



European Quality Link

International Association of Quality Assessment and Accreditation Agencies

EQUAL MBA GUIDELINES



PREAMBLE

The European Quality Link (EQUAL) is the international association of quality assessment and accreditation agencies in the field of business and management education. EQUAL operates for the benefit of member business schools, students, end users and society at large.

TITLES, CHARACTERISTICS & CATEGORIES

The MBA is a generalist, postgraduate qualification at the Master's level. It must correspond to appropriate intellectual and academic standards for Master degrees and integrate personal development.¹ The MBA is also a post-experience qualification, and the harnessing of prior work experience within a learning group is a unique feature of the MBA programme that should be explicitly built upon. It is normally positioned as a career accelerator for experienced management or a means to make a career shift for specialists or practicing managers, and in most cases is designed to be suitable for those without a prior degree in a management subject, in addition to those with a management degree. The focus of the MBA is therefore on the integration of management concepts with a practical focus to enable graduates to practice successful strategic leadership in complex situations. The designation 'MBA' should be used sparingly for qualifications that fit this definition.

The designation 'Executive' MBA should meet the requirements above but should specifically be targeted at participants with senior management experience (normally more than seven years postgraduate experience, with some at a leadership level). Programme design and delivery should reflect the needs of students significantly more advanced in their professional careers.

A fully specialised Master's degree should not be called an MBA. Pathways, 'labels' or sector-specific programmes are acceptable as long as the MBA retains its essential generalist core.

Programmes designed to help inexperienced graduates prepare for their entry into professional life should not be called an MBA and should normally carry an alternative title.

STUDENT ADMISSIONS

As a Master's level qualification, admission to an MBA programme will normally require at least a first degree or equivalent. This requirement should only be waived exceptionally in the case of candidates with substantial and proven professional experience, alongside other evidence of their ability to perform at the Master's level. As a post-experience qualification, the MBA should be designed solely for participants with at minimum 2-3 years of relevant postgraduate work experience. Admission to an MBA programme should be through a rigorous process of selection to ensure that only qualified participants are given access to the programme. This should normally include a personal interview.

¹ For example, see *Dublin Descriptors for second cycle awards*: <http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/building-the-european-higher-education-area/bologna-basics/Bologna-an-overview-of-the-main-elements.aspx>

DURATION

As an intensive programme designed for those who may not have an academic background in management or related subjects, it is expected that the MBA would include a substantial proportion of structured contact (not limited to class room contact) between faculty and the learning group and within the learning group itself. An MBA programme should be intellectually demanding and critically reflective, requiring a substantial personal investment in terms of commitment and effort. It should be designed to incorporate a combination of intellectual academic rigour and practical application.

It is expected that an MBA would provide for ample interaction between both participants and faculty, which is particularly important for the development of transferable 'soft' skills. The MBA delivery modes (such as full-time, part-time, online learning, distance learning, blended learning) must each offer an equivalent intensity and must include appropriate features to ensure the achievement of curricular requirements and interaction defined above. Programme design should ensure that participants have sufficient opportunities for synchronous², interactive learning with each other and with the faculty as part of a shared learning journey, building on the experience of the group, in addition to other asynchronous interactive platforms.

KNOWLEDGE & UNDERSTANDING

There is an expectation that general Master level programmes should provide a broad, analytical and integrated study of business and management. Graduates will be able to demonstrate relevant knowledge of, and critical engagement with, the key issues in strategy and leadership alongside more broadly the types and networks of organisations, the external environment in which they operate and how they are managed. This broad awareness implies the ability to manage diversity.

“Strategy and Leadership” – given the MBA’s focus on the integration of general management and the development of future business leaders, a consideration of the role of strategy and leadership should be central to the MBA curriculum, fostering the ability to make decisions in non-standard situations in an autonomous way.

“Organisations” - this encompasses the internal aspects, functions and processes of organisations including their diverse nature, purposes, structures, stakeholders, governance, operations and management, together with the individual and corporate behaviours and cultures which exist within and between organisations and their influence upon the external environment. The term organisations should be widely interpreted and cover private and public sector organisations, non-government and not-for-profit organisations.

“External environment” - this encompasses a wide range of national and international factors, including macro-economic, environmental, ethical, legal, political, sociological and technological, together with their effects at local, national and international levels upon the strategy, behaviour and management of organisations.

“Management” - this encompasses the various processes, procedures and practices for effective and responsible management of organisations. It includes theories, models, frameworks, tasks and roles of management together with rational analysis and other processes of decision making within organisations and in relation to the external environment.

