



Application Trends: Full-Time MBA Programs in the United Kingdom

Introduction

This paper, derived from the Graduate Management Admission Council® 2008 Application Trends Survey, focuses on the responses of full-time MBA programs in the United Kingdom (UK) and draws comparisons with aggregate data from other European countries and the United States (U.S.). Data presented in this publication are a summary of the responses from 13 participating UK full-time MBA programs—a small fraction of the 197-program overall sample. For the purposes of this document, the term “other Europe” refers to Western and Eastern European countries excluding the UK.

Key Findings

- Overall, the majority of UK programs (77%) reported increased application volume compared with last year.
- On average, one-year full-time MBA programs in the UK received more applications per program than their counterparts in other European countries and the U.S.
- By citizenship, foreign applicants dominate the applicant pool (91%) of full-time MBA programs in the UK.
- MBA programs in the UK appeared to attract applicants with more work experience than those in other European countries or in the US.
- Accepted applicants for programs in the UK were less likely to enroll than accepted applicants for programs in other European countries and the U.S.
- Similar to the offerings of other participating programs in Europe, most of the surveyed full-time MBA programs in the UK were offered in a one-year format. Based on the average media rankings, nearly one in three (31%) participating programs ranked in the top 50.

For the first time in the history of the Application Trends Survey, which was introduced in 2000, the number of participating programs from the UK allowed us to take a look at UK full-time MBA programs as a group. Although in some cases UK program trends and characteristics appear to match those of other European countries, such as with their applicant pool composition, for example, in other cases UK trends more closely matched those of U.S. programs, as with their more qualified applicants and greater total application volume. Despite the insufficient number of observations necessary to obtain a comprehensive picture of full-time UK MBA programs in previous years of the study, this year’s data provides a foundation for examining future UK application trends.

Program Profile

The characteristics of participating full-time UK MBA programs are as follows (Table 1):

- Most of the participating full-time MBA programs with offices in the UK were offered in a one-year format (77%), which is a similar proportion seen among programs in other European countries.
- Nearly one half of UK programs (46%) had classes with 50 students or fewer.
- Proportionally more programs in the UK (85%) than in other regions (46%–50%) received government funding.
- The majority of UK programs (77%) have one start date per year.
- Nearly one in three (31%) responding UK programs, compared with 17% to 21% in other regions, ranked in the top 50 according to their average media rankings.

	UK (n = 13)	Other Europe (n = 25)	U.S. (n = 129)
Length^a			
One year	77%	84%	29%
Two years	23%	16%	71%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Tier^b			
First	31%	21%	17%
Second	—	29%	25%
Third	69%	50%	58%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Class size			
50 students or fewer	46%	65%	32%
51 to 100 students	23%	17%	32%
More than 100 students	31%	17%	36%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Funding sources			
Receives government funding	85%	46%	50%
Program operates with private financing	15%	54%	50%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Enrollment type			
Class begins once a year	77%	92%	80%
Class begins several times a year, including rolling admissions	23%	8%	20%
Total	100%	100%	100%
^a For the purposes of this report, programs with a duration of 18 months or less are classified as one-year, those of 19 months or more are classified as two-year programs.			
^b Full-time MBA programs were classified in this report by their tier based on the average media rankings across those published by <i>Business Week</i> , <i>Financial Times</i> , and <i>U.S. News and World Report</i> . First-tier programs are those in the top 50 (1 through 50), second-tier programs are the next 50 programs (51 through 100), and third-tier programs include those ranked 101 and lower and unranked programs.			

Applicants

In general, about one-fourth of applicants to full-time UK (23%) and European (26%) MBA programs resided in the country where the program they applied to was located, a contrast with the proportion among U.S. programs, where more than half (57%) the applicants resided in the country where they applied (Table 2). By citizenship, the UK had the greatest proportion of foreign applicants (91%) among the examined regions.

