



**European Association for  
Public Administration  
Accreditation**

## EAPAA Accreditation Committee Evaluation Report

**Evaluation Report with respect to the request for accreditation of the Master of Public Administration Department of Public Administration, Babes Bolyai University**

In consideration of the Self-Evaluation Report of the above programme, the Site Visit Report of 21 August 2014 of the EAPAA Site Visit Team for this programme, and the response of the programme to the draft of the Site Visit Report, the EAPAA Accreditation Committee, at its meeting of 9 September 2014 in Speyer, Germany, has evaluated this programme against the EAPAA Accreditation Criteria (version 8, September 2011).

### 1. Accreditation Criteria

<b>2. Applicability/Eligibility</b>	
2.1 Domain	The programme is a professional master programme (according to the Romanian regulations), and has a strong interest in consolidating the link with public sector practitioners.
2.2 Geography	Romania is a member of the Council of Europe since 1993 and an EU Member State since 2007, therefore the accreditation of the Master of Public Administration falls within the jurisdiction of EAPAA.
2.3 Programme longevity	The Master of Public Administration has been in operation for 15 years, so it qualifies for a “normal accreditation” process.
2.4 Programme variants and locations	The Master of Public Administration is offered only in the fulltime version and in one location, at Cluj-Napoca headquarters.
4 Category of accreditation	The Master of Public Administration is a two-year, full time master programme.
<b>5. Standards</b>	
5.1 Domain of public administration <b>Score: Adequate</b>	The Master of Public Administration shares the belief of the Department, that the study of public administration is interdisciplinary in nature and should be based on five main sources: management, sociology, economics and public finance, political sciences and law. The Programme has four individual tracks that include disciplines such as: Economics and public finances, Organizational theories, NGO management, Comparative governance, Public management, Ethics, Comparative European and administrative law”. As presented in the Self-Evaluation Report, “the graduates of the programme have solid knowledge in management, sociology, economy, political science and law” (p.12).

<p>5.2 Mission of the programme <b>Score: Adequate</b></p>	<p>The Programme under evaluation has developed a pragmatic approach to study content and it seems that there is an increasing interest in linking the educational objectives to the practical experience students need when entering public / private organizations. However, the Site Visit team recommends refreshing the mission of the Programme so to accommodate all intended learning outcomes and to correlate them to the competencies fit to the public administration field. Since the programme intends to be research-based and theory-driven, the intended learning outcomes would then comprise next to skills also knowledge.</p>
<p>5.3 Level <b>Score: Adequate</b></p>	<p>The Master of Public Administration offers learning outcomes that correspond to the generally, internationally accepted qualifications of an academic master programme. During the Site Visit, the team has had several discussions with students, alumni and practitioners who have all corroborated the statement above.</p>
<p>5.4 Practise and internships <b>Score: Adequate</b></p>	<p>The Site Visit Team considers that the Programme has evolved in comparison to the accreditation visit of 2007. Internships are now included in the Master of Public Administration, and practitioners seem to be actively involved in the teaching process. Therefore, it has adequate links to the public administration profession. However, the Team feels that the curriculum development process could do more to include practitioners, whose views on learning outcomes and the competencies students acquire might be of use to the Department of Public Administration. Although the team appreciates the informal networks between the programme faculty and practitioners, it suggest to consolidate these networks through the creation of an Advisory Board, which can then be formally engaged in the development process of the programme.</p>
<p>5.5.1.1 Core components <b>Score: Good</b></p>	<p>Overall, the programme consists of the necessary core components: core courses, specialisation, internship, and dissertation. It is noted, however, that political sciences seems to be underemphasised for the NGO Management track. In comparative perspective, the 10 ECTS for dissertation writing and defense, seems rather low. It is commendable that the programme has a compulsory internship, but the minimal duration of two weeks may not always create the necessary conditions for students to truly work on real life problems. Guaranteeing that students do substantial work during a very short internship is a point of attention for the programme.</p>
<p>5.5.1.2 Other Components <b>Score: Adequate</b></p>	<p>The specialisations are sufficiently described in the curriculum. Extra work required to level up students from backgrounds other than PA is not addressed in the curriculum, but individually tailored in an informal way. This may work in practice. However, a more explicit levelling up strategy and expectations management may prevent certain groups from dropping out.</p>
<p>5.5.1.3 Structure and didactics of the programme</p>	<p>The structure and didactics of the curriculum is good and the programme is doable in the foreseen time.</p>

