



INTERNATIONAL MBA SURVEY 2020

# PART 3: THE MBA CLASS OF 2020

## Introduction

### What is it like to be an MBA student in 2020?

For most of the world's population this has been a year defined by worry, disruption and lockdown. The effects of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, and its impact on business education could never have been predicted just mere months ago.

But, while the news and conversation in the higher education arena has focused predominantly on how Business Schools have responded to the crisis through offering enhanced online teaching, learning, and networking initiatives, this piece of research seeks to take a pulse of how students are managing to balance their studies and other commitments, in the face of an unprecedented pandemic.

Parts one and two of this four part series, exploring the views and opinions of MBA students and graduates across the world, have investigated MBA graduates'

employability and MBA career trajectories – against the backdrop of the 'new normal' caused by Covid-19.

Employers polled were confident that Business Schools are producing MBAs with mindsets focused on maximising profit (42% thought Schools are producing 'a great deal' of MBAs focused on this); and 49% thought Business Schools were producing a great deal of MBAs with an international outlook.

However, in spite of these encouraging findings, employers also revealed their worries about the recruitment landscape of tomorrow.

There was an overwhelming lack of confidence in the future of both global and local economies, with most survey participants taking a conservative – and in some cases pessimistic – view on their plans for the near future.

With volatility caused by geopolitical issues set to continue and even

exacerbate challenges in the recruitment market, future trends on MBA recruitment figures are hard to predict.

But how are these issues impacting current students? And how would these students rate their Business School and MBA experiences?

Both the students and graduates who took part in the careers research had varied reasons for completing an MBA but – for the most part – were more focused on self-improvement and soft skill enhancement than on harder metrics, such as pay increases or promotions.

This third part of the survey is designed to examine the opinions of MBA students in particular, on topics that include perceptions of business education, reasons for completing an MBA, aspirations, and student feedback on a variety of Business School facets (including programme design, recruitment, admissions,

onboarding, teaching quality, and careers advice).

The results showcase a discerning – and sometimes critical – group of students, with a shared passion for lifelong learning, but a diverse set of views around their own ambitions and how their Business Schools can – and should – be supporting them on the path to their aspirations.

I would like to thank Ellen Buchan, Insight and Communications Executive at AMBA & BGA for her analytical skill in pulling together the results; and Tim Banerjee Dhoul, Content Editor at AMBA & BGA for his work on final report you're about to read.

I hope you discover the findings to be interesting and useful.

**David Woods-Hale**  
**Director of Marketing and**  
**Communications, AMBA & BGA**

## Methodology and participant demographics

Between 27 March 2020 and 27 May 2020 AMBA & BGA conducted the largest ever online survey of its 49,000 MBA student and graduate members, based in more than 150 countries.

A total of 752 current MBA students completed the online questionnaire and shared their opinions on their current employment situation and their views and aspirations for the future.

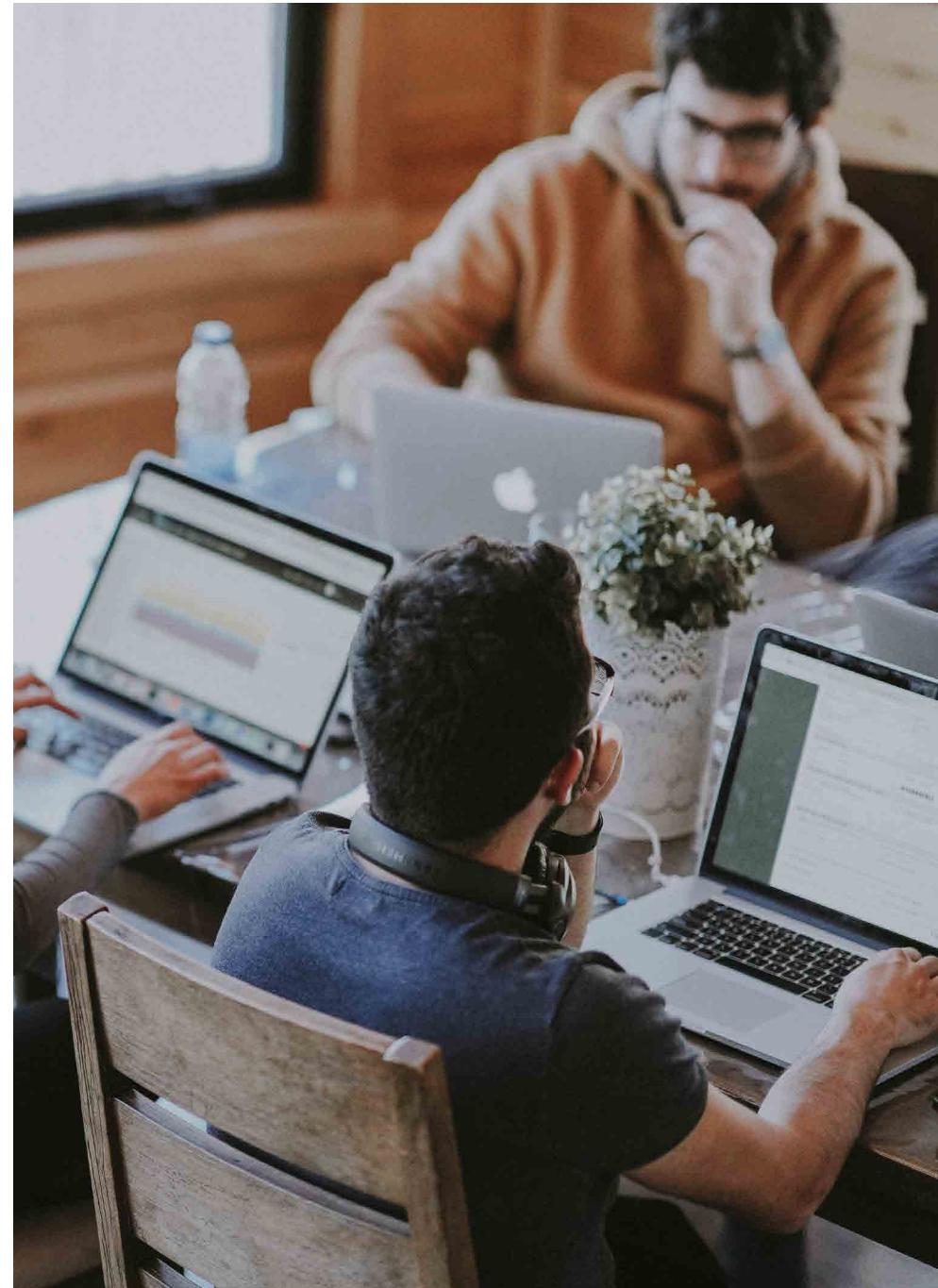
Considering the sample of current MBA students, 65% are male and 34% are female. In terms of age, 3% are aged between 18 and 24; 43% are in the age group 25-34; 37% are in the age group 35-44; 14% are aged 45-54;

2% are in the age group 55-64; and less than 1% are aged 65+.

The survey covered a fairly even geographic spread.

The region that was represented most frequently is Europe (excluding the UK), with 27% of student participants based in this region at the time of the survey. This is followed by the UK (16%); India (12%); Africa (13%); Asia and the Middle East (12%); Latin America (7%); North America and the Caribbean (7%); Oceania (4%); and China and Hong Kong, China (1%).

In instances when figures do not sum to 100% or to a combined sum, this is due to rounding.





# Part one: MBA demographics

Among the total sample of current students polled, 63% were working towards completing an MBA at the time of completing the survey; 30% were studying for an executive MBA (EMBA); 2% were studying for DBAs; 1% were studying master's in business management (MBM) programmes and; 3% were studying another course.

Just under half of participants (49%) were completing a part-time programme, while 32% were studying full time and 20% were on modular programmes (where lessons are taught in short blocks of intensive teaching).

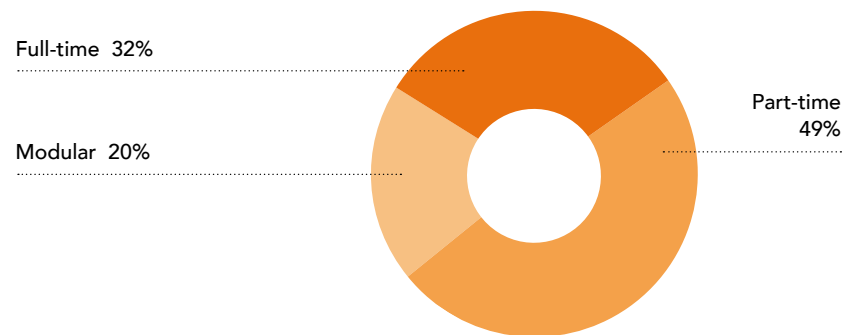
Part 2 of this series of research polling

AMBA's 50,000-strong student and graduate members explored their career trajectories and ambitions.

