
Accreditation Review 2.4

Robert Owen, and Mark Stoddard, Association of MBAs, and Dr. Patrick Tissington, Aston Business School

DBA Criteria

In August 2005, the Association of MBAs launched the criteria for the accreditation of DBA (Doctor of Business Administration) programmes. This completes the Association's portfolio of accreditation for postgraduate degrees in general management, alongside the recent PEMM (pre-experience Masters in general management) accreditation that complements the Association's long-standing MBA accreditation.

The widening of the accreditation portfolio has been a response to demands from the marketplace – business schools, students, graduates, and corporates alike – to provide a guarantee of quality, as well as clarity over the differences between these degrees, in a burgeoning international marketplace for management education.

Accreditation by the Association of MBAs is an independent, international and programme-specific assessment scheme, ensuring excellence and continual development in postgraduate management education. The criteria, while setting the norms that accredited programmes are expected to meet, are designed to allow for innovation and the assessment of the overall quality – the outputs – of degree programmes.

Issues of clarification and quality have become increasingly important with regards to the DBA. Ever since the DBA was first developed in the USA, debate has ensued over the exact nature of the degree, and its relationship with the more traditional doctoral-level degree, the PhD. As accreditation is market driven, and therefore exists to protect the consumer, the criteria play an important role in educating potential students about exactly what the DBA should do for their personal and career development, and allow them to make an informed choice about the relevance of the degree for their future aspirations.

The number of DBA programmes offered worldwide is increasing rapidly. Naturally, concerns over the quality of some of these programmes have arisen, especially in light of the confusion over the exact nature of the degree.

The Association's accreditation will provide a clear signal as to the exact nature of a quality DBA programme, including the knowledge, skills and understanding that a DBA graduate will expect to develop, as well as the expectations that an employer can have of a graduate from an accredited programme.

The criteria defines the DBA as:

“...a Doctoral level, research-based qualification, designed to make a contribution to the enhancement of trans-disciplinary professional practice in management as well as a contribution to knowledge via the application and development of theoretical frameworks, methods, and techniques. A DBA places emphasis on the novel application of theory, rather than the creation and testing of theory.”

In essence, this means that the DBA is primarily a research degree, rather than a taught doctorate, and is equivalent in standing and workload to a PhD - but with an applied bias rather than a more theoretical one. The research undertaken for the DBA must therefore be applied to ‘live’ business problems, and the link between theory and practice must be demonstrated.

As a research degree, the thesis is the main piece of work that will be assessed for the award of the DBA - although assessed taught elements are acceptable on a DBA programme, provided that they allow enough time for students to complete a significant piece of research work. As such, the DBA may involve more ‘directed’ study than a traditional PhD, though this is not necessarily the case. Thesis assessment must include an oral defence (viva voce).

This differentiates the DBA from other high quality ‘professional doctorates’ as a research qualification rather than a taught programme. For example, the doctorate in clinical psychology is largely a taught professional qualification similar to that of medical doctors. In contrast, the graduate from an accredited DBA programme will be seen to have built on the broad business education achieved (probably via the MBA) and be qualified as an independent researcher having carried out a major piece of original research.

The focus of the accreditation assessment of the DBA thesis, and the programme as a whole, will be on the outcomes of the programme – in terms of what a DBA graduate should be able to do on completion of the degree, and in terms of the relevance of their work to potential employers. The criteria define the outcomes as follows:

5.2 The purpose of a DBA is to:

- (i) contribute to the enhancement of trans-disciplinary professional practice in management;
- (ii) equip graduates to undertake business management research;
- (iii) develop scholarship through business management research.

5.3 In terms of knowledge and understanding, a DBA graduate will develop:

- (i) Doctoral level in-depth knowledge and understanding of one or more areas of business and management;
- (ii) the ability to create, and then integrate, new knowledge;
- (iii) an in-depth knowledge of research design, research methodology, and the management of research;
- (iv) understanding of the role of the internal and/or external consultant;

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- (v) the ability to defend research proposals and research outcomes;
 - (vi) the ability to go into, and work in, a variety of organisational contexts, and to innovate and manage change.

5.4 Employers can expect graduates to:

- (i) work in a variety of organisational contexts;
- (ii) solve business problems based on new research, understanding the role and limitations of research in solving business problems;
- (iii) adopt innovative and creative solutions to business problems and opportunities;
- (iv) bring new and relevant scholarship to bear on a business management problem;
- (v) be able to present scholarly research to both academic and non-academic audiences.

Another important feature of the criteria revolves around the adequate provision of supervision for DBA students. This is a key issue given the oft-sited problems with resourcing a critical mass of well-qualified, experienced supervisors for doctoral programmes worldwide. Supervision is an essential element of doctoral degrees, and accredited programmes will have to ensure that there are procedures in place to guarantee that students have regular access (both formally and informally) to effective interaction with their supervisory team.