<b>Score: Good</b>	
5.5.1.4 Intake <b>Score: Adequate</b>	The selection of students is constrained by national education law. However, the SVT has the opinion that the programme can look for ways to deal with some students' lacunae that do not come at the expense of regular classes. One way is for the intake interview to direct applicants to recommended readings. Another way is to organise some levelling up classes during the orientation days that precede the start of the academic year, or provide voluntary add-ons. The latter could be specified in advance and later on tailored to the actual student needs.
5.5.2 Length <b>Score: Complies</b>	The duration of the programme is adequate.
5.5.3 Results <b>Score: Adequate</b>	The results of the programme are adequate. The problem, however, seems to lie in the fact that employers cannot wait to employ the students until after they have completed their thesis as final requirement for the degree. This partly explains the high attrition rate, and prompts the programme to consider ways to convince employers to provide conditions and incentives for students to complete their master degree.
5.6 Quality Improvement and Innovation	
5.6.1 Programme accomplishment <b>Score: Adequate</b>	Based on the self-evaluation report and the qualitative information from stakeholders, the quality assurance on the course level is satisfactory. In addition, students have the possibility to use the "red button" for immediate concerns regarding any issue. At the programme and faculty level regular quality improvement sessions take place. However, a systematic quality framework listing distinct measures and criteria is missing (although planned for end of 2014). We strongly recommend developing such a framework in order to see how all levels of quality (horizontal, vertical) are addressed and how findings get used for programme improvements. As mentioned in the 2007 accreditation report we also recommend including quality criteria regarding careers of graduates, satisfaction of alumni, and employers.
5.6.2 Curriculum Development <b>Score: Adequate</b>	Although there is no well documented curriculum development procedure, there are many activities contributing to this development. Curriculum development is ongoing. However, due to the non-documented processes and based on the self-evaluation report as well as the evidence from the site visit it is not totally reproducible how the regular curriculum is developed, what has been decided, and what exact changes have resulted from this process in the last seven years. Without wanting to encourage a too much formalized procedure we recommend as in section 5.6.1 including and documenting the various steps in curriculum development as a highly important element of the quality improvement framework.
5.6.3 External Reviews <b>Score: Adequate</b>	Most recommendations of the EAPAA 2007 report have been addressed during the last seven years and the site visit team observed evidence that the programme management has initiated several changes in the programme due to external reviews. Regarding the drop-out rates and levelling out of different backgrounds of students we rather recommend finding solutions in voluntary add-ons to the programme. The initial