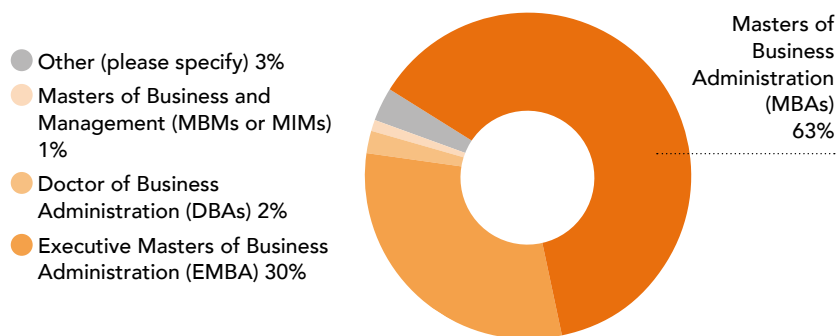
To recap, the student sample is mixed in terms of their prior management experience, with just under a quarter each having 0-3 years (24%), 4-6 years (23%), and 7-10 years (21%) experience. Just 7% of student participants had never worked in a management-related role, prior to starting their MBA.

In terms of the duration of the qualification, more than two thirds of participants (67%) were completing their studies over two years; 14% over one year; and 10% over three years.

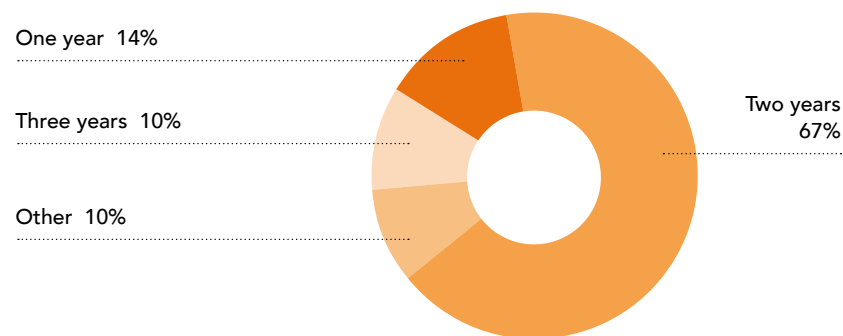
**Figure 2.** Are you undertaking a full-time, part-time or modular programme? (Total count: 747)



**Figure 1.** What type of programme are you completing? (Total responses: 748)



**Figure 3.** What is the length of your MBA programme? (Total count: 743)



## Part two: The decision-making process for MBAs

Participants were asked to share their main reasons for wishing to complete an MBA. The most popular reason (cited by 70% of the sample) is 'to acquire more skills and knowledge about the business world'; this is followed closely by 'to expand my area of expertise' (cited by 69%).

The next most frequently cited reasons for completing an MBA include 'to get a broader understanding of how business should be managed' (53%); 'to change career' (51%); and 'to help differentiate myself in the job market' (49%).

Fewer participants cited reasons such as 'to learn how to run an ethically sound business' (20%); and 'to earn more money in the short term' (12%).

The participant pool is roughly an even split between those who had chosen to study at home or abroad, with 43% saying the programme they had chosen was based outside of their country of origin; and 55% saying it was based in their own country.

Just under a third (31%) travelled abroad to enrol onto their course; and 68% stayed in their home country. Students who had made the decision to study abroad, were then asked for

their reasons for choosing the countries in which they were studying at the time of completing the survey.

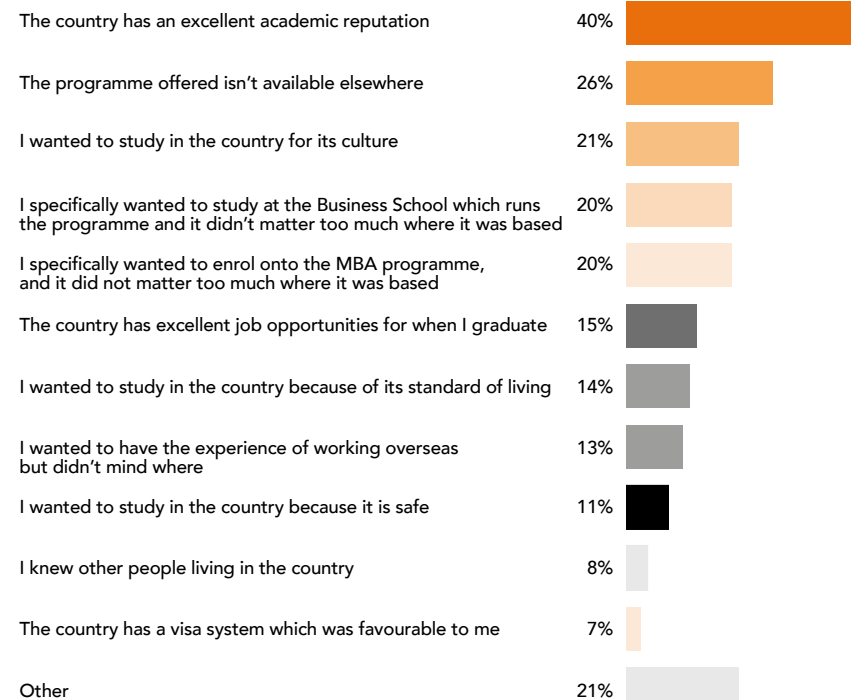
The reason cited by the largest proportion of students for choosing a country in which to study is the academic reputation of the country (cited by 40% of students as the main reason they decided to study where they did).

Just over a quarter (26%) of respondents chose the country they did because the programme they wanted wasn't available anywhere else, and 21% were attracted to the country they chose because of its culture. Figure 4 outlines a breakdown of the reasoning behind the sample's decision-making process.

Just over one in five (21%) had other reasons for choosing their study location. Some of the most common answers in this pool included cost of programme, work and career commitments, and personal and family constraints.

Figure 5 outlines the numbers of programmes individuals applied for, prior to choosing an MBA. About six out of 10 (60%) applied for just one programme; 18% applied for two

**Figure 4. What were the main reasons why you decided to study in the country you are now based in? (Total responses: 311)**



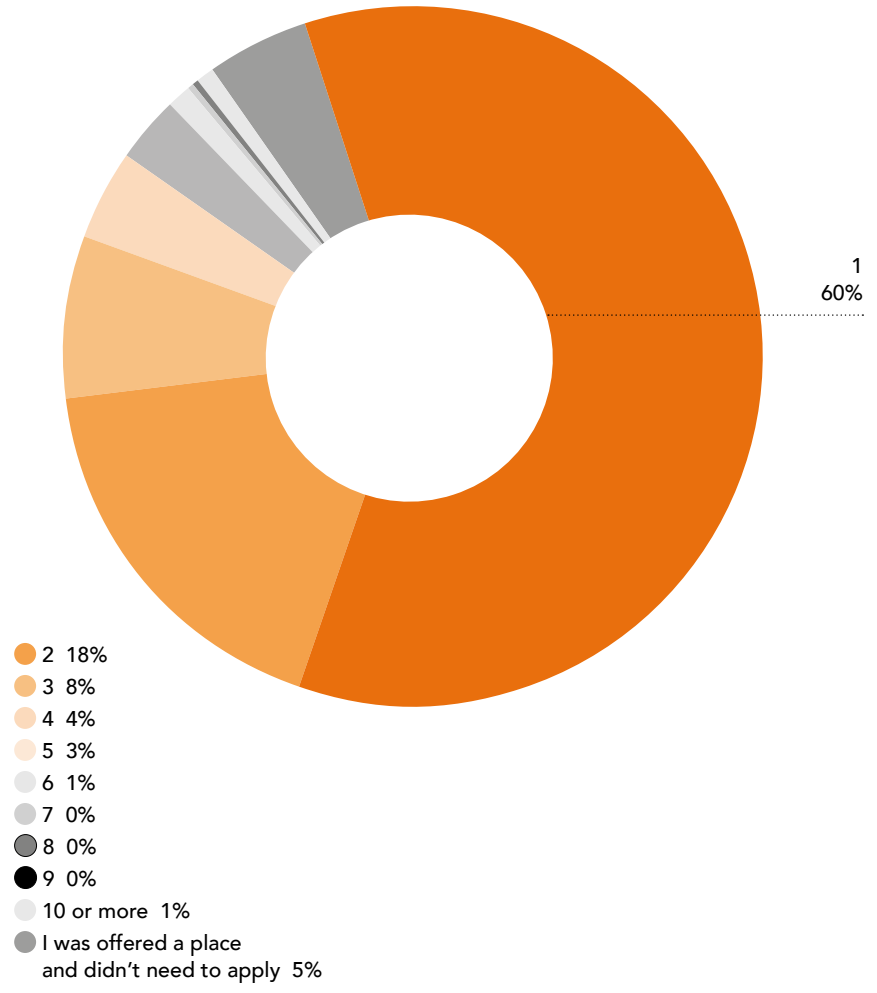
programmes and about 16% applied for three or more programmes. Just under 5% were not required to apply for any programmes as they had already been offered a place at the Business School of their choice.

