

## **Invited Paper**

### **Scottish Family Businesses: Innovative Strategies for Education and Business Support**

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#### **Biographical Details**

Dr Claire Seaman holds the Chair in Enterprise and Family Business at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh, Scotland. She has published over 30 journal articles on family businesses in the UK, New Zealand and Latin America and is a regular contributor to family business conferences worldwide. Her recent book, *The Modern Family Business*, was developed with colleagues and published by Palgrave Macmillan. Claire maintains close links with the business community and business organisations such as the Scottish Family Business Association, Family Business United and local economic development agencies. She is a frequent speaker at gatherings of family businesses and professional advisors. This interaction enables her to share insights from evidence based research with practitioners, while ensuring that her research focuses on areas of importance to the family business community, and has led directly to current research that focusses on the European Family Business Associations. Experiences and close interactions with business and business support agencies help keep her professional work rooted into the realities and complex dynamics of families in business who create enterprises that dominate the economic and societal landscape around the world.

#### **Abstract**

Family business is of critical importance to economies, communities and societies across Scotland, but academic research that considers and supports this group of businesses through links to the policy agenda is in the relatively early stages of development. In 2017, it was estimated that the Top 100 family businesses in Scotland contributed 11% of on-shore GDP to the Scottish economy and supported around 100,000 jobs. The development of a 'Top 100' list for Scottish Family Businesses is key because it allows us to consider their economic importance alongside the wide range of international family business research that considers their differentiating factors. Building this bridge between academic research and policy is a current priority. This paper outlines some of the practical developments from this work, whilst contributing to the debate about the translation of academic research into the wider field of policy and business support. In opening the debate, the academic team at Queen Margaret Business School are also highlighting their willingness to engage with colleagues whose professional experience is similar or complementary and to share approaches that have worked across different countries, cultures and geo-political divides.

#### **Keywords**

Family business, small business impact, Scotland, business education, migrant communities

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## **Introduction**

This paper sets out to extend and enhance a debate on the number, nature and type of family businesses that operate across Scotland, the education and research activity that contributes to our understanding of them and the manner in which business support organisations contribute. In so doing, the authors relate some of the academic activity that has taken place at Queen Margaret Business School in Edinburgh and highlight areas for future development. Inherent within this discussion is an openness to the development of new and diverse networks that contribute to the future development of family business research, education, learning and support within a local and International context.

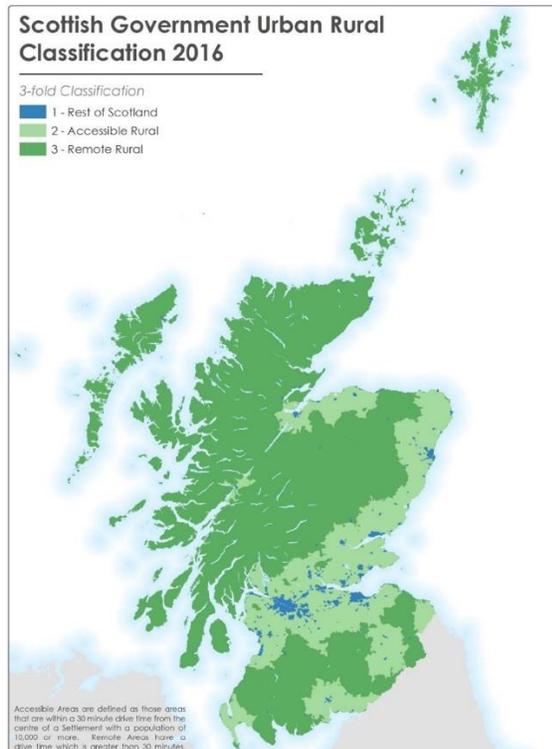
The debate on family business, their economic and social importance and indeed the factors that differentiate family businesses from the corporate model is extensive and, while relatively young in academic terms, well established. Worldwide, the economic importance of family business has been the subject of some discussion, which has reached a reasonably consistent conclusion that somewhere between 65-80% of businesses have some degree of family ownership, management or control. This debate has been bedeviled by a long standing discussion about definitions, which remains un-resolved and which in turn makes comparing figures from different research teams tricky. However, while this definitional debate is vital for researchers, it should not preclude our developing an understanding that family business is the most common sort of business in existence, probably one of the oldest forms of business and of crucial importance across cultures, continents and geo-political divides. Whilst this definitional debate has continued, further research from a variety of countries and research teams has continued to indicate that family businesses operate in a different model from those developed within the corporate model. A variety of authors conclude that family firms are more likely to take a long-term view (Brigham et al, 2014; Peng et al, 2018), can continue to innovate after the first generation (Rondi et al, 2018; ), draw heavily on the values of the founding family (Seaman and Bent, 2017; Seaman et al, 2018) and exercise high levels of corporate social responsibility and corporate citizenship (Bingham et al, 2011; Campopiani and De Massis, 2015). This is not to say, of course, that all family businesses are in some mysterious way 'good' or that they behave impeccably. In reflecting the values of the family (Kidwell, 2018; Terlack et al, 2018), there will be wide variation in the behaviour of family businesses even within their immediate social context. Add to this the relative longevity of family businesses, the propensity for migrant communities to start businesses (with the change inherent in the migration process) and societal change over time and a pattern emerges that sees family

