



**European Association for  
Public Administration  
Accreditation**

## **EAPAA Accreditation Committee Evaluation Report**

**Evaluation Report with respect to the request for accreditation of the Bachelor's programme Public Administration, and the Master's programme Public Administration of the Radboud University, Nijmegen School of Management, Nijmegen, the Netherlands.**

At its meetings of September 3 and 4, 2018 in Lausanne (Switzerland), the EAPAA Accreditation Committee evaluated the programmes against the EAPAA Accreditation Criteria.

### **1. Accreditation Criteria**

<b>2. Applicability/Eligibility</b>	
2.1 Domain	
2.2 Geography	The responsible party for the content and quality of the programme is the School of Management, Nijmegen, the Netherlands. The Netherlands is a member of the Council of Europe, therefore the programme falls within the jurisdiction of EAPAA.
2.3 Programme longevity	Both programmes have been accredited by EAPAA before (lastly 2011). The programmes fulfil this criterion.
2.4 Programme variants and locations	There are no variants or other locations of the programme.
4 Category of accreditation	The bachelor programme opts for the first cycle bachelor level public administration programmes accreditation. The master programme opts for the second cycle graduate/master level public administration programmes accreditation.
<b>5. Standards</b>	
5.1 Domain of public administration	As can be read from the programmes missions, both are clearly in the public administration domain. The Public Administration programmes at Radboud University view themselves as programmes with a classic, generalist public administration core. They aim for their students to analyse problems and issues concerning government and governance, public policy and public sector management in an academically responsible manner.
5.2 Mission of the programme	Both programmes have a strong mission and identity, focusing on educating generalists with strong academic skills for the Dutch public sector. The

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	<p>choice for the bachelor's and master's programme to be generalist is deliberate. The SVT praises the strong identity of both programmes. They make a clear, recognizable choice to be generalist programmes with a research focus, oriented towards the Dutch public sector. The mission of the programmes is well-translated into aims and objectives, and is used as a starting point for the design of the programmes.</p> <p>In the <i>bachelor's programme</i>, students learn to draw on theory and knowledge from economics, political science, sociology, philosophy and law, and apply this to problem-solving in the public interest. This multidisciplinary expertise is integrated with a focus on ethics and values in order to be able to act in the general interest in an increasingly complex world. Students are also extensively trained in research skills in order to be able to describe and explain developments in the field of public administration.</p> <p>The master's programme aims to offer its students a more integrated, interdisciplinary approach. Students learn to apply insights from current research in multiple disciplines into the theory and practice of public administration. The students study and interpret situations from various perspectives.</p> <p>The SVT is impressed by the explicit attention to ethics and values.</p>
5.3 Level	
5.4 Practice and internships	<p>The main link between the programmes and the practice of public administration is the internship. Both the bachelor's and the master's programme have the opportunity for students to pursue an internship. Although not compulsory, students are encouraged to complete an internship either in the bachelor's or master's phase of their studies in Nijmegen. Most students (80%) take this opportunity in their master's. Other activities related to practice are the attention to professional skills and career preparation. The analytical and reflective skills which the programmes aim to teach their students are useful in the professional field. Both programmes regularly draw on real-life policy issues in their courses. Both the bachelor's and the master's programme have a seminar series in which practitioners are invited for guest lectures. The students can use career services at faculty or university level, although these are not tailored to specific programmes.</p> <p>The SVT is generally satisfied with the relationship to practice of the programmes. The SVT noted that direct involvement of practitioners in the programmes is limited, and has the feeling that the programmes could benefit from more structural contact with the field.</p>
5.5.1 Curriculum Content	
5.5.1.1 Core components	<p>The bachelor's programme is structured along five pillars of public administration: the public sector, organization &amp; management, public policy, research methods and multidisciplinary. All pillars are covered in each of the three years, with the difficulty of the content increasing over the years. The SVT is impressed by the strong core components of the programme and the clear structure and logic in which these are offered. In the SVT's view, the bachelor's programme does a very good job in teaching</p>

