



**European Association for  
Public Administration  
Accreditation**

18 March 2013

## **EAPAA Accreditation Committee Evaluation Report**

**Master of Science in European Politics and Policies (MEPP), Faculty of Social Sciences, Catholic University Leuven, Leuven, Belgium**

Evaluation Report with respect to the request for accreditation of 26 September 2011

In consideration of the Self-Evaluation Report of the above programme of January 2012, the Site Visit Report of 23 August 2012 of the EAPAA Site Visit Team for this programme, and the response of the programme of 26 June 2012 to the draft of the Site Visit Report, the EAPAA Accreditation Committee, at its meeting of 8 September 2012 in Bergen Norway, has evaluated this programme against the EAPAA Accreditation Criteria (version 8, September 2011).

### **1. Accreditation Criteria**

| <b>2. Applicability/Eligibility</b>  |   |
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| 2.1 Domain                           | Formally the MEPP is a political science programme with a strong orientation in public administration. The programme offers graduates a comparative understanding of public sector structures, policy-making, and administration within Europe, as well as a methodological approach for analyzing convergence and divergence of decision-making, policies and administration in Europe. The MEPP programme is designed for present day or future practitioners in policy, administrative, or consultative functions at the sub state, state, and international level, and at the same time presents opportunities for research training as it functions as a pre-PHD track for political science and public administration. The domain does indeed fall within public administration as required by EAPAA. |
| 2.2 Geography                        | Belgium is a member of the Council of Europe, therefore the programme falls within the jurisdiction of EAPAA.   |
| 2.3 Programme longevity              | The program was evaluated positively by EAPAA first in 2005. The present evaluation is meant to result in a reaccreditation. The site visit team got ample information that the program continuously modernizes itself and that external as well as internal criticism is taken seriously and does result in improvements of the program.   |
| 2.4 Programme variants and locations | The programme can – due to increasing flexibility measures – be followed on a full-time and a part-time base. This makes no difference to the curriculum.   |
| 4 Category of                        | The MEPP programme applies for the second cycle graduate/master level   |

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| accreditation   | programme (one year). The site visit team encountered no problems in the above. All the formal aspects of this criterion are adequately fulfilled.  |
| <b>5. Standards</b>   |   |
| 5.1 Domain of public administration<br><b>Score: complies</b> | <p>The MEPP programme seeks to provide students with an advanced academic training to gain a comparative understanding of public sector structures, policies, and processes and to master methods for the analysis of policy-making, administration and management. The domain-specific competences are looked upon from an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspective. In the core components of the MEPP programme, Public Administration is understood as a discipline that uses and integrates insights, concepts, and theories from related disciplines to understand public administration structures and processes in their comparative contexts.</p> <p>The Accreditation Committee judges this program clearly as a public administration program. It has sufficient attention to management, policy making and governance and in its electives it is sufficiently multidisciplinary. Although there are no separate courses addressing normative issues, such as democratic values, it was made clear to the committee that such values are integrated within the core courses of the program.</p> |
| 5.2 Mission of the programme<br><b>Score: Good</b>            | <p>As it says in the self-evaluation: The Master of European Politics and Policies' mission is to combine academic excellence in the comparative study of public sector structures, policy-making and administration within Europe, with a continuing concern for the practical challenges professionals in policy, administrative and consultative functions face at the sub-state, state and EU level. In promoting comparative approaches MEPP not only seeks to strengthen cognitive capacities and analytical skills, but also to foster an open-minded attitude to diversity. This mission serves as a guiding principle during the selection process of applicant students. and is brought to the students by the chosen educational strategy.</p> <p>The Accreditation Committee is very positive about the comparative approach taken in this program. It compliments the program with its efforts to specify the mission and sees a clear improvement therein compared to the previous EAPAA judgment on this criterion.</p>  |
| 5.3 Level<br><b>Score: Adequate</b>                           | <p>The program seeks a connection between research and education and parts from the idea that students are held responsible for their own learning and must become more independent throughout their education. Furthermore the program tries to accomplish that students master 1) general competencies at an advanced level and have thereby the capacity, for problem solving thinking, 2) general scientific competencies at advanced level 3) have an advanced understanding and insight in the scientific disciplinary knowledge specific to European public management, administration and policy analysis and 4) the competencies necessary for performing independent scientific research.</p> <p>The Accreditation Committee judges these goals to be consistent with internationally accepted descriptions of the needed qualifications for the master degree.</p>   |
| 5.4 Practise and  | The program does not include an internship, and students are familiarized   |