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businesses contribute to economies and societies in a very wide range of ways and with considerable variation (Miller et al, 2018; Peng et al, 2018). Acknowledging this heterogeneity in family firm behaviour does not, however, preclude us acknowledging their importance on numerical and social grounds and asserting that their inclusion in the education and business support networks of a given country is appropriate [Dassler et al, 2006b; Collins et al, 2013]. Integrating the concepts of family, co-preneurialism (Jayantilal et al, 2016) and ethnicity into existing education and business support mechanisms is a challenge that offers substantial scope for debate, future research and the development of an integrated, diverse range of solutions. Developing this agenda is the primary focus of this paper, preceded by some commentary on the economic and social conditions prevalent in Scotland and the current provision for family business in education and business support services.

### **Scottish Perspectives**

Scotland is a relatively small country, with a current population of around 5.5 million (National Records Office, 2017) and a landmass of around 80K KM<sup>2</sup>. At present, Scotland is the most northerly country within the United Kingdom, with a devolved Scottish Government carrying certain powers whilst the UK Government in Westminster retains other functions. The landmass in Scotland includes cities, rural farmland and wilderness areas, including the Cairngorms and Northwest Highlands. At the referendum in 2014, Scotland voted to stay part of the United Kingdom and uses Sterling as its currency. Within Scotland, the distinction between urban and rural areas is very stark. The 2016 review by the Scottish Government classifies the landmass of Scotland into three areas: Urban, Accessible Rural and Remote Rural (Figure 1).



*Figure 1 Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification (2016)*

Key to an understanding of the geography of Scotland as it relates to family business, however, is an understanding that in remote rural areas, defined here by criteria that include accessibility, major inward investment and engagement from major international businesses is less likely. Family owned and managed small, medium and micro-businesses tend, therefore, to play an even more important role here.

Within Scotland as a whole, current estimates indicate that SMEs account for 99% private sector businesses in Scotland, 95% private sector employment and 38% private sector turnover (Scottish Government, 2014). From research literature, we know that around 65-80% private sector businesses are owned by families and, in addition, around 56% of businesses in Scotland are home based, accounting for 17% private sector employment and 10% private sector turnover (FSB 2015). Whilst precise numbers of family businesses are difficult to establish, in part because of the definitional debate but also because official statistics tend to focus on classifying businesses by business size, locale and sector of operation. The data available, therefore, are fragmented but compelling: family businesses are economically vital to Scotland.