	interview could be used more emphatically to make students aware of deficiencies and to devise tailor-made plans and reading lists to catch up on deficiencies. Rather than trying to accommodate all types of students in early courses and use time of regular master classes, voluntary seminars or tutorials could be offered as extracurricular options.
5.7 Student Assessment <b>Score: Good</b>	An adequate variety of assessment methods are used during the programme. In projects the students practice real-life situations. The quality of the project papers and thesis reports are on average satisfactory. However, evidence of average grades, dropout rates, and the development of those figures over time was neither presented in the self-evaluation report nor provided at the site visit. The implementation of a monitoring of grades and grade development including dropout rates at course level is recommended. Regarding the dissertation process we recommend structuring the process of writing the dissertation including more formal deadlines as well as early and clear communication. In addition, continuous achievements of such a process (e. g. hand in proposal, research design) could be included into the grading of the dissertation so students are guided better towards the end of their dissertation.
5.8 Programme Jurisdiction <b>Score: Adequate</b>	The jurisdiction of the programme (through the programme director) is adequate, within reasonable formal procedures of decision making in the department and faculty.
5.9.1 Faculty nucleus <b>Score: Good</b>	Taking into account the scale of the programme the staffing of the core faculty in numeric terms is good.
5.9.2 Faculty qualifications <b>Score: Adequate</b>	The qualitative level of the faculty is adequate and varies depending on age and experience. Full-time faculty and qualified academic teachers are the base of the core teaching components of the curriculum. Staff should publish more in international peer-reviewed journals. As the faculty is fluent in English, publications in international journals should not be a major problem if their articles are of sufficient interest and quality. Furthermore, we recommend that the faculty participates regularly at international research conferences with own research presentations. In addition, there are young scholars very much engaged in the development of the programme and their career. We recommend having a keen eye on their development in regard to the standards required for their promotion (focus on research and international publications, no overload due to teaching and administrative tasks).
5.9.3 Diversity: gender and minorities <b>Score: Adequate</b>	During the last years an increase of female faculty members can be observed. Although the distribution of female and male instructors is not yet fairly balanced and there is a slight gender imbalance in the higher ranks the proportion of women is increasing in dependency of the wider context of the programme. The department as well as the programme management showed efforts in addressing this issue and in improving the gender balance. Population minorities are served well. As the programme is in English, the Romanian students from all ethnic origins are in the same situation and there is specifically no handicap for minorities.

<p>5.10 Admission of Students <b>Score: Adequate</b></p>	<p>No specific admission criteria are possible in Romania. Interviews with applicants are held. The bachelor degree, proficiency in English, preference for specialisation, and experience with government/NGO are important for the selection of candidates. We recommend using the initial interview to clearly inform applicants about the programme's expectations, using the interview more emphatically to make students aware of deficiencies and to devise tailor-made plans to catch up on deficiencies. The gender imbalance of students should also be addressed by marketing campaigns and interviews. In addition, the alumni network could be used to show male role-models in public administration jobs with a MPA degree. In addition, we recommend developing a strategy for the planned future recruitment of non-EU students for the MPA programme (e.g. Chinese, Indian students) because the level of education and also the expectations might widely differ to EU students although the admission criteria may be met.</p>
<p>5.11 Supportive Services and Facilities <b>Score: Good</b></p>	<p>The facilities and supportive services are good. The new library is definitely an improvement and the new building an asset to the programme.</p>
<p>5.12 Student Services <b>Score: Good</b></p>	<p>Student counselling services are good. Retention techniques are adequate but leave room for reinforcement. The SVT is of the opinion that student attrition can be better remedied by using additional retention techniques. The first category of potential drop-outs could be tackled by better expectations management at the intake of students and levelling up lacunae prior to the start of regular classes or with voluntary add-ons. The second category of potential drop-outs might be helped by a stricter regulation of the thesis writing process and by creating incentives to employers to facilitate working students to finish their final curriculum component.</p>
<p>5.13 Public Relations <b>Score: Good</b></p>	<p>The public relations strategy of the programme is good.</p>
<p><b>6 Additional Criteria Not applicable</b></p>	<p>Not applicable.</p>

## 2. Conclusion

The Master of Public Administration programme of the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, has proven its sustainability and its ability to meet EAPAA's standards. The programme is multi-disciplinary and firmly fits the domain of public administration and management. The staff and students have shown themselves to be highly committed, at a time of public sector cuts and regulatory constraints that are not necessarily favourable to running a programme like this. The sustained quality level and progress are therefore to be complimented.

Previous suggestions by EAPAA have to a large extent been taken up, especially when it comes to internships, which has led to an increase in the quality of the programme. Yet the site visit team believes the bar could be raised higher, with relatively small effort, if a number of steps are taken. Below we list a number of recommendations on key challenges facing the programme. Generally,

these point the way towards more structured interaction and procedures. Although the strong informal relations and flexibility should be preserved, some careful formalisation would help to consolidate the gains made over past years.

### Drop-out rates

The dropout rate of students in the master programme is a key issues. There are roughly two kinds of dropouts: those who leave at an early stage of the programme and those who complete most of the programme, but not the dissertation.