This suggests that potential MBA students are very set on the

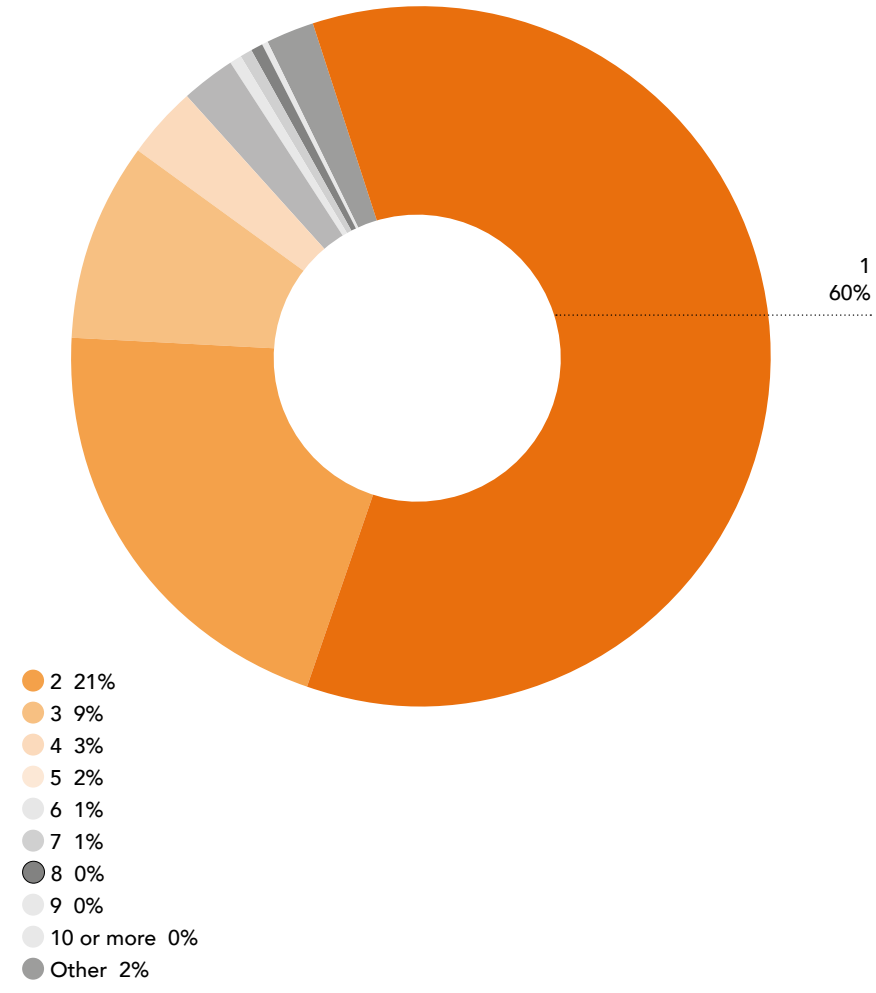
programmes for which they wish to apply and are confident in their application being accepted.

The number of offers received was largely in line with the number of applications made, with 60% receiving one offer; 21% receiving two; and 16% receiving three or more.

**Figure 5. How many different MBA programmes did you apply for?**  
 (Total responses: 733)



**Figure 6. How many offers did you receive?**  
 (Total responses: 725)



The survey asked students to outline their reasons for choosing a particular programme.

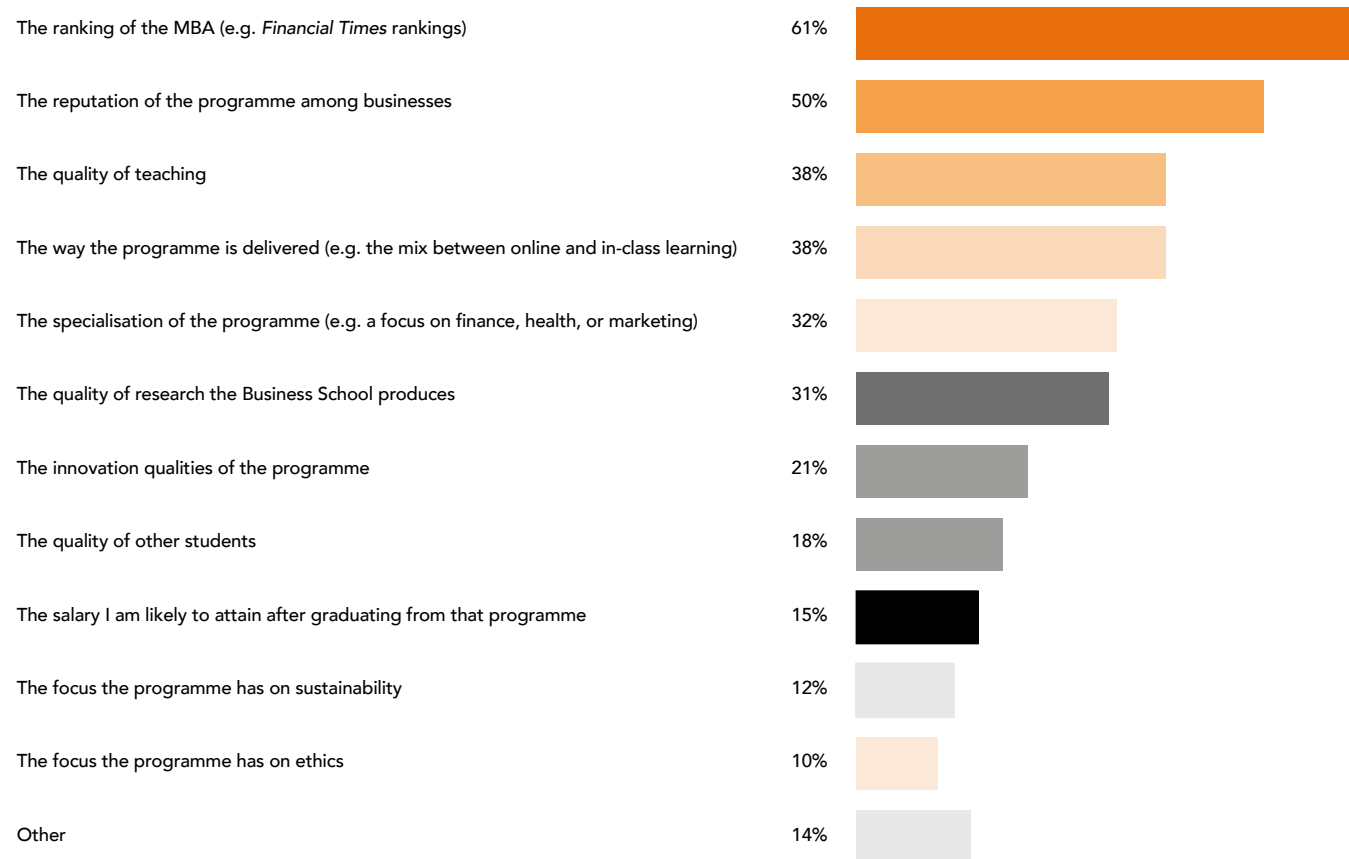
More than six out of 10 (61%) said it was the ranking of the MBA programme that led to their decision.

Other popular answers included the reputation of the programme among businesses (cited by 50% of students); the quality of teaching (38%); and the way the programme is delivered (38%).

All decision-making factors cited are detailed in Figure 7.

**'More than six out of 10 (61%) said it was the ranking of the MBA programme that led to their decision'**

**Figure 7. What made you decide to enrol onto your programme of study? (Total responses: 727)**



## Part three: Student experience

The next section of the survey sought to ascertain students' perspectives on various aspects of their Business School experience, including the application process, onboarding, careers support, course design and delivery, and accommodation.

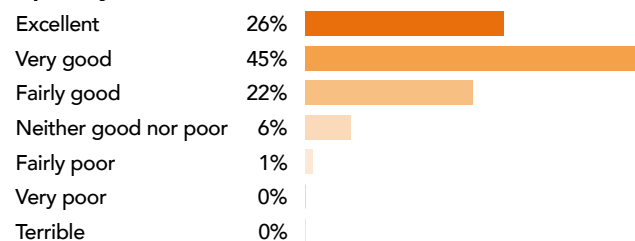
The first question of this section polled participants on the application process.

As Figure 8 reveals, current students are largely positive about their application experience. Almost three quarters (71%) said open days they attended were 'very good' or 'excellent'; 71% said information about the programme was 'very good' or 'excellent'; 75% said information about the country was 'very good' or 'excellent'; 70% said the entrance exam process was 'very good' or 'excellent'; 71% rated communications from the School as 'very good' or 'excellent'; and two thirds (66%) said communications between current students and candidates was 'very good' or 'excellent'.

