

DBA ACCREDITATION CRITERIA



OVERARCHING THEMES

Since its inception, AMBA's mission has been to promote and protect postgraduate management education internationally. AMBA aims to encourage students to enrol on international quality programmes in reputable Business Schools and employers to recruit from such Schools. The DBA is an important component of AMBA's portfolio as a transdisciplinary, practically-focused Doctoral-level programme.

AMBA's accreditation scheme is designed to provide a quality assurance and quality enhancement mechanism for Business Schools and DBA programmes worldwide, in order to ensure the value of this qualification for potential students, graduates, employers and society. With many competing programmes, accreditation informs prospective students and employers about Business Schools and programmes that meet AMBA's international quality standards.

Accreditation is holistic in nature, using the criteria as a benchmark for assessing the overall quality of an Institution and its DBA programmes. Accreditation assessments seek to balance the requirements for comparable international standards with the need to recognise local legislative and cultural differences. AMBA will not necessarily rule out for consideration any deviations where the Institution and its DBA programmes are of genuine international quality, with career outcomes demonstrably equivalent to those seen at other accredited Institutions.

DBA Definition

The DBA is a Doctoral-level, research-based qualification, designed to make a contribution to the enhancement of trans-disciplinary professional practice in management disciplines, in addition to a contribution to knowledge via the development and application of theoretical frameworks, methods, and techniques. A DBA places emphasis on the novel application of theory, as well as the potential creation or testing of theory within the context of practice.

DBA Attributes

MBA graduates will have built on their prior professional experience and academic background to acquire a broad base of management knowledge and skills that enables them to:

- Contribute to the enhancement of trans-disciplinary professional practice in management.
- Bring new and relevant scholarship to bear on new business and management problems.
- Create, apply, and then integrate new knowledge.
- Provide an evidence-based approach to critically analyse and evaluate management problems understanding the role and limitations of research in solving these problems.
- Be able to present scholarly research to both academic and non-academic audiences.
- Adopt innovative and creative solutions to business problems and opportunities.
- Provide leadership for change in multiple contexts for a variety of stakeholders.
- Work in a variety of organisational contexts.

Key Principles

1. The DBA Portfolio – In order to ensure clarity and transparency in the marketplace, all programmes awarded by the Institution bearing the designation DBA must be submitted for accreditation.
2. Institutional Integrity, Sustainability & Distinctiveness – The Institution offering a DBA must be sustainable, financially viable, and committed to quality and continuous improvement. It should possess a distinctive market identity and a research culture which provides the basis for a high-quality and successful DBA portfolio.
3. Supervision Quality & Sufficiency – The Institution must be able to provide the DBA portfolio with sufficient and balanced expertise in research and consultancy that creates a platform for highly qualified and relevant supervisory teams available for each DBA participant.
4. Programme Design & Leadership – Each DBA programme must be supported and periodically reviewed in a systematic way, with sufficient academic oversight and operational support. The DBA should be designed represent best practice in management research and application, taking into account market trends and practices.
5. The Participant Experience – The DBA is designed to be a Doctoral, applied post-experience qualification for senior executives; the admissions process must be rigorous in ensuring that an appropriate intake is recruited and aided in progression and completion.
6. Competences, Graduate Attributes & Learning Outcomes – The DBA should have clearly articulated learning outcomes which can be measured and mapped through to course learning outcomes and assessment. Outcomes should broadly reflect AMBA DBA attributes and be aligned to the mission of the Institution.
7. Research Output & Support – The DBA should produce a significant Doctoral-level transdisciplinary research output that advances research in business and management and is relevant to practice.
8. Assessment Rigour & Relevance – The DBA assessment strategy must be robust and rigorous to ensure that output meets the requirements for Doctoral-level study with demonstrable practical relevance.
9. Delivery & Access – The programme should be designed and delivered in such a way to enable busy senior executives to develop sufficient skills in applied research methods and to produce Doctoral-level research, in addition to providing appropriate space for personal development and reflection.
10. Impact & Lifelong Learning – Graduates should be able to demonstrate significant impact as a result of their DBA in a variety of organisational contexts, and should be supported in their continual development by the Institution.

CRITERIA

Framework & Eligibility

This document sets out the criteria for DBA programme accreditation. While setting the standards that accredited provision is expected to meet, these criteria are not intended to be so prescriptive as to stifle innovation or to preclude other measures by which quality may be assessed.

