Testing times for students

Aptitude tests have long been a part of the MBA, but what do they prove and how can you pass? Nic Paton reports

The GMAT, which costs a flat fee of $250 (1340), consists of four timed sections: two analytical writing tests and two multiple choice quantitative and verbal tests. The questions gradually become more difficult the more correct answers you give, meaning that in essence you are moving up a scale.

What score you get is determined by the number of questions you answer, how many you get right and the level of difficulty of each question you answered.

Scores range from 200 to 800, with the vast majority falling somewhere between 400 and 600. The sort of score business schools want inevitably varies, with London Business School, for instance, asking for around 680, although it stresses that a lower score will not necessarily rule you out. In Grant's case, for entry to Said, he scored 650.

"If someone has scored badly, the odds are that they're struggling," says Peter Casladine, accreditation services manager at the Association of MBAs. The test is far less capable of doing is predicting whether a high scorer will turn into a successful student.

"It is a proven test for predicting how a student is likely to do on the core MBA courses. It is also extremely useful in helping us to form a comparison that cuts across national differences and educational systems," explains Julia Tyler, associate dean of the MBA programme at London Business School.

But this has not stopped some business schools, such as Cranfield School of Management, from developing their own internal aptitude tests for students alongside the GMAT.

The reason behind this is not that schools believe that the test is flawed but that they want a fall-back for where scores are borderline or where there may be other issues, says Cranfield admissions adviser John Mapes.

Number the best you can handle a GMAT? Banana stock

1. For which of the following numbers is the number of factors 441?
   a) 9
   b) 16
   c) 27
   d) 32
   e) 11

2. How many different positive integers are factors of 441?
   a) 4
   b) 9
   c) 7
   d) 3
   e) 11

3. If $n$ is a prime number greater than 2, how many different positive even divisors does it have, including it?
   a) 2
   b) 3
   c) 4
   d) 6
   e) 8

# Test run Three GMAT sample questions

In Grant's case, as he applied relatively late and time was tight, he decided that a formal course was a waste of time.

"One of the guys on my course did a three-month course over weekends just on GMAT," he recalls.

But he adds: "You do need to spend time, at least a weekend, looking at the books and getting to understand how the questions are put together. If you do not you will waste half an hour just working out how to answer the questions."