

TEACHERS TALK

Features to look for in AN INTERNATIONAL MBA

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Much has been written about the quality of MBA programmes in Bangladesh. While there are undoubtedly some programmes which offer excellent academic content and a transformative experience for their students, there are others which achieve neither.

What prospective students and employers in Bangladesh might be less appreciative of, however, is the fact that this problem is international in scope. Even countries that one might consider mature academic destinations, such as the UK, the USA, Australia, and Canada, all suffer from similar variability in programme quality.

In this article, I offer an insider scoop on how prospective students and employers can tell a good MBA from a bad one by evaluating four key features, based on my experience teaching at the Sussex MBA.

First, I discuss two indicators of quality that MBAs share with other academic programmes, and then I discuss two markers of quality that are unique to MBAs.

Just like any other degree, the foremost indicator of an MBA's quality will be the reputation of the institution offering the degree. An institution with an established international reputation for academic excellence will attract the most distinguished faculty to their business schools and the very best students. These institutions will continuously hone their degrees to meet the needs of the

contemporary global economy and have robust quality assurance processes in place.

You will often encounter their alumni in prestigious positions across society. For example, alumni from the University of Sussex feature prominently among the faculties of Bangladesh's top universities, among the leadership of NGOs, and other civil society organisations, and among high-ranking members of the civil service.

Another important marker of the quality of an academic programme is the profile of individual academics who teach on the course. Advanced degrees such as high-quality MBAs require contributions from leading researchers, pedagogues, and practitioners who can leverage their expertise to deliver the most nuanced take on cutting-edge knowledge, using the latest and most effective educational techniques. It is worth viewing the profiles of faculty who teach on a programme you are interested in to check that their level of expertise aligns with your expectations.

In my department alone, we have a member of faculty who advises the UK government on the level of the minimum wage, the World Bank's former head of research, and a former President of the Royal Economic Society. The people who teach on your chosen programme should be just as impressive.

A distinguishing feature of an MBA programme is that it is designed to harness the lived experiences of a

diverse cohort of select professionals and empower them to transform and enrich one another to mutual benefit. To achieve this objective, MBA students must be required to have gained substantive work experience prior to admission to the course.

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An easy way to spot a low-quality MBA is that they will often waive or soften the work experience requirement to broaden their market to include insufficiently experienced professionals or even fresh graduates. While admitting such students might help pad a poorly reputed university's balance book, it does nothing to create the type of dynamic learning environment sought by elite MBA students and their employers.

The Association of MBAs (AMBA) is an international organisation that was set up in 1967 to promote the benefits of advanced business education. Today, AMBA is an internationally recognised accrediting body for high-quality MBA programmes.

During its accreditation visits, AMBA investigates every aspect of MBA education by interviewing university leadership, faculty, students, and alumni before arriving at a judgement as to the quality of the programme. Very often, AMBA identifies areas for improvement which must be acted upon if accreditation is to be upheld on a continuing basis. Thus, both prospective students and potential employers can be assured of quality educational provision if a degree is accredited by AMBA.

Variability in the quality of MBA programmes is a global issue. But a few simple checks can help students and employers alike gauge the quality of an international MBA. The quality of education is likely to be better at an institution with an international reputation for academic excellence. Teaching faculty who are recognised leaders in their field, either as researchers or as practitioners, are often able to offer an education that is better tailored to the needs of the contemporary global market.

Institutions with more rigorous entry requirements, especially relating to work experience, are likely to offer a more enriching learning environment for MBA students. And finally, Business Schools that hold highly coveted external accreditations such as from AMBA are likely to be able to robustly assure the quality of their educational provision.

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