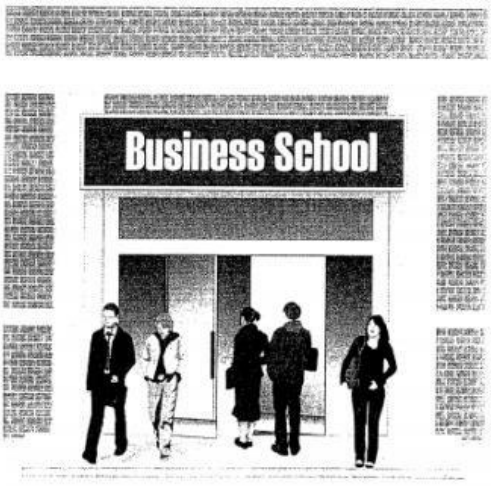
Reading passage 6

READING PASSAGE

You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 1–13**, which are based on the reading passage below.



Few students taking a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) are there through sheer love of learning. Most want to learn in order to apply their knowledge once the course is over. On the other hand, the MBA is an academic course. How do you take account of these conflicting needs when it comes to assessment? 'In education generally – not just in the MBA world – there is a move away from traditional exams towards people looking for ways to make assessment more relevant,' says Jeannette Purcell, chief executive of the Association of MBAs (AMBA). She says that exams will always exist because so much of an MBA involves acquiring knowledge best tested through a written paper, but 'business schools are developing programmes to become more practical, more applied, using real life situations and assessment has to reflect that change.'

One reason for this is the rise in the executive over the full-time MBA, which means most students are studying while working for a company. Another is a changing approach towards learning. Oliver Westall, Lancaster University Management School's MBA director, says: 'When I began teaching many years ago, there was an attitude that we decided what ought to be taught, because we knew what students needed to know. Now, increasingly, especially when students come to our MBA programme with an average of seven years' experience, sensible faculties realise that students can bring a lot more to the table when they share their experience.'

Business schools therefore now often assess students on their ability to work as part of a team, while some even include an element of peer assessment in which students mark each other's contributions. Dublin City University assesses its MBA students through team presentations, team-written assignments, case study analyses, individual work-based projects, strategic organisational analyses and business plans. Exams account for less than 50 per cent of the total marks awarded, while teamwork

Gareth Griffiths, MBA programme director at Aston University, where students undertake a consultancy project at the end of the course worth a third of the overall mark, says that while employers' opinions are important they have to be treated with caution because they can expect far too much or too little. Sometimes they cannot be objective because they hope to employ the student in future. This struggle to be objective is a common concern when it comes to alternative methods of assessment. 'I think any alternative to assessment by exams is not going to be as rigorous or as accurate,' says Purcell. But she argues that the more these alternative assessment methods are used, the better business schools will get at using them effectively. And there are ways of ensuring rigour, such as benchmarking across different courses and assessors, and making sure that assessments are based on more than one person's opinion, and on fixed criteria.

While AMBA (the Association of MBAs) would expect a course to involve some exams before it gave accreditation, Purcell says, it would be concerned if exams were the only assessment

LIVEWORKSHEETS

accounts for around 30 per cent. Melrona Kirrane, academic director of the MBA programme, says team-based assessment raises issues every year. 'MBA students are enormously competitive and quite aggressive and hostile,' she says. 'They are there for their own purposes and they aren't impressed when other team members don't play their part.' But she says it remains a key part of assessment, because being able to function well in a team is vital in any business organisation.

Teamwork is also tested in consultancies for real companies, which is also playing an increasingly important role in assessment for many institutions. Full-time MBAs at Ashridge complete their written exams within three months of starting the programme, to provide a foundation of knowledge, and the rest of the course focuses on practical work. They can choose to take a consulting project for up to eight weeks or submit a 10,000 word dissertation. For the past two years, Coventry University has allowed students to do a company internship rather than a dissertation in their final semester. Three quarters of their mark in this is based on a report they present to the company, a further 10 per cent on the employer's assessment, and 15 per cent on a piece reflecting on their own learning.

method. Meanwhile, few would suggest that alternative assessment methods are an easy option for the student. Marie Hardie, postgraduate internship manager in Coventry University's business school, says students find they not only have to get used to a company's culture in a few weeks, they often have to persuade them to part with money – 'Not an easy thing to do'. Overseas students can find non-exam assessments particularly stressful. While exams can be challenging for those whose first language isn't English, so can verbal presentations.

Dan Gray, an Ashridge MBA student, says that while he appreciates his course's practical focus, exams are still important, 'After all,' he says, 'exams test your ability to perform under pressure, and that's a critical skill for any senior manager.' But it is not the only skill. 'If you think about what employers want from MBA students, they want well rounded people who have demonstrated skills in all areas and have been assessed in many different ways,' says Purcell. Marco Romero's assessment for consultancy work he carried out for the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce during his MBA was so positive that he is still working for them.

Questions 1–5

Look at the following people (Questions 1–5) and the list of statements below.

Match each person with the correct statement, **A–H**.

1 Jeannette Purcell
2 Oliver Westall
3 Melrona Kirrane
4 Gareth Griffiths
5 Dan Gray

List of Statements

A concedes that practical skills are important, but maintains that exams are a valuable assessment tool

B feels that testing by exams is more thorough and precise than other methods

C says that written exams are becoming more and more critical

D suggests the views of employers are not always impartial

E thinks that MBA students have more practical know-how nowadays

F states that evaluation by peers should be included in any course assessment

G thinks persuading companies to pay for courses is difficult

H believes team-based assessment to be essential in evaluation of MBA students

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Questions 6–12

Complete the sentences below.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

6 Purcell believes that other methods of assessment are replacing ..... .

7 Business students are now tested on being able to function in a ..... .

8 At Dublin City University ..... still makes up less of the total marks than exams.

9 On full-time MBAs at Ashridge written exams are done early so students can concentrate on ..... .

10 One way to ensure the thoroughness of testing is not to rely on just one individual's ..... .

11 To students from outside the UK the testing that is not based on exams is sometimes especially ..... .

12 One form of assessment that is sometimes demanding for students who are not native speakers of English is ..... .

Question 13

Choose the correct letter **A**, **B**, **C** or **D**.

13 Which of the following is the most suitable title for the reading passage?

A The end of written exams?
C Practical assessment in decline?
B The importance of MBAs
D Teamwork and written exams compared

LESSON 6 – REVIEW

1. How many types of comparison sentences are there?
2. List at least three linking words showing comparison.
3. What are the key features that need describing in a bar chart?
4. What is an effective to analyze and report a table?
5. What are some other ways to paraphrase '11-14 year old people'?
6. Can you remember some phrases for reporting percentages?
7. What structures for proportion that we have?
8. How can we analyze and report a pie chart task?
9. What is the strategy for Matching names in IELTS Reading?

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