

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71634/xaht8298>

*Journal of
Scholarship and Innovation in
Management Education*

Issue 2, 2025

© The Author(s) 2025

The effect of PRME accreditation on curriculum: A case study



This work is licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

Rose White

Corresponding Author

Rose White, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YW.

Email: r.c.white@lancaster.ac.uk

Abstract

Sustainability themes have become central to business education, influencing international accreditation standards and rankings. Business schools, including LUMS, actively engage in these exercises, embracing the ethos of continuous improvement. This article examines the impact of PRME accreditation on LUMS' integration of sustainability into its curriculum, using evidence from PRME submissions in 2021 and 2023. Reviews of module handbooks revealed a small increase in sustainability-related content, concentrated in specific Departments. Despite making some progress, the urgency and accountability for embedding sustainability remains a challenge. However, the School has committed to longer term planning to embed sustainability content into the curricula.

Keywords

Business School, sustainability, PRME, curriculum, accreditation

Introduction

In the past decade, the theme of sustainability has transitioned from a peripheral topic to a central element of business education, reflected in changes to international accreditation standards and rankings metrics. Business schools continue to actively engage with, and participate in, accreditation and ranking exercises, buying into the ethos of continuous improvement. LUMS is directly impacted by this environment as a holder of the 'Triple Crown' of international accreditations ([AACSB](#), [EQUIS](#) and [AMBA](#)), as a Principles of Responsible Management Education ([PRME](#)) signatory, and as a provider of numerous FT and QS ranked programmes, including our MBAs, MSc Finance and MSc Management programmes. New initiatives are continually evolving, for example, the 'Positive Impact Ratings' with a stated intention to "move business schools from becoming the best *in* the world, to becoming the

best for the world”([Dyllick and Muff, 2020](#)). But how much impact do these initiatives really have in changing behaviours and attitudes towards sustainability?

PRME is a UN initiative, with a mission to “transform management education and develop the responsible decision-makers of tomorrow to advance sustainable development” ([PRME, 2025](#)). There are currently over 850 PRME signatories globally, 109 of which are in the UK. To maintain membership, schools are required to report regularly on their progress, demonstrating a commitment to responsible management education. LUMS was a relatively late adopter of PRME, becoming a signatory in 2019 to support our strategy to be a responsible management school. This article reviews the effect of PRME accreditation on LUMS’ progress in embedding sustainability related content into its curriculum, using evidence collected for our PRME submissions in 2021 and 2023.

Methodology

In 2021 and 2023, as part of our Sharing Information on Progress (SIP) Reports, LUMS conducted two reviews to identify the prevalence of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) and responsibility themes in our Undergraduate (UG), Postgraduate Taught (PGT) and Postgraduate Research (PGR) curricula. Module handbooks were collected from each department (Table 1) and provided the principal data source. The handbooks contain an outline of the module content, assignment details, and academic reading lists. The findings were published in the LUMS 2022 ([LUMS, 2022](#)), and 2024 ([LUMS, 2024](#)) PRME SIP Reports which were available to all staff on our website.

Table 1 Module handbooks by Department

Department	2021	2023
Accounting and Finance	96	94
Economics	57	70
Entrepreneurship and Strategy	36	38
Organisation Work and Technology	55	40
Marketing	48	52
Management Science	83	72
Executive Education	28	38
Generalist PG (incl MBAs)	65	61
Generalist UG	18	17
Total	486	482

The documents were mined for usage and frequency of sustainability-related keywords, using terms derived from the Corporate Knights Better MBA methodology ([Corporate Knights, 2021](#)). In total there were 121 search terms. As the module handbooks are not standardised, and the information contained in them varies in both content and detail, the search was undertaken manually to ensure that terms that formed part of an instruction, schedule or were contained within a bibliography, were excluded.

Findings

Table 2 provides a summary of occurrences for the top 10 terms from 2021 and their relative performance in 2023.