	UK	Other Europe	U.S.
By location	<i>n</i> = 13	<i>n</i> = 23	<i>n</i> = 101
National ^{a, b}	23%	26%	57%
Local ^c	45%	35%	46%
International ^b	77%	74%	43%
Total	100%	100%	100%
By citizenship	<i>n</i> = 10	<i>n</i> = 21	<i>n</i> = 116
Domestic	9%	15%	48%
Foreign ^d	91%	85%	52%
Total	100%	100%	100%

^a. Includes permanent residents.

^b. $F = 26.659$; $df_1 = 2$; $df_2 = 133$; $p < .05$. Bonferroni test showed statistically significant differences, $\alpha = 0.05$, between the UK and the U.S., and between other European countries and the U.S.

^c. The mean difference between subgroups is not statistically significant.

^d. The term "foreign" is defined by applicant citizenship and is used to refer to any applicant whose citizenship differs from that of the country where they apply. For example, French citizens would be considered foreign by a program in the UK, and UK citizens would be considered foreign by a French program. Foreign applicants include permanent residents of a given country if they do not have the country's citizenship.

Candidates applying for full-time MBA programs in the UK typically had more work experience than candidates applying in other regions—86% of applicants for UK programs had three or more years of work experience compared with 75% for other European countries and 52% for the U.S. (Table 3).

Table 3. Work Experience of Full-Time MBA Program Applicants, Percentage of Applicants, the UK, Other European Countries, and the U.S.

	UK (n = 10)	Other Europe (n = 24)	U.S. (n = 71)
Less than 1 year ^a	10%	7%	20%
1 year, but less than 3 years ^b	4%	18%	28%
3 years, but less than 6 years ^c	52%	37%	33%
6 years, but less than 10 years ^d	27%	30%	13%
10 years or more ^e	7%	8%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%

^a F = 3.824; df₁ = 2; df₂ = 102; p < .05. Bonferroni test showed statistically significant differences, α = 0.05, between the US and other European countries.
^b F = 14.756; df₁ = 2; df₂ = 102; p < .05. Bonferroni test showed statistically significant differences, α = 0.05, between all pairs of subgroups.
^c F = 5.990; df₁ = 2; df₂ = 102; p < .05. Bonferroni test showed statistically significant differences, α = 0.05, between the US and the UK.
^d F = 21.184; df₁ = 2; df₂ = 102; p < .05. Bonferroni test showed statistically significant differences, α = 0.05, between the US and the UK and between the US and other European countries.
^e The mean difference between subgroups is not statistically significant.

Although the majority of programs reported an improvement in applicant academic quality compared with last year—62% in the UK; 72% in other European countries; and 65% in the U.S.—a greater proportion of UK program applicants (39%) were likely to be around the same quality as last year (Table 4).

Table 4. Quality Assessment of Full-Time MBA Program Applicants Compared with Previous Year, the UK, Other European Countries, and the U.S.

	UK (n = 13)	Other Europe (n = 25)	U.S. (n = 127)
Significantly more academically qualified	—	12%	6%
Moderately more academically qualified	39%	28%	19%
Slightly more academically qualified	23%	32%	40%
About the same quality as last year	39%	28%	28%
Slightly less academically qualified	—	—	6%
Moderately less academically qualified	—	—	1%
Significantly less academically qualified	—	—	—
Total	100%	100%	100%
More qualified	62%	72%	65%
About the same	39%	28%	28%
Less qualified	—	—	7%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Overall Application Trends

On average, full-time MBA programs located in the UK received more applications than MBA programs in other European countries but fewer than those in the U.S. (Table 5). However, the average one-year program in the UK received nearly three times the number of applications submitted to the average one-year MBA program in the U.S.

