

SA business schools seek accreditation

After years of promises, SA business schools are finally doing something about their international profiles.



University business schools at Rhodes, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) and Potchefstroom have all begun the lengthy and expensive process of seeking international accreditation for their business administration programmes.

Rhodes is in the early stages of discussions with the London-based Association of MBAs (Amba) for accreditation of its MBA programme. School director Owen Skae says: "Amba has visited and given us a list of five issues we need to address. We want to market ourselves more aggressively overseas and Amba is a big part of that."

Potchefstroom, part of North West University, is further down the Amba path, with director Tommy du Plessis expecting a final accreditation team to visit in October. NMMU is taking a different route, starting with accreditation of its business administration doctoral programme. All being well, the MBA programme will follow next year.

"We'll take it one step at a time," says director Steve Burgess "We have a lot on our plate at the moment." That includes the imminent move from the Port Elizabeth city centre into a new, purpose-built school on the main NMMU campus. Burgess expects the new premises to be ready in November.

Du Plessis also has bricks and mortar in mind. The university has finally allocated land for the construction of an off-campus business school that will include a 250-seat auditorium.

International status

Until now, only five SA business schools have enjoyed any kind of international accreditation: the "big four" SA university business schools - Wits, Stellenbosch, Cape Town's Graduate School of Business (GSB) and Pretoria University's Gordon Institute of Business Science (Gibs) - plus Henley, which holds accreditations through its UK parent.

In recent months, Stellenbosch and GSB have joined an exclusive group of fewer than 60 schools worldwide to hold the "triple crown" of accreditation. Both have been accepted by the US-based Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), to add to Amba and their acceptance by the European Foundation for Management Development, which manages the EQUIS accreditation programme.

Wits Business School (WBS), on the other hand, risks losing its only accreditation, Amba, because of a dramatic fall in the number of students studying for its full-time MBA. Amba demands a minimum 20 students for approved programmes and Wits has only 14 in 2013.

Part of the reason is undoubtedly the result of problems at the school over the past decade - including several changes of leadership, resignations of senior academics and arguments with Wits University over the school's role and autonomy.

Wits struggles

The last of these appears to have had a direct bearing on the current MBA numbers. The university this year drew WBS, part of the faculty of commerce, law and management, into its central enrolment system. So people applying to enrol for all WBS academic programmes, including the MBA, now deal with the university, not the school.

"Our interface with students is limited to teaching," says school director Wendy Ngoma "I have no doubt this has had a negative effect on enrolments here."

Amba is likely to allow a year's grace before withdrawing accreditation, to allow WBS to sort out its numbers. Ngoma, who has run the school since 2010, hopes this year's appointment of Adam Habib as university vice-chancellor, in place of the sometimes combative Loyiso Nongxa, will lead to an easier relationship.

She has prepared a report for Habib, on what she thinks should be the role of WBS.

Recommendations include greater autonomy to make it more dynamic and market-responsive; research into what makes top local and international schools successful and giving the school greater agility.

"Because everything has to go through the university, it can take up between six and nine months to appoint faculty members," says Ngoma. "The new vice-chancellor says he wants appointments to take no more than three months in future."

Gibs keeps growing

By contrast with its cross-town competitor, Gibs continues to go from strength to strength. Following the completion of its latest R45m expansion, dean Nick Binedell says no more construction is planned. "By international standards, we are now a big school. So we will concentrate on providing our clients with even more quality and added value."

Cape Town's GSB will shortly also undertake expansion but not on its own premises. The Waterfront, overlooked by the school, has offered up to 300m² of rent-free space for an innovation hub called Project 17. According to school director Walter Baets, its role will be to create affordable solutions in housing, health, education and energy. "It's business model innovation with a purpose," says Baets.

GSB is partnered in the project by the main university and supported by the Western Cape provincial government. They are looking for sponsors for the estimated R15m to R20m to turn the Waterfront area into an area with between 20 and 25 working spaces. Companies will be invited to suggest and sponsor projects, for which "they will get first refusal on intellectual property".

This is proving a challenging time for schools on many fronts. Stellenbosch has begun the search for a new director after John Powell, who succeeded the long-serving Eon Smit in 2010, resigned suddenly this year to return home to the UK. He is now professor of strategy at Exeter University.

Independent Milpark Business School has rebranded itself to reflect its changing teaching emphasis. Where it once had three faculties - specialising in commerce, banking and investment, and financial planning and insurance - these will become semi-autonomous schools, allowing the main brand to concentrate on MBAs, executive education and general

management academic programmes.

Unisa's plans

At Unisa's Graduate School of Business Leadership, acting director Elmarie Sadler has presented the university with a five-year plan to prepare the school for the long-term future. Sadler, who is the second acting director after David Abdulai left last year, is likely to apply for the permanent post but says: "I can't allow things to drift. Acting or not, I have a vision for the school."

Even the schools body, the SA Business Schools Association (Sabsa), is undergoing change. Its chairman, Potchefstroom's Du Plessis, says former Cape Town GSB director Nick Segal has been asked to oversee the transition, possibly as its director.

Du Plessis says the department of education and Council on Higher Education "do not recognise Sabsa as a professional body that can act on behalf of its members. We need to change our structure to achieve that," he says.

Source: Financial Mail via I-Net Bridge

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>