



**European Association for
Public Administration
Accreditation**

EAPAA Accreditation Committee Evaluation Report

Evaluation Report with respect to the request for accreditation of Master of Strategic Urban Studies (MSUS), NSOB

In consideration of the Self-Evaluation Report of the above programme, the Site Visit Report of 30 August 2012 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 10 September 2013 in Edinburgh, UK, has evaluated this programme against the EAPAA Accreditation Criteria (version 8, September 2011).

1. Accreditation Criteria

2. Applicability/Eligibility	
2.1 Domain	The curriculum is organized around several core themes all based on organizing public space: urban planning; economic development; creativity and innovation; security and social diversity. These core themes clearly fall under public affairs, management and administration. The MSUS programme is eligible for accreditation.
2.2 Geography	The Netherlands are a member of the Council of Europe, therefore the programme falls within the jurisdiction of EAPAA.
2.3 Programme longevity	The programme has been in operation for 5 years and 31 participants have graduated so far. The programme is therefore eligible for the accreditation procedure.
2.4 Programme variants and locations	The MSUS programme is offered only in one variant, namely part-time.
4 Category of accreditation	The MSUS programme falls in the category of 'executive/mid-career public sector specialization master programmes' (2 years).
5. Standards	
5.1 Domain of public administration Score: Adequate	The MSUS-programme is clearly a programme that can be situated in the domain of public administration. In contrast to the Metropool-programme (which has been visited simultaneously), the focus is more on cognitive and reflexive competencies (and less of dexterity – professional skills). Students are made familiar with the basic models and theories, and from this basis, they study 'urban issues' in a multidisciplinary way. However, as a point of attention, we observed, in some master-theses (passed), a rather limited

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	<p>application of the acquired knowledge of PA-models and –theories in relation to the topic investigated/studied.</p> <p>It is understood that this programme does not have a “conventional curriculum with standard PA course topics” and the curriculum “that looks substantially different from regular university PA programs”. Students are sufficiently prepared in the classical PA disciplines and the professors guarantee the teaching of the classical PA theories on the necessary level. However, there remain some doubts about the institutional guarantees, because of the lack of the formal, direct visibility of these knowledge in the curriculum. Being fully in accordance with the EAPAA criterion means a more explicit presence of this knowledge in the descriptions of the modules and the literature.</p>
<p>5.2 Mission of the programme Score: Good</p>	<p>The programme is part of the larger NSOB-network. This network consists of 7 Dutch universities. The origins of the programme lay in the belief of NSOB that PA should be taught differently to practitioners which have already some experience in the civil service, compared to generation-students that follow the regular bachelor and master courses offered by universities. The advantage of the NSOB-network, of which the programme profits, is at least twofold: (1) the network of 7 universities guarantees the participation of professors from the leading PA-institutions from the Netherlands, and (2) the programme is embedded in a network that also provides consulting, does in-company work and conducts research in PA.</p> <p>As a point of attention, it is not always clear how professors are selected. should not be a problem, if selection- and evaluation-criteria of teaching staff were more specified and formalized. Another important question is why the programme teaching staff is not more international in nature.</p> <p>The programme has a clear mission and educational philosophy, that should enable students to link theory to solving real world issues of urban governance and management.</p>
<p>5.3 Level Score: Good</p>	<p>The level of the programme is on par with the international standards for a PA-programme. There is a mix of competencies (cognitive, reflexive) aimed at, and the high workload and tight follow-up procedures by distinguished professors ensure that students acquire these competencies.</p>
<p>5.4 Practise and internships Score: Excellent</p>	<p>There is no internship experience in the programme. Instead, different case studies are studied and participants are required to fulfil their final research project by order of a client. The final research project focuses on the application of the acquired knowledge in a consulting assignment for a real-world client. The field trips at the end of each module also offer an insight in urban practice.</p> <p>The practical experience the MSUS offers is mandatory for all participants and incorporated into the cognitive elements of each module. There is no separate grade for field practice the participants obtain.</p> <p>Overall, the NSOB is offering a good programme that consists of eight modules that includes an onsite session and has a structural relation to practice. The quality of the final research projects can be improved, particularly on their adherence to accepted academic and institutional standards.</p>

