

Master of Business Administration (MBA)

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.

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 105 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, a range of 'electives' chosen by the student as relevant to his or her career path, and a dissertation or work-based project.

The taught programme is made up of a core 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.

Some MBAs are specially designed for particular industries (such as finance or retailing), or sectors (such as the public sector). 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:

Specific sectors –

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

Particular emphases –

- international business
- globalisation
- leadership
- e-business.

Yet despite their similarities in structure, no two MBA programmes are exactly 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.

Mode of study	What it involves
Full time	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.
Executive MBA	Business schools and universities use the term 'Executive MBA' to refer to 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.
Modular MBA	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.
Open/ distance learning	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.



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 105 business schools, most of which offer MBA programmes. Thirty-seven of the MBA programmes are accredited by AMBA (the Association of MBAs) which guarantees that the programme has achieved a given level of quality. Accredited programmes are listed on the 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 other MBAs.

The other 68 business schools that are not AMBA-accredited are all members of the Association of Business Schools (ABS). The quality of many of their programmes is high and many choose not to go for AMBA accreditation since they wish to offer more specialised 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.



There are also external ratings. The best known are produced by:

- *Business Week*
- *The Economist*
- *The Financial Times*
- *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 6-7), though some schools ask for higher standards.


Institutions will want to know that you have not only fulfilled all these conditions, but have 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 transcript is usually required. Also, be clear in your application about your work experience and the responsibilities you have had in each job; and remember that voluntary and leisure activity experience can help your profile.

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



Some business schools strongly encourage all full-time MBA applicants to take the GMAT test, and it is especially advised for overseas 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

- 1 Do your initial research for courses on www.educationuk.org (for all UK courses), www.prospects.ac.uk, www.postgraduate.hobsons.com and www.mbaworld.com (for courses accredited by the AMBA).
- 2 Always ask each institution how their MBA is priced.
- 3 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.
- 4 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?

You should bear in mind immigration requirements when considering whether to study in the UK. Requirements vary according to your nationality or citizenship and the length of time you want to study. You will not be allowed to extend your permission to stay in the UK for more than two years on courses that are below degree level and are of less than one year's duration. The UKCOSA website will give you further information on this topic – www.ukcosa.org.uk/pages/guidenote.htm

Note in particular that you will not be given permission to enter the UK as a student if the school, college or university that you want to study at does not appear on the UK Department for Education and Skills Register of Education and Training Providers. You can check the register by clicking on 'Browse the Register' at www.dfes.gov.uk/providersregister/

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

6 Where can I find more information?

British Council

Website www.educationuk.org and
www.educationuk.org/scotland

Find details of your nearest office at
www.britishcouncil.org/home-contact-worldwide.htm
which includes links to all our country web pages and
a worldwide address book giving contact details for all
offices

Association of MBAs (AMBA)

25 Hosier Lane
London EC1A 9LQ
Telephone +44 (0) 20 7246 2686
Fax +44 (0) 20 7246 2687
Email info@mbaworld.com
Website www.mbaworld.com

Association of Business Schools

344-345 Grays Inn Road
London WC1X 8BP
Telephone +44 (0) 20 7837 1899
Fax +44 (0) 20 7837 8189
Email abs@the-abs.org.uk
Website www.the-abs.org.uk

Graduate Management Admission Test

Graduate Management Admission Council

Website www.mba.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
Email education@fulbright.co.uk
Website 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

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

Other Resources

Official MBA Handbook 2005-2006 by Michael Pilgrim (21st edition, Financial Times/ Prentice Hall, ISBN 0 2737 0608 X) – MBA schools directory compiled by the Association of MBAs (AMBA), which includes advice on choosing a school; tables of specialist schools; open and distance learning degrees; and the graduate outlook.

Official Guide for GMAT Review (11th edition, Educational Testing Service, summer 2005) – 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 the Fulbright Commission website www.fulbright.co.uk/eas/bookstore/

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