



**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 Organisation Science, and the Master's programme Public Administration and Organisation Science of Utrecht University, Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance, Utrecht School of Governance (USG), Utrecht, 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

2. Applicability/Eligibility	
0. Preamble	Given the prominence of its educational approach, the bachelor's programme was awarded the Specific Feature small-scale and intensive education in 2014. This allows the programme to select every year a group of up to 93 first-year students. In addition to the regular programme assessment, the SVT also performed a practical assessment, which is reported in a separate document, to verify if the specific small-scale intensive character of the bachelor's programme can be reaffirmed. The master's programme comprises seven tracks, which provide in-depth elaborations on specific topics within the domain of public administration and organisation science. Five tracks are organised as 'regular' one-year full-time programmes taught in Dutch; the track European Governance is taught in English and constitutes the second year of a two-year Double Degree programme; students start the degree in Brno, Konstanz or Dublin and upon completing the second year in Utrecht, receive two master's degrees. The track Sports Policy and Sports Management is a part-time two-year dual programme where students combine work experience and education. The SVT has met representatives from all tracks but will report mainly on its appreciation of the overall master's programme. Nonetheless, where relevant, reference will be made to individual tracks.
2.1 Domain	The bachelor and master programmes are standard academic degree programmes in public administration. The programmes fulfil this criterion.
2.2 Geography	The programmes are organized by the Utrecht School of Governance which is situated in Utrecht, as part of the Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance of Utrecht University, the Netherlands. The Netherlands is a

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	member of the Council of Europe; therefore the programme falls within the jurisdiction of EAPAA.
2.3 Programme longevity	All programmes have been accredited by EAPAA before (lastly 2011). The programmes fulfil this criterion.
2.4 Programme variants and locations	There are other locations. As stated above, the master's programme has two 'variants': an English taught double degree where this master programme is the second year, and a two-year part-time 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.
5. Standards	
5.1 Domain of public administration	The competencies are aligned with the PAGO domain-specific reference framework and with the five Dublin Descriptors for bachelor's programmes. They cover substance, research, professional skills and professional attitudes. The SVT observed that both the master's programme as a whole and the seven individual tracks cover all different knowledge areas of the PAGO domain specific reference framework: three tracks are oriented towards the domain of governance, while four other tracks rather focus on organisational questions of public issues.
5.2 Mission of the programme	The design and organisation of both programmes revolve around the mission of USG: to make a substantial contribution to the organisation and governance of society and the creation of societal value. The research and programmes of the department focus on the management and organisation of public issues as they interact with political and social developments. The <i>bachelor's programme</i> emphasises explicitly in its objectives and learning outcomes that it brings students a broad multidisciplinary perspective on public administration and organisation, a variety of science-philosophical research approaches and methods, the ability to communicate at academic level in a professional environment, and the development of a professional attitude. The <i>master's programme</i> stands out because of the number of tracks (7), which reflect the focal areas of USG's research programmes, and their link to the department's own consultancy practice and contract-funding research. The SVT wondered to what extent this is one master's programme with seven tracks or rather seven different programmes. The SVT observed that the intended learning outcomes of both programmes are organised along three inter-related learning pathways: substance of public administration and organisation of public issues; research into public administration and organisation of public issues; and professional conduct in public administration and organisation of public issues. While the SVT thinks highly of the breadth of the programme, it was surprised to see that the intended learning outcomes are identical across all tracks and that each track realises these objectives in its own way through