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| internships<br><b>Score: Adequate</b>                                  | with the practice in the European public sector, through (guest) lectures from practitioners, by attending symposia, workshops and conferences on different issues and by applying theories to actual cases. Although the Accreditation Committee respects the choices made by the program in this regard, and acknowledges that there are limitations in time, it does regret that the program does not make more use of the opportunity offered by its strategic location near Brussels to offer internships to its students. The interviews with students also pointed to the desires in this regard. This is not to say that the relation to practice is inadequate, but the Accreditation Committee encourages the program to do more in this respect.   |
| 5.5.1 Curriculum Content   |   |
| 5.5.1.1 Core components<br><b>Score: Adequate</b>                      | The program offers 29 ECTS on compulsory courses in European Policy- and Decision-making, Comparative Public Administration in Europe, Comparative Public Management in Europe, Comparative Public Policy in Europe, Multilevel Governance: Comparative Analysis of Regionalism and Federalism, Pressure Groups in the European Union, and a Research Seminar. Although the Accreditation Committee does acknowledge the unique character of the program, and does respect the choices made locally with respect to program profile it concludes that quantitative research methods are missing in the program, although the capacity to apply them is mentioned in the mission. Furthermore more attention could be devoted to economics and law.<br>This is not to say the program lacks multidisciplinary. In the meeting with the students, they indicated that they valued the interdisciplinary nature of the programme.  |
| 5.5.1.2 Other Components<br><b>Score: Adequate</b>                     | There are a number of electives for this program. The students found them sufficient, although it was the opinion of the site visit team that in these electives part of the issues mentioned in 5.5.1.1. could be taken up.  |
| 5.5.1.3 Structure and didactics of the programme<br><b>Score: Good</b> | The program uses the concept of Guided Independent Learning, which holds that students are held responsible for their own learning and must become more independent throughout their education and thus need less or at least a different kind of guidance. On the other hand, the instructor is still held responsible for the stipulation of specific objectives, the development of an evaluation system and the creation of a learning environment where these three elements are geared to one another and this within the existing context. The objectives set for the master programme are translated in the objectives for each course, paying attention to knowledge as well as to skills and attitudes. In that respect, a variety of teaching methods is used and monitored, with special attention for activating methods (group work, case studies). Students indicated that they valued the interactive nature of the courses and the degree of organisation of the courses. The alumni the site visit team spoke with valued highly the skills gained throughout in particular the emphasis on comparative analysis, as well as the skills gained from working on group papers and the skills gained from the courses. |
| 5.5.1.4 Intake<br><b>Score: Adequate</b>                               | The admission process is given in the self-evaluation in 11 steps.<br>In recent years the admission requirements have been strengthened with  |

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|  | <p>positive results. Most important is that the students already have completed a master and that in case this is not a master in public administration extra precautions are taken before such a student is enrolled. The same goes for students that nearly missed the required level of the language test.</p> <p>However, the way the programme makes sure all graduates have adequate knowledge of all public administration core components, given the diverse background of the students, was unclear to the Accreditation Committee. In a reaction to a letter from the Accreditation Committee the programme explained their admission procedure in more detail. Important is that the academic background of the candidate is carefully examined. It is during this background check that the basic understanding of public administration are verified.</p> |
| 5.5.2 Length<br><b>Score: Complies</b>                 | The length of the program (60 ECTS) and study times is consistent with European standards.   |
| 5.5.3 Results<br><b>Score: Good</b>                    | The master is finalized with a master thesis. The judgment thereof is guided by clear criteria. Furthermore, all graduates find a job in the European public sector or related field. The site visit team also spoke with a number of alumni who are now in the trajectory of a PhD thesis. All these persons were positive about the level of the program. The committee read some of the master theses and concluded that the grading by the supervisors was almost identical to an ad hoc grading by the committee. The level is as expected. Furthermore the alumni were very positive about the master program and the level thereof.   |
| 5.6 Quality Improvement and Innovation                 |  |
| 5.6.1 Programme accomplishment<br><b>Score: Good</b>   | The program is regularly evaluated, at the university level, on the program level itself as on the course level. Although the actual outcomes of the evaluations and the improvements are not mentioned in the report, the site visit team received a document in which all the recent improvements were described. In this document it appeared that the program is trying to improve itself every year and that they take the development of the curriculum very serious.  |
| 5.6.2 Curriculum Development<br><b>Score: Adequate</b> | The self-evaluation extensively describes the role of different stakeholders in the development of the curriculum, starting with actors within the university, the permanent educational committee, the steering committee, the academic staff and the students and alumni. The only stakeholders missing are the potential employers. However, they are approached when commissioned research is done and when students do an internship.   |
| 5.6.3 External Reviews<br><b>Score: Adequate</b>       | The program was evaluated positively by EAPAA first in 2005. Since 2005 numerous changes have been made in the program, partly based upon this external evaluation.  |

