

Nudge unit pushes research credential

Job prospects are sunny as schools learn to make an impact, reports Des Dearlove

Sunshine is here again for MBA graduates as two surveys show that job prospects are getting better for those who have been to business school, despite continuing uncertainty over the UK economy.

The average salary of MBA graduates working in the UK now tops £82,000, the highest since 2004, according to figures from the Association of MBAs (AMBA).

The Careers Survey 2013 (based on 1,000 AMBA-accredited business schools in 75 countries) shows that the median salary, including cash bonuses, is £90,000 — a 7 per cent increase on 2010. The research, published on February 14, also found that within ten years of gaining an MBA, more than half of those surveyed were either in senior management, CEO or directorship positions.

“The MBA is a long-term investment which brings value to a graduate throughout their career,” says Vanessa Harwood-Whitcher, chief operating officer at AMBA.

A survey by the Graduate Management Admission Council is also upbeat. Its 2012 Year-end Employer Poll



Mark Taylor: ‘Impact is the acid test’

an MBA applicants at UK schools has fallen by up to 40 per cent in the last couple of years. However, we are seeing pockets of growth in applicants from Taiwan, China and Thailand.”

Applications to Cranfield School of Management’s full-time MBA programme have doubled so far this year. Anthea Milnes, head of graduate programmes, says that the increase is coming from South America, Australasia, Africa, India and South East Asia.

UK business schools face other far-



Measuring our work is an important part of our strategy

found that 76 per cent expect to hire new MBAs in 2013, up from 69 per cent in 2012.

The jobs market may look brighter, but business schools are watching applicant numbers carefully. There is a big fall in student applications from India, attributed in part to the UK government’s tougher visa rules, but schools are seeing rising applications from other countries.

“Indian students are some of the most enthusiastic and committed MBA students,” says John Colley, director of MBA and executive programmes at Nottingham University Business School. “The number of Indi-

more actionable research, will seem entirely reasonable.

After all, MBA students have always had to face the harsh reality of the jobs market on graduation. Now the institutions that prepare them for the real world will have to demonstrate their own worldliness.

Mark Taylor, dean of Warwick Business School (WBS) believes that impact is the acid test for a business school. “It is vitally important that we measure the impact we have in the real world,” he says. “If we are not working with the business world to make a difference with our research and expertise, then we are just a school rather than a business school.”

So how can business schools demonstrate impact? At WBS, Taylor points to the behavioural science group, headed by Nick Chater, and the first of its kind in Europe. Professor Chater’s work has had an influence on government policy through the so-called “nudge unit,” nudging the public to become organ donors among other things.

The group has also set up the first behavioural design lab, in partnership with the Design Council, to tackle big societal problems such as binge drinking, teenage depression and diabetes.

At London Business School, impact is explicit in the school’s vision. “London Business School’s vision is to have a profound impact on the way the world does business,” says Rosemary Vipond, director, academic affairs. “Therefore, measuring the impact of the school’s work on the

business environment is an important element in our overall strategy.”

Other schools are also taking the impact challenge seriously. Academics at Brunel Business School are attending workshops to help them explain their work to practising managers and develop impact case studies for the school’s REF submission.

“This is more about improving the communication of research,” says Professor Amir Sharif. “Academics must seek to disseminate their research in business friendly terminology.” Ensuring that research reaches practitioners in a timely manner will be a challenge, however.

“Cutting-edge business processes are changing so quickly that research risks becoming irrelevant before it’s published,” acknowledges Professor David Goss, head of Surrey Business School. “The REF criteria mean that business schools need to innovate at the same speed as business.”

John Board, Dean of Henley Business School, believes that measuring impact is something all business schools should do. “Business schools live or die by their interaction with the business world.”

Vlatka Hlupic, professor of business and management at Westminster Business School, agrees. “Transferring knowledge from business schools to the real world of business has never been as important.”

He welcomes the REF requirements, quoting Soichiro Honda, the founder of Honda: “Action without philosophy is a lethal weapon. Philosophy without action is worthless.”