	individual track-specific curricula.
5.3 Level	The SVT considers that the intended learning outcomes of the <i>bachelor's programme</i> are adequate in terms of content (public administration / organization science), orientation (academic) and level (bachelor's). The formulation of the master's programme outcomes reflects the proper –higher – level of cognitive skills that one can expect of a master's student
5.4 Practice and internships	All students on the bachelor's programme are exposed to professional practice. In addition to the core programme with social and professional skills, several courses integrate real-life case studies, simulations and guest speakers. Students can also do a research internship as an elective. The <i>master's programme</i> prepares students in various ways for practice. Already during the admission interview, students are asked what their ambitions are upon completion of the programme, and these ambitions are revisited during the individual progress reviews with the thesis supervisor. Courses, moreover, feature guest speakers, case studies and working visits to governmental and public sector organisations. Many students conduct research in the professional field during the thesis preparation phase. The SVT learned, moreover, that two tracks pay particular attention to practical experience as part of the curriculum: students in the Sports Policy and Sports Management track acquire work experience in a sport-related organisation from the very start of the programme; the European Governance track has a compulsory internship where students combine research with work experience. During the programme, all students also participate in specific job-market activities such as training sessions for assessments or for writing application letters.
5.5.1 Curriculum Content	
5.5.1.1 Core components	The curriculum of the <i>bachelor's programme</i> comprises of four types of courses: domain-specific disciplines such as public governance and organisational sciences, supportive disciplines such as constitutional and administrative law and sociology, methodology courses such as quantitative and qualitative enquiry, and electives. The SVT observed that the structure of the curriculum is coherent and that the intended learning outcomes are translated adequately in the different components and the individual courses of the programme. The SVT found that all relevant disciplines are addressed in the core curriculum of the bachelor's programme, taking up a considerable number of credits. Each track of the master's programme offers three types of courses, in line with the three learning pathways: substance, research, and skills (professional conduct) courses. Five tracks have a similar curriculum structure, featuring three substantive courses, two academic and professional skills courses and a research seminar that prepares students for the master's thesis. The English-language European Governance track students have already studied one year in Brno, Konstanz or Dublin before moving to Utrecht. At USG they have one semester of substantive courses and one semester focusing on research, including a research seminar, a research internship and the master's thesis. The Sports Policy and Sports Management track is offered as a part-time two year programme in which

	<p>the substantive link between specialised topics and the administrative and societal context is drawn in its own way, addressing specific topics from within the context of governmental policy and the societal value of sports and featuring an extensive internship period. The SVT learned that, in this track, until now the students have performed, in addition to their studies, a part-time two-year internship in a sports sector organisation. As of September 2019, this master's programme track will be converted into an independent 1.5 year programme with the internship of 30 EC being fully integrated in the 90 EC programme.</p>
5.5.1.2 Other Components	<p>In the bachelor's programme there is one elective course in year 2, a minor of 30 EC in the fifth semester, and a specialisation in the graduation phase of 22.5 EC. The graduation phase consists of a research seminar and a thesis in one of the research themes of the department, which coincide with the specialisation tracks offered in the master programme. Bachelor's students can take additional honours courses.</p> <p>The SVT learned that the curriculum does not offer any formal electives, but acknowledges that the <i>master's programme</i> in itself consists of seven specialisations. Moreover, students have the opportunity to tailor the study programme to their individual needs and interests. First of all, the social and professional skills component (15 EC) consists of eleven courses from which students can choose two. Secondly, the graduation research phase allows students to select a research topic, a research organisation and a suitable research strategy. Based on the materials and the discussions, the SVT wondered to what extent all students who graduate from the master's programme have acquired the same set of research skills.</p>
5.5.1.3 Structure and didactics of the programme	<p>Both programmes are underpinned by a similar educational philosophy, which is based on small-scale, intensive and activating education: students work in small groups, there is frequent contact between lecturers and students, staff and services are accessible, and teaching happens mainly in workshops where students are challenged to develop, discuss and apply knowledge and insights on the basis of practical assignments and projects. The SVT observed that small-scale, motivating and intensive teaching is indeed a distinctive feature of the educational philosophy in both bachelor's and master's programmes. An important element in this philosophy is the creation of a close academic community of staff, students and services. The <i>bachelor's programme</i> includes few plenary lectures. Most core courses are organised in study groups (30 participants) or half study groups (15 students). In electives and specialisation courses the maximum group size is around 25 students; tutorials in the graduation research phase usually have five students. Furthermore, the programme uses activating teaching methods: students receive a specific task which challenges them to develop and apply knowledge and insights on the basis of practical assignments and projects. When discussing literature, students provide a lot of input and give presentations or organise sessions themselves. Students indicated to the SVT that the individual courses are feasible and the number of contact hours appropriate. While the drop-out rate is quite low, the SVT observed that bachelor's students face difficulties in graduating on time.</p>

