



29 March 2010

## Fair in Geneva enlightens MBA aspirants

by Michèle Laird

**The QS World MBA Tour stopped in Geneva over the weekend to allow prospective MBA students to meet face-to-face with admissions officers from top international business schools. The first Geneva edition of a worldwide professional event recognizes the potential of Switzerland as a good MBA and job market. It also reveals the wealth of the local MBA offer.**

---

"An MBA fair is a very important part of the MBA admissions process," says Nunzio Quacquarelli, who founded [Quacquarelli Symonds Ltd](#) in 1988 when completing an MBA at Wharton. By helping high achievers connect with top schools and employers, his company is now considered a global leader in career advancement.

"An MBA is a significant investment in your future career and in your future earnings," he highlights. "You want to make the right choice, so you need to talk to representatives of the schools."

By allowing direct contact, the [QS World MBA Tour](#), he claims, improves the candidate's chances of getting into the school of his or her choice. The world tour now takes place in 72 cities and 39 countries on five continents, delivering valuable information and insight that work both ways, helping the prospective student aim for the right school, but also allowing the schools to favour the right candidates.

MBA's are not for fresh college graduates looking to postpone their entry into the real world, but are aimed at the more mature candidate. Most business schools require a minimum of 3 years work experience for an MBA, ten for an EMBA (Executive MBA that is usually obtained mid-career without giving up a job). In terms of profile, quality and diversity were the key words during the panel discussion that took place before a packed audience.

"I am pleasantly surprised," says Hong Kong-born Benjamin So, who after seven years as IT application architect with a Swiss multinational is considering adding business skills to his career path.

The selection process of MBA candidates, he learns, is only partially based on the GPA (grade point average at university) of the candidate and on results of the notorious [GMAT](#) (graduate management admission test), a "pattern recognition test" required by most business schools and that Europeans tend to find alien.

American students, on the other hand, prepare the GMAT well in advance to boost their scores, just as they do with the SAT (scholastic achievement tests) that are obligatory to gain entrance to undergraduate studies in the US. "We do not however, rule out students who underperform on the GMAT because there are so many other elements that go into selecting the right candidates," reveals Dr. Katrin Muff, dean of [Business School of Lausanne](#). "An application file that is impeccable and complete is even more important. Give us a chance to be impressed," Muff underlines. "Make us understand who you are and why an MBA will make a difference in your life."

"To learn that the admissions process is not only based on quantity, but that there is a qualitative aspect to it as well is something I did not know before coming here today," she says.

"We look for applicants who come to us with an interesting story of where they are going next," explains Marschall Sitten, program coordinator for the [International Organizations MBA](#) (IOMBA). "Strong applicants go to the heart of what we stand for," he says of the select programme at the University of Geneva that only accepts 40 students a year. Alexis Mellon, regional manager for Europe for the [Furqua School of Business](#) at Duke University, North Carolina states that "Businesses need people who think 'global' and understand the world."

With an aim to customizing corporate education and allowing Duke MBA students to test their skills in different environments, her school has branches in North Carolina, London, Saint Petersburg, Shanghai, Dubai and Delhi and is planning to develop further to South America and Africa. "Switzerland is also a great market,"

she enthuses. "It is an international hub with lots of businesses. People here are both highly qualified and diversified."

"We have a long partnership with QS," Mellon adds, "and we know that they do their research well when they organize their world tours." "Our job is to deliver the right candidates to the right schools," Isabelle Pasmantier, marketing director of QS France explains. "With the crisis, we are actually experiencing an increase in demand for business schools and this for various reasons." "Some candidates are looking to acquire added value, but some are actually changing fields. I know of an architect, for example, who wants to move into business. Others want to become entrepreneurs and yet others are specifically attracted by corporate social responsibility and ethical practices. These are all areas where we can guide them," says Pasmantier.

The first Geneva edition of the QS World Tour showcased schools from the USA, UK, France, Spain and Germany, as well as prestigious business schools in Switzerland that confirm the strength and variety of the local offer. [IMD](#), [Thunderbird School of global management](#), [University of St.Gallen](#), [BSL](#), [IOMBA](#), [Lausanne HEC](#) and [Geneva HEC](#) were present at the fair. "This overview is very important for me," says Ieva Tikuisyte, a recent graduate of the Lausanne Hotel School who now works in strategic marketing. "It is still early days for me since I didn't realize that I needed more work experience. But when I choose a business school it will be to make sure that what I do, I do well and that I can pass it on." "As a Lithuanian, what I discovered at this fair is that I may have an advantage in terms of diversity. That's not bad for a start," she says hopefully.