	<p>public administration as a multidisciplinary subject. The various disciplines are clearly visible and firmly integrated in the bachelor's curriculum. Master's students are expected to compare theories. Both the core and specialist courses explore the interrelatedness of themes in public administration and are aimed at turning the students into critical academics. They learn to make a substantiated choice between theories and approaches in composing a research design. The four core courses cover research approaches, administrative ethics, evaluation monitoring and public governance. After this, the students choose one of the four specializations to further deepen their knowledge. The programme is completed by two capstones: an internship and the master's thesis. The SVT is satisfied with the core components in the master's programme. They adequately cover the basics of policy and management at a master's level. The SVT thinks the programme is successful in achieving its ambitious interdisciplinary goals. Through the obligatory courses and thesis requirements, students study public administration themes from a variety of perspectives, and learn to reflect on this.</p>
5.5.1.2 Other Components	<p>Bachelor's students can choose electives (24 EC) in their third year from a selection of elective courses or a minor programme inside or outside the university. Students can also choose to do an internship or go abroad for electives.</p> <p>Master's students can choose between one of three Dutch-language tracks (Policy &amp; Consulting, Organization &amp; Management and Public Safety Management) and the English language specialization Comparative Politics, Administration and Society (COMPASS) offered jointly with the political science master's programme. Additionally, students can choose to pursue the research master's in Public Administration and Organizational Science, which is formally offered by Utrecht University but co-organized by this programme. The Dutch-language tracks consist of two specialized courses (12 EC), followed by a free slot (6 EC) for either an internship, an elective, an extra research project or an international exchange programme. The English-language Compass track has an international character, both in content and student population. The track focuses on analysing complex systems of government and governance from an international comparative perspective.</p> <p>The SVT is satisfied with the opportunities for specialization in the master's programme. A substantive portion of the curriculum is reserved for the specializations, giving students the opportunity to shape their curriculum to their own preference.</p>
5.5.1.3 Structure and didactics of the programme	<p>The SVT is positive about the clear structure and coherence of the BPA curriculum. The programme has a strong internal logic that is insightful for both staff and students. Based on the interviews with students and staff during the site visit, the programme appears feasible in the time foreseen, and appears to have no major stumbling blocks. The workload seems to be adequate and not overly demanding for the students. In terms of teaching methods, the programme mostly relies on lectures combined with small-scale working groups, seminars and assignments. Having studied the contents of several courses and discussing didactics with students and staff,</p>

	<p>the SVT concludes that these are adequate, but not very innovative or varied.</p> <p>The SVT thinks the MPA curriculum fits the goals of the programme. The capstone project(s) at the end bind the programme together and provide a clear goal for students to work towards. The programme is demanding, but feasible for students in all of the tracks. The master's programme mainly uses interactive teaching methods. The SVT has studied the contents of several courses and is satisfied with the teaching methods used. Students have an active role in preparing and participating in seminar discussions, which fits the goals of the programme to make students critical and reflective. The topics, projects and assignments throughout the courses are varied and offer students a rich learning environment.</p> <p>Programme management and staff discuss them regularly and check whether all intended learning outcomes of both programmes are properly covered throughout the courses. The SVT approves of this, but thinks this process could be reflected more in the wording of the course objectives.</p>
5.5.1.4 Intake	<p>The structure, contents and didactics of both programmes are generally in line with the qualifications of the students entering the programme. The bachelor's students form a largely homogenous group of Dutch students. There are no discernible patterns in drop-out rates or study success related to specific qualifications of groups of students.</p> <p>In the master's programme, the premaster is intended to remedy deficiencies of students before entering the programme. In the experience of the teaching staff, the premaster is generally successful in this. Some hbo-students and international students in the Compass programme had difficulties with the expected level of independent learning. The premaster was recently changed to include learning and reading skills. According to students and alumni, some master's students from an applied science or international background have initial difficulties in the master's programme. However, the teaching methods, in which students are required to actively participate and interact, quickly help them to obtain the required level.</p>
5.5.2 Length	Both the bachelor's (180 EC) and the master's programme (60 EC) fulfil the length criteria for academic bachelor's and master's programmes in Europe.
5.5.3 Results	<p>The SVT was positive about the level of the theses in both programmes. In all cases, the students convincingly demonstrated that they had achieved the minimum level required by the programme.</p> <p>The vast majority of bachelor's students continue with a master's programme, either in Nijmegen or at other universities. As far as the programme can tell, they are doing well at other places. The programme can tell with certainty that the bachelor's programme properly prepares students for the master's programme in Nijmegen.</p> <p>The employability of the master's students of the programme is exceptionally high, with 90% finding a relevant job within a year, with an average search time of 4 months. Employers told the SVT that graduates from the Nijmegen programme (either interns or alumni) distinguished themselves by the high research skills, independence and their broad perspective.</p>