	UK	Other Europe	U.S.
All applicants	<i>n</i> = 13	<i>n</i> = 25	<i>n</i> = 128
Mean ^a	545	311	731
Median	224	114	271
All applicants, one-year programs	<i>n</i> = 10	<i>n</i> = 21	<i>n</i> = 28
Mean ^b	395	294	142
Median	212	120	101
Domestic applicants	<i>n</i> = 10	<i>n</i> = 21	<i>n</i> = 116
Mean ^c	52	53	322
Median	37	28	138
Foreign ^d applicants	<i>n</i> = 10	<i>n</i> = 21	<i>n</i> = 116
Mean ^a	515	304	352
Median	215	97	148

^a The mean difference between subgroups is not statistically significant.
^b $F = 3.339$; $df_1 = 2$; $df_2 = 65$; $p < .05$.
^c $F = 4.037$; $df_1 = 2$; $df_2 = 144$; $p < .05$.
^d The term "foreign" is defined by applicant citizenship and is used to refer to any applicant whose citizenship differs from that of the country where they apply. For example, French citizens would be considered foreign by a program in the UK, and UK citizens would be considered foreign by a French program. Foreign applicants include permanent residents of a given country if they do not have the country's citizenship.

For all full-time programs combined across regions, the competition among students appeared to be the strongest in the UK as more than five applicants, on average, competed for the same place in the incoming class (Table 6). One-year programs reported a more prominent difference with twice as many applicants competing in the UK (5.8) for a place in the MBA class than in the U.S. (2.9).

	UK	Other Europe	U.S.
All applicants	<i>n</i> = 13	<i>n</i> = 23	<i>n</i> = 118
Mean ^b	5.6	3.4	4.6
Median	5.6	2.7	4.0
All applicants, one-year programs	<i>n</i> = 10	<i>n</i> = 20	<i>n</i> = 31
Mean ^c	5.8	3.4	2.9
Median	5.8	2.7	2.5

^a The number of applications per seat is calculated by dividing the number of applications received by a program by the targeted number of students in the incoming class.

^b $F = 3.050$; $df_1 = 2$; $df_2 = 151$; $p < .05$.

^c $F = 8.359$; $df_1 = 2$; $df_2 = 58$; $p < .05$. Bonferroni test showed statistically significant differences, $\alpha = 0.05$, between UK and other European countries and UK and U.S.

Interestingly, U.S. and UK programs experienced similar application volume changes when compared to last year. More than three quarters of UK programs (77%) reported an increase in application volume (Table 7), and the UK had the largest proportion of programs—38%—receiving significantly more applications than last year.

	UK (<i>n</i> = 13)	Other Europe (<i>n</i> = 21)	U.S. (<i>n</i> = 122)
Up significantly (21%+)	38%	24%	36%
Up moderately (11–20%)	8%	9%	23%
Up slightly (1–10%)	31%	29%	20%
Flat (no change from previous year)	8%	29%	7%
Down slightly (1–10%)	8%	9%	7%
Down moderately (11–20%)	8%	—	7%
Down significantly (21%+)	—	—	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Up	77%	62%	79%
Flat	8%	29%	7%
Down	16%	9%	15%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Domestic Application Trends

Although domestic applicants accounted for only 9% of the total applicant pool of full-time MBA programs in the UK, 50% of programs reported an increase in applications from domestic candidates compared with last year (Table 8).

	UK (n = 10)	Other Europe (n = 21)	U.S. (n = 113)
Up significantly (21%+)	20%	19%	25%
Up moderately (11–20%)	20%	14%	23%
Up slightly (1–10%)	10%	24%	21%
Flat (no change from previous year)	20%	19%	11%
Down slightly (1–10%)	10%	14%	11%
Down moderately (11–20%)	—	5%	7%
Down significantly (21%+)	20%	5%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Up	50%	57%	69%
Flat	20%	19%	11%
Down	30%	24%	20%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Foreign Application Trends

Full-time MBA programs across all regions reported increased numbers of foreign applicants compared with last year—70% in the UK, 77% in other European countries, and 72% among U.S. full-time MBA programs (Table 9).

Table 9. Change in the Full-Time MBA Program Foreign^a Application Volume Compared with Previous Year, Percentage of Programs in the UK, Other European Countries, and the U.S.

