

# VIEW FROM THE BOARD

**Macquarie University's Global MBA Advisory Board talk about why they got involved, how industry views the online MBA in 2020, and why good online MBAs are disrupting the marketplace and, in the process, changing the future of education.**

## Peter O'Brien

Is a core member of Russell Reynolds Associates' Global Board & CEO Advisory Partners and leads the firm's business across Asia Pacific. Previously, Peter led the Global Supply Chain Practice, as well as the Global Industrial Services & Infrastructure Sector and remains a mentor for both.

Peter joined Russell Reynolds Associates more than 10 years ago from DHL, where he was the Managing Director of its independent Asia-based business operation, offering fully integrated supply chain solutions to companies worldwide. Peter previously

held senior global supply chain management roles based in Europe with DHL and its parent, Deutsche Post World Net. Earlier, he worked at PricewaterhouseCoopers and TNT Limited. Peter began his career practising law as a corporate commercial lawyer with Phillips Fox Lawyers in Australia.



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**Yasmin King**

Is the CEO of SkillsIQ, Yasmin is an experienced negotiator and mediator, having led major commercial negotiations as a negotiation consultant and coach. Yasmin was the inaugural NSW Small Business Commissioner and the first Associate Commissioner for the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission appointed with responsibility for small business.

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“Working with classmates online and across different time zones, as Macquarie’s GMBA students do, reflects the world in which we live and work today. There is nothing more current.”



**Warren Bingham**

Is the Executive Chairman of MedTech International Pty Ltd, a consultancy specialising in leading organisations with innovative and disruptive medical technologies. He is also the CEO of BioAnalytics Holdings, a start-up firm that developed a novel mandibular device for sufferers of obstructive sleep apnoea.



**Q. Why did you decide to join the advisory board?**

O'Brien: Working, as I have now for a number of years, in an advisory capacity, I felt that advisory boards were generally fruitless and added limited value, so I was quite hesitant when I was invited to join Macquarie's. However, it quickly became apparent that they were trying to build something that was distinctly different. Lan, the Academic Programme Director, wanted to create a culture whereby the members of the advisory board would be actively involved and could make a material difference in influencing the direction of the MBA programme, which resonated with me.

King: The GMBA isn't an adaptation of an on-campus programme; it's a programme that's been designed specifically to be online and so it offers all of the attendant benefits one would expect from a cutting-edge online MBA. That was a big draw for me.

**Q. How does the advisory board support the GMBA?**

O'Brien: Beyond the co-creation of curriculum, custom workforce offerings, and thought leadership, we try to help ensure the student experience and learning throughout the programme is real, materially valuable, and relevant, as opposed to just being theoretical.

Dealing with real and current issues and solving complex problems as someone develops as a leader is the ultimate objective. This is something that companies struggle with today as we operate in such a disruptive environment, and one of the reasons I got involved. We focus on real experience and real problem-solving.

Rather than students just being part of a network and a brand, we want to expose them, through our industry connections, broader relationships, and experience, to businesses they can work and interact with in order to

understand and then solve real problems. This allows them to not only apply what they're learning in a real business environment but also showcase their talents to potential employers.

**Q. To what extent are recommendations acted upon?**

O'Brien: While universities can be quite slow to move, and rather bureaucratic, this has not been my experience with Macquarie. For example, recently, it occurred to me that there might be an opportunity to partner on research, specifically thought leadership, looking at the workforce landscape, post-COVID-19. Within a matter of weeks of discussing it, teams had been assembled, both at my firm, Russell Reynolds Associates, and Macquarie, specifically looking at the way we 'work', 'learn', and 'lead'. This is a very practical example of an idea and suggestion that is now happening.

**Q. In your opinion, what makes the advisory board so effective?**

Bingham: It's the combined skillset, experience, and knowledge base of the advisory board, coupled with our intimate knowledge of the structure and curriculum of the GMBA, and the student experience, that really adds value.

King: I think we're able to provide real-time guidance on where we see potential deficits in the business landscape, and because we all have a different lens, you end up with this 360-degree view, which is very powerful. This not only informs the faculty but allows them to adapt their material in short order.

Lan, the Academic Programme Director, has also done an excellent job of marrying cultural diversity with professional diversity. For example, I run a not-for-profit and sit on



the board of a tech start-up, but could easily be sat next to a board member from one of the big consulting firms, and that's important because we all bring different perspectives to the table.

**Q. Once upon a time, online MBAs were seen as the poor relation. How does industry view the online MBA today?**

Bingham: I think it depends on a number of factors, one important one being the reputation of the school. Without knowing the GMBA, you know that Macquarie is highly regarded for its academic rigour and exceptional faculty, which is important, not just to employers, but also to students. Not all online MBAs are created equal.

O'Brien: There's no doubting the fact that, in the past, online MBAs were seen as lightweight. However, today, it's about being relevant, and that means being online and being able to operate effectively in this virtual world in which we now exist.

Online MBAs like Macquarie's GMBA reflect the speed of change we're currently experiencing because they have the ability to adapt and react as events unfold. What this is doing is exposing those on-campus programmes that are out of touch and, consequently, offering less value and less relevant current learning. Today, I think it's about building credibility by being connected, globally, to the right organisations and the right people, seeing and learning what is evolving now, and the online model accelerates this process.

**Q. In your opinion, does the online MBA format stand up to its on-campus counterpart?**

Bingham: Yes, certainly in Macquarie's case, and I can say that with confidence having been through their on-campus MBA

and knowing the GMBA incredibly well. Working with classmates online and across different time zones, as Macquarie's GMBA students do, reflects the world in which we live and work today. There is nothing more current.

King: If we're talking about the GMBA, then absolutely. Although the programme is online, it offers opportunities for real engagement between teaching staff and students, and between students themselves, as there is a level of shared experience. For example, a current GMBA student who did their undergraduate degree at a sandstone university in Australia, and whom I know, has mentioned on several occasions that they've had more engagement with the teaching staff and students on the GMBA than they ever did on their undergraduate degree!

**Q. What does the Macquarie name and reputation bring to the GMBA?**

King: As I mentioned earlier, one of the reasons I'm proud to be involved with the Macquarie GMBA is because it's not a face-to-face MBA that's simply being delivered online. The GMBA has been designed specifically for the online learning space, which means it's flexible, stackable, and positioned at a price point that makes it accessible.

**Q. What does the future hold for online MBAs, post-COVID-19?**

King: I think post-COVID-19, people are going to be far more concerned about content, and whether a programme's content is relevant. I also think flexibility, adaptability, and cost, paired to relevancy and real-world learning, will be important factors for potential students. This is where I believe good online MBAs will surpass on-campus MBAs, the latter requiring students to take time out of work to focus on material that may not be entirely relevant.