At the core of the accreditation scheme is full recognition of the autonomy of individual degree-awarding Institutions to offer DBA programmes and of the need for individuals and employers to have an internationally recognised accreditation process based on external and peer review of DBA provision.

Accreditation assesses the current standards of postgraduate management education offered at an Institution while promoting a developmental philosophy and a commitment to continuous improvement and quality enhancement. Institutions gaining accreditation are expected to maintain and demonstrate this commitment to regular improvement within their own programmes over the duration of each accreditation period.

Assessors will base their recommendation on the overall context of the DBA provision under assessment, taking into account the quality of the Institution offering the DBA.

The key component and metric of DBA quality is the research thesis itself, which must demonstrate Doctoral quality as well as a significant contribution to management practice. As such, only programmes which have graduated at least three DBA students over the last three years are eligible for DBA accreditation. As an assurance of continuity and sustainability of quality provision, an Institution and its DBA provision will have conformed to the majority of the Association's criteria for a minimum period of three years prior to its first assessment. An accredited MBA portfolio is normally a pre-requisite for the assessment of an Institution's DBA portfolio; however, if an Institution does not offer an MBA, then DBA accreditation may be permitted in exceptional circumstances.

Principle 1: The DBA Portfolio

In order to ensure clarity and transparency in the marketplace, all programmes awarded by the Institution bearing the designation DBA must be submitted for accreditation.

1.1 An Institution's DBA provision in its entirety must be tabled for assessment and meet the accreditation criteria. This includes any programmes that are offered and awarded which bear the name 'DBA'. All DBAs in the portfolio should meet the criteria below although with a different emphasis considering the target market. The Institution is responsible for fully identifying and communicating its DBA portfolio to AMBA, as well as to other stakeholders.

1.2 Portfolio assessment will include all programmes delivered at the Institution, outreach programmes, franchises, and programmes delivered in conjunction with partner Institutions. Programmes offered at multiple campuses should each undergo an on-site assessment to ensure the equivalence of experience for students at each site. All Institutions involved in the delivery of collaborative provision should normally expect an on-site assessment visit to assess the quality and equivalence of experience offered on the specific programmes, and partner Institutions with unaccredited DBA provision will be expected to apply for accreditation within the current review cycle of the multi-centre programme. The awarding Institution must assume full responsibility for the quality of collaborative delivery, and is expected to make the initial application for AMBA accreditation.

1.3 Where a DBA programme is to be awarded jointly by more than one Institution, one (accredited) Institution is to be designated the lead provider and will be responsible for delivery by the partner Institution(s). This also applies to programmes which allow students to undertake exchanges or modules delivered by other Institutions.

Principle 2: Institutional Integrity, Sustainability & Distinctiveness

The Institution offering a DBA must be sustainable, financially viable, and committed to quality and continuous improvement. It should possess a distinctive market identity and a research culture which provides the basis for a high-quality and successful DBA portfolio.

2.1 The assessment of DBA provision will take account of the Institution offering the programmes. The Institution is generally expected to be the Business School or equivalent unit that offers degree programmes, including the DBA portfolio. Institutions offering accredited DBA programmes should have:

(i) an appropriate mission, explicitly expressed and regularly reviewed, which reflects its key strengths and underpins the design of the DBA portfolio, acknowledging the significance of research and research training;

(ii) a well-defined, credible and coherent strategy, realistically reflecting its resources and constraints as well as its stated mission, with specific reference to high-quality research;

(iii) an effective and integrated organisation for the management and leadership of activities, with a significant degree of autonomy and control over its future;

(iv) a commitment to sustainability, good governance and continuous improvement which impact on the DBA, underpinned by well-defined and implemented policies. The Institution should therefore be able to demonstrate satisfactory outcomes from its own internal, national and possibly international audit processes, and should provide evidence that it has responded successfully to any recommendations resulting from these processes;

(v) market legitimacy, secured financial viability and Institutional continuity;

(vi) a discrete identity and an appropriate degree of autonomy (e.g. from the wider University) for decision-making on issues such as strategic development and resourcing with respect to educational provision and management of educational resources, including with regards to the DBA;

(vii) identified its target population and have a developed sense of the market for its products, understanding the particular target market for the DBA;

(viii) a clear and effective policy with regards to its relations with the organisational and managerial world, with demonstrable impact on the DBA, particularly with respect to applied trans-disciplinary research; and

(ix) a clearly articulated strategy for partnerships with other academic Institutions, which enhances a range of opportunities for the benefit of the DBA portfolio.