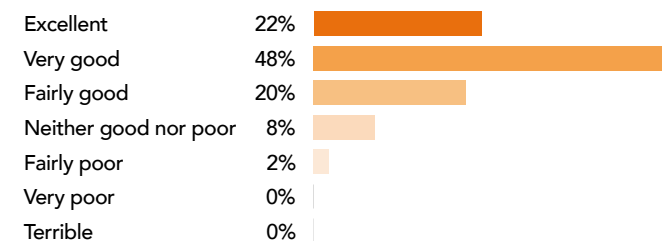
**Figure 8.** How would you rate your experience of the following aspects of the application process?

(Total responses: 404)

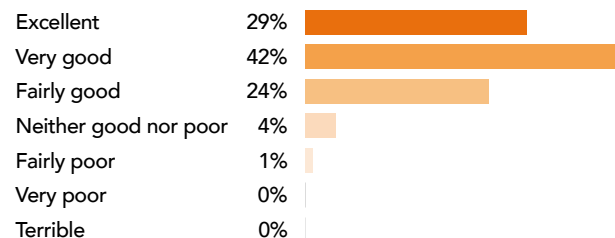
### Open days



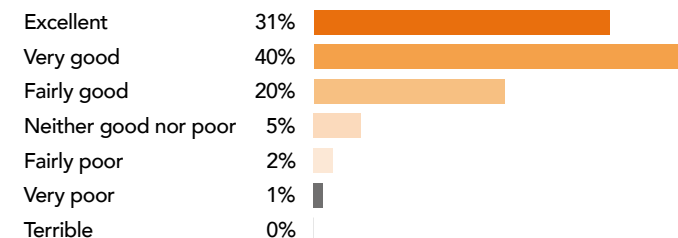
### Entrance exam



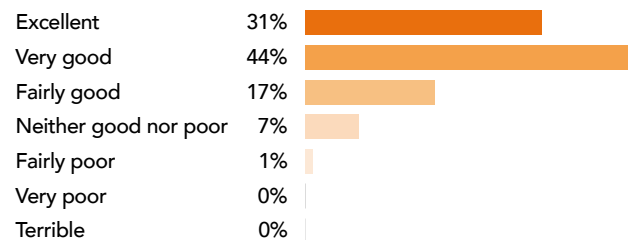
### Information about the programme



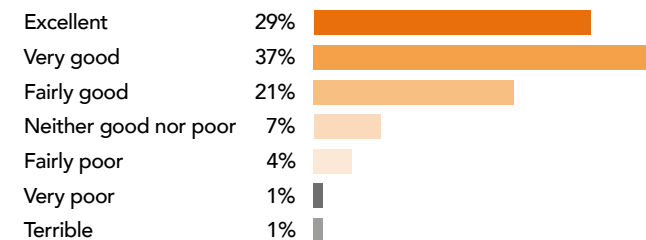
### Communications from the School



### Information about the country

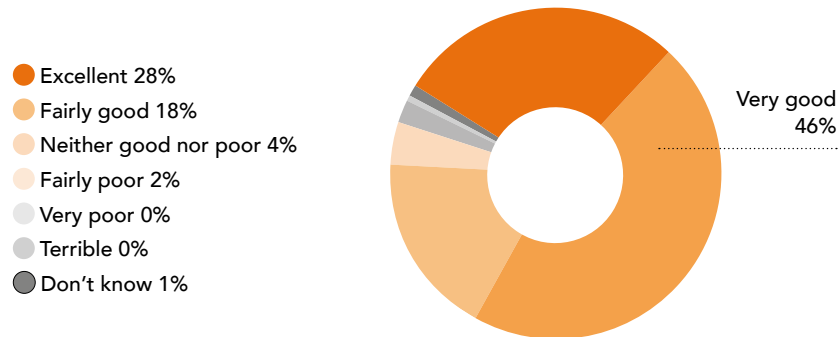


### Communications with current students





**Figure 9.** How would you rate the onboarding experience at the Business School you attend? (Total responses: 703)



In saying that, 43% believe that the application process could have been improved at their School, with 29% saying it couldn't be improved and 28% not being sure if it could be improved or not. When prompted to suggest what could be improved, answers from students included the following:

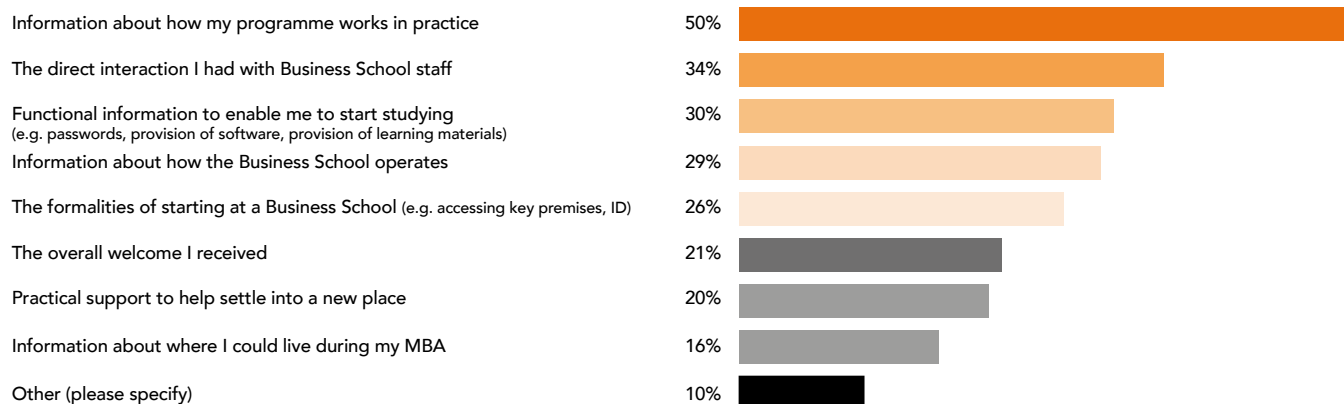
- More information about timelines from application to offer
- More paperless processes and less need to fill in paper documentation
- Online / virtual interview process

- More frequent communication
- Clear criteria around applications
- Shorter waiting times
- Recorded information / videos for candidates that miss open days
- More contact and communication with current students and alumni

In terms of onboarding, students are positive about their experience, with 74% saying their onboarding experience had been 'very good' or 'excellent'.

However, 53% said that their onboarding experience could have been improved.

**Figure 10.** What could be improved about your onboarding experience? (Total responses: 361)



As Figure 10 demonstrates, 50% of participants said the onboarding process at their Schools could have been improved with more information about how programmes work in practice. Other areas in the onboarding process participants think could be improved include the direct interaction they had with Business School staff (cited by 34% of participants); functional information to enable them to start studying (e.g. passwords, provision of software, provision of learning materials) (30%); and information about how the Business School operates (29%).

When prompted to suggest other enhancements that could improve onboarding, participants' ideas included a buddy programme; guest lectures from students / alumni during induction week; and more detailed information about work-life balance while studying.

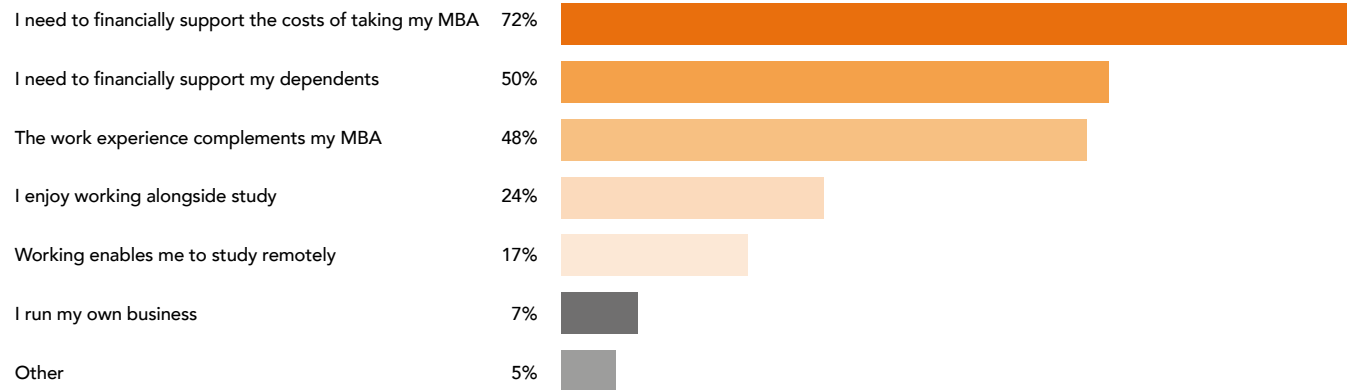
According to the results, 66% of students surveyed were working full time, 12% were working part time and 23% were not working while completing their MBA.

