

MBA Accreditation in Detail

With so many MBAs on offer around the world, it can be bewildering for the potential applicant to choose between seemingly similar programmes. However, not all programmes are of the same quality and a simple and instructive way of narrowing the choice is to investigate which schools are accredited.

There are three international accrediting bodies for business schools. These are:

- AMBA - the Association of MBAs, based in the UK
- EQUIS - the quality assurance scheme run by the European Foundation for Management Development (efmd) and based in Brussels
- AACSB – the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, based in the USA

To achieve accreditation by one of these bodies is an achievement in itself. To achieve accreditation by all three bodies is a truly outstanding accomplishment and one to be proud of.

Only 23 schools in the world have accreditation from AMBA, EQUIS and AACSB. Strathclyde is one of them and as a result can justifiably claim to offer excellent management education.

AMBA

With so many MBAs on offer, quality has become the key. AMBA was set up in 1967 to promote the MBA to institutions, prospective students and employers and to ensure the quality of programme produces professional managers. The accreditation process was established to secure these objectives. The process is market-driven and international in focus, and each business school offering an MBA are assessed against a set of criteria established by AMBA's Independent Accreditation Advisory Board.

For potential students, accreditation provides a reliable list of schools tested for quality. For business schools, it gives international credibility to their MBA provision and an overview of their position against international standards. For the MBA graduate, it gives reassurance of the degree's value at a time when the market risks saturation, and for the employer it guarantees the quality of the MBA. It confirms that to recruit an MBA from an accredited school is to recruit top talent.

Accreditation panels conduct the accreditation visits and they are drawn from a pool of academics who are closely involved with accredited MBA programmes in business schools world wide, and practitioners who are

familiar with both business school academia and corporate management development, ensuring that each accreditation panel is well equipped to assess the quality of nominated MBA programmes. AMBA specifically accredits the programme itself.

Initially, AMBA has a discussion with a business school seeking first time accreditation to establish whether it would be appropriate for that school. If so, the school completes a self-audit and this is used to assess whether an accreditation visit would have a successful outcome – if so, the school moves to the next stage. A pre-assessment visit follows to evaluate facilities and the on-site assessment visit takes a full day, following a pre-arranged timetable, with four or five personnel making up the panel.

The panel evaluates each MBA route individually, including programmes delivered in conjunction with partner institutions and taking into account the quality of the institution itself. Quality of teaching is assessed, as well as research, administrative support, resources and facilities, faculty size, admissions procedure, quality of student body, design and content of curriculum, structure, duration and delivery.

Their report then recommends accreditation, accreditation subject to qualification, or non-accreditation. Accreditation is valid for up to five years, after which a school must submit for re-accreditation. Any circumstances adversely affecting the MBA programme during the period of accreditation means that AMBA can either suspend or cancel the accreditation award.

USGSB has been AMBA accredited for many years and this year was successfully reaccredited for a further five years.

EQUIS

EQUIS' fundamental objective is to raise the standard of management education worldwide. Its focus is not primarily on the MBA programme, but on all management programmes offered by an institution from a first degree up to the PhD.

EQUIS is intended to provide recognition that the accredited institutions are not only attaining high standards in their national market, but are also credible in the international arena. Institutions accredited by EQUIS must demonstrate not only high general quality in all dimensions of their activities, but also a high degree of internationalisation.

Deans of reputed academic institutions, managing directors and HR directors of major corporations, heads of national professional associations, consultants, and assessment experts form the pool from which the international peer review teams are drawn.

A school initially applies to enter the scheme, and then goes through a preliminary eligibility screening to determine whether there are major obstacles to eventual accreditation and whether accreditation is probable. Once declared eligible, the school carries out a self-assessment. This is submitted and a team of four peer reviewers visits the institution to establish whether it meets EQUIS standards. Their presentation to the awarding body is the deciding factor on accreditation.

EQUIS investigates the school's strategy, quality of resources, faculty, students, student services, programmes, research, the degree of internationalisation, and connections to the corporate world.

Strathclyde was accredited by EQUIS three years ago, and was the first school in Scotland to be accredited. It is still the only accredited school in Scotland.

AACSB

AACSB accreditation is a process of voluntary, non-governmental review of educational institutions and programmes, reviewing entire colleges and universities. As a specialised agency, AACSB International grants accreditation for undergraduate and graduate business administration and accounting programmes.

AACSB International accreditation represents the highest standard of achievement for business schools, worldwide. Institutions that earn accreditation confirm their commitment to quality and continuous improvement through a rigorous and comprehensive peer review. AACSB International accreditation is the hallmark of excellence in management education.

AACSB International accreditation assures stakeholders that business schools:

- Manage resources to achieve a vibrant and relevant mission.
- Advance business and management knowledge through faculty scholarship.
- Provide high-calibre teaching of quality and current curricula.
- Cultivate meaningful interaction between students and a qualified faculty.
- Produce graduates who have achieved specified learning goals.

Acknowledging the diversity within AACSB, all accredited members share a common purpose – the preparation of students to enter useful professional, societal and personal lives. The accreditation review focuses on a member's clear determination of its mission, development of its faculty members, and the planning and delivery of its instruction. Each institution must achieve and demonstrate an acceptable level of performance consistent with its mission while satisfying AACSB accreditation standards.

In the accreditation process, schools must complete a self-evaluation report. AACSB evaluates the report, and a visit by the peer review team follows. For AACSB accreditation, a school must offer degree-granting programmes in business or management, and there must be continuing resources for these programmes.

The programmes must support diversity among its students and faculty. AACSB investigates the accreditation process, quality of students and staff, teaching and resources, research, and interaction between students and staff.

Strathclyde was awarded AACSB accreditation in December 2003. Again, it is the first and only business school in Scotland to hold triple accreditation, and one of only eight in the UK.