2.2 Institutions should demonstrate that the level of overall resourcing is appropriate for post-experience researchers. Library, computing and research facilities must be of a high standard and should be accessible, at least electronically, out of normal working hours and at weekends. Access to industry-standard hardware and software is important, as is the availability of business databases and literature search facilities. Sufficient resources should be dedicated to innovation, improvement and the development of the DBA.

2.3 The Institution must be able to offer an explicit rationale for offering a DBA, as opposed to, or in addition to, an MPhil or a PhD.

Principle 3: Supervision Quality & Sufficiency

The Institution must be able to provide the DBA portfolio with sufficient and balanced expertise in research and consultancy that creates a platform for highly qualified and relevant supervisory teams available for each DBA participant.

3.1 In order to provide a suitably resourced and high-quality pool of supervisors and faculty available

for the DBA, it is expected that the Institution will have an explicit, mission-led faculty strategy as well as an efficient organisational structure, with a strong research focus.

3.2 The DBA supervisory and teaching team should be of a size which can, with regard to the overall supervision and number of participants, fully resource the provision to the required standard for which accreditation is being sought.

3.3 The Institution should have a thorough and inclusive faculty development and recruitment policy to ensure that staff are suitably diverse, innovative, reflect the Institution's commitment to continuous improvement and continue to meet high standards. In addition, the supervisory staff must be able to demonstrate appropriate networks and structures for their professional development as researchers and supervisors, which may take place outside of the Institution.

3.4 The Institution should provide a high-quality research environment for the DBA, and be able to demonstrate high levels of quality in the DBA teaching and supervisory team as evidenced by past and current trans-disciplinary management research that demonstrably impacts management practice, scholarship and consultancy, and that exemplifies the research interests and outcomes within an organisational context. It is expected that a significant proportion of research output is of international quality, relevant, and demonstrably contributes to organisations and to society.

3.5 Faculty, including DBA supervisors and those teaching on any taught element of the DBA programme, must be appropriately qualified and credible, and be able to teach at Doctoral level. It is expected that the majority of faculty will hold a Doctorate, or have a credible research and research publication record.

3.6 Adequate thesis supervision for DBA students by experienced members of the School's faculty is essential. Each DBA student should preferably be allocated at least two supervisors as part of a supervisory team, in order to provide a range of research expertise and to ensure continuity. Both supervisors must display excellence in recent research output, and at least one supervisor must have experience as a PhD and / or DBA supervisor, having been part of a supervisory team for at least one successful Doctoral candidate. One supervisor must also be experienced in the subject / topic area being researched by the DBA student. The supervisors must be able to devote adequate time to each student they are supervising.

3.7 All supervisors should normally hold a Doctorate, unless there is other evidence of research expertise in their field.

3.8 The Institution should formally address the issues of collegiality and integration of staff into the total teaching and learning environment of the School, including part-time faculty, faculty from another part of the Institution, staff from other Institutions and practitioners. All members of the DBA teaching team, irrespective of origin, should be fully integrated and subject to the Institution's quality assurance policy.

Principle 4: Programme Design & Leadership

Each DBA programme must be supported and periodically reviewed in a systematic way, with sufficient academic oversight and operational support. The DBA should be designed to represent best practice in management research and application, taking into account market trends and practices.

4.1 Sustainable academic leadership is essential for a high-quality DBA programme, independent of the supervisory model. There should be clearly defined roles relating to the academic leadership and administrative responsibilities for the DBA programmes with individuals identified for each. Those assigned roles of academic leadership should be credible and committed to the programme.

4.2 The Institution should be able to demonstrate a level and quality of professional leadership and support appropriate to the size of the DBA provision.

4.3 Mechanisms must exist to ensure sufficient feedback and response to student reactions to course

delivery and content on the DBA.

4.4 DBA programmes must be regularly reviewed to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the market, taking into account input from all stakeholders. Formal programme re-design is expected to take place on a cycle approximately every five years, based on a re-evaluation of the currency and achievement of learning outcomes.