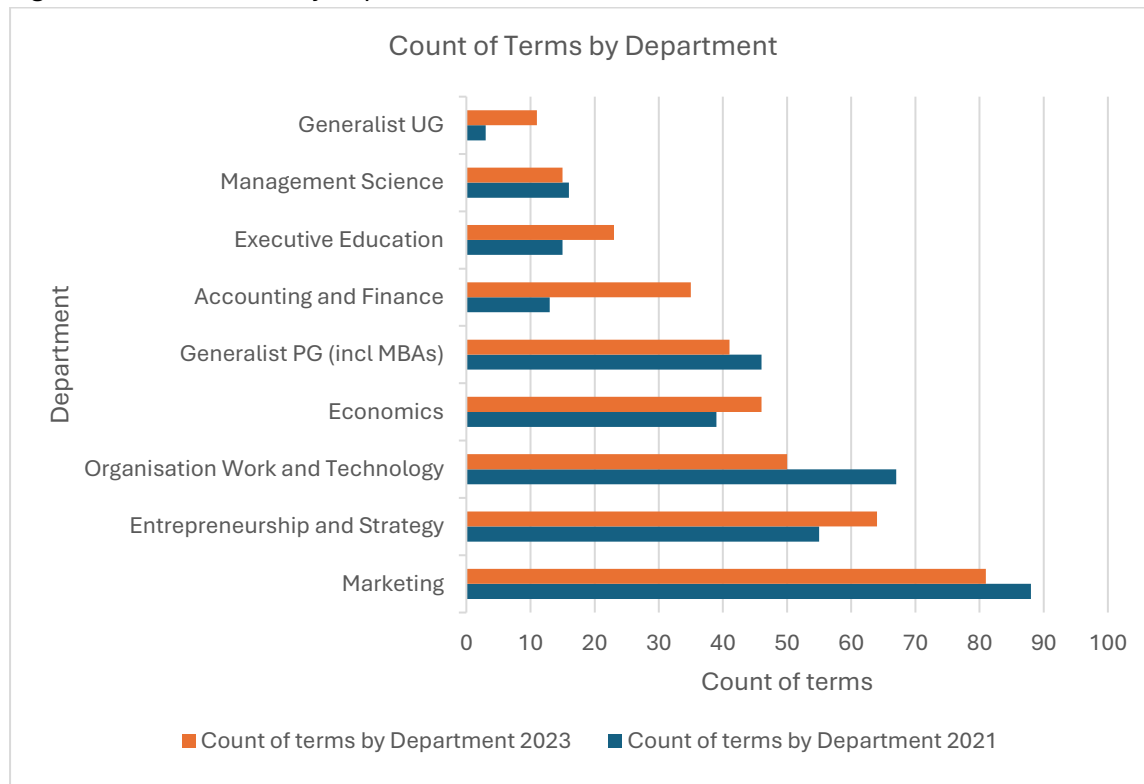
Table 2 Number of occurrences for top 10 terms in 2021 and in 2023

Term	2021	2023	+/-	%
Sustainable/ility	50	38	-12	-24
Ethics	32	48	16	50
Health	18	20	2	11
Governance ⁱ	17	32	15	88
(In)Equality	16	18	2	13
Diversity	13	21	8	62
Moral(ity)	13	9	-4	-31
Food	11	7	-4	-36
Gender	13	17	4	31
CSR	8	14	6	75
TOTAL	191	224	33	17

Although there was a small increase in the number of occurrences of SDG related terms in the handbooks over the period, it is notable that there was very little increase in the number of modules containing these terms, and that the content remained concentrated in circa 33% of the handbooks.

In 2021, of the 486 modules, only 33% (160) contained any of the search terms, and by 2023 this had only improved slightly to 36%. The gains and losses were spread across the department as shown in Figure 1. For example, Accounting and Finance saw a 22% increase in the number of SDG related terms used in their handbooks, but Organisation, Work and Technology saw a 17% decrease.

Figure 1 Count of Terms by Department



Overall, there was a 11% increase in the number of SDG related terms referenced in the module outlines (332 in 2021 to 366 in 2023). The analysis also showed that mentions of SDG related themes were concentrated in several pockets, most notably in the Departments of Marketing and Entrepreneurship and Strategy, and at Master's level on our Executive MBA programme.