Of those continuing to work, 72% were doing so because of a need to financially support the costs of taking the MBA ; 50% needed to financially support dependents; and 48% believed the work experience complements their MBA.

While a large proportion of participants had chosen to work and study simultaneously, a massive 91% admitted that this is 'very challenging' or 'fairly challenging', as demonstrated in Figure 12.

**Figure 11. For what reasons are you continuing to work while completing your MBA programme?**

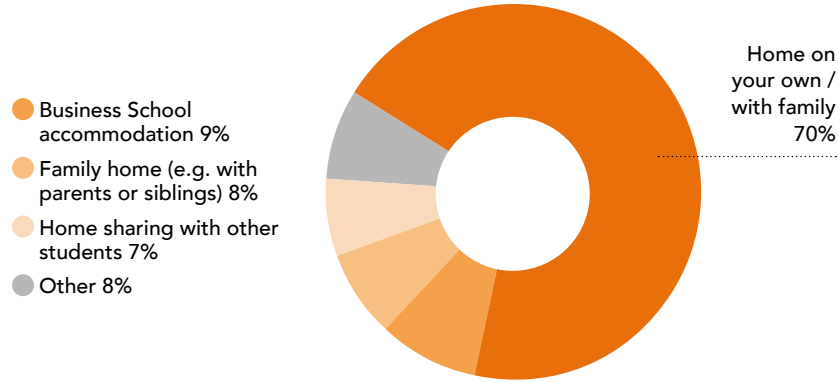
(Total responses: 533)



**Figure 12. How challenging is it for you to balance work with your MBA study?** (Total responses: 534)



**Figure 13. What type of accommodation are you living in?**  
(Total responses: 689)

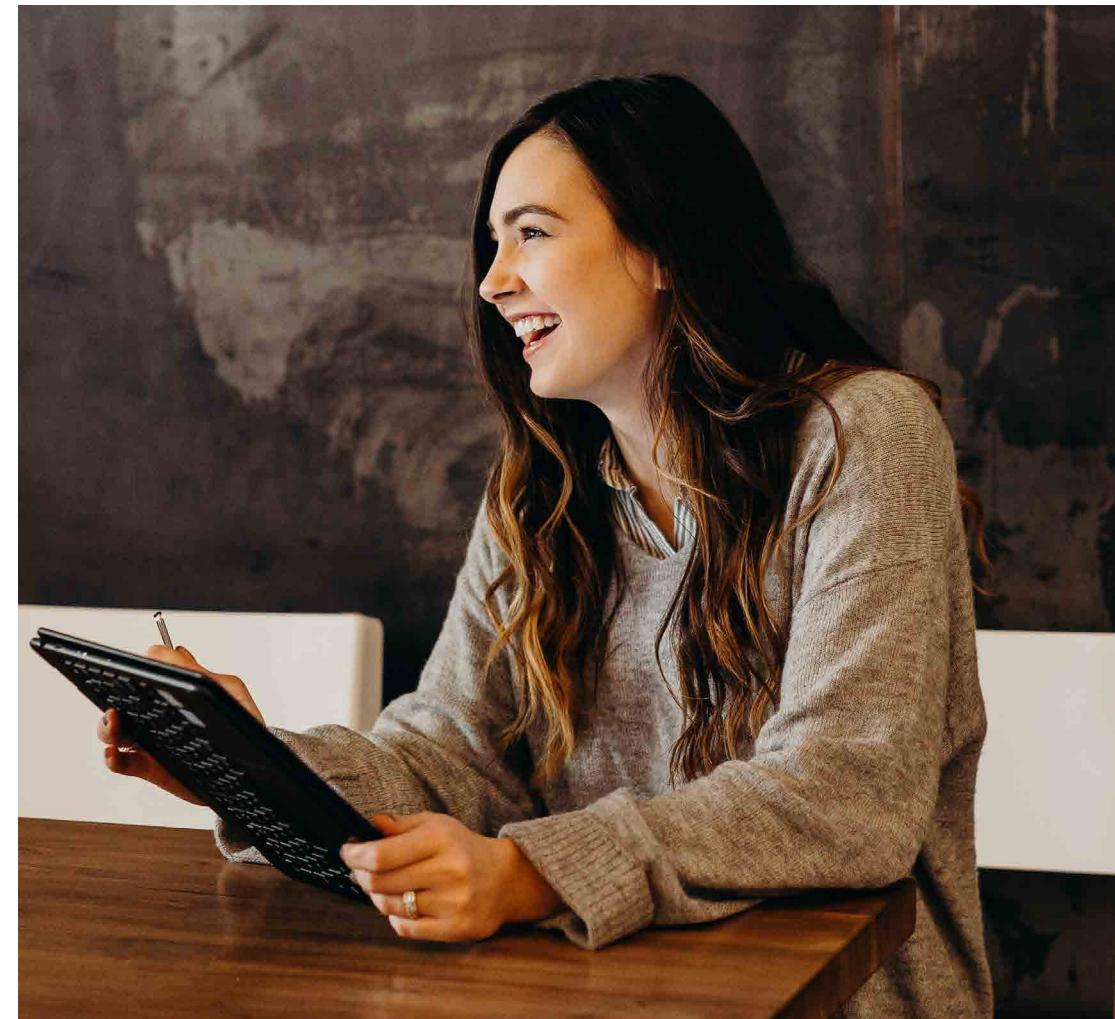
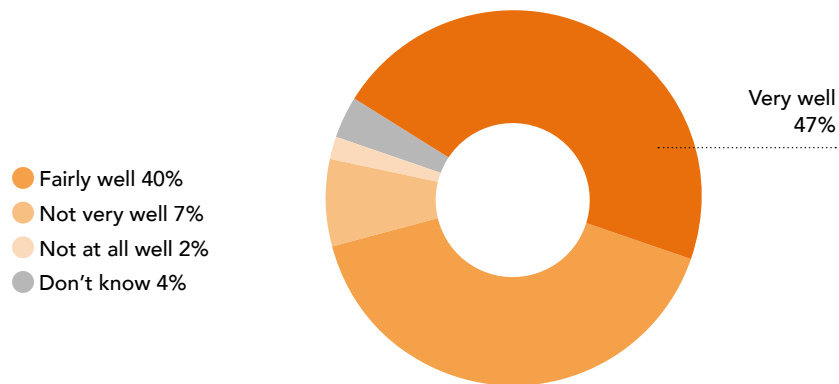


Seven out of 10 (70%) student participants were living in their own homes, alone or with family while studying. Just under one in 10 (9%) of respondents were living in Business School accommodation; 8% were living with siblings or parents;

and 7% were sharing with other students.

Almost nine out of 10 (87%) of this group agree that their chosen type of accommodation suited their needs 'very well' or 'fairly well'.

**Figure 14. How well does the accommodation you live in support the demands of completing your MBA?** (Total responses: 686)



## Part four: Expectations vs. reality

The survey then moved on to explore participants' impressions of their course experience overall looking at various aspects, from pedagogy and course design, to careers support.

Overall, 51% of students that took part in the research said that, at the time of completing the survey, their

MBA experience was exceeding their expectations. A third (33%) said the experience met with their expectations; and 16% admitted it had fallen short of their expectations.

Participants were asked to outline their reasoning as to why they thought the MBA experience exceeded their

expectations or fell short. Some of the responses are included below.

### Why do you say the MBA experience meets your expectations?

*'I have a better understanding of people and organisations, as the learning from the MBA has served to solidify some of what I learned through on-the-job training over the years as well as improved my way of thinking.'*

*'The faculty team is deeply involved in research and the quality of learning materials is good and up to date.'*

*'The culture and diversity of the people and knowledge presented here was astonishing.'*

*'The breadth and depth of the teaching are incredible.'*

*'The MBA taught me to look at the business in an entirely new context.'*

*'It has stretched me beyond what my abilities were.'*

*'It has given me confidence, knowledge and skills to be a better person, manager and colleague.'*

*'It has expanded my knowledge on how a situation can be analysed from multiple dimensions and to thinking critically all the time.'*

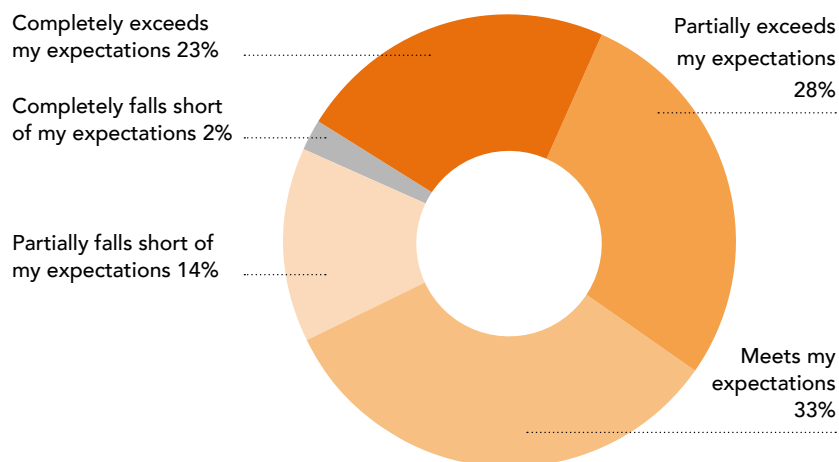
*'I didn't think it would be so much fun and that I would meet so many intelligent people with which I would be able to share my knowledge and experiences.'*

