of excellence.

"We are operating in an increasingly challenging environment with government funding cuts and international

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competition. My intention is to encourage innovation across all areas of activity and increase our co-operation with business, public and third sector organisations. In the jargon of a business strategist, I am keen to secure sustainable competitive advantage for the School."

A linguist, Sarah Dixon is returning to her roots – she achieved her BA in Russian and German from the University of Bradford. She also speaks French and is learning Mandarin.

Professor Mark Cleary, vice-chancellor at the University of Bradford, said: "Sarah's appointment is unusual in that she has not followed the traditional academic route for becoming a dean. This will be a great strength for the School and for implementing the business engagement strategy led by Arthur Francis.

"We owe a great debt of gratitude to Arthur for his leadership in strengthening the School of Management's position in the UK's top league. Handing over to Sarah, with her wide experience of academic roles and the corporate world, will ensure the School continues to move up this league."

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Call for critical mass on low carbon

The School of Management is backing Yorkshire Forward's bid for the region to be the UK's leader in sustainable energy technologies with the potential to drive future commercial developments.

The Dean believes carbon capture storage (CCS) is just one of many technologies which signals the region is moving ahead to meet an increasing demand for a low carbon future.

Prof Arthur Francis said: "A critical mass of interested companies, academic activity and demand is now poised to take the lead. "A part of the UK which helped industrialise and pollute the world could now be known for leading the way in cleaning it up".

The School has played a key role in the university's Ecoversity vision for sustainable development. The new Emm Lane building was awarded an 'excellent' accreditation for sustainable construction by the gold standard BRE Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) and the university has been named the 'greenest' in the UK for its development of a sustainable environment.

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Public sector rethink will require very different management skills

"The public sector is going through the most challenging period any of us can remember," says Julian Rawel, director of executive education at the School of Management. "Services will have to be delivered in new and different ways, requiring a culture change in thinking. Managers will have to understand and 'own' profit and loss issues and the public will have to become more involved in their communities."

The School of Management has been working with senior management teams of a number of large public sector organisations. Rawel explains the challenges they face: "For ten years there has been unprecedented growth in the public sector. Managers have, in part, become used to tackling problems by demanding and getting more funds.

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"So the new regime is double edged. Growth has stopped abruptly and most organisations are looking at spending cuts of around 20%. You cannot keep delivering good quality services by tweaking around the edges. This is requiring a wholesale rethink."

On top of the financial pressures, Rawel says that the taxpayer has become ever more demanding and expects better service than ever.

He believes that in the new economy, people will have to do more for themselves: "Patients will have to become more responsible for their health and not such a burden on primary and secondary care. Residents may have to clear the snow off their own pavements instead of moaning. But I think the benefits will be far more than just reduced costs.

"More ownership of the problems will help create pride and community spirit. If we get out a bit more and work with our neighbours, look out for each other we will start to see community improvements. This is the way to reduce crime and litter and perhaps even tackle some of the youth problems."

Rawel says the critical area for managers is to understand how to use available funding in the most service efficient and effective ways. They need to work collegiately across very different services, get IT systems to 'talk' to each other and understand the customer and prioritise services. He adds: "It's no longer about my department – it's about our organisation."

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Competitive edge identified in Leeds financial and professional services

The abundance of skilled managerial talent driving the financial and professional services sector of the Leeds city region is highlighted in new research by economist Damian Ward. The first study of its kind into the biggest financial and professional services centre outside London was undertaken by Dr Ward for Financial Leeds to identify the sector's strengths and opportunities and to guide industry leaders and policy makers on future employment and training needs.

Dr Ward says: "There is a perception that this region is reliant on low cost financial services, such as call centres, making it vulnerable to changing economic fortunes but the statistics do not bear this view out.

"The breadth and depth of managerial and professional expertise is helping to drive businesses forward, coupled with a pool of cheaper labour for sales, administration and process operations – key attractions for those looking to operate outside the capital."

The report highlights how the sector has quickly responded to the intensity of competition with companies upping their value added services to meet the more exacting needs of clients both within the city region and across the national economy.

"A good example of this is the Skipton Group. By moving into mortgage administration services for other companies, they have created additional ways to add value and generate profit," said Dr Ward.

Dr Ward's interviews with senior managers working in the city's law, accounting, retail and commercial banking and support services indicate innovation within the sector provides the greatest opportunities to generate future economic wealth for the region.

An FT Special Report, Doing Business in the Leeds City Region is published on 17th March 2010.

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Business school expertise helps third sector rise to a commercial challenge

Bradford University School of Management is working with leading social exclusion charity Foundation to help the charity win new contracts and reach its target turnover of £14.5 m by 2012. The school has undertaken successful Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) with several businesses, but this is the first time the school has worked with a third sector organisation in this way. Fewer than nine per cent of KTP projects across the UK are with third sector organisations.

Dr Nigel Lockett, Director of the school's Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management said: "Many of the disciplines of the commercial world can be used to great effect in social enterprises and charities like Foundation without compromising their core values. By the end of the two years we would expect Foundation to be in a better position to show value for money, win more contracts and therefore help more people."

KTP associate Sara Hajnassiri, who is doing a PhD at the school, is working with Foundation to increase its competitiveness and encourage cultural change among its 340 employees across 17 offices.

Foundation works with the most socially excluded groups throughout the North of England, including offenders, homeless people and young people at risk.

Chief executive Steve Woodford helped to found the charity 25 years ago and has seen it double in size in the last five years.

"A key challenge for us is the considerable change in the way funding is now awarded for the services we offer. It's not enough to be the best and well thought of in the sector if you're not competitive and can demonstrate value for money," he explained.

"Sara is helping us to embrace the best of the private sector and to rise to the challenge of taking colleagues with us now that we have to be more commercial. She will also be looking at how we can best tailor our offer for individual local authority contracts.

"Bringing in the school of management's expertise is stimulating and invaluable. The third sector is usually good at finding resources but I think KTPs have been a closely guarded secret and more universities should be forging close links with our sector."

For further information about KTPs go to <http://tiny.cc/RIYCN> or email business partnerships' manager Melanie Powell on M.J.Powell1@Bradford.ac.uk

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Professor Jackie Ford in the press

Professor Jackie Ford has been talking to the Mail on Sunday's 'You' magazine, commenting on a feature on health issues around employing older workers. One of her former research projects is a study of recruitment and retention of older staff in public-service organizations.

"My own experience of studying older workers shows that they are highly committed, very willing and able to take on new challenges. They have a corporate memory that can be of enormous value to their employers.

"If they do fall ill and are unable to do a particular job, then a good employer will be both flexible and creative in how to retain their talents and skills. For example, there are significant roles for older employees in nurturing and mentoring younger workers.

"Some research even suggests that with rising obesity and other health related problems such as binge drinking among young people, older employees could actually be healthier than their younger counterparts."

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Experts Blogging

You can follow some of our academics on the Bradford blog. Read what they have to say on topical issues.

See the blog at: <http://www.bradford-blogs.co.uk/management/experts/>

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