Discussion

As noted by Alcaraz, Marcinkowska, and Thiruvattal (2011) "...PRME Secretariat has no intention (or resources) to judge the activities described in the SIPs or, even less, to verify them. Most likely, no one is going to check that the activities reported in the SIPs really took place." In LUMS, carrying out this analysis was an action directly driven by our PRME reporting requirements, however, the ensuing lack of consequence meant that there was no urgency or timeline by which to deliver change. Our PRME accreditation needs to continue to gain visibility and traction within the School, and, although it is competing in an already congested environment, it is encouraging to see signs of improvement. Some of our largest programmes at UG level now have core modules introducing students to complex ethical and environmental challenges they are likely to face in their working lives, and the Accounting and Finance Department has incorporated environmental, social and governance (ESG) topics into core modules at UG and PG level.

Alongside our PRME reporting, a research project focussed on the experience of our MBA and post-experience classes aimed to address themes around the effect of ESG related teaching on students, and their experience of studying at LUMS, has been conducted. The 'B-School to E-School' project asked what more we could or should do to drive change, both in terms of teaching, and behaviours. The findings of the report, in part, echoed the PRME analysis in that the programme content, and experience of studying at LUMS did not, despite many good intentions, necessarily reflect our 'responsible' ambitions.

Conclusion

Progress on incorporating sustainability and SDG related content in a systematic manner across the curriculum has been slower in LUMS than we might have expected. Despite our desire to be recognised as a ‘responsible’ management school, LUMS is still largely operating the ‘bolt-on’ method of operating as identified Muff (2013), rather than a truly embedded model. The increase in the use of sustainability-related terms suggests that, although overall these themes are gaining traction, they are not consistently being linked to specific subject areas, nor is the curriculum being strongly influenced or changed by the sustainability agenda.

Changes to the PRME reporting mechanisms mean that we will not have to repeat this level of detailed curriculum analysis in the future. However, the School has already developed plans based on the B-School to ESG-School work undertaken by Iszatt White and Watton for longer term curriculum development planning. This will aim to embed this type of content throughout the curricula and will be monitored regularly through the School’s annual planning return.

References

AACSB Business Accreditation Standards 2020

<https://www.aacsb.edu/educators/accreditation/business-accreditation/aacsb-business-accreditation-standards> (accessed 01/04/2025)

Alcaraz, Jose & Marcinkowska, Magdalena & Thiruvattal, Eappen. (2011). The UN-Principles for Responsible Management Education : Sharing (and evaluating) information on progress. *Journal of Global Responsibility*, 2, p160. <https://doi.org/10.1108/20412561111166021>

AMBA Accreditation Criteria 2022

https://www.associationofmbas.info/app/uploads/2022/11/AMBA_MBA-Criteria-June-2022_24pp_rev2.pdf (accessed 01/04/2025)

Corporate Knights Better World MBA Rankings Methodology,

<https://www.corporateknights.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/2021-Better-World-MBA-Methodology.pdf> (accessed 10/04/2025)

Dyllick, T., & Muff, K. (2020). A Positive Impact Rating for Business Schools: Case Study. *Sustainability*, 12(22), 9551. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12229551>

EQUIS Accreditation Standards and Criteria https://www.efmdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/EQUIS_Standards_and_Criteria.pdf (accessed 01/04/2025)

LUMS 2022 PRME Report <https://d30mzt1bxg5llt.cloudfront.net/public/uploads/sip-reports/LUMS-PRME-Report-2020-2021.pdf> (accessed 01/04/2025)

LUMS 2024 PRME Report <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/media/lancaster-university/content-assets/documents/lums/PRME-Report.pdf> (accessed 10/04/2025)

Muff, K. (2013). Developing globally responsible leaders in business schools: A vision and transformational practice for the journey ahead. *Journal of Management Development*, 32(5), 487-507. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02621711311328273>

PRME “About Us” <https://www.unprme.org/about/> (accessed 01/04/2025)

Author Profile

Rose White is the Accreditation and Rankings Manager at Lancaster University Management School. She has 15 years' experience in Higher Education and manages LUMS' suite of accreditations, including the 'Triple Crown' of AACSB, EQUIS and AMBA. Rose is an active member of national and international accreditation and rankings networks.

ORCID iDs

Rose White <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6012-8010>

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Neil Ralph and Dr Marian Iszatt White for their advice and guidance, Professor Jan Bebbington for her support with the PRME accreditation and Professor Radka Newton for her leadership of the SIME Network.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.