	Teaching in the <i>master's programme</i> takes place in fixed groups of no more than 25 students, which allows students to form learning communities around each master's track in the department. Students on all tracks have an average of 12 contact hours per week, a combination of tutorials, individual instruction and feedback, sub-groups, tutor groups and working visits. Students are challenged to make active contributions to education. Moreover, they are expected to prepare well for the sessions through presentations and questions.
5.5.1.4 Intake	<p>The admission procedure for the <i>bachelor's programme</i> is set up in such a way that the main criterion for selection is the extent to which a candidate is likely to complete the programme successfully. As a result, incoming students are rather homogeneous in terms of their capacity to succeed in the programme. Moreover, the educational philosophy with its small-scale education, intensive teaching and direct contacts with staff contributes to students levelling up quite quickly, if this is at all needed. Hence, the drop-out rate is fairly low.</p> <p>A similar approach is adopted in the <i>master's programme</i> with students being selected in view of their match with their chosen programme track. Deficiencies at the start of the tracks, if any, can be repaired in the initial course in period 1 which establishes how the core of the particular track relates to the domain of PAOS. The SVT observed that also in the master's programme, the drop-out is fairly low.</p>
5.5.2 Length	The SVT confirms, based on the information materials and the discussion on site, that the <i>bachelor's programme</i> is a three-year full-time programme of 180 EC. All tracks of the <i>master's programme</i> consist of 60 EC; Both programmes meet the length criteria for academic bachelor's and master's programmes in Europe.
5.5.3 Results	<p>The SVT observed that students are producing bachelor theses on a broad variety of topics with almost all theses adopting a qualitative research approach. In each case, the SVT found that the thesis fulfilled at least the minimum requirements one would expect of a final product of an academic programme at bachelor's level. There were several good quality theses, but also a number of theses which were near the pass / fail divide. In almost all cases the SVT agreed to the scores given by the assessors, both in the higher and the lower score ranges.</p> <p>In order to establish whether master students have effectively achieved the learning outcomes, the SVT reviewed a sample of 21 theses covering all tracks and the whole range of scores given. In each case, the SVT found that the thesis fulfilled at least the minimum requirements one would expect of a final product of an academic programme at master's level. While there were several good quality theses, the SVT found other theses to be on the pass / fail divide. In the latter cases, the assessors had spotted the weak quality too.</p>
5.6 Quality Improvement and Innovation	
5.6.1 Programme accomplishment	The SVT learned that about 85% of the <i>bachelor's graduates</i> enter a (research) master's programme at USG or elsewhere. Bachelor's students

	<p>indicated during the discussions that the programme is paying increasing attention to support students in their orientation on the job market. According to general data collected by the <i>master's programme</i>, about 30% of the master's graduates find a job in the area of policy, while another 35% go into management consultancy and 10% stay within academic education/research. Depending on the tracks they followed, graduates also find jobs in employment services, in finance or in the care sector. Both employers and alumni pointed to their academic, professional and social-communicative skills. Moreover, recent graduates indicated that the practice-based research they conduct in the professional field at the end of their (master's) studies, is a good starting point for entering the labour market.</p>
5.6.2 Curriculum Development	<p>According to the Self-Evaluation Report, both programmes have been under constant development over the past few years. Various stakeholders are involved in adjusting the programme in terms of content, structure and teaching method.</p> <p>Students complete evaluations on each individual course, while student representatives have SVT meetings every semester with the respective Director of bachelor's / master's Education. Course evaluations and programme adjustments are discussed in the Degree Programme Committee featuring both students and staff. Programme coordinators and course coordinators meet informally, as well as formally in teaching staff meetings. Students indicated to the SVT that adding up all the different opportunities they have, they play an active role in improving education. The SVT learned that the professional field also provides input to the discussion on curriculum content. This happens informally during alumni activities or in discussions with organisations that are connected to the programmes as internship provider or as contractor for USG Consultancy. Every two years the department evaluates in a more formal setting the master's programme with alumni, in order to determine whether the knowledge and skills that students gain during the programme have proven useful on the job market and whether innovation is needed.</p>
5.6.3 External Reviews	<p>Both programmes have reported extensively on the decisions of the previous accreditation visit and, in so far as the bachelor's programme is concerned, of the committee establishing the Distinctive Feature Small-scale and intensive education. The SVT observed that these recommendations have been followed-up adequately and resulted in bachelor's and master's curricula that have undergone relevant modifications in recent years. Furthermore, the internal certification process organised by Utrecht University resulted in some additional adjustments. In case similar internal certification exercises are not envisaged in the future, both programmes should consider organising a mid-term audit involving also external peers.</p>
5.7 Student Assessment	<p>Based on the description in the Self-Evaluation Reports and the sample of tests consulted on site, the SVT thinks that the assessment system is fine. In recent years, both bachelor's and master's programmes have invested in testing practices and in strengthening the principles underlying assessment. Moreover, the SVT has come across a wide variety of assessment methods</p>