4.5 The relationship between the supervisor and the student, and the requirements of both parties, must be clearly outlined, and progress of these responsibilities must be officially monitored. Supervisors and students should communicate formally at regular intervals and appropriate junctures. Informal meetings and / or communication are expected with greater regularity. In order to monitor and support progression there should also be a formal annual review of the student's progress by a DBA supervisory panel. The supervisory team should include one first point of contact for the student, and this should be clearly communicated to all parties.

4.6 The supervisor must ensure that the student receives constructive and effective feedback, and has input into the assessment of the student's developmental requirements.

Principle 5: The Participant Experience

The DBA is designed to be a Doctoral, applied post-experience qualification for senior executives; the admissions process must be rigorous in ensuring that an appropriate intake is recruited and aided in progression and completion.

5.1 There should be an expectation on the part of the provider that the student will be able to fulfil the objectives and demands of the programme and achieve the standard required for the award. Evidence will be required to show rigour in procedures and standards for admission, for example, standard testing and interviewing. Interviews are expected to form an important component of the admissions process.

5.2 The DBA is intended for those with previous managerial experience who wish to make a significant contribution to the enhancement of professional practice in the management area via the critical review and systematic application of appropriate theories and research to professional practice. The DBA is targeted at holders of an MBA or a Masters-level degree in Management, or holders of an equivalent professional qualification, and mature and experienced managers with the potential to meet the learning and research requirements of the DBA.

5.3 In general, students are expected to have a minimum of five years postgraduate work experience prior to DBA study, with a three-year minimum allowed in exceptional cases. At least some of this experience should be at a senior level.

5.4 Evidence of suitable language proficiency will be required. In most cases the DBA thesis should be prepared and presented entirely in English, unless a specific rationale is provided for using a local language. Where teaching is in English, standardised evaluation of students for whom English is not a first language will be expected.

5.5 DBA selection should take into account the motivation and likely progression of students to complete within the expected timescale. Demonstrably effective mechanisms must exist to support student progression throughout the course of study.

5.6 As part of the research process, each student must submit a research proposal, and evidence of its evaluation by the Institution will be required.

5.7 There should be mechanisms in place to ensure interaction between DBA students, and other members of the postgraduate research body as part of a wider and inclusive research community.

5.8 The entitlements and responsibilities of being a research student should be clearly defined and articulated to the student prior to commencing the DBA.

5.9 Where a DBA student is involved in teaching at the Institution, training and adequate development opportunities should be provided.

5.10 There will be no exemptions allowed for the DBA thesis. Exemptions may be allowed on any part of the research methods taught element of the DBA, provided that any prior learning is at the appropriate Doctoral level standard, and that the prior learning was achieved in the last five years.

5.11 Mechanisms must be in place to ensure that students, especially international students, receive adequate pastoral care and support throughout their course of study. The Institution should also have a formal policy to support students with disabilities. All student policies should be clearly articulated.

5.12 Where students have been away from formal education for an extended period of time, explicit help in learning skills should be provided.

Principle 6: Competences, Graduate Attributes & Learning Outcomes

The DBA should have clearly articulated learning outcomes which can be measured and mapped through to course learning outcomes and assessment. Outcomes should broadly reflect AMBA DBA attributes and be aligned to the mission of the Institution.

6.1 Each individual DBA programme must have clearly stated aims, objectives and learning outcomes, which reflect the mission and strengths of the Institution. Learning outcomes should be clear and explicit in describing what participants are expected to know and be able to do as a result of the programme. They should make clear the ways in which the Institution recognises and assesses intellectual, analytical, personal and enterprise qualities as well as the specific research expertise developed by the programme.

6.2 Learning outcomes should be mapped and measured against curriculum design and assessment, to ensure that the programme is cohesive and that all intended graduate outputs are achieved.

6.3 Evidence must be provided that the DBA programme enables its participants to build on their prior professional experience and academic interests to develop research expertise that enables them to:

- (i) contribute to the enhancement of trans-disciplinary professional practice in management;
- (ii) bring new and relevant scholarship to bear on new business and management problems;
- (iii) create, apply, and then integrate new knowledge;
- (iv) provide an evidence-based approach to critically analyse and evaluate management problems understanding the role and limitations of research in solving these problems;
- (v) be able to present scholarly research to both academic and non-academic audiences;
- (vi) adopt innovative and creative solutions to business problems and opportunities;
- (vii) provide leadership for change in multiple contexts for a variety of stakeholders; and
- (viii) work in a variety of organisational contexts.