	UK (<i>n</i> = 10)	Other Europe (<i>n</i> = 22)	U.S. (<i>n</i> = 114)
Up significantly (21%+)	30%	36%	38%
Up moderately (11–20%)	10%	23%	21%
Up slightly (1–10%)	30%	18%	13%
Flat (no change from previous year)	10%	9%	6%
Down slightly (1–10%)	20%	9%	11%
Down moderately (11–20%)	—	5%	6%
Down significantly (21%+)	—	—	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Up	70%	77%	72%
Flat	10%	9%	6%
Down	20%	14%	21%
Total	100%	100%	100%

^a The term “foreign” is defined by applicant citizenship and is used to refer to any applicant whose citizenship differs from that of the country where they apply. For example, French citizens would be considered foreign by a program in the UK, and UK citizens would be considered foreign by a French program. Foreign applicants include permanent residents of a given country if they do not have the country’s citizenship.

Offers, Enrollment, and Class Size

While the percentage of MBA program applicants receiving the offer of placement was similar throughout the examined regions (45% to 47%), the percentage estimated to actually enroll was far lower in the UK (43%) than in other European countries (62%) or the U.S. (60%) (Table 10).

Table 10. Full-Time MBA Program Offer and Estimated Enrollment Rates in the UK, Other European Countries, and the U.S.

	UK	Other Europe	U.S.
Percentage of total applicants that received the offer of a place	<i>n</i> = 10	<i>n</i> = 21	<i>n</i> = 115
Mean ^a	47%	46%	45%
Median	45%	42%	40%
Estimated percentage of applicants with a place who enroll	<i>n</i> = 12	<i>n</i> = 20	<i>n</i> = 116
Mean ^b	43%	62%	60%
Median	30%	65%	59%

^a The mean difference between subgroups is not statistically significant.
^b *F* = 6.298; *df*₁ = 2; *df*₂ = 145; *p* < .05. Bonferroni test showed statistically significant differences, α = 0.05, between the UK and other European countries and between the UK and the US.

In general, participating UK programs fall between U.S. programs and programs in other European countries in terms of average class size (Table 11). UK programs were also far more optimistic about the future—only 8% expected to reduce class sizes versus 23% in other European countries and 12% in the U.S.

Table 11. Targeted Size of the 2008–2009 Full-Time MBA Program Entering Class, the UK, Other European Countries, and the U.S.

	UK (n = 13)	Other Europe (n = 22)	U.S. (n = 117)
Average class size ^a			
Targeted 2008–2009 (#)			
Mean ^b	96	77	114
Median	65	45	78
Actual 2007–2008 (#)			
Mean ^b	93	70	109
Median	64	40	74
Percentage change (%)	3.2%	10.0%	4.6%
Growth plans ^c			
Expect to increase	54%	59%	50%
Do not expect to change	38%	18%	38%
Expect to reduce	8%	23%	12%
Total	100%	100%	100%

^a Year-to-year: (UK) the mean difference is not statistically significant; (other European countries) $t = 2.591$; $df = 21$; $p < .05$; (U.S.) $t = 4.415$; $df = 116$; $p < .05$.
^b The mean difference between subgroups is not statistically significant.
^c The difference between subgroups is not statistically significant.

The class sizes of European and UK one-year full-time MBA programs showed strong similarities and tended to be nearly twice the size of equivalent U.S. programs (Table 12). Only one in 10 UK programs expected to reduce their class size.

Table 12. Targeted Size of the 2008–2009 One-Year Full-Time MBA Program Entering Class, the UK, Other European Countries, and the U.S.

	UK (n = 10)	Other Europe (n = 19)	U.S. (n = 31)
Average class size			
Targeted 2008–2009 (#)			
Mean	73	75	47
Median	40	45	45
Actual 2007–2008 (#)			
Mean	69	68	41
Median	46	41	35
Percentage change (%)	5.8%	10.3%	14.6%
Growth plans			
Expect to increase	60%	58%	68%
Do not expect to change	30%	16%	19%
Expect to reduce	10%	26%	13%
Total	100%	100%	100%



Findings presented in this paper are based on analysis of the 2008 GMAC® Application Trends Survey data. For questions or comments regarding the study findings, methodology, or data, please contact the GMAC Research and Development department at research@gmac.com.

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