

# Master of Business Administration

The Master of Business Administration (MBA) is widely seen as the most prestigious qualification for business and management throughout the world. International students who study this popular programme in the UK value its ability to give them business and management skills at the highest level and its assistance in launching a business career.

## Checklist: why study for an MBA in the United Kingdom?

- The UK has a long tradition as a trading, financial and business centre, and an excellent reputation for educating international students to a high standard.
- More MBA students are educated by UK institutions than in the rest of Europe put together.
- You have a wide choice in what you study and how you study – you can take the classic general MBA or a specialist qualification in your own field.
- UK qualifications are recognised all over the world.
- The UK has 111 business schools, many of which have invested heavily in developing state-of-the-art learning facilities and attracting high-quality staff.
- The opportunity to improve your fluency in English will improve your job prospects and help both you and your employer develop international links.

## 1 What do I need to think about?

You must first determine whether you are likely to qualify for entry to an MBA, or whether another postgraduate Master's programme (MA; MSc) might better serve as a foundation either for further study or work in a functional area of management.

The MBA is very prestigious and necessary if you are aiming for a strategic management position. Entry is very competitive, and many business schools expect candidates already to have significant work experience in management. However, if you are interested in a career in functional management – for example, finance, human resources or information technology – you may wish also to consider the other postgraduate options. See our subject sheet on *Management* in this series.

Doing a specialised postgraduate course or following a foundation course would improve your chances of studying for an MBA at an appropriate stage in your career.

## 2 What can I study?

Almost all MBAs have three components: a taught programme of core modules, a range of elective modules from which the student chooses those most relevant to their career path, and a dissertation or work-based project.

**Core modules** consist of subjects needed to understand the operations of any organisation, such as:

- accountancy and financial management
- operations management
- marketing
- organisational behaviour

- human resource management
- information technology
- strategy.

**Elective modules** offer further specialisation in these core subjects.

### **Sector MBAs**

Some MBAs are specially designed for particular industries or sectors. They offer a comprehensive knowledge base equivalent to that of the general MBA, but replace elective subjects with specialised teaching in that specialism. There is a growing range available, including:

- public administration and government
- health and social services
- arts, museums and leisure management
- risk and insurance
- technology
- engineering
- retailing
- financial institutions
- defence.

**Some MBAs offer a special focus on:**

- international business
- globalisation
- leadership and entrepreneurship
- e-business.

Yet despite their similarities in structure, no two MBA programmes are identical. Business schools are located throughout the four countries that make up the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). They can be found in large cities, in regional capitals, in smaller towns and in ancient centres of learning. All these schools have extensive links with business, commerce and the public sector, both nationally and close to their home base. These links directly benefit students by providing research and placement opportunities and by enriching the curriculum with examples of actual management experiences. All business schools share a common mission – excellence in teaching and developing managers – but each has its own unique characteristics.

### **Modes of study**

MBAs can be studied in a variety of ways.

However, be aware that the part-time options may not be available to some international students.

<b>Mode of study</b>	<b>What it involves</b>
<b>Full-time</b>	An intensive one-year programme usually starting each September (although start dates vary), suitable for those who wish to either take a break or significantly change direction in their career. A high percentage of students are from overseas, and it is not unusual to find many different nationalities represented on a course.
<b>Executive MBA</b>	Business schools and universities use the term 'Executive MBA' to refer to



	<p>a programme for people who are improving their knowledge while they stay with the same employer. Candidates for Executive MBAs are usually nominated and supported by their employer with the expectation that their project work and dissertation will be directly related to the employer's sector. The Executive MBA can be offered as a fixed-term, part-time programme over two years (though executive modular courses are also available). A typical attendance pattern would be 15 weekends (Fridays and Saturdays) a year. Some contain international managers as participants, all sponsored by their employer.</p>
<b>Modular MBA</b>	<p>UK and EU students only. This is very flexible in its format, typically designed around one-week blocks complemented by self-directed study. There can be several entry points each year. Students take an average of three years to complete the programme (the minimum is two years and the maximum is eight years). A varied selection of electives enables students to focus on areas of particular interest or relevance. All modules are self-contained and students can also choose when to do them.</p>
<b>Open/distance learning</b>	<p>Many students now successfully study for their MBA through distance learning – one of the fastest-growing sectors of business education. Most distance learning programmes require attendance at workshops and residential weekends – often held at different locations throughout the world – and may take three to five years to complete.</p>