*'The course emphasises the discovery of your own potential and the application of knowledge acquired to your current job rather than just feeding you with academic knowledge.'*

*'The learning is hands-on and practical as well as being geared towards a cohort with multiple and diverse backgrounds.'*

*'I thought I might really struggle with the content for subjects I have never studied before but it is pitched appropriately for all levels.'*

**Figure 15.** So far, does the MBA experience meet your expectations? (Total responses: 681)



## Why do you say the MBA experience falls short of your expectations?

*'Lack of more practical exposure. Too much focus on grades rather than experiential learning.'*

*'It's easier than expected, and the alumni/ job prospects are weaker than expected (even before Covid-19).'*

*'Expectations were to connect face to face and engage in a much more interactive way, but Covid-19 didn't let it happen.'*

*'I expected both the academic and the student level to be higher. Another key issue is the network opportunities, which are much fewer than was advertised.'*

*'I was expecting higher standards of education and closer approaches to real-life practices.'*

Given that popular decision factors for completing the MBA, among the sample, included the desire to change career, the survey moved on to ask participants if they were engaging with the careers support at their Business Schools in order to

help them achieve their career goals, following the completion of their MBA.

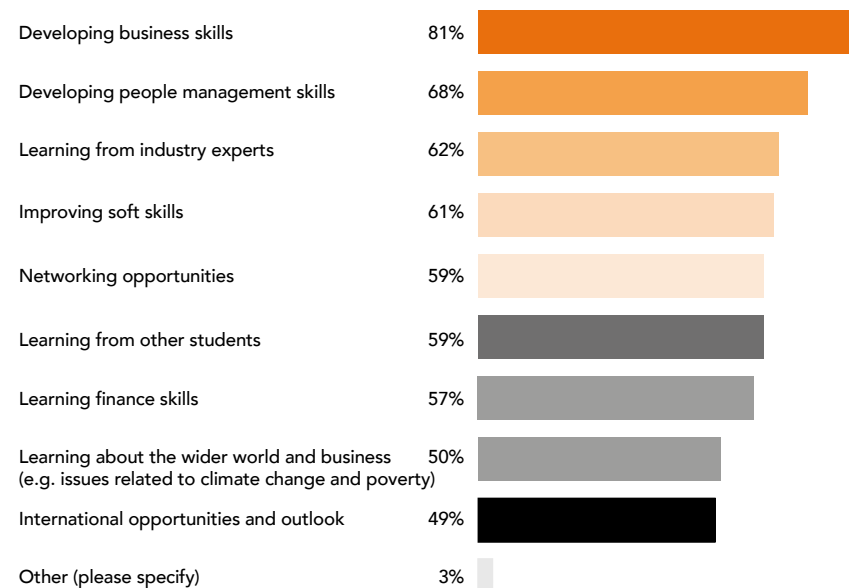
The results were mixed, with 48% of respondents saying they were engaging with careers support at Business School and 49% saying they were not. Just over 3% of respondents were not sure whether or not they were engaging the services of their School's careers department.

For the 322 participants that said they were using their School's careers services, the survey moved to find out how effective this service was in supporting them to achieve their goals. Participants are generally positive about the services and support they receive from their School's careers teams.

When asked to recall careers support received in terms of job applications, CVs and interview preparation, 80% rated the service as 'excellent', 'very good' or 'fairly good', while 65% rated their School's networking with employers as 'excellent', 'very good' or 'fairly good'.

Job search facilities are also viewed positively by the sample with 65%

**Figure 16. Which core aspects of your MBA interest you the most?**  
(Total responses: 665)



rating them as being 'excellent', 'very good' or 'fairly good' at their Business School.

The study sought to ascertain the aspects and also course topics within the MBA programme that were of most interest to students.

Developing business skills was the aspect of most interest to

participants, with 81% of the sample citing this as such.

This was followed by developing people management skills (cited by 68% of students as an aspect of interest in their MBA); learning from industry experts (62%); improving soft skills (61%); networking opportunities (59%); and learning from other students (59%).



Considering topics taught within MBA programmes, 57% of student participants said general management is among those of most interest to them. This was followed by global leadership (cited by 54%); strategic marketing (53%); finance (52%); strategy execution (52%); and global strategy (52%).

Just 22% cited accounting as an area among those of most interest to them and less than one in five (18%) cited statistics here.

Students were then asked to rate the quality of the teaching they had experienced so far in their course. A quarter (25%) rated their teaching as

**'32% said the MBA provided "very good" value for money and 48% said it provided "fairly good" value for money'**

'excellent'; 43% said it is 'very good' and 24% said it is 'fairly good'. Just 2% said that the quality of teaching has been 'fairly poor', 'very poor' or 'terrible' in their experience.

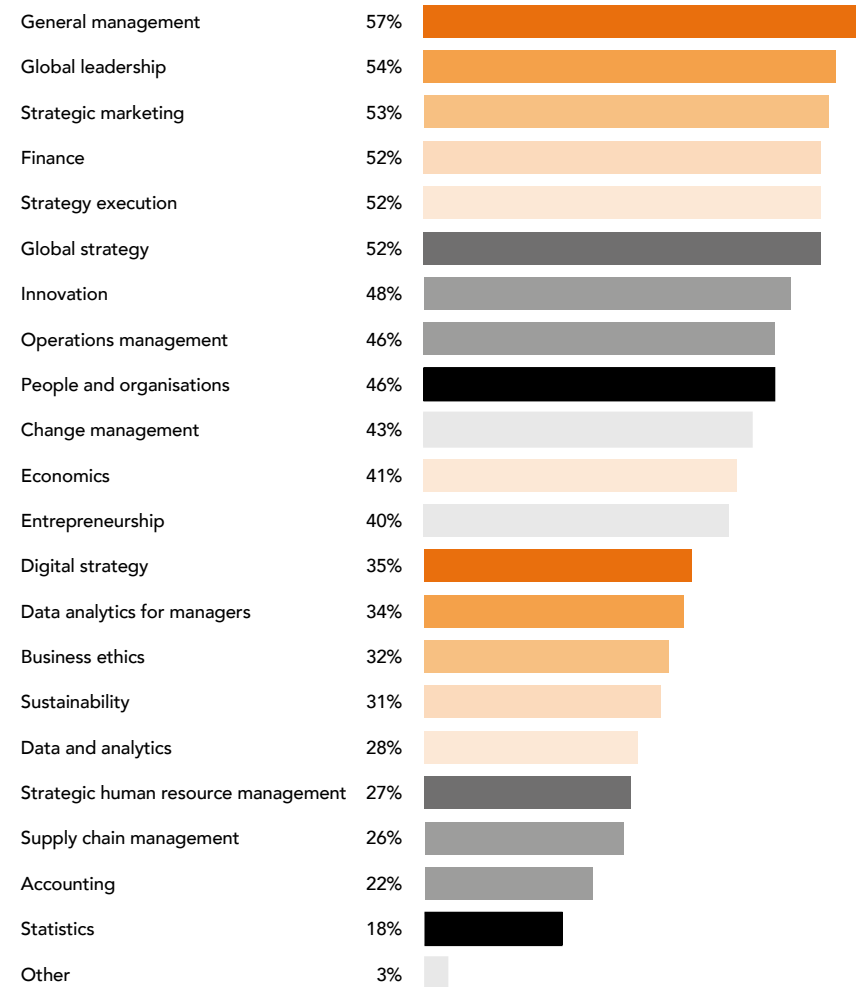
The MBA represents a significant investment for students, but overall survey participants agreed their MBA was delivering good value for money. Just under a third (32%) said it had provided 'very good' value for money; and 48% said it had provided 'fairly good' value for money.

At the other end of the scale, 7% believe that the value for money they had received from their MBA was 'fairly poor', or 'very poor'.

**A quarter of students (25%) rated their teaching as "excellent"; 43% said it is "very good" and 24% said it is "fairly good"**

**Figure 17. Which topics in your MBA interest you the most?**

(Total responses: 665)



While students polled are positive about the MBA experience and the value for money, as outlined above, seven out of 10 survey participants (69%) believe that the delivery and/or content of their MBA programme could be improved.

Half of those who answered this question (50%) think there could be better opportunities to network (although the research was carried out at a period in time when most countries in the world were

experiencing enforced lockdowns or travel quarantines due to Covid-19); 43% think partnerships with their Business Schools and corporates could be improved; and 43% suggested improvements around teaching modern business trends (such as AI and data).

