



## Doctor of Business Administration

**H**ow did Deutsche Bank shift from a regional to a global operational structure? How does Siemens maximise the entrepreneurial spirit of its leaders towards identifying innovative solutions for customer requirements? How did National Semiconductor improve its delivery performance with a key client?

- The answer to all of these questions is Action Learning. In the words of Gerard van Schalk, Chairman of the Executive Board at Heineken, "... *Action Learning has become the primary vehicle for generating creative ideas and building business success at Heineken.*"<sup>[1]</sup> With Action Learning, working professionals in leadership roles form small teams and work cooperatively to tackle complex, deep-rooted problems and they learn by doing so.
- What is the most efficient and effective way to enhance business acumen and develop critical leadership qualities? The answer is also Action Learning. With the University of Liverpool's Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) Programme by Critical Action Learning, students develop doctoral-level knowledge and research skills across critical management areas by relating classroom scholarship to management problems in real time, every day.
- In traditional business programmes, students are left to themselves to determine how to apply their studies and their research to the actual practice of management. This is problematic because only 5% of learners claim to use classroom knowledge directly on the job. Even worse, after five days, learners remember less than a tenth of what they heard in a lecture. This is why the

University of Liverpool's DBA is designed around this proven educational methodology.

<sup>1</sup> Marquardt, M. (2004). *Harnessing the Power of Action Learning*. *Training & Development*, 58 (6), 26-32.



*"Most universities offer a face-to-face Doctor of Business Administration programme which requires an on-site, classroom learning environment. The University of Liverpool offers a 100% online DBA by Critical Action Learning programme in a virtual platform, and is one of the very few universities delivering the curriculum by Critical Action Learning and Action Research."*

**Dr. Lisa Anderson,**  
Director of Studies Online MBA & DBA,  
University of Liverpool Management School

## Doctor of Business Administration

- The University of Liverpool's online Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programme places great emphasis on highly relevant, workplace-based research by producing truly actionable knowledge, in the context of the student's organisation, rather than focusing on creating narrowly defined and theoretical scholarly research.
- This professional doctoral business programme produces a qualification which, whilst being equivalent in status and challenge to a PhD, is more appropriate for those pursuing professional rather than academic careers. Its practically-oriented approach is highly beneficial to working professionals as it allows the immediate integration of actionable knowledge and critical thinking skills into their working environment.
- The DBA programme's combination of deep practice-based learning and research, with rigorous classroom scholarship, is made possible due to the unique delivery of the programme by Critical Action Learning. The Critical Action Learning and Action Research hands-on learning methods allow students to reflect, not only upon the tribulations and practices encountered at the workplace, but also on one's attitudes and biases that led to the decision-making which impacted the situation.
- Today's business environment is fully globalised and highly complex with disruptive change seemingly lurking around every corner. In this environment, effective leaders need to be able to make sense out of a morass of sometimes conflicting information and help their organisations solve truly challenging problems. By applying Critical Action Learning and focusing on the creation of highly relevant and useful research, the University of Liverpool DBA programme is positioned to prepare its students to thrive and advance in their careers.

## The DBA student

- The DBA by Critical Action Learning provides an exciting experience for working professionals who wish to improve their practice and advance their careers.

- This programme is ideal for senior business managers, independent consultants, government and policy makers, and a myriad of others in leadership positions who want to become significantly more effective in the practice of management, as well as enhance their ability to engage in intense and highly relevant research.
- Entrepreneurs and working professionals who work in both the profit and non-profit sectors will also benefit from this practice-based learning approach to become change agents in their respective organisations.