## Choosing the right course for you

### Checklist: choosing the right course

- Ask employers in your own country which business schools they respect, and ask alumni whether they would go to that school again if they had the chance.
- Consider whether you are looking for an international career, or a better understanding of the environment and dynamics of your current employer to help your progress. This will affect your choice of a general or specialist MBA.
- Decide what balance between theory and practice you think is best suited to you. Some MBAs are built around case studies, whereas others place more emphasis on management theory. Look at each institution's website or prospectus to get a feel for what it would be like to study there.
- Check course entry requirements against what you know to be your educational profile, your English language proficiency and your work experience.
- Bear in mind other factors, such as cost, location and size of business school, international mix of students on the programmes, provision of supervision for dissertations, and whether the business school has provision for supervising at a distance.
- Be aware that many schools now interview candidates overseas, but if at all possible you should still try to visit your preferred institutions to see if you like the atmosphere, and to assess the type of student they attract.
- The *Official MBA Handbook*, compiled by the Association of MBAs, offers advice and information on choosing a school (see 'Where can I find more information?').
- Not everyone is able to take a year or more out of work to study for an MBA. If you need to combine work and study, would distance learning suit you best?
- Do not confine your application to one location, unless this is unavoidable. There are excellent schools throughout the UK. Remember that outside London it is usually possible to live and study without long commuting journeys and living costs are generally lower.



## Ranking and reputation

In the UK there are 111 business schools that are members of the Association of Business Schools, the leading networking and representative body for British schools. Almost all offer MBA programmes, and can be found listed on the [www.the-abs.org.uk](http://www.the-abs.org.uk) website. All these schools have their teaching and research quality independently assessed by the Quality Assurance Agency, which publishes its reports on its [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk) website.

Thirty-seven universities also have MBA programmes that are accredited by AMBA (the Association of MBAs), which guarantees that the programme has achieved a given level of quality using international benchmark comparisons. AMBA-accredited programmes are listed on the [www.mbaworld.com](http://www.mbaworld.com) website.

Some employers feel that the reputation of the business school where you study the MBA is the most important factor in your choice. If this is the case it may be that you want to choose an AMBA-accredited course. However, AMBA courses are often filled quickly and because they are often in very prestigious universities the costs of the programmes are usually higher than the cost of other MBAs.

It cannot be claimed that good teaching and a positive student experience are the sole prerogative of those schools charging the highest fees. Many schools charging lower fees also achieve good ratings for teaching and the student experience. Please note that fees at the most prestigious schools are well beyond the maximum amount payable for those holding a British Council Chevening award.

There are other external ratings that may be consulted. The best known are produced by:

*Business Week*

*The Economist*

*The Independent*

*Financial Times*

*The Times*

*The Daily Telegraph*

*Forbes magazine*

*The Wall Street Journal.*

All these rankings can prove useful as a guide to high-quality providers but should also be treated with caution. There is no definitive list of 'top' business schools and you should look at a number of factors to find the best school for you as an individual. Look for MBA programme accreditation as an indicator of quality and talk directly to the school and its MBA alumni about their experiences and achievements.

For more information see *Choosing your postgraduate programme* in this series.

## 3 Entrance

Competition for places on well-regarded programmes is fierce. The *minimum* you could be asked for is:

- an honours degree or its equivalent; or alternatively a professional qualification regarded as equivalent
- managerial work experience; normally an MBA programme will require three years' management experience prior to entry, although there are a few that will accept newly qualified graduates or value any work experience; a few business schools offer a preliminary qualification that can be converted to an MBA after the candidate has gained the necessary experience
- depending on the overall profile of the candidate, some business schools will require a GMAT score (see below)
- a good understanding of both written and spoken English (IELTS level 6 or 7), though some schools ask for higher standards.

Institutions will want to know that you have not only fulfilled all these conditions, but have also excelled in them. Your personal characteristics are important, and an academic reference and several essays may also be asked for. Their assessment of your potential will be thorough and rigorous. You will almost certainly be interviewed, which can sometimes be done in your own country.

Once you have made your decision you need to ensure that your application gets the best consideration. Clearly indicate the details of your educational qualifications. A copy of your academic transcript is usually required. Also, be clear in your application about your work experience and the responsibilities you have had in each job. Remember that voluntary and leisure activity experience can help your profile, particularly if they have involved elements of leadership and organisation.



## The GMAT test

This is the Graduate Management Admission Test, based in the United States and sponsored by the Graduate Management Admission Council. It measures a candidate's academic potential for advanced management studies and is a standard and uniform predictor of graduate-level performance for the many candidates applying from all over the world, from a wide range of undergraduate colleges and universities.

For full details see the Graduate Management Admission Council official website [www.mba.com](http://www.mba.com).

Some business schools strongly encourage all full-time MBA applicants to take the GMAT test, and it is especially advised for international candidates. However, if your entrance profile is good the business school may not insist on the GMAT. A few schools do not rely on the GMAT at all, and several more use it at their discretion in the light of their knowledge about a candidate's overall profile.