Figure 20 (overleaf) illustrates the various improvements students suggested as part of the study. In an open-ended question, participants were able to suggest potential

enhancements that could be made at their Business Schools in their own words.

Some of these responses are included below:

*'Help to think through how what you are learning relates to your current job, or future roles. How to apply what you are learning.'*

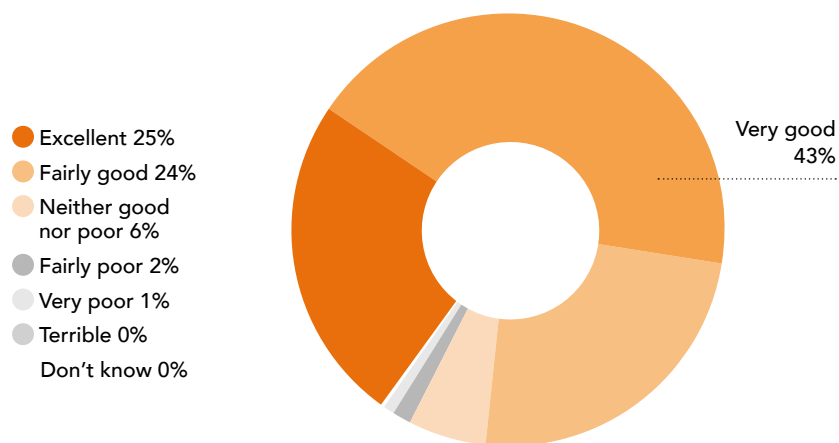
*'More direct contact with lecturers, in terms of more*

*video conferencing seminars.'*  
*'Critical skills, for example presentation training and executive board report skills.'*

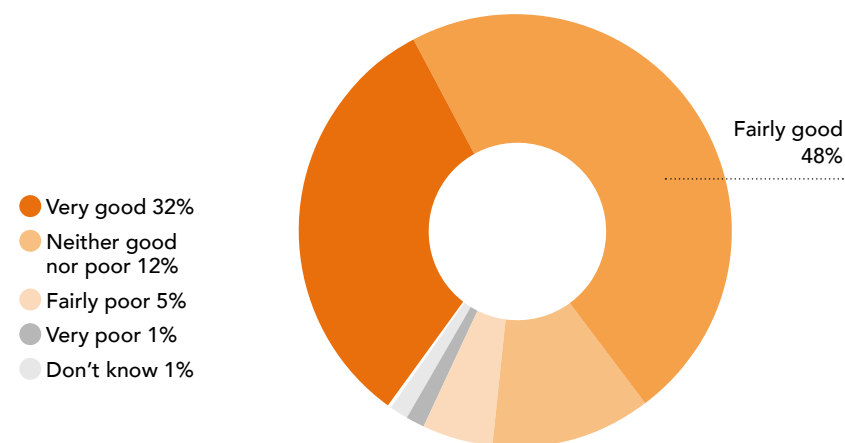
*'More contact hours and teaching for part-time programmes.'*

*'Control [faculty] retention as they were changing almost every semester and for one semester all three faculty members that teach one module were not available.'*

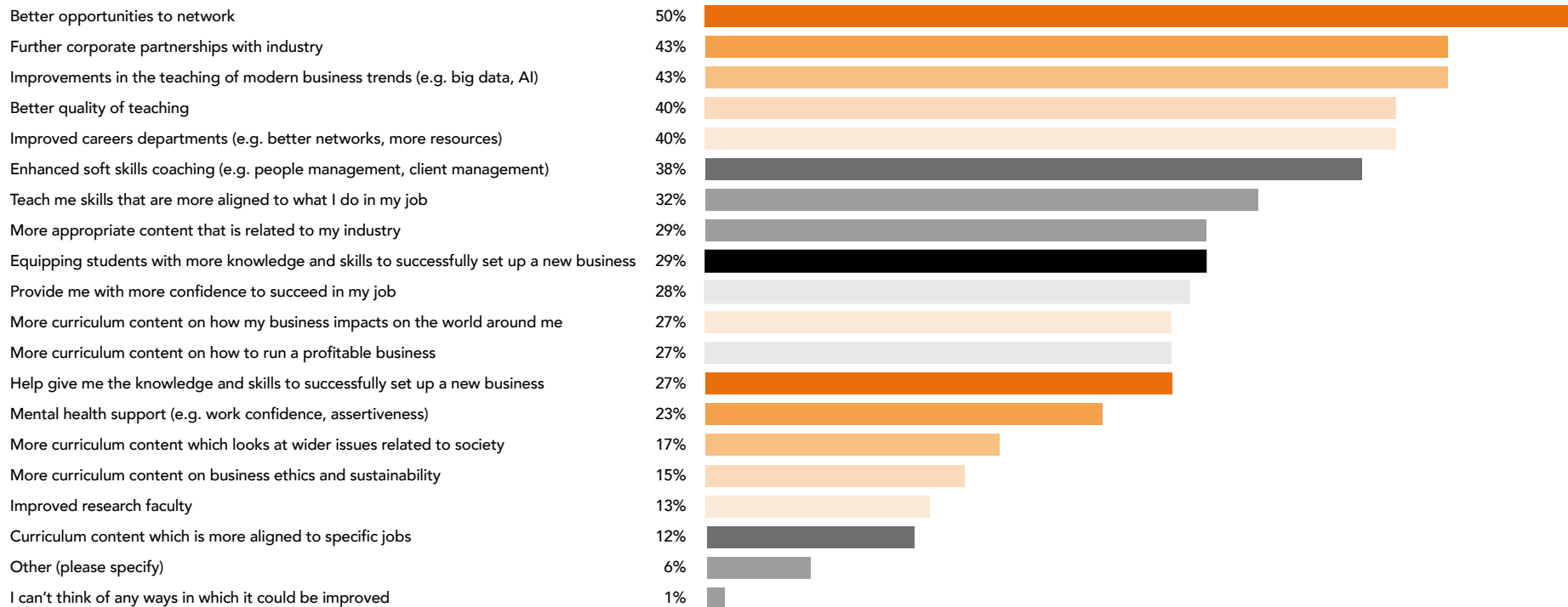
**Figure 18.** How would you rate the quality of teaching on your programme? (Total responses: 666)



**Figure 19.** To what extent do you think your MBA is good or poor value for money? (Total responses: 664)



**Figure 20.** Which, if any, of these things would you like to see improved in your MBA? (Total responses: 452)



## Part five: Post-MBA planning

The final section of the questionnaire sought to investigate how MBA students were considering their future and their plans for after graduation.

More than half of those surveyed (54%) do not intend to return to the same job they held prior to undertaking their studies and 17% are not sure.

Those who are not returning to the same job they held before completing their MBA were asked what their post-MBA plans were.

As figure 21 outlines, a third (33%) of student survey participants are planning to move to a new company in the same sector in which they currently operate – but with a different job function – following completion of their qualification; and conversely, a similar proportion (29%) are planning to move to a new company in a different sector with a similar job function.

Just under one in 10 (9%) want to return to the same company and the same job role, but at a more senior