² See <http://edglossary.org/synchronous-learning/> and <http://edglossary.org/asynchronous-learning/>

Within the framework of these four main areas, it is expected that graduates will be able to demonstrate theoretical and practical knowledge and understanding in the following areas:

- **markets** - the development and operation of markets for resources, goods and services
- **customers** - customer expectations, service and orientation
- **finance** - the sources, uses and management of finance; the use of accounting and other information systems for managerial applications
- **people** - the management and development of people within organisations, theories and practice of leadership and the development of multicultural and diversity understanding
- **operations** - the management of operational processes and resources
- **information systems** - the development, management and exploitation of information systems and their impact upon organisations
- **communication and information technology** - the comprehension and use of relevant and current communication and information technologies for application in business and management
- **business policy and strategy** - the development of appropriate policies and strategies within a changing environment, to meet stakeholder interests in for example: internationalisation and globalisation, business innovation, creativity, enterprise development, and knowledge management
- **responsible management** – ethics, sustainability, corporate social responsibility and risk management.

The curriculum should be highly integrative, building on prior knowledge and work experience, to demonstrate the importance of a holistic understanding of contemporary management with a focus on strategy and leadership. The later part of the programme may make provision for electives and may include the possibility for participants to choose a major area of study or specialisation.

SKILLS

Successful graduates should be able to demonstrate a range of cognitive and intellectual skills together with techniques specific to business and management. Given that the MBA is designed to prepare students for senior management roles, it is essential that graduates should also be able to demonstrate relevant personal and interpersonal skills. These include:

- cognitive skills of critical thinking, analysis and synthesis. This includes the capability to identify assumptions, evaluate statements in terms of evidence, to detect false logic or reasoning, to identify implicit values, to define terms adequately and to generalise appropriately.
- effective problem solving and decision making using appropriate quantitative and qualitative skills including identifying, formulating and solving business problems.
- the ability to create, evaluate and assess a range of options together with the capacity to apply ideas and knowledge to a range of situations in conditions of limited knowledge or uncertainty.
- effective communication, oral and in writing, using a range of media which are widely used in business including the preparation and presentation of business reports.
- interpersonal skills of effective listening, negotiating, persuasion and presentation.
- numeracy, mathematical and quantitative skills including statistical data analysis, interpretation and extrapolation; management science skills as support to the decision-making processes in an organisation the use of models of business problems and phenomena.
- effective use of communication and information technology for business applications.
- effective self-management in terms of time, planning and behaviour, motivation, self-starting, individual initiative and enterprise.
- effective performance, within a team environment, including leadership, team building, influencing.
- project management skills.
- ability to conduct research into business and management issues, either individually or as part of a team for projects/dissertations/presentations. This requires familiarity with and an evaluative approach to a range of business data, sources of information and appropriate methodologies, and for such to inform the overall learning process.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The programme should be designed explicitly to position theory into practice, building on the practical experience of the participants in addition to the academic and practitioner expertise of the faculty.

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Given the interconnectedness of today's global economy and its importance for strategy and leadership which are cornerstones of the MBA, it is essential that MBA degrees offer and encourage an international learning experience. This can be delivered in many ways, for example through: the curriculum, student exchanges, cross cultural environments, international work placements, learning a foreign language and study visits. The critical element is that students are challenged to think beyond national borders.

ASSESSMENT

It is essential that the objectives and learning outcomes for the programme are comprehensive, clearly articulated and measurable.

Participants in an MBA programme should be rigorously assessed through a balanced regime of examinations and graded assignments in order to ensure that learning objectives are being met up to Master's degree standards. Assessment should include an appropriate mix of formative and summative assessment methods.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EQUAL would like to acknowledge the outputs of several organisations in the drawing up of these Guidelines. These include: the Association of MBAs (UK) and EFMD (Belgium).

MEMBERSHIP OF EQUAL

- AACSB International, US
- ABS-Association of Business Schools, UK
- AEEDE, ES
- AMBA, UK
- ASFOR, IT
- Association Nationale des IAE, FR
- Association of Business Schools - Finland, FI
- BMDA, LT
- CAMBAS, CZ
- CEEMAN, SI
- CFBSD, CA
- Chapitre des Ecoles de Management, FR
- CLADEA, Consejo Latinoamericano de Escuelas de Administración, Peru
- ECONA, NO
- EFMD, BE
- FIBAA, Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation, DE
- FNEGE, FR
- FORUM, PL
- GMAC, US
- RABE, Russian Association of Business Education, RU
- SEFE, FI
- Swedish Association of Graduates in Economics and Business Administration, SE
- VSNU, NL