

## ~~Ranking Article~~ Degree of Recognition - Financial Mail [MBA](#)

Welsh-born former rugby referee John Powell is dreaming of the Triple Crown. But it has nothing to do with the 15-a-side game. Rather, he is pursuing the triple accreditation crown for Stellenbosch University Business School, of which he is director.

The school has already been acknowledged by the UK-based Association of MBAs (Amba) and the EQUIS accreditation arm of the European Foundation for [management](#). Development in Business. Now the European Foundation has cleared the first hurdles for acceptance by the US-based Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Success will confirm his view that Stellenbosch is “unquestionably” [SA](#)’s leading business school.

The [MBA Ranking tables](#) are posted in our free members area, view the results and discuss it in our [forum](#)

If only it were so simple. Wits Business School, Cape Town University’s Graduate School of Business (GSB) and the Gordon Institute of Business Science (Gibs), each of which has at least one international accreditation, could all argue their case. And what about Henley Management College, which has enjoyed triple-crown status for years through its UK parent?

Even the popular view that [SA](#)’s four university schools are a cut or two above the rest is often challenged. Some smaller schools argue that because all local [MBA](#) providers meet accreditation criteria set by the Council on Higher Education (CHE), programmes are all equal.

That’s clearly not so. All CHE approval means is that programmes have met minimum standards. Some, having hauled themselves over the qualifying bar, have made little progress since. Others, setting their own ambitious targets, have raced ahead. Most of [SA](#)’s providers acknowledge that for their qualifications to gain real currency, further acceptance is needed. Amba accreditation is a common target.

For many of SA’s would-be corporate ladder-climbers, however, that is the least of their worries.

Written by David Furlonger

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One of the big advantages of international accreditation is that your qualification is recognised anywhere in the world. But only 16% of MBA graduates questioned for our rankings named international mobility as their chief reason for study.

Business education and the advancement of personal skills are the main motives, by some distance. They are also the most likely to be fulfilled. It is reassuring that financial reward and promotion are becoming less important. As our tables show, the expectation of money and power is seldom realised. Most employers don't pay MBAs more.

That realisation may make some people think twice about enrolling for an MBA. Henley GM Fran Connaway argues that too many South Africans undertake MBAs when they should rather be pursuing general management education. With MBA programmes costing between R43000 and R166000, it becomes harder to justify the outlay if the likelihood of a salary return on investment is diminished.

Some of those price tags have risen considerably. A couple of schools have cut their course fee slightly this year from 2009. But mainly it has risen. Stellenbosch, which was considerably cheaper than its direct competition, has inflicted the biggest increase, 46%. It is followed by Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) with 31%, Rhodes 18%, Cape Town and Henley 15% and Wits 13%.

A number of schools have complained in the past that fees don't cover the cost of MBA courses and that they have to cross-subsidise from their profitable executive education programmes. NMMU's 31% increase appears to have been guided partly by its ambition to be perceived as a premium product. Last year it was the cheapest of our ranked programmes. School director Piet Naude says: "That's not where we want to be. If you want to make a quality statement, you must price accordingly."

There's a long way to go before NMMU, or indeed any of the pack, share the "premium" tag currently enjoyed by the traditional market leaders. According to the 300 companies polled for this ranking, Cape Town's MBA has the best reputation in the SA business world: 21% of companies consider it top. Stellenbosch, rated best overall business school by the same companies earlier this year, is the closest challenger, with 18%.

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The news for Wits is depressing. In previous years it has consistently polled more than 20% of the vote. In 2010 it's down to 13%. Is the school finally paying the price for years of [leadership &nbsp;instability](#)?

Its corporate reputation recovered during the three-year directorship of Mthuli Ncube, following a series of short-term tenures and a period of in-house disruption. But with both Ncube and his successor, Bheki Sibiyi, having left in the past few months, some business executives are again asking questions about the school.

Gibs, having quickly established its reputation as a leading provider of executive education, is finding the MBA nut harder to crack. Director Nick Binedell will be reassured by the fact that its reputation score has increased every year. Unisa is also enjoying a steady swell of support.

Gibs' long-term prospects are likely to be bolstered through the attitude taken back to the workplace by its graduates, who rate the school and its programmes particularly highly. As in previous years, it should be noted that in the graduate rating of schools — "Top of the Class" — we are comparing graduate perceptions of their own programmes. We are not saying Free State has the best lecturers (though who's to say it doesn't?), merely that its graduates score them higher than other graduates score theirs.

The table (Top of the Class, page 36), like many others, is intended to give a taste of each programme. While there is no denying that leading schools boast infrastructure, academic support and [research &nbsp;resources](#) that are often unavailable to their smaller rivals, it is equally clear from these rankings that students at the latter do not feel short-changed.

As long as students enter MBA programmes with realistic expectations, there is no reason why they should be disappointed with the outcome. But it is important for those planning to undertake an MBA, and their employers, to do their homework. Whether the programme is full-time, part-time, distance or modular, they must understand the time and study commitment.

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It is not for nothing that the MBA is called the “marriage-breaker”.

It’s also better to consider more than one institution. All schools are oversubscribed with applicants. Some accept nearly all, some half, one takes one in three and another picks one in nine. Though schools are entitled to consider equivalent prior learning of candidates without formal academic qualifications, over 80% of graduates who took part in this [survey](#) had entered their MBA programmes with university degrees. More than a quarter had honours degrees and 12% had master’s.

Source: <http://www.fm.co.za/Article.aspx?id=121239>