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The development in 2017 of an annual 'Scottish Family Business Top 100' list, by Family Business United Scotland in conjunction with a number of partners including Queen Margaret Business School, aimed to provide accessible figures to highlight the importance of family business to, for example, policy makers. The Top 100 family businesses alone account for, for example, 11% on-shore GDP and maintain around 100K jobs. The data that emerged prove interesting in a wider sense because they highlight that some major family businesses continue to operate in rural areas where to some extent they assume greater relative importance as employers. Further, major inward investment often focusses upon geographic areas well served by transport links to the detriment of rural areas, highlighting the relative importance of rural family businesses. Rural family businesses are often relatively reluctant to undertake major geographic relocation, although this would merit further research. Family business in Scotland is not limited, however, to large business. Data on family engagement with small and micro-business is similarly difficult to clarify, but building on the percentage of small firms agreed through international research, their contribution is vital. Nor is family business limited to long-standing communities. The existence in Scotland of many diverse and highly entrepreneurial communities is well established (Dassler et al, 2006; Seaman et al, 2015; 2016), as is the tendency for new migrant groups to establish businesses in response to a variety of 'push and pull' conditions. Further, there is some evidence that where a family has expertise in business and/or the start-up process, that knowledge is often used by a variety of family members to contribute to a variety of businesses. By considering the unit of analysis as the family – as opposed to the business – research opens up an additional range of benefits conveyed by the family within one or more businesses. Further research would be welcome but importance is established (Nordqvist and Melin, 2010) and in this Scotland is unlikely to differ widely from the pattern observed in a variety of western countries.

Within the current economic strategy for Scotland, the Scottish Government has mapped out a number of priority areas, including food and drink businesses, sustainable tourism, biosciences, the creative industries and energy businesses. In identifying priorities, the Scottish Government has to some extent built on the currently existing aptitudes and skill set of business in Scotland. It has also, however, highlighted areas for economic development where high growth businesses might reasonably be found or developed and whilst the prioritization of high growth businesses remains key to economic policy current research also contends that the continuation of existing businesses through robust education and support in succession is also key (Goodison Group in Scotland).

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## **International Perspectives**

Family business research and business support is relatively well developed internationally. Whilst each country, including Scotland, presents its own unique blend of circumstances and history, there are very clear lessons that can be learned from an International perspective and it is here that ideas to support family businesses across the diversity of Scotland begin. Whilst it is not possible to cite every piece of research that contributed to this process, an early assessment of the priorities for Scottish family business indicated that we should address businesses of different size, operating in different sectors and geographic locations, with a wide variety of infrastructure challenges and run by very diverse families. The geographic diversity of Scotland, for example, lead us to look to Canada and Australia to ensure that micro-family-firms in rural areas were included in our thinking (Gill et al, 2014; Ratten et al, 2017). In particular, the link between types of governance and financial policy appeared to parallel closely the case in Scotland (Gill et al 2017) and contributed to the development of education in this area. Similarly, rural business (Ratten et al, 2014; Belmonte et al, 2016), the role of women in family businesses (Dugan et al, 2011; Ramadani et al, 2017), the links between innovation, creativity and social capital (Dana & Ramadani, 2015; Letonja and Duh, 2015; Cunningham et al, 2015; Seaman et al, 2015) and the propensity of family businesses to develop internationally (Ratten et al, 2017a; Ratten et al, 2017b) all contributed to the development of robust ideas.

One of the challenges in developing a portfolio of responses for family business in Scotland is the sheer breadth and diversity of literature that may contribute. Indeed, this is an on-going debate within the field of family business research. One example is where migration, the development of minority ethnic communities and family business research intersect. Family business and migration pre date written history and yet are a relatively young field of research, which has to some extent evolved in parallel with the fields of small business research and minority ethnic entrepreneurship. In practice, however, the strands overlap and contain common issues and challenges. This overlap provides a hinterland currently not fully explored and contextualized within research. There is a very clear need within the field of family business research to draw together current research from different fields, to highlight and conceptualize these hinterlands of as a working model for future analysis. The sometime artificial distinction between small business, population movement and family business is perhaps of especial importance where research is developed into practice and the routes or challenges to success are the real key drivers for all parties. The development of appropriate support systems through formal and informal networks

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is a key priority for communities, economies and the success of the family themselves and this makes the intersection between migration research, minority ethnic business research and family business research a very good example. It is not, however, the only area where research fields intersect. The development of theories around the multiple rationalities of business strategy and family strategy (Fletcher, 2002) has developed within small, family business research and offers an opportunity for research and practical business engagement at the intersection between family and business literature. Family strategy is a relatively under-explored subject within family business research, but early work by Saraceno (1989) offers useful insight. Saraceno (1989) views strategy as consisting of four elements:

1. The existence of an intelligent actor able to evaluate and to choose;
2. Relationships of interdependent interaction, where the subjects are endowed with the ability to alter each others behaviour by their own moves;
3. A given set of resources and constraints enabling choices to be made in the course of the interaction; and
4. A temporal horizon, where time is not only a resource or a constraint. i.e. relative to the allocation of time, but is the horizon within which the strategies unfold; the future in which the possible outcomes of choices and decisions are assessed; the present, in which they are evaluated; the past, which provides the choices with form and informational content.

Saraceno, 1989

There are many definitions of strategy and approaches that can be taken and the aim of this paper is not to explore these in detail. Saraceno's purpose, however, was to illustrate that the concept of strategy applies as much to the family as it does to the business, albeit with reservations about the extent to which the family can be considered a single subject or unit of analysis. By extending her work on strategy within a small family business context to acknowledge these multiple rationalities, Fletcher (2002) allows an explicit understanding of the intertwining of family and business strategy which is reflected in much family business consultancy. In practice, we see the 'three circles model' of family business (Harvard Business Review, 2018) used widely as a part business support and consultancy approaches that aim to help families find good routes forward. This approach to the syncretic production of the future for families and their businesses finds its routes in entrepreneurship research (Anderson et al, 2007) but highlights an important and

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positive approach taken at Queen Margaret Business School. The portrayal in the general media and indeed sometimes in academic research sometimes portrays family business as a flawed model that has to be improved (economics, management, strategy) or a source of problems that should be encouraged to heal (psychology, therapy) (Carlock and Ward, 2010). By viewing family businesses as a positive force for good and an integral part of societies, economies and communities, we encourage a view to develop whereby we ask how the challenges that present can be addressed rather than nullified. Carlock and Ward (2010) highlighted five key tensions that require governance and planning within the family business environment if the tension between the family expectations and the demands of the business are to be balanced (Figure 2)

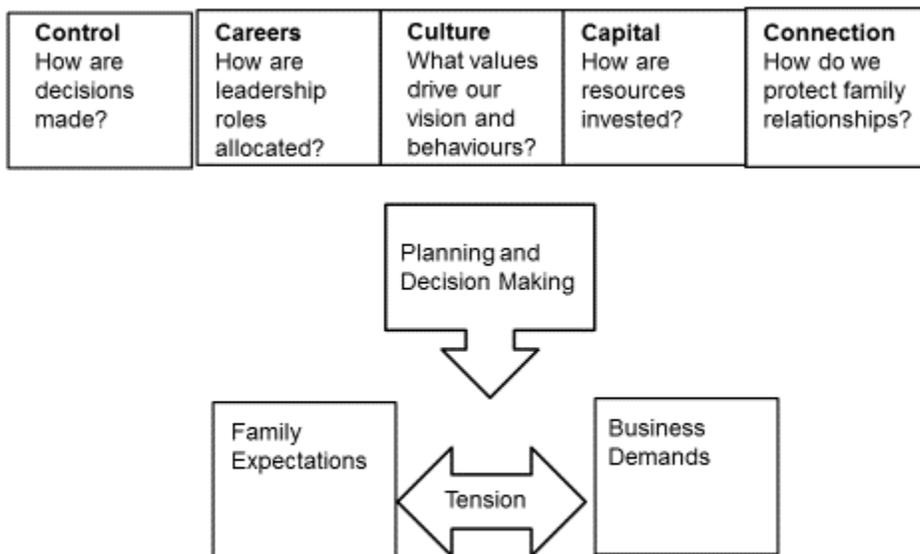


Figure 2 Globally Five Factors Demand Planning and Governance to Balance Business Demands and Family Expectations

From: Carlock, R.A. and Ward, J. (2010) When Family Businesses are Best. The Parallel Planning Process for Family Harmony and Business Success. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. p9

Finding routes by which research in a variety of areas can contribute to the dissipation of tension between family expectations and business demands emphasizes the breadth of research that could be taken into account whilst simultaneously reinforcing the concept of the family business research hinterlands. If we accept that the hinterlands where research focusses on matters of practical importance to family business has a role to play, blended with research that considers family business its primary focus, we allow for the development of new and improved impact.

