

Ken Symon Business Editor

LEADING world business schools have dismissed claims that they are involved in a scheme to create a pounds-30 million "executive super-school" in Scotland.

IMD in Lausanne, Switzerland, and Harvard Business school in the US have denied any involvement with the scheme, despite suggestions in one newspaper report that they were shortly to sign up on the deal.

There have been a number of attempts going back years to create a business super-school in Scotland to train executives, which would attract top management academics, but this project is certainly not as has been reported.

Stewart Hamilton, a Scot who is professor of accountancy at IMD, which is based at Lausanne in Switzerland, said: "We are not involved in this project and, to our knowledge, Harvard isn't either. We hope some day a world-class executive school will emerge in Scotland but we do not believe it is this scheme.

"We are not involved in this project and will not be involved."

However, a third business school, Babson, has apparently said that it has had some discussions on the scheme that is being pushed by Hardie Associates, a marketing consultancy. However, there is no mention of the scheme on the Babson website. Reports on Babson's involvement in the RBS business school at Gogarburn are covered, however.

The apparent attempts to create a school were first reported in a front page story in Scotland on Sunday in November, but the facts are not as that report suggested.

It stated that Mace, the major construction group that built the pounds-350m Royal Bank of Scotland HQ at Gogarburn near Edinburgh, was involved in the scheme. The RBS site includes a business school for the company's executives.

The report had suggested that a site for the super-school project had already been chosen and that it would be a 100bed centre based within 30 minutes of a major airport, possibly in east central Scotland.

The school would supposedly be led by a dean or managing director on a salary of about pounds-150,000 and would focus on executive education rather than MBAs, which are taught in existing schools.

But, significantly, there is no mention of the scheme on the Harvard Business School website, which carries a digest of all stories involving the school and its academics.

And a Harvard Business School spokesman said: "I have checked with the executive director of our executive education programmes, and he knows nothing about this. Thus, this report in Scotland on Sunday has no basis in truth whatsoever."

It was suggested that the idea had emerged from a discussion last year involving ministers, business leaders and civil servants on ways to boost Scotland's economy.

Scottish business leaders, including several prominent members of the Entrepreneurial Exchange have given their backing to the idea of a world-class executive school. It appears to be this idea that the scheme outlined in the SOS report was hooking into.

Dennis Hardie of Hardie Associates who is behind the scheme was quoted in the Scotland on Sunday as saying: "If you sit in the lecture rooms at Harvard you will be with the directors of Shell or Microsoft. This is what we aspire to."

He has expressed the hope that a site would be announced imminently and that the building would be completed by 2008.

But Hamilton at IMD said that if that was their view, then the backers of the scheme had gone about it in entirely the wrong way.

Ian Parker, the marketing director of Mace, said: "There isn't really a project to be involved in at the moment. We have had discussions about a possible business school but it has not really developed to project stage.

"We have done work with Hardie Associates, in which they have operated as marketing consultants."

Hamilton said he was concerned that the scheme would make it more difficult for the idea of a single super institution for Scotland to become a reality.

There had earlier been hope that RBS would throw its weight behind a scheme which would help make it a reality. Instead it opted to create its own centre of executive development on its Gogarburn site.

The RBS school will run courses and training programmes designed in partnership with leading business schools, including Harvard and Babson. That is likely to be the only Scottish project in which Harvard is directly involved for some time to come.

NEED TO KNOW

THE FACTS A report suggested that a project to create a pounds- 30 million executive super-school in Scotland was imminent. But world-leading business schools Harvard of the US and IMD of Switzerland, which were reported to be signing up to the project, deny any involvement.

BACKGROUND The purported project comes against the backdrop of the long-held desire by leading business people and academics for Scotland to have its own world-class executive school to attract major talent here.