Principle 7: Research Output & Support

The DBA should produce a significant Doctoral-level transdisciplinary research output that advances research in business and management and is relevant to practice.

Thesis

7.1 The DBA thesis, based on research carried out throughout the DBA programme, is the primary piece of work that will be assessed for the award of the DBA degree. The thesis should make a contribution

to the enhancement of professional practice in management as well as a contribution to knowledge via the application and development of theoretical frameworks, methods, and techniques.

7.2 Assessment by a portfolio of publishable research is acceptable, but this must be accompanied by an assessed linking document which encompasses elements of critical thinking and the contribution to practice.

7.3 Any thesis not written and presented in English must be accompanied by a full English translation of results and implications to enable wider dissemination of research outputs.

7.4 There should be a clearly defined progression rate with regards to the completion of the thesis, including submission of the thesis and deadlines for progression.

7.5 Regular support, feedback and progression monitoring during the thesis stage is essential to provide appropriate guidance and to encourage timely completion.

Taught Courses

7.6 The DBA is a research based, rather than a taught qualification. However, taught components are acceptable and can be useful in developing knowledge and skills, as long as such components allow adequate time for research and the preparation of the final thesis.

7.7 Research methodology training is an essential part of the DBA. Such training should be formally scheduled at a level appropriate for Doctoral study (at least at the Masters level) and should include: research design; data collection and analysis; the application of various research methods; management of research projects; and research presentation. This training should be assessed to certify the student's competence in these areas.

7.8 Any DBA taught components should be taught and assessed at the Doctoral level and have clearly stated aims, objectives and learning outcomes. Learning outcomes should be clear and explicit in describing what participants are expected to know and be able to do as a result of the component. They should make clear the ways in which the Institution recognises and assesses intellectual, analytical, personal and enterprise qualities as well as the specific knowledge being developed by any taught element of the programme.

7.9 Personal growth is an important element of a DBA, and should be a key and integrated element of an accredited programme. The programme must be explicit about the means by which transferable management skills are developed throughout the programme. Such skills include, but are not restricted to: ability to manage change; communication; leadership; teamwork; dealing with ambiguity; negotiation; problem solving; critical thinking; and ethical values.

7.10 Innovation in DBA programme design and delivery is strongly encouraged, particularly in the ways in which such developments enhance integration, sustainability, personal growth, and the sharing of experiences amongst researchers.

Principle 8: Assessment Rigour & Relevance

The DBA assessment strategy must be robust and rigorous to ensure that output meets the requirements for Doctoral-level study with demonstrable practical relevance.

8.1 The DBA thesis is the primary form of assessment for the award of the DBA qualification. The assessment criteria should be explicit, readily available and require a standard to Doctoral level. The criteria should also express and evaluate the applied nature of the research outcomes, with specific and explicit attention to the expected impact of the research on management practice.

8.2 Assessment of the thesis should include an in-depth, face-to-face Viva Voce (oral) examination.

8.3 The Viva should be assessed by a minimum of two appropriately qualified examiners, who hold a

Doctoral level research degree. At least one of these examiners should come from outside the Institution. At least one external examiner should be research active in the field being assessed. Examiners must be independent of each other, and not previously involved in the research being assessed.

8.4 Examiners should be provided with guidelines on assessing the thesis prior to the Viva, and are expected to produce individual reports prior to, and following the Viva, detailing the reasons for the judgement reached. In order to ensure DBA outcomes, the Viva and the reports should include specific examination and feedback on the practical application and impact of the research.

8.5 There should be clear processes to deal with split decisions of the examination panel.

8.6 There should also be processes in place to ensure that each Viva is conducted in a fair and consistent manner. Appeals or complaints procedures should be clearly stated and available to the student.

8.7 The key purpose of assessment is to enable students to demonstrate that they have met the objectives and achieved the learning outcomes of the programme at the standard required for the award of a DBA degree. The assessment scheme for any taught components should have detailed criteria and specify the range and relative weights of the various assessment methods used; it should be comprehensive and consistent across the various subject areas, and underpinned by a suitable assessment strategy.