5.5.1 Curriculum Content	
5.5.1.1 Core components Score: Good	<p>The Master of Strategic Urban Studies (MSUS) is a part-time programme aimed at mid-career high-potential civil servants.</p> <p>All participants have to write assignments in each module and phase of the programme. They are written in groups only. At the end of the first year participants have to give a presentation in front of a jury. After the second year, the students have to submit a master thesis written in subgroups of two to four members. The programme consists of four blocks: Unfreezing phase (7 months), workshop phase (4 months), deepening phase (7 months), and application phase (4 months). The programme is problem-based and not divided into classical disciplines dealing with public administration, such as economics, law, political science, sociology, public finance, informatisation, and public management.</p> <p>The curriculum gives a good overview of the problems metropolitan areas face. The problem-based approach guarantees an adequate transfer of the knowledge being taught in class to the challenges the students have to deal with at their working-place. The analysis of the course material shows that the programme integrates research findings and literature in an adequate way and gives an excellent introduction to the problems urban areas face. Because the programme does not follow the classical Public Administration disciplines, there is no systematic approach to the basic concepts and theories of Public Administration, which is not a problem for the programme which has a clear focus, but may not be fully in accordance with the EAPAA criterion.</p>
5.5.1.2 Other Components Not applicable	There is no specialization. All participants take the same overall programme for the same degree.
5.5.1.3 Structure and didactics of the programme Score: Good	<p>The variety of didactic methods is rich and in line with the expectations for an executive programme. The emphasis is on reflection: students have to write assignments after each module and phase of the programme and to give an oral presentation after the first year. Additionally, they must write a master thesis which has to deal with a real-world problem. Because all work is done in groups, the students learn to co-operate for problem-solving. Summative exams do not exist. All students have a learning manager who supports them while preparing their assignments and the student are in a close contact to the faculty.</p> <p>A unique selling proposition of the programme are the modules abroad. The modules do not just take place in a hotel, but in cities of different sizes where the urban problems can be directly addressed and discussed on site, supported by local, world-class universities (such as Humboldt or John F. Kennedy School of Government).</p> <p>The structure and didactic concept of the master programme are convincing. There is an adequate balance between units taught in class and self- and group-learning. Additionally, the two modules taught abroad in metropolitan areas are very well organized and contribute to the accomplishment of the goals of the programme.</p> <p>It could be discussed if certain assignment should not be done on an individual basis, because until now everything is group work. Last but not</p>

	least, the programme does not include any summative exams. The value of such exams is controversially discussed in andragogy. But it could make sense to vary the forms of student assessment.
5.5.1.4 Intake Score: Good	The students entering the programme have an adequate qualification. Because the employers must support the admission and each application is thoroughly checked, it is assured that not only the intellectual skills of the students are adequate, but also the motivation and the working environment.
5.5.2 Length Score: Complies	The curriculum length of two years is in line with the objective of the programme (part-time 60 ECTS master program) and in accordance with the accreditation category that is applied for.
5.5.3 Results Score: Good	The qualifications students acquire are adequate and fully in line with the programme's mission. The discussion with the students, alumni and employers have shown us that the programme is strengthening the professional skills of the students and most of the alumni have made significant progress in their career.
5.6 Quality Improvement and Innovation	
5.6.1 Programme accomplishment Score: Excellent	The programme uses a range of evaluation and feedback mechanisms. These include formal/written and informal/oral evaluations, as an integral part of the programme. While there is no quantitative trigger for evaluations leading to consequences, the evaluations are taken very seriously and faculty/convener have to deliver high quality teacher if they want to continue in the programme. The Programme Deans have a crucial role in the supervision of teaching quality and responses to feedback from participants. In this way the programme assesses the accomplishment of its objectives; it uses information about its performance in directing and revising programme objectives, strategies, and operations regularly.
5.6.2 Curriculum Development Score: Adequate	The programme assesses the accomplishment of its objectives; it uses information about its performance in directing and revising programme objectives, strategies, and operations regularly. The information used is gathered in an informal way from the network of the NSOB. This is appropriate, given the network character of the NSOB as an organization. However, we recommend supplementing these measures with more systematic measures of curriculum development, in particular systematic evaluations by alumni and stakeholder organizations.
5.6.3 External Reviews Score: Adequate	There has been no external review of the programme. Feedback is derived from the cooperation of NSOB with the participating municipalities. Additional external reviews could help to continuously improve the programme. A point of attention here could be the internationalization of the programme, in the sense of strengthening the international comparative aspects of the curriculum.
5.7 Student Assessment Score: Adequate	The student assessment is the aspect of the programme that is most open to debate. The debate centers around the method of evaluation. Evaluation is mainly based on group-assignments. Next to that there are individual presentations and (in the master phase) a master thesis. No grading is