	<p>that include proper feedback to students. The SVT observed that both programmes pay sufficient attention to ensuring that assessments are valid and reliable.</p> <p>Given the attention of both programmes to assessment, the SVT was surprised to notice that there is no written assessment plan (policy) describing at the level of the programme how the different assessment methods are used and how – certainly in the bachelor’s programme – testing proceeds from simple to more complex forms of assessment. The USG department has one Board of Examiners for all its degree programmes, as well as a Testing Committee that functions as a subcommittee of the Board of Examiners. Over the years the legal position and tasks of the Board of Examiners has changed significantly. From the discussion on site with representatives of both Board and Committee, the SVT gathered that these members possess the proper capacity and expertise to perform all tasks according to the requirements set by Dutch law.</p> <p>With regard to thesis assessment, the SVT found the situation to be quite similar for both bachelor’s and master’s theses. In both cases the thesis is evaluated and marked by two graders internal to USG, who report on their evaluation on one evaluation form. The SVT observed that each thesis is assessed using an evaluation form with relevant assessment criteria. Although the SVT agrees in most cases with the scores given by the assessors, it was not always possible to establish how the graders arrived at the final mark, because there is no direct link between each assessment criterion and the score, nor is there an individual weighting of these criteria or a set of decision rules. Moreover, about one third of the thesis assessors in both samples did not back up their scores in the evaluation form with qualitative feedback. The SVT learned, however, that the Testing Committee is taking an active stance in guaranteeing the thesis quality: it created an overview of minimum requirements for theses, it examines every year a thesis with a narrow pass mark and its recommendations have led to the introduction recently of a peer review system to enhance calibration and inter-rater consistency.</p>
5.8 Programme Jurisdiction	Covered in the Institutional Accreditation
5.9.1 Faculty nucleus Score:	<p>Covered in the Institutional Accreditation</p> <p>According to the overview in the Self-Evaluation Report, USG staff on the <i>bachelor’s programme</i> dedicate 10.8 FTE to education, which results in a staff-student ratio of 1:25 when counting a total student number of 275. Recently several new staff were hired.</p> <p>USG staff on the <i>master’s programme</i> dedicate 7.9 FTE to education, which amounts to a staff- student ratio of 1:17 when counting an average student number of 165.</p>
5.9.2 Faculty qualifications	Staff have multiple roles – lecturer, supervisor, trainer - in helping students to achieve the programme objectives. The SVT learned that almost all lecturers combine teaching and research and that education and teaching within USG benefits from the lecturers’ involvement in the research

	programmes. most lecturers have in addition to a PhD also a university teaching qualification. Students are satisfied with the quality of the staff and with their availability.
5.9.3 Diversity: gender and minorities	<p>The SVT learned from the materials and the discussions that diversity is currently an issue at institutional level and for the management of both bachelor's and master's programmes. The bachelor's programme has looked into the selection process and the diversity of its inflow; USG has been working on increasing the diversity of the staff. The SVT observed that the department and the programmes do not have quantitative materials to underpin policies and decisions in all aspects of diversity, although there is valuable data on gender diversity.</p> <p>In terms of the international composition of students and staff, the programmes have had a distinctively Dutch profile until now, with only one master's track being offered entirely in English. This is likely to change, given the growing attention to internationalisation in the programmes. Moreover, the SVT learned during the visit that recently a number of international staff have been hired.</p>
5.10 Admission of Students	<p>In accordance with the Distinctive Feature Small-scale and intensive education, the <i>bachelor's programme</i> is entitled to select students that best fit the programme. According to the Teaching and Examination Regulations, the programme admits up to 93 students per year. The SVT learned that about 300 students apply and that the programme does not ask for a higher tuition fee, although it is entitled to do so. The SVT observed, moreover, that the programme has developed a comprehensive admission procedure: selection tools include a written thematic interview, a profile test, a recommendation, marks and an interview.</p> <p>The <i>master's programme</i> is also a selective and small-scale programme and the admission is set up in such a way that it ensures an optimal match between student and programme. Each track has a maximum inflow of 25 students. The formal admission requirements and procedures are documented in the Education and Examination Regulations. Once the admission committee has determined that the applicant meets the basic requirements, the student participates in the selection procedure. Applicants submit a cover letter, a recommendation, a CV and a transcript of their bachelor's programme. This package is then discussed during an interview, for which the selection committee uses a standardised assessment form. The SVT gathered from the materials and the discussion on site that this selection procedure is lengthy and comprehensive, but also effective as it allows the programme to select from a considerable number of applicants those students that fit the programme. The selection process itself is evaluated regularly, and adjusted where necessary.</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: the bachelor programme is a selective programme with much attention to small-scale learning, but the success-rate is relatively low. The master programme is too diverse and lacks a common core.

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.