8.8 While innovation in assessment methods is encouraged, particularly where new teaching and learning methods are being used, detailed evaluation by the School of such innovations will also be looked for.

8.9 Assessment should also be used to provide feedback to students in a consistent and timely manner and assist in the subsequent individual and group learning.

8.10 Evidence is required that steps are taken to ensure that the individual's own work is being assessed, with an explicit policy with regards to plagiarism.

8.11 Assessment standards should be consistently reviewed and applied at Doctoral level across the programme and the portfolio. This includes instances where delivery and assessment is undertaken at partner sites and on student exchanges.

8.12 Any policy regarding fall-back qualifications for those that do not complete the DBA must be made explicit, with rigorous criteria for the evaluation of these qualifications applied.

Principle 9: Delivery & Access

The programme should be designed and delivered in such a way to enable busy senior executives to develop sufficient skills in applied research methods and to produce Doctoral-level research, in addition to providing appropriate space for personal development and reflection.

9.1 Programmes may be full-time, part-time, distance / open learning or multi-mode. Innovative approaches to design and delivery are welcomed if they enhance learning opportunities and can maintain the coherence and integrity of the course. It is essential that the Institution can demonstrate that students are integrated into a wider research community, irrespective of the delivery mode by which they are studying.

9.2 Distance / open learning DBA programmes will be expected to meet these criteria in full, with particular attention being paid to the effective operation of the following:

(i) access to research and library facilities;

(ii) integration of the supervisory and faculty team;

(iii) both formal and informal interaction between the supervisory team and the student;

(iv) interaction between students and other members of the postgraduate research body both as part of

the student learning group and a wider research community;

(v) the monitoring and maintenance of student progression;

(vi) quality of the delivery and learning process for taught courses, including research methods; and

(vii) policies and procedures to ensure that the individual's own work is being considered, and that assessment standards are consistent.

9.3 The duration of a DBA programme shall meet the general Doctoral requirement that it should be equivalent to three year's full-time study. For what might be regarded as a standard course for a normal entrant, the minimum duration is likely to be four calendar years on a part-time basis.

Principle 10: Impact & Lifelong Learning

Graduates should be able to demonstrate significant impact as a result of their DBA in a variety of organisational contexts, and should be supported in their continual development by the Institution.

10.1 Facilities should exist to assist in employment for students at the conclusion of their studies where necessary, with career development opportunities available irrespective of delivery mode and employment status.

10.2 A well-established and active association of DBA alumni is expected, which provides tangible networking and lifelong learning opportunities for its members.

10.3 An accredited DBA should be able to provide evidence of significant impact and return on investment for its graduates and other stakeholders providing DBA holders with legitimacy among both academics and practitioners. When assessing the overall quality of the programme, consideration will be given to the value added by the DBA programme to work experience, research impact and career development. The views and experiences of appropriate alumni, employers and sponsors will also be sought. The transfer of learning from the programme to the place of work will be evaluated, and evidence that these outcomes are being met by graduates in the workplace is expected. An inclusive view of the measurement and articulation of impact and the return on investment of the DBA is encouraged, taking into account contribution to society and value creation.

10.4 The Institution should have appropriate mechanisms to regularly review the long-term success and impact of graduates, and to evaluate the currency and achievement of programme learning outcomes.

GLOSSARY

- **Doctoral-level Learning:** many academic Institutions refer to the Dublin Descriptors for the requirements of Doctoral-level learning.
- **Franchise:** an Institution offering another Institution's programme and degree award, but delivering the majority of teaching.
- **Institution:** the Business School, or equivalent organisational unit offering the programme / portfolio seeking accreditation. AMBA will also consider the relationship between the Institution and any parent body, particularly where any other programmes are offered that may require inclusion into the Institutional portfolio on the basis of market clarity.
- **Portfolio:** all programmes bearing the designation 'MBA' awarded by the Institution must be submitted for assessment and pass accreditation standards. In the interest of market clarity, any programmes offered outside of the Institution but bearing the same degree award is also expected to be included in the portfolio, unless agreed by AMBA on the basis of market separation.
- **Transdisciplinary:** a research topic that requires the integration of multiple academic areas.

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