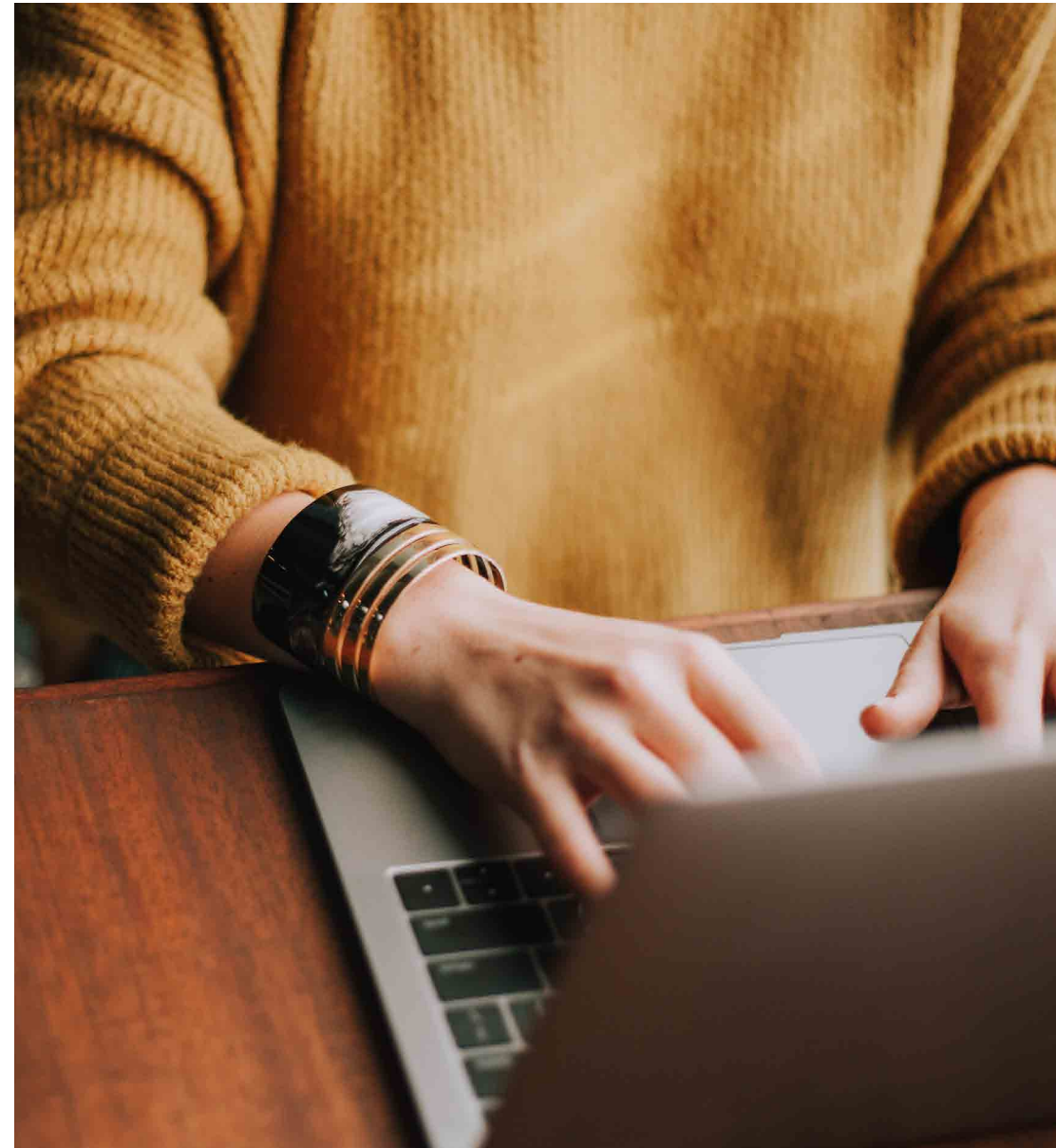
level when they complete their MBA; and 7% hope to have a different role in the same company.

Meanwhile, 16% have plans to launch their own business.

Notably, 6% of participants said they are still unsure of their post-MBA plans, at the time of completing the questionnaire.

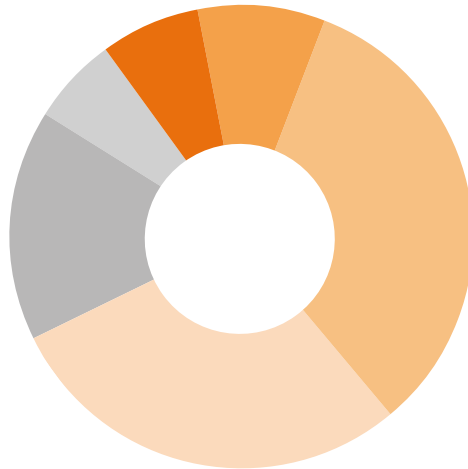
More than half (55%) are making plans to stay in the country in which they are completing their MBA; and, while 24% are planning to move elsewhere, 21% are not sure where the future will take them.

As figure 22 illustrates, of those that are choosing to stay in the country in which they completed their MBA, the largest proportion (39%) are doing so because it is their home country. A third (33%) point to the career opportunities in their country of study; 29% like the social life in their country of study; 20% consider it 'home'; and 12% had met their partner in their country of study.

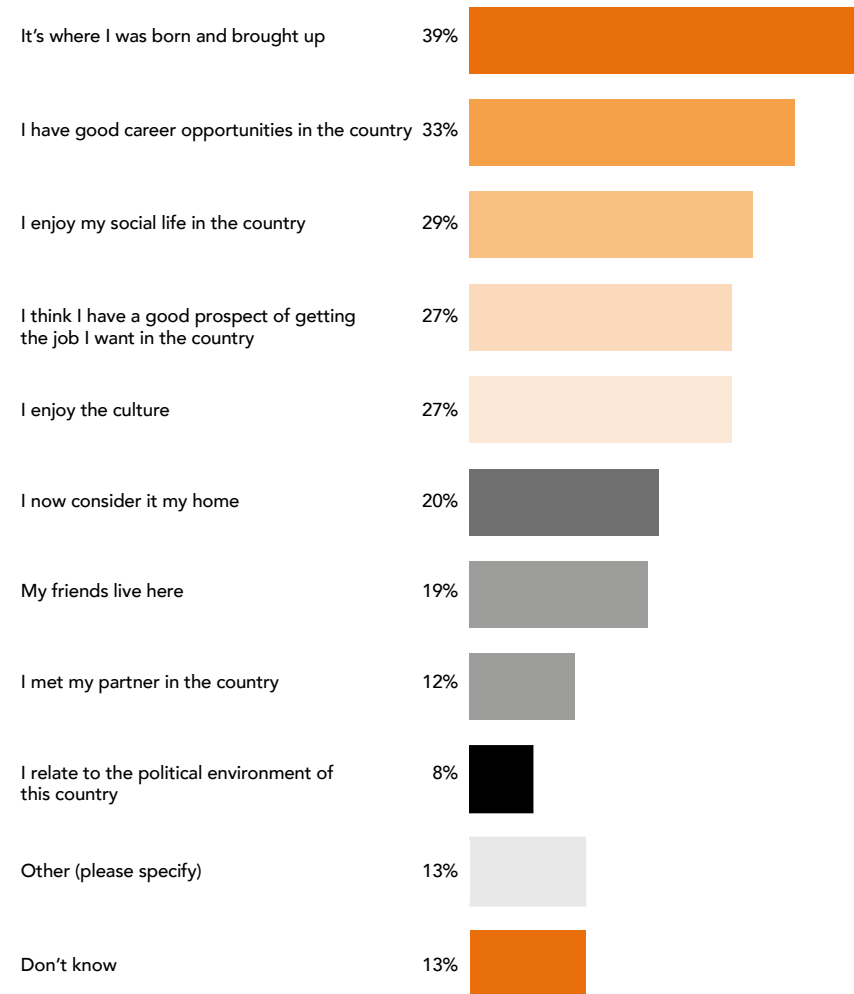


**Figure 21.** Which of the following best describes what you intend to do once you graduate with an MBA? (Total responses 353)

- Return to the same company with a different job function 7%
- Return to the same company with the same job function but at a more senior level 9%
- Move to a new company in the same sector with a different job function 33%
- Move to a new company in a different sector with a similar job function 29%
- Launch your own business 16%
- Don't know 6%
- Launch a not-for-profit organisation 0%



**Figure 22.** Why are you choosing to remain in the same country in which completed your MBA? (Total count: 626)





# Conclusions

The findings reveal that, for the most part, the class of 2020 was riding the chaos of the current global uncertainty and making the most of their MBA experience.

A quarter (25%) rated their teaching as 'excellent'; 43% said it was 'very good' and 24% said it was 'fairly good'.

Considering advice received in terms of job applications, CVs and interview preparation, 80% rated the services provided by their School's careers team as 'excellent', 'very good', or 'fairly good'. Two thirds of participants (65%) rated their School's networking

with employers as 'excellent', 'very good', or 'fairly good'.

Just under a third (32%) said the MBA had provided 'very good' value for money for them; and 48% said it had provided 'fairly good' value for money.

In saying that, a significant proportion of respondents were keen to put forward suggestions for improvements their Schools may want to consider.

Seven out of 10 participants in the survey believed that the delivery and/or content of their MBA programme could be improved overall; more than half (53%) said that their onboarding experience could have been improved; and 43% said that the application process could be improved at their School.

**'Participants used the survey as an opportunity to offer their Business Schools suggestions for enhancing their services and strategies'**

Suggestions from survey participants on enhancements to MBA programmes included more networking, more partnerships with other Business Schools and corporates, and more teaching on AI and big data.

Participants used the survey as an opportunity to offer their Business Schools suggestions for building and enhancing the services and strategies that were already in place, rather than criticising the experience they were being offered.

Participants also recognise the work being done by their Schools to mitigate the challenges caused by social distancing and remote learning, with several remarking that continuity arrangements implemented were impressive, and allowed them to still enjoy their experience, despite the effects of Covid-19 lockdowns and

related restrictions that were out of the hands of their Schools.

Overall, more than half (51%) said that the MBA experience was exceeding their expectations. In fact, a sizeable 84% said the MBA experience either met or exceeded their expectations so far – and considering the ambitious and discerning nature of the participant pool overall, the results suggest that Business Schools within the AMBA network can consider themselves to be succeeding in their delivery and their mission, in spite of global volatility.

**'The class of 2020 was riding the chaos of the current global uncertainty and making the most of their MBA experience'**

**'A sizeable 84% said the MBA experience either met or exceeded their expectations so far'**



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