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One of the ways in which businesses are both supported and engaged with on-going research is through the work of family business associations. Family business associations exist in many different parts of the world, with somewhat different societal norms, conventions and remits. Early comparative work between Queen Margaret Business School and the Universidad di Extremadura in Spain highlighted differences in provision. Within Scotland, the UK and Spain there exist various Family Business Associations that aim to support family businesses. Within the UK, the Institute for Family Business operates as a very effective membership organisation that primarily represents larger businesses. In contrast, the original Scottish Family Business Association was a free-to-join organisation supported by grant funding that offered opportunities for any business that self-defined as a family business but a lack of on-going funds contributed to its demise. In contrast, Family Business United Scotland, which is relatively new, operates in a manner that is much closer to the family business organisations in Spain, the Instituto de la Empresa Familiar (IEF). Businesses pay a certain amount annually and both organisations maintain close links with universities.. Evaluating the manner in which family business associations engage with their members, the services they offer (including training) and the philosophies that underpin their work is an under-researched area. In particular, the extent to which the family business associations engage with the research community varies widely, raising questions about the thinking that underpins the development of family business associations and the manner in which the research community engages with the wider field of family business. The development of an education pathway for Scottish Family Businesses as part of a collaboration with Family Business United Scotland is a direct development from this research, and springs in part from evidence from Spain that the IEF played a much stronger role in business education, policy and profile than had hitherto been the case in Scotland. The areas where both organisations now contribute to the family business agenda is summarized in Figure 3:

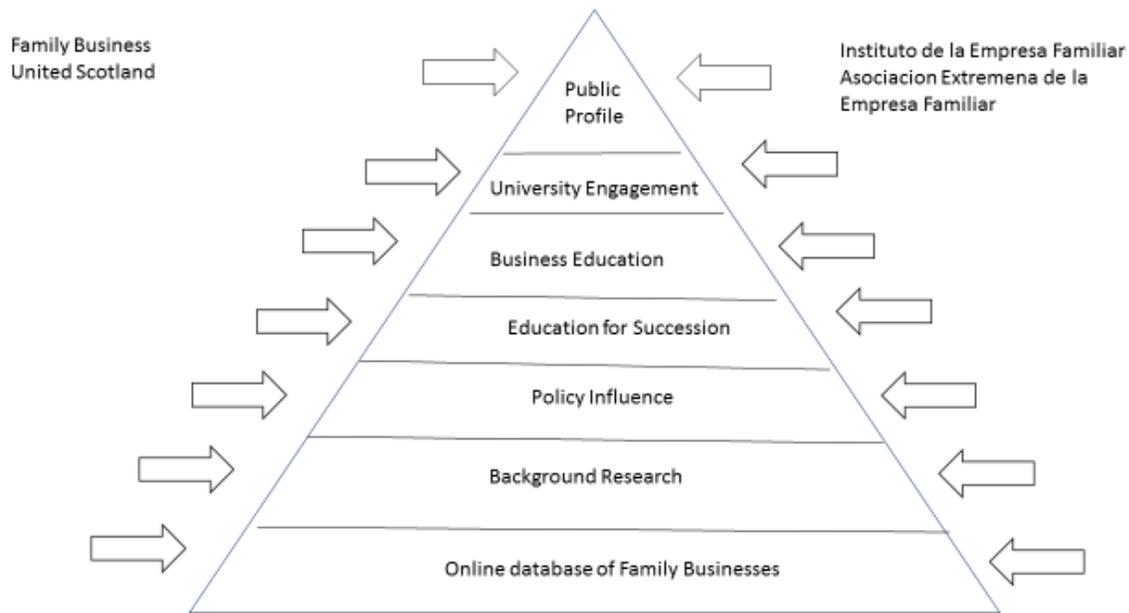


Figure 3: Family Business Associations in Scotland and Spain

### **Research, Education and Business Support Provision for Family Businesses in Scotland**

#### *Family and Smaller Enterprises Research Group*

Key to the development of research-lead business engagement, learning and teaching and indeed business support is an appropriate research base. This led to the development within Queen Margaret Business School of a Family and Smaller Enterprises Research Group built on an established pattern of research with a mission to foster ideas and intellectual capital concerning family and smaller enterprises. The group is purposed by the University with the development of research that takes into account both the established international body of knowledge around family and smaller enterprise but which also took account of the Scottish perspective. The objective of this group is the development of high quality research, impact cases, learning and teaching. This mention of 'impact' merits some explanation. Within the UK, the quality of research carried out by individual universities is assessed as part of the Research Excellence Framework (REF). REF happens every 5-6 years and builds upon the foundation of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) that preceded it. Crucially, however, REF requires individual research teams to demonstrate how their research has been used in the real world to create positive change and it is this definition of 'Impact' that is crucial here. Whilst there is much that has been and will be written about the development of REF Impact, the key for FaSE is the requirement in a UK University context to engage with the outside world (in this case, businesses

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and business support agencies), to make positive change happen outwith the University and to evidence that change as it is developed. This on-going research is carried out in conjunction with a variety of external parties including business support agencies; individual businesses and Family Business support organisations, although in this context the crucial partnership has been with Family Business United Scotland.

The history of family business associations in Scotland has a number of different dimensions. The original Scottish Family Business Association, which operated as a 'free to join' network for self-defined family businesses operated for some time in parallel with the Institute for Family Business (IFB). IFB is a membership organisation with a (relatively) high annual membership fee. The level of annual membership fee for IFB tends in practice to restrict its membership to larger family businesses and the middle ground is now occupied by the development of Family Business Unites Scotland (FBU Scotland). FBU Scotland is a development from the original Family Business United, which operates in England and Wales and which has now both expanded into Scotland and subsumed the Scottish Family Business Association. FBU Scotland aims to offer an unparalleled rallying point and voice for the Scottish family business community and an invaluable source of insight into the sector. This celebration of the family business sector and championing of their cause is vital in a country where family business have not traditionally been fully celebrated and where the mechanisms for business data collection tend to mitigate against full recognition of the importance of family owned businesses. FBU Scotland aims to create a community whereby families in business can share and learn from each other, to run programmes to help family firms deal with the challenges they face and to develop a voice for the Scottish family business sector.

By including educational priorities within their remit, FBU Scotland has effectively created a space for partnership with Universities and education providers in a more general sense. The partnership has so far developed an education pathway for family businesses in Scotland that includes a spectrum of opportunities from half-day seminars to doctoral education. The development of a strategic pathway, which allows individuals to enter or leave at any level, has been paralleled by attempts to ensure family businesses are part of the under-graduate and taught masters curricula. Extending that to professional doctoral level education *via* the creation of a DBA route and PhD research already being carried out allows the full remit of family business education to be considered and synergized with the wider research environment. The spectrum

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of doctoral level family and smaller enterprise research is relatively wide. Recent projects include work that focusses on knowledge management and innovation in family firms, comparisons of family and non-family business performance in listed firms, the use of social media to support small, family owned and rural enterprises and a raft of work that looks at family businesses in communities that trace their origin to Pakistan, Latin America, Ghana and Nigeria. Further work that looks at the role family firms play in community, at the development of family farms and their spin-off businesses and indeed the manner in which family firms develop networks and social capital is currently in development, alongside work with the business support organisations and advisory communities.

Key to this development of education, business engagement and research, however, is an understanding of the manner in which they fit together. This inter-play, summarized here as Figure 4, highlights the co-dependency within these disparate elements and the manner in which they synergize to allow real impact to develop.

