



Choosing the next step . . . the Sydney MBA and Postgrad Expo, held at the International Passenger Terminal. Photo: ROB HOMER

Risk courses in demand

Katie Walsh

It was business as usual at the annual MBA and Postgrad Expo that toured the biggest cities this month, as prospective students sought courses that grappled with a risk-riddled financial world.

The cross-disciplinary offerings on display from the 71 universities, business schools and independent providers at the expo can open eyes and lead to a change of tack; interest picked up in areas beyond business.

"A lot of people come along to the show with MBA in their head and they see other options," said Denise Cooney, director of expo organiser Exhibitions Plus. Attendees exploring MBA options fell from about 75 per cent to 50 per cent this year.

The expo landed in Perth last Thursday, its final destination in a tour that attracts more than 3000 potential students nationwide.

The crowd attracted in each city fluctuated every year, Ms Cooney said. But "this year the Melbourne show was a very busy show", while Sydney won the hat for most exhibitors and Canberra was successful in attracting high-calibre PhD candidates.

Beyond business, "sciences, education, IT, psychology and environment are all coming out quite strong", Ms Cooney said, noting the shortage of teachers and the efforts by education departments to recruit people from varying backgrounds.

Both the NSW Department of Education and Training and the Department of Education & Early Childhood Development in Victoria exhibited at the expo.

A spokesman for DEECD said it was the third time the department had participated in the expo.

"People are attracted to teaching to make a difference, with money being secondary motivation," the spokesman said, adding that job security was a key driver in uncertain times.

The spokesman said there was a steady growth in older applicants who want to embark on postgraduate study and are motivated to "give back or influence the next generation in the profession they entered, for example in engineering, nursing, law".

The associate dean of postgraduate programs at the University of NSW's Australian School of Business, Chris Adam, said there were "some spikes of interest in science programs and in education", for UNSW.

Demand for business programs remained high and there was a surge in areas such as actuarial studies, Professor Adam said.

"I have a feeling that to some extent the effect of the [global financial crisis] has probably been put behind people," he said, adding that accounting and finance offered renewed job prospects.

People are also flocking to one of the school's newest offerings — a masters degree in risk management.

Professor Adam said the attraction to the risk programs, including actuarial studies, seems to be motivated by a desire to know more about risk — a desire that some may rue didn't come earlier.

RMIT college of business in Melbourne has tapped into the market after the GFC and will offer a new masters in management next year.

RMIT had some 360 different postgraduate programs, but most inquiries were for its MBA program, said its deputy vice-chancellor international and development, Stephen Connelly.

IT and media and communications took a higher billing than last year, while nursing, international development, fine arts and communication design appeared as new inquiries.

Mr Connelly said about 80 per cent of attendees wanted to expand existing knowledge or advance their careers. The city location of the expo suited "professional people who can visit the expo at lunchtime or after work", he added.

In a survey at last year's expo, attendees ranked the chance to improve career options as having highest importance, followed by personal development and staying competitive in the job market.

Prospective students will have the chance to explore options further in the coming month when many universities will hold postgraduate expos on their campuses.