## Programme Outline

- The Doctor of Business Administration programme takes an innovative approach, fostering learning by engagement and action. Students are able to create professional actionable knowledge, both through classroom learning and by applying Critical Action Learning and Action Research using appropriate quantitative and qualitative methods.
- The core curriculum of the DBA programme consists of contemporary management topics such as change and crisis management, innovative approaches to leadership, managerial decision making as well as ethics, sustainability and social impact.
- Alongside the core modules, students each write a Doctoral Development Plan (DDP) reflecting on their development as doctoral practitioners and researchers. The DDP helps students create doctoral-level professional knowledge and develop the critical thinking skills needed for leading businesses and organisations in the midst of ambiguity.
- Students complete their qualification with an original thesis based on a critical project undertaken in their organisation. Unlike a thesis for PhD research, this thesis is designed to produce new, actionable knowledge for immediate use.
- The DBA is designed with the understanding that most senior managers will change positions and organisations throughout their careers. By focusing on building critical reflection, critical thinking, and doctoral-level skills, students should graduate with knowledge and

expertise that they can apply in a variety of organisational and managerial settings.

## Action Learning and Critical Action Learning

- Action Learning is an educational process that occurs when a group of individuals meet on a regular basis to deliberate and learn from their experiences to improve practice in an organisational context. Strategies, tactics and actions determine the outcomes and results which subsequently influence the strategies again.
- Critical Action Learning is a critical reflection on the beliefs, attitudes and biases that led to the selection of the chosen actions which improved the results. Reflection makes the learner aware and provides opportunity to modify these underlying assumptions. This practice-based hands-on approach, referred to as Double Loop Learning, is a unique feature of this programme.
- The University has based the DBA programme on Critical Action Learning because it recognises that even seemingly simple business problems can be impacted by the dynamics of personal attitudes and the complexities of power and politics in organisations.

## Action Research

- Action Research is where the researcher takes on a project, or intervention, with the dual purposes of solving an identified problem and generating new, actionable knowledge. In the context of this DBA programme, students as action researchers closely examine their organisations. This "insider" action research allows meaningful and positive changes to be applied through the proposed intervention.
- Action Research is a systematic approach that utilises a set of sophisticated analytical tools and begins with critical reflection. In fact, becoming a critically reflective practitioner is one of the key outcomes of the DBA programme.