5.6 Quality Improvement and Innovation	
5.6.1 Programme accomplishment	The programmes have succeeded in building an impressive assessment system with an outstanding attention to quality assurance.
5.6.2 Curriculum Development	<p>Curriculum development in both programmes is mainly demand-driven. The programmes collect input from student, staff and external sources on several occasions, and use this to improve the programme. The Educational Committee, and to a lesser extent the Board of Examiners, play an active role in this. Examples of evaluations used in curriculum development are course evaluations, a yearly brainstorm session and an exit questionnaire for all students.</p> <p>The SVT has studied reports from the Educational Committee and the results of several course evaluations, and discussed quality assurance in interviews throughout the site visit. It was impressed by the very good quality assurance within both programmes. Although the internal quality assurance is very good, the programme could make better use of external stakeholders in their curriculum development. Quality assurance mainly driven by input from internal stakeholders has the associated risk of focusing too much on quality of education and less on relevant external developments that might affect the programme.</p>
5.6.3 External Reviews	The previous accreditation in 2011 resulted in a number of recommendations, which played an important role in improvements made in the past years. Recommendations included the improvement of the staff-student ratio in both programmes, greater diversity of assessment methods in the bachelor's, the inclusion of financial management in the bachelor's, more attention to professional skills in the master's, more generous grading of theses in the master's programme, and improvement of contacts with alumni. The SVT concludes that the programmes have in general responded very well to these recommendations.
5.7 Student Assessment	<p>The assessment policy of both programmes is based on three principles: continuous testing throughout the courses, a continuous professional discussion of assessment by the Board of Examiners and the staff, and continuous monitoring of assessments in the programme to ensure their quality.</p> <p>The SVT was impressed by the assessment policy within the programmes. It has studied various assignments, assessment instructions and the test matrix, and was very impressed by these documents. The assessments were varied and very relevant with regard to the course objectives.</p> <p>The SVT considers the test matrix which the programmes use to be of an innovative design and to constitute international best practice.</p> <p>The thesis is assessed by two separate assessors based on clear criteria provided to the students at the start of the thesis trajectory.</p> <p>The SVT studied a number of theses and the accompanying assessment forms for both programmes, and was very impressed by the depth and transparency of the thesis grading process. The SVT is also very positive about the process of thesis review by a single member of staff to discover patterns in grading. It is however less convinced that this can be combined with a role as second assessor.</p>

	<p>It is the policy of the Nijmegen School of Management to have Boards of Examiners at programme level, and have them supported by faculty services. The two Public Administration programmes share a Board of Examiners between them.</p> <p>In both the documentation and the interviews during the site visit, the SVT saw a very active and influential Board of Examiners. The SVT became convinced that the chair has an independent yet influential role in quality control of the programme. The board has succeeded in bringing assessment within the programme to a very high level.</p>
5.8 Programme Jurisdiction	Covered in the Institutional Accreditation
5.9.1 Faculty nucleus Score:	Covered in the Institutional Accreditation
5.9.2 Faculty qualifications	<p>Both programmes are taught by experienced, established researchers in public administration or related fields. All teachers hold a PhD degree and have a University Teaching Qualification, and some also hold a Senior Teaching Qualification. All staff teaching courses in English are required to obtain a certificate to guarantee an appropriate language level. Specific attention is paid to a fit between the courses taught and the research focus of the teacher, with the aim to have all courses taught by a specialized teacher.</p> <p>The SVT is impressed with the quality of the teaching staff in both programmes. The department employs a high level teaching staff with a solid research track record. The staff have a broad range of expertises, covering all key public administration disciplines.</p>
5.9.3 Diversity: gender and minorities	<p>Both programmes strive for diversity among students and staff, and equal opportunities for all groups of students. To reach these goals, the university has several central policies in place. This includes policies on gender diversity in staff and regulations for studying with disabilities.</p> <p>The SVT concludes that diversity within the programme is adequate. It is not a major aim of the programme, nor do there appear to be any issues. The programme does well in gender balance of both students and staff, and performs well in attracting students from ethnic minorities. The SVT does have the impression that the programme could make better use of the international classroom in the Compass track. This track studies governance in an international comparative perspective, but does not appear to challenge students explicitly to use their own backgrounds in this.</p>
5.10 Admission of Students	<p>The bachelor's programme admits all students with pre-university education (vwo) degrees, as is common for Public Administration programmes in the Netherlands. According to the SVT, these admission criteria are adequate for this programme.</p> <p>The master's programme directly admits students with an academic bachelor's degree in Public Administration or Political Sciences, obtained at a Dutch university. Students with a bachelor's degree from another university programme or university of applied sciences (hbo) are admitted after successfully completing a premaster programme of 60 EC. Depending</p>

	<p>on the background of students, it is possible to get waivers for a number of courses in the premaster. The premaster consists of selected courses from the bachelor's degree, and mainly focuses on research methods, public sector and public administration theory and a number of courses on the various disciplines in which public administration is embedded. In addition, for the Compass track, students need to prove their proficiency in English to qualify for entry to the programme.</p> <p>According to the SVT, the admission criteria make sense. The SVT notes that the student comment section in the programme's self-evaluation recommends an evaluation of the premaster. Student experience of the premaster is not monitored, although students from a wide variety of background participate. Experiences might differ for various groups. The SVT thinks the request for an evaluation is appropriate, and advises the programme to follow up on this.</p>
5.11 Supportive Services and Facilities	Covered in the Institutional Accreditation
5.12 Student Services	Covered in the Institutional Accreditation
5.13 Public Relations	Covered in the Institutional Accreditation
6 Additional Criteria	N.a.

## 2. Conclusion

Based on all material and especially the report of the NVAO-EAPAA site visit team, the Accreditation Committee has evaluated the programmes.

In conclusion: strong programme, strong mission, strong Board of Examiners and assessment system, impressive test matrix. The independence of the second reader should be better organised, and the relation with the practitioners should be stronger. The Compass programme should be improved.

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