	<p>awarded for individual modules. Students pass (or not) for the programme as a whole. The decision lies with the deans of the programme, after having consulted teaching staff, and after having had intense follow-up and feedback discussions with the students. This is a rather unusual manner to evaluate students in order to award them a degree (or not). However, we believe that this method of assessment seems useful for this programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The low number of students allows for follow up students by the deans and the module-professors -The compulsory attendance of students in (small) classes with a lot of interaction shows the qualities, skills and progress of students -There is a lot of 'social control' through group dynamics in a group of motivated and experienced practitioners prevents students from free-riding. -According to the students, group work also invites for reflection through discussion with fellow-students. <p>Despite the 'unusual' evaluation procedures and -methods, students are evaluated individually and objectively, and based on criteria that were known by the students on beforehand. As a point of attention, however, we question whether this particular (and rather informal) way of evaluating would still be applicable under other conditions, such as a considerable growth of student numbers. The programme could give a short formal description ("manual") of the decision-making-procedure on the content development, reflecting the current practice.</p>
<p>5.8 Programme Jurisdiction Score: Good</p>	<p>The programme could be more specific about the way in which, and by whom, the programme is developed. This includes decisions about content of modules, curriculum changes, appointment of faculty, evaluation procedures, etc. Especially given the amount of stakeholders and institutions involved – 7 universities, programme deans, learning managers, project managers, the 'G4 contact group' –, it needs some clarification how such decisions are taken, and by whom.</p> <p>The programme could give a short formal description ("manual") of the decision-making-procedure on the content development, reflecting the current practice. It should be part of the quality management.</p>
<p>5.9.1 Faculty nucleus Score: Good</p>	<p>The NSOB is an interuniversity organization for executive education of seven universities in the Netherlands. NSOB's own staff remains limited to deans and associate deans, in addition to a director and support staff (20 persons). Lecturers are not employed by the NSOB, but by the universities the NSOB is collaborating with. In the NSOB model of business the faculty is composed of contracted professors by the programme requirements. In terms of number of teaching staff, this practice systematically provides the sufficient number of faculty.</p>
<p>5.9.2 Faculty qualifications Score: Good</p>	<p>All faculty have at least a PhD qualification. The academic professionals have permanent professorship at Dutch universities, the practitioners have the adequate experiences and all of them are senior advisors. At the NSOB the faculty is therefore of very high quality, professionally and scientifically highly prepared for the required field of teaching.</p>

5.9.3 Diversity: gender and minorities Score: Poor	At the moment there are three female lecturers in the MSUS programme, that is 8.3%. The programme management has made efforts to increase the proportion of the women in the programme.
5.10 Admission of Students Score: Good	The programme targets civil servants from Dutch municipalities, cities and regions in the field of urban governance and infrastructure management. The academic prerequisites for admission are adequate (bachelor & 'some work experience' OR substantial work experience that can substitute for a Bachelor degree). It is important to note that MSUS targets more senior civil servants, and the emphasis is more on subject matter related expertise and methodological competencies (than on professional skills). Based on our interviews with current students and alumni, we are confident that the admissions process is sufficiently selective. The admissions process is not very formalized, but the selection of participants is the result of the close collaboration between NSOB and the stakeholder. The admission goals, admission policy and admission standards are therefore clear and in line with the programme objectives, although the admission process could be more transparent.
5.11 Supportive Services and Facilities Score: Good	NSOB is located in a small building in central The Hague. The building is ideal for the teaching purposes of the programme. The support from 'learning managers', who act as coordinators and facilitators between the academic and skills oriented aspects of the programme is unique and a key asset of the programme. A downside is the limited library facility of the NSOB. While the Royal Library is in close vicinity to the NSOB building and can be used by participants, more direct access to (electronic) material would be desirable. Overall, the accommodation and material facilities are adequate to realize the programme in an effective and efficient way.
5.12 Student Services Score: Good	Student services are adequate in relation to the mission of the programme. Programme advisement, progress appraisal and career guidance are available to students. The access to scientific literature is now dependent on incidental arrangement by the course professors. This could be arranged in a more structured way.
5.13 Public Relations Score: Adequate	Looking at the exclusivity of the programme, the current "minimalist" PR practice seems to be sufficient one. A more up-to-date and comprehensive PR activity would be helpful to involve the stakeholders more efficiently and maintain the high prestige of the NSOB for long time.
6 Additional Criteria Not applicable	Not applicable.

2. Conclusion

Based on all material and especially the report of the EAPAA site visit team, the Accreditation Committee has evaluated your programme. The MSUS-programme is clearly a programme that can be situated in the domain of public administration. The focus is more on cognitive and reflexive competencies (and less of dexterity – professional skills). The programme focuses on the increasingly important topic of urbanization and urban governance, and addresses these issues from

a multidisciplinary approach. Urban issues are studied through the lenses of, e.g., economy, criminology, sociology, and spatial planning. This approach is innovative for a field (PA) that is in need of more interdisciplinary approaches. Employers respect the programme as a very high quality PA education, and the graduated students have excellent career perspectives in the municipal governments.

The review also shows a number of points where there is room for improvement:

1. The quality of the final research projects can be improved, particularly on their adherence to accepted academic and institutional standards.
2. Because the programme does not follow the classical Public Administration disciplines, there is no systematic approach to the basic concepts and theories of Public Administration which is not a problem for the programme which has a clear focus, but may not be fully in accordance with the usual standard criteria. It should be important to make transparent, how the content of the programme gives comprehensive conceptual and theoretical fundamentals of PA to the students.
3. There is a need for more systematic measures of curriculum development, in particular more institutional assurances of the quality of curriculum development, e.g. through systematic evaluations by alumni and stakeholder organizations. Additional external reviews could help to continuously improve the programme.
4. The programme could give a short formal description ("manual") of the decision-making-procedure on the content development, reflecting the current practice. It should be part of the quality management.
5. If there are any plans to increase the number of enrolled students, the used assessment method would be not applicable. Keeping the current size of the programme in terms of number of students is a key of the quality and the success.

Based on the above evaluation of the specific criteria, the EAPAA Accreditation