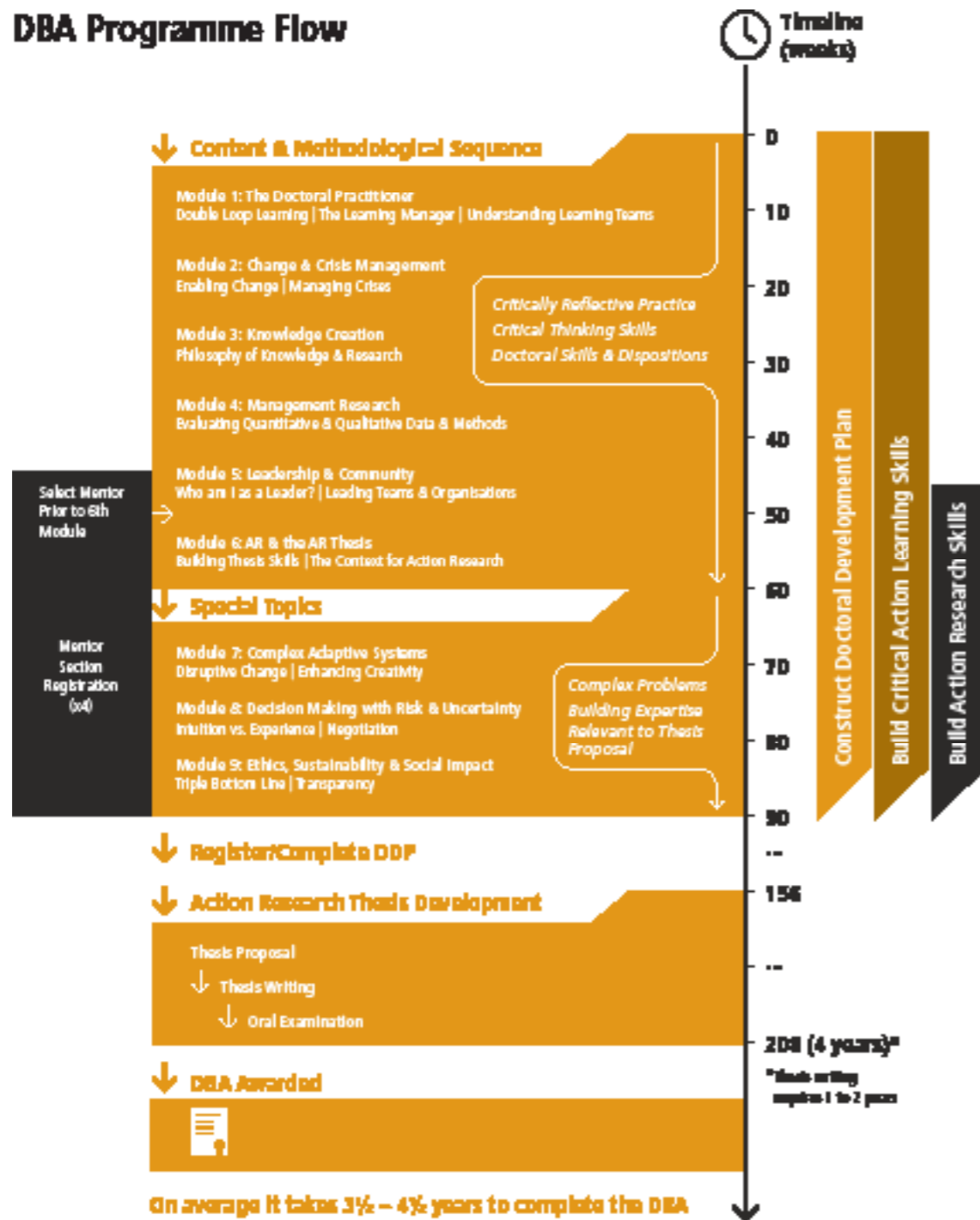
## Programme Structure

- Students are required to follow two, non-credit bearing modules (Student Readiness Orientation and Foundations for Academic Success) that will prepare them for their online learning experience. For more information about these modules – full descriptions, duration as well as the additional student support services available – please refer to the [Centre for Student Success document](#).
- The DBA programme continues with nine modules (30 credits per module), the Doctoral Development Plan (90 credits), and culminates in a thesis (180 credits).
- The first module is twelve weeks in length and each subsequent module is ten weeks. Modules are sequenced in an order that is best suited to the students' development on the programme. The first six core modules will incorporate the Critical Action Learning methodology while the remaining three will incorporate both Critical Action Learning and Action Research methodologies.
- The Doctoral Development Plan (DPP) progresses in parallel with the nine core modules.

## Preparatory Modules

- Student Readiness Orientation
- Foundations for Academic Success

## DBA Programme Flow



### Core Modules

- The Doctoral Practitioner
- Change and Crisis Management
- Knowledge Creation
- Management Research: Quantitative & Qualitative Methods
- Leadership and Community
- Action Research & the Action Research Thesis
- Complex Adaptive Systems
- Decision Making with Risk and Uncertainty
- Ethics, Sustainability and Social Impact

### DDP Project

- The Doctoral Development Plan (DDP) is a 10,000-word, first-person research project progressively prepared in parallel with the nine taught modules of the doctoral programme. It is an account of students' reflection on the research that they have undertaken and upon each student's development as a researcher.
- The DDP serves as a means of assessing the extent to which the student has progressed as a doctoral-level thinker, critical action learner and action researcher. It will also include a commentary on the overall contribution to knowledge made by the student during the nine modules.
- Faculty mentors and DDP Clinics assist students in completing the DDP project. The focus is on four key concerns: contribution to knowledge, research methodology, development of doctoral skills and dispositions, and metacognitive skills.
- The DDP is intended to promote reflection on Double Loop Learning – what students are learning and how they are developing as individuals as a result of the learning process.

### Thesis

- The culmination of the DBA programme, this written project demonstrates the student's mastery and integration of all previous learning. The thesis is the cornerstone of the UK university system. It is an original, scholarly work that applies the student's new knowledge and experience, proving mastery of the techniques studied.