## 4 Next steps

### Checklist: Your next steps

- Do your initial research for courses on [www.educationuk.org](http://www.educationuk.org) (for all UK courses), [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk), [www.postgraduate.hobsons.com](http://www.postgraduate.hobsons.com) and [www.mbaworld.com](http://www.mbaworld.com) (for courses accredited by the AMBA).
- Always ask each institution how their MBA is priced.
- Apply early – international candidates should make sure that their application is with the institution well before the closing date (often May) in case an offer is made requiring the candidate to attend a pre-session English programme.
- You should first ask a school whether or not they require GMAT. If they do, try to take the test by March of the proposed year of entry, and register as early as possible.

## 5 What else do I need to know?

The regulations for entry into the UK are constantly changing and it is vital that you check the Home Office Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) website ([www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk)) on a regular basis and check locally with your British Mission so you are aware of how UK immigration procedures will affect you.

With the introduction of the new Australian-style points-based system you will need to keep even more up to date with the new immigration system changes when applying for a visa or work permit. For information on the points-based system go to:

[www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/managingborders/pbsdocs](http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/managingborders/pbsdocs).

For advice on working in the UK:

[www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk](http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk).

For advice about visas;

[www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/studyingintheuk](http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/studyingintheuk).

For practical advice on living in the UK download *Studying and living in the UK* from [www.educationuk.org/bc\\_img/body/articles/pdfs/stud\\_live\\_uk.pdf](http://www.educationuk.org/bc_img/body/articles/pdfs/stud_live_uk.pdf).



## 6 Where can I find more information?

The British Council has produced the Education UK portfolio to provide international students with a wide range of information and guidance that will help them find out more about studying a UK course and other important issues, such as applying to study, entry clearance and living in the UK. The portfolio includes:

- The Education UK website and a number of country websites containing locally relevant information – [www.educationuk.org](http://www.educationuk.org)
- *The essential guides to education in the UK: Undergraduate and pre-university, Postgraduate and MBA\**
- *Universities, Colleges and Schools Handbook\**
- *Club UK* magazine,\* also available online at [www.educationuk.org/clubuk](http://www.educationuk.org/clubuk)
- *Postgraduate UK* magazine.\*

\* The publications are available at a selected number of British Council offices for students to use.

The Education UK websites are a valuable source of information, with a database of over 450,000 courses and profiles of institutions that contain details of entry requirements and course fees; some offer a virtual tour of their campus.

### **Association of MBAs (AMBA)**

25 Hosier Lane  
London EC1A 9LQ

Telephone +44 (0)20 7246 2686  
Fax +44 (0)20 7246 2687  
E-mail [info@mbaworld.com](mailto:info@mbaworld.com)  
[www.mbaworld.com](http://www.mbaworld.com)

### **GMAT enquiries in the UK**

US Education Advisory Service  
Fulbright Commission  
Fulbright House  
62 Doughty Street  
London WC1N 2JZ

Telephone +44 (0)20 7404 6994  
Fax +44 (0)20 7404 6874  
E-mail [education@fulbright.co.uk](mailto:education@fulbright.co.uk)  
[www.fulbright.co.uk/eas](http://www.fulbright.co.uk/eas)

### **MBA and GMAT enquiries in the Netherlands**

Regional Registration Centre  
CITO-Sylvan Prometric  
PO Box 1109  
NL 6801 BC Arnhem  
Netherlands

Telephone +31 26 352 15 77  
Fax +31 26 352 1278

### **Association of Business Schools**

344-345 Grays Inn Road  
London WC1X 8BP

Telephone +44 (0)20 7837 1899  
Fax +44 (0)20 7837 8189  
E-mail [abs@the-abs.org.uk](mailto:abs@the-abs.org.uk)  
[www.the-abs.org.uk](http://www.the-abs.org.uk)

### **GMAT enquiries in the USA**

Graduate Management Admission Test  
Educational Testing Service  
PO Box 6103  
Princeton  
NJ 08541-6103  
USA

Telephone +1 609 771 7330  
Fax +1 609 883 4349

### **Graduate Management Admission Test**

**Graduate Management Admission Council**  
[www.mba.com](http://www.mba.com)



## Other useful resources

*Official Guide to Choosing an MBA 2008*, Prentice Hall – the directory compiled by the Association of MBAs (AMBA), in association with *The Independent* newspaper, which includes advice on choosing a school; tables of specialist schools; open and distance learning degrees; and the graduate outlook. Available at website [www.mbaworld.com](http://www.mbaworld.com).

*Official Guide for GMAT Review*, 2007 edition, Educational Testing Service – this contains information on the new computer-adaptive GMAT, more than 1,000 real test questions, and more than 100 analytical writing assessment topics, strategies and explanations. Available through Amazon at [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk).

**Note:** please note that these publications may not be available at your local British Council office.

While every effort has been made to ensure that the information given here is correct and up to date, the British Council accepts no legal liability for its accuracy, currency or completeness.

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