The first wave of dropouts is likely to be partially related to knowledge deficiencies among students entering the programmes. As already noted in a previous evaluation, the differences in background between students entering the programme are strong. The variation will be even greater if the programme realises its ambition to attract more international students. Although at the end the differences level out, it leads to wasted effort on the part of both the faculty and students. We are aware of the regulatory constraints the programme faces in limiting this variation through selection or mandatory prerequisites. Therefore, in our view, the solutions must be found in voluntary add-ons to the programme. The initial interview could be used more emphatically to make students aware of deficiencies and to devise tailor-made plans to catch up on deficiencies. Rather than trying to accommodate all types of students in early courses, orientation days, voluntary seminars or tutorials could be offered as extracurricular options. The extra efforts expended on this are likely to pay themselves back in the form of fewer dropouts and better performance in later stages of the curriculum.

The failure of a number of students to finish their thesis appears to be caused by the happy circumstance that they can quickly secure jobs. As this is in itself good and probably unavoidable, the question becomes how the programme can give these students and their employers an incentive to finish the complete programme. We recommend explicitly addressing this issue with employers, stressing the added value of dissertations. As part of this, dissertation topics could be linked more closely to the current needs of employers, making the outcome of this final stage of the programme of more direct practical relevance. In addition, the programme could take more efforts to structure the process of writing the dissertation, through earlier communication and more formal deadlines. This would in our view benefit the students by giving more handholds during a slippery phase in the programme.

### Relations with alumni and employers

The recommendation from the 2007 evaluation to strengthen links with alumni and practice appears to have been taken up to some extent, but only up to a point. While there are good informal connections, these are not clearly visible to the outside world, nor are there structured mechanisms to integrate feedback from alumni and employers into the design of the programme. The programme would in our view benefit from establishing an advisory board in which these groups are represented, which could give regular feedback.

### Quality assurance

It has become clear from the site visit that the system of quality assurance has been significantly strengthened over the past years, although this is not entirely evident from the self-evaluation report, which omits some important initiatives. The programme is to be commended for its efforts to collect data on performance and for its commitment in acting upon feedback. Still, we believe that



some more formalisation would help to safeguard the improvements of the past period and make them less dependent on the efforts of individual people. By creating a regular platform for interaction between students and faculty, existing efforts would become both more visible and sustained. This should not be read as a plea for more regulation, but rather for the construction of a more explicit dialogue at the programme level.

#### International students

The arrival of more students from outside Europe is likely to raise particular issues, e.g. with respect to contact hours, internships, didactics, case-material, language proficiency, extracurricular programmes. It is recommended that the programme devises an explicit strategy on how to deal with these issues.

#### Faculty

The development of the programme benefits from the strong engagement and commitment of young scholars. We recommend having a keen eye on their development in regard to the standards required for their promotion (focus on research and international publications, no overload due to teaching and administrative tasks).

#### Recommendations

The SVT makes the following recommendations:

- Sharpen the mission formulation with the engagement of all stakeholders.
- Adapt the learning outcomes to embrace next to skills, also knowledge and the multidisciplinary character of the programme.
- Guarantee political science component in NGO –management track
- Guarantee that compulsory internship involves meaningful problem-solving work
- Actively use interviews for expectations management regarding the workload expected from a 130 ETCS programme, and advice applicants on extra readings
- Level up graduates from other backgrounds than PA with voluntary add-ons prior or during the first semester, without taking time off from regular classes
- Institutionalise a thesis guidance schedule
- Introduce a fixed script for thesis defences with equal time allotted to all students.
- Engage employers in suggesting thesis subjects
- Have strong link between internship and thesis
- Have stronger link between staff current research and thesis subject: engage students through dissertation work in current research
- Institutionalise the quality insurance system
- Set up an advisory board with alumni and employers to involve them in the master programme development.
- Draft a strategic note on the impact of internationalisation on the mission, on levelling up, on contact hours, internships, course materials, thesis subject, extracurricular activities.
- Invest in the research and publication potential of the junior staff.

**Based on the above evaluation of the specific criteria, the EAPAA Accreditation Committee concludes that this programme meets the criteria for accreditation sufficiently and can be accredited without restrictions.**