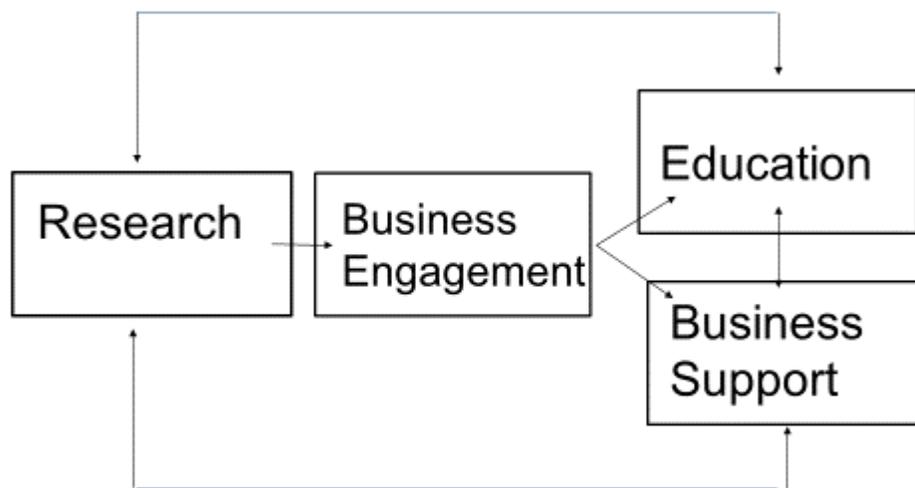


Figure 4: Capturing the Research, Knowledge and Practice Dynamic in Family Business

The interplay described in Figure 4 is vital to recent developments in family business work in Scotland and forms a cornerstone of this work. The more recent development of the 2017 Scottish Family Business Top 100 allows a bridge to policy makers to be more explicitly developed, by highlighting key facts and figures about family businesses in Scotland and the contribution they make to key strategic areas of economic interest. In 2018, the plan is to further develop this ‘Top

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100' to allow politicians and policy makes to see clearly the impact family businesses have on their geographic region or the area for which they hold a political remit. This process should also allow the disproportionate role that family businesses play in remote rural areas (Figure 1) to become more visible by highlighting the key players and indeed the jobs they represent. As this development continues through 2018, the plan is to distribute information to politians at all levels and policy makers in the diverse regions of Scotland.

## **Conclusions and Next Steps: Building the Bridge to Policy**

This paper outlines a number of identified activities that have contributed to the development of specialist work in the area of family and smaller enterprise at Queen Margaret Business School in Edinburgh. These different areas contribute in very different ways: academic study falls within this remit and the integration of family business study within our undergraduate and masters programmes, along with the developing PhD and DBA cohort, help to develop the landscape for business education in Scotland. Developing doctoral education with different family business *foci* and a variety of different communities in Scotland and beyond is a key focus.

Another key focus is building a much more explicit bridge to policymakers. In partnership with Family Business United Scotland, a list of the Top 100 Family Businesses in Scotland was developed, to highlight the importance of family businesses to the economy. Figures from Scotland in 2017 indicate, for example, that the Top 100 family owned firms contribute 11% of onshore GDP and employ 100,000 people. Taking into consideration that somewhere between 65-80% of businesses are family owned and managed, there remains a school of thought that suggests family business study has some relevance for all business students over and above the specialist options. These figures about the Top 100 family businesses in Scotland come from The Scottish Family Business Top 100, which was developed as a specific attempt to build a bridge between academic research, learning & teaching and the world of policy. The Scottish Family Business Top 100 is not a piece of academic research, but then that is neither its purpose nor its value. Academic research offers considerable insight into the manner in which family firms differ from firms without a family element, their benefits, disadvantages and nuances. What is much harder to glean from academic research is the detail of exactly what family firms mean for local economies or specific sectors of business, yet this is information that policy makers find useful. By developing the Scottish Family Business Top 100, we contribute numbers to the policy debate to influence thinking and thus to increase our impact on the business world. A good example is the food and drink sector, which represents one of the priority areas for the Scottish Government, where there are 17 family firms in the Top 100. Those 17 firms generate £266 million in profits before tax, employ 16,156 staff and contribute £3.6 billion in turnover annually. When it comes to convincing policy makers to take family firms seriously and hence of the value of engagement with the wider research agenda around family businesses in Scotland, such figures are a vital piece of the jigsaw.

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Continuing to build research, business engagement and education in parallel with the developing policy agenda remains key and an ongoing piece of work within Queen Margaret Business School.

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