It is also expected that, in order to carry out effective applied research in the field of general (trans-disciplinary) management, students will have at least three years relevant and appropriate managerial work experience, and hold either an MBA or a Masters degree in management.

Accreditation is attractive for institutions as a method of identifying programmes as upholding the quality standards already described and a framework to distinguish the type of programme on offer. The process of accreditation has always been intended to be one where quality is identified and recognised but not through the imposition of excessive bureaucracy.

Dr. Carol Vielba, Associate Dean for Academic Quality and Standards at Cass Business School, and a member of the Association's DBA Working Group that developed the criteria in conjunction with the Association's International Accreditation Advisory Board, added: "The DBA fills a gap in the market for those already qualified at postgraduate level that want to take multi-disciplinary and applied management studies to a higher level. It is a qualification that builds logically on the MBA (or other Masters level management programmes), but at the same time is something distinctive. This is why the Association's move to develop a set of quality standards and output-based criteria for the DBA is so important. Students should find programmes specified in a way that helps them to decide whether the DBA is the right course for them and what they can expect from a quality DBA. Business schools can use the criteria to develop DBA programmes that incorporate best practice. And for employers the criteria provide a straightforward description of the skills they can expect a holder of the DBA to possess."

The full DBA accreditation criteria can be [downloaded here](#).

In the initial phase, DBA accreditation is only open to institutions that already offer an accredited MBA portfolio. This will ensure a certain consistency of general standards in postgraduate management education while the accreditation process is being developed.¹

In addition to the DBA, the Association has also extended its accreditation portfolio to include the accreditation of PEMM degrees. The first group of programmes to achieve this recognition of excellence are listed below.²

Accreditations

The Association now accredits MBA programmes at over 100 different institutions, and in 40 different countries. Recent accreditations and re-accreditations are listed below. Please click on the name of the institution to enter their website.

Recent Accreditations

[University of Southampton School of Management](#)

[Audencia Nantes School of Management](#)

[International University of Monaco](#)

[Kent Business School, University of Kent](#)

[Tias Business School](#)

[Maastricht School of Management](#)

[School of Management, Royal Holloway College, University of London](#)

Recent Re-Accreditations

[Nottingham University Business School](#)

[Bristol Business School \(UWE\)](#)

[EM Lyon](#)

[Theseus International Management Institute](#)

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PEMM Accreditations

[The Birmingham Business School](#)
MSc in International Business

[ESCP-EAP European School of Management](#)
Masters in European Business

[Grenoble Graduate School of Business](#)
Master in International Business

[HEC School of Management](#)
Master of Science in Management

[IAE Institut d'Administration des Entreprises, Aix-en-Provence](#)
Master Administration des Enterprises 'Double Competence'
'Master Sciences du Management

[Kingston Business School](#)
MA in Business Management

[EM Lyon](#)
MSc in Management

[NIMBAS Graduate School of Management](#)
MA in International Business and Marketing Management

[Business School, Oxford Brookes University](#)
MA in Management
MSc International Strategic Management

[Graduate School of Business, the University of Strathclyde](#)
MSc in Business and Management

[Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School](#)
Masters in General Management

Accreditation News

Business Leadership Review is pleased to be co-sponsoring the European Leadership Learning Award, in conjunction with IEDC - Bled School of Management, Exeter Centre for Leadership Studies, ESMT European School of Management and Technology, and Solvay Business School. For more details on this award, please [click here](#).

The Association's 2nd annual Deans and Directors Conference in Latin America, on 25th – 27th August in Región de Los Lagos, Chile, was an extremely successful and well-received event.

The combination of outstanding speakers, delegates from some of the finest schools in Latin America, Europe and North America, an excellent programme and a wonderful setting resulted in a perfect opportunity to refresh knowledge, share insights and reinforce networks. The Latin American perspective pervaded all the presentations – even if the subjects presented were deliberately of universal concern – providing the conference with a distinctive character.

Sessions covered such diverse topics as: knowledge management; the business school market; career development in the MBA; the balance between teaching and research; internationalisation; and the rankings.

Presentations from the Conference are available on the Association's website.

¹ For further information on DBA and PEMM accreditation, please contact: Robert Owen, Director of Accreditation Services, on: r.owen@mbaworld.com; +44 (0) 207 246 2657

² To view the press release for the first PEMM accreditations, please [click here](#).

His teaching and research areas are: Strategy, Innovation, Marketing and Change. He also works as a Consultant at Universidad del Pacífico and in the GCP of Wharton School