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|  | programme. With this mainstreaming approach they aim at teaching ethical sensitivity in various fields, rather than at confining ethics to a separate course. In an appendix to the letter the program showed all courses where ethics was an important issue. For the Accreditation Committee this reasoning was convincing.   |
| 5.7 Student Assessment<br><b>Score: Adequate</b>                 | The program uses a mix of assessments, ranging from traditional written examination (open or closed book), traditional oral examination with written preparation, individual paper with presentation, individual paper, and group paper with presentation. Lecturers have the professional autonomy in deciding what methods to use to assess and evaluate student progress, according to the specific objectives of the course. During the meetings with students and alumni no complaints were heard about the assessments. To an important extent the outcomes of student-assessments are relatively high, because the admission criteria are such that only very motivated students enter the program.  |
| 5.8 Programme Jurisdiction<br><b>Score: Adequate</b>             | The programme jurisdiction is extensively described in the self-evaluation and gives an adequate view of the responsibilities. It deals with the academic director, the program coordinator, the administrative coordinator, and the permanent educational committee.   |
| 5.9.1 Faculty nucleus<br><b>Score: Good</b>                      | There is large number of staff involved in the program. Although it did not become clear from the self-evaluation or site-visit what the student-staff ratio is exactly, afterwards the information was received that the core staff equals 4.60 FTE. In case of 30 students, this gives a ratio of 6.5 students per professor.   |
| 5.9.2 Faculty qualifications<br><b>Score: Good</b>               | All but one of the academic staff possess a PhD degree. All courses are taught by PhD staff. The staff publishes extensively and contributes to the development of Public Administration as a discipline. It is clear that many staff members do teach in the subjects they also conduct research in and use their research in their courses.   |
| 5.9.3 Diversity: gender and minorities<br><b>Score: adequate</b> | Although there is a female dean and a female program director, the gender ratio in the staff as a whole is still skewed. Nonetheless the program is aware of this problem and the committee was told that this ratio will improve. The number of women in the Faculty, particular at senior levels, is low. This is something the university recognises, but is reluctant to adopt a quota system and appoint and promote on merit.   |
| 5.10 Admission of Students<br><b>Score: Good</b>                 | The self-evaluation and the underlying documents provide a clear picture of the admission goals et cetera. These involve the right academic degree: university degree (after at least 4 years of study) in the fields of political science, sociology, law, economics or (modern) history from an internationally recognized university; the required academic level: they should have graduated with at least distinction; sufficient knowledge of English: they should have passed the required level on an internationally validated test like TOEFL or IELTS, as well as criteria for motivation. There is a substantial number of students applying for the programme. The standards of admission seem high. Many of these students come from outside Belgium and even outside the EU. |

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| <p>5.11 Supportive Services and Facilities<br/><b>Score: Good</b></p> | <p>The Master of Science in European Politics and Policies is fully integrated into K.U. Leuven's overall academic organization and financial structure. There are extensive library facilities, including the use of electronic journals. The classrooms have modern equipment. Furthermore some buildings were renovated at the time of the site visit to make them up-to-date. Furthermore the program can be proud to have more and larger seminar rooms, a guesthouse for foreign students and visiting professors, new underground parking structures, a clearly identifiable main entrance for the faculty of Social Sciences and a new Media Centre.</p> |
| <p>5.12 Student Services<br/><b>Score: Good</b></p>                   | <p>Given the diversity of the enrolled students a good advice system is necessary and has been accomplished. There are program coordinators to who the students can go in order to discuss the study program. Furthermore, assistance is offered by the international office, the Study Advisory Office and the Social Service. The Job Service which provides a database to help students seeking student jobs or vacation jobs and the study advisory office provides individual counseling and/or job search workshops.</p>   |
| <p>5.13 Public Relations<br/><b>Score: Adequate</b></p>               | <p>The program is widely advertised. Information to students is provided by the International Office and the Study Advisory Office. Also the students and alumni had no complaints about the public relations. All of them knew well in advance what they started and they were not disappointed. The University is working hard at marketing the degree, although such attempts are relatively new. They are also working at developing relationships with alumni.</p>  |
| <p><b>6 Additional Criteria<br/>Score: N.A.</b></p>                   | <p>Not applicable</p>  |

## 2. Conclusion

The MEPP program is a strong program and the site visit committee even tends to qualify it as excellent, i.e. that the programme internationally is an example for other programmes. The site visit team especially values its focus on comparative public administration and the level of the program. It sees as a major advantage that so many students enrol from different countries. The mission and the program are well defined.

This is clearly a very good programme when judged on its own criteria. The quality of the Faculty is high, the quality of the research is good and the ideal that research should be the basis of, and inform, teaching is excellent. But every programme can be improved, as the University itself recognises. In this case the improvements relate to the lack of an internship, although it is recognised that this is difficult in a one year course with a serious thesis component. The Faculty have attempted to increase the role of practitioners into the course and in part this compensates for the lack of an internship, but only in part. Nonetheless, it is popular with students and thoughts should be given to increasing it.

Furthermore, the Accreditation Committee asks the program to consider the possibility for students to specialize in economics, law or quantitative empirical research.

The students are very positive about the program and the job perspectives thereof. They would, as the site visit team would, recommend that given the strategic location of Leuven vis-à-vis Brussels the program would make an additional effort to enable internships.

Additionally, a mix of oral and written types of examination was pointed out by students to bring more added-value both in terms of reflecting results adequately and overall, keeping students even more engaged in the process of learning.

The site visit team talked to several alumni and they were positive about the jobs they got because of this master. They were especially positive about the skills acquired.

Based on all material available (Self-Evaluation Report , Site Visit Report and the reactions of the programme to the draft Site Visit Report and the letter from the Accreditation Committee, the Accreditation Committee comes to the conclusion that the programme meets the criteria for accreditation , and so the programme can be accredited without restrictions.