- Writing a doctoral thesis can be a daunting task. For this reason, the University has integrated a support system into the programme to enable students to progress successfully through the stages of thesis development. In fact, students begin "scaffolding" thesis writing skills mid-way through the programme in mentoring sections that allow them to share ideas with other students while building a rapport with a faculty mentor.
- Thesis development will last between one and two years and will consist of four stages. These stages are: developing the thesis proposal, faculty review and approval of the proposal, writing the thesis itself, and the oral examination (known as the "viva voce") of the thesis.

### Programme Duration

- The programme will take between 3.5 and 4.5 years based on the recommended study schedule. Should students need to alter their study path due to work or family commitments they can do so in consultation with a Student Support Manager.
  - Course work: 2.5 years
  - Thesis: 1 – 2 years

### Core Modules

#### The Doctoral Practitioner

*AIM: To provide a comprehensive introduction to the DBA programme and to our unique and intensive management learning environment.*

- The Doctoral Practitioner introduces students to the DBA programme and to the requirements for successful participation in our online pedagogical environment. The module examines the significance of learning and of fostering personal and organisational learning. The module explores the origins and growth of Action Learning (and the related concept of Critical Action Learning) and its application to management development. The module also explores the nature and applicability of a range of other action modalities. Emphasis will be placed on planning small phases of project work that can be applied and studied throughout the programme on critical reflection, and on sustaining the ap-

plication of learning throughout one's career. Module assignments focus on practical application of writing and critical-thinking skills and promote professional practice and academic excellence.

#### Change and Crisis Management

*AIM: To understand and apply several models for change management particularly from a stakeholder perspective and to develop the ability to lead teams and organisations through disruptive change scenarios.*

- This module begins with the notion that the success of any organisation is dependent upon its ability to manage change and handle crises while also creating value for its stakeholders. "Crises" in this sense encompass a wide range of events impacting the organisation. In this module, students analyse and evaluate several models for change management, and consider their application in practice. This module also prepares students to lead change initiatives within a variety of organisational settings. For example, students will explore constructs such as intervention theory (see Argyris, 1970) as a means of developing effective decision making strategies regarding process and expected outcomes. Additionally students will explore and apply skills of effective coaching such as active listening, empowering, enabling change, and using feedback to create interactive dialogue and deeper understanding. Finally, the role of leadership in crisis situations will be explored and analysed.

#### Knowledge Creation

*AIM: To provide students with a philosophical and methodological foundation of knowledge creation in management research.*

- The aim of this module is to provide students with a philosophical and methodological underpinning of knowledge creation in management research. The module will provide students with key theories to support their application of Action Research during the programme and place Action Research in historical context.
- In the construction of knowledge it is important that students consider what management research is; how

to understand the relation between cause and meaning; the notion of positivism, idealism, realism and post modernism; the nature of the qualitative process and the nature of the quantitative process.

#### Management Research: Quantitative & Qualitative Methods

*AIM: To introduce students to the qualitative and quantitative aspects of management research. Rather than simply concentrating on the development of research skills, this module focuses on applying this understanding towards "making meaning" of scholarly and popular research articles.*

- In this module, qualitative and quantitative frameworks for inquiry are introduced. Qualitative designs including case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography. This module also helps develop the student's skills in descriptive statistics, statistical inference, quantitative techniques – including analysis of variance and covariance – multiple linear regressions and various nonparametric techniques. Quantitative designs covered include experimental and quasi-experimental, survey, and causal-comparative. The "frame of reference" for this module is not simply a demonstrated understanding of particular techniques. Rather, the focus is on applying this understanding towards "making meaning" of published research. Assignments, therefore, focus both on skill development and demonstration as well as on the effective interpretation of published research and the application of that research to workplace problem solving.

#### Leadership and Community

*AIM: To provide an intensive examination into the concepts and practices underlying the successful leadership of high performing teams and organisations, particularly in a challenging global context.*

- This module is premised on the notion that organisations are comprised of interlinked "communities" of varying sizes from small teams to large departments. Additionally, these communities not only interact with each other within an organisation but also relate to larg-

er communities outside of the organisation. This module focuses on the theory behind and practical skills of (1) effectively leading teams and departments ("micro" communities); (2) strategically managing the interrelationships among teams and departments to create high-performing organisations (the "meso" community); and (3) thoughtfully leading teams, departments, and organisations in the context of diverse cultures and nations ("macro" communities). In this context, the module also presents a critique of particular aspects of leadership theory, its negative aspects, and its substitutes. Focus areas include the development of oneself as a leader, development of others as leaders, shared leadership, and development of effective and vibrant organisational communities. Finally, the module examines the concept of the learning organisation and the relationship between leadership and facilitating learning within the organisation.

#### Action Research & the Action Research Thesis

*AIM: To introduce the concepts and practices of Action Research as a mode of intensive management inquiry. This module also introduces the student to the structures and expectations of the doctoral thesis.*

- This module explores the notion of Action Research in its many and varied forms. The term Action Research is used to describe a planned intervention by a researcher in an organisational or community setting which attempts to solve a problem, or effect a change, and to simultaneously study the phenomena employing rigorous and ethically acceptable methodologies. Action Research involves a series of stages of entry, contracting, diagnosis, action and evaluation (Gill, 1986). It is necessarily collaborative and differs from basic research in that it involves mutually agreed goals and control between the researcher and the client. It differs from consultancy in that it has a strong research focus and should result in a contribution to professional and/or theoretical knowledge. Students will become familiar with the stages of Action Research, the methodologies typically used in such an intervention and the ethical dilemmas often faced by Action Researchers by critically examining a number of case studies. Students will also explore the distinctions between insider and ex-

ternal Action Research and appreciate the challenges and opportunities presented by both modalities. The module will also help students to understand how to write, structure and present an Action Research thesis at doctoral level.

#### Complex Adaptive Systems

*AIM: To provide an additional frame of reference for understanding how organisations manage through disruptive change. This module compares organisations to biological organisms that must adapt to a changing environment or perish.*

- This module builds on concepts covered in Change and Crisis Management. What does it mean for organisations to manage successfully through disruptive change? One approach to answering this question is Darwinian: crises in the environment demand that species adapt or perish. The species that have survived can be described as complex adaptive systems. Modern organisations can also be understood as complex adaptive systems and they face the same dilemma as living species: adapt or perish. Considering organisations in this framework leads us to new insights about how to lead them effectively. The primary aims of this module are to describe the formal underpinnings of complex adaptive systems and to give students an intuitive appreciation for the behaviour of organisations as complex adaptive systems. Students will also explore how organisations respond successfully and unsuccessfully to environmental "stimuli" such as emergent technologies, competitive pressures, and economic and political instability.

#### Decision Making with Risk and Uncertainty

*AIM: To examine the complexities of managerial thinking and decision making with a particular focus on the trade-offs between rationality and intuition as well as the strategies effective managers can use to mitigate risk in decision making processes.*

- This module examines the psychological, social and organisational processes and problems associated with thinking and decision making in various organisational contexts and with varying levels of certainty. Emphasis is placed on exploring the complexities of managerial

thinking and decision making, the trade-off between rationality and intuition, and strategies to manage risk in decision making processes. Current theories and approaches in understanding managerial thinking and decision making are explored as are issues associated with group decision making, conflict and negotiation. A particular focus is placed on the relationship between decision making theory/practice and workplace learning modalities.

#### Ethics, Sustainability and Social Impact

*AIM: To introduce the student to the tensions and trade-offs involved in the adoption of a focus on ethics, sustainability, and social impact by an organisation in a competitive economy. The module also introduces the student to the concepts of stakeholder analysis and the triple bottom line with a focus on personal and organisational ethics and issues of transparency.*

- Ethical, sustainability, and social impact (ESSI) issues have been largely treated as peripheral concerns to business. However, for a variety of reasons, organisations are now fusing social mission with competitive strategy. This module provides the student with an understanding of how ESSI fits into the strategic development of organisations. It looks at the implications of adopting an ESSI focus in a competitive economy. The module also introduces the student to the concepts

of stakeholder analysis and the triple bottom line. A principal part of the module is devoted to personal and organisational ethics and issues of transparency, including discussion of the social impact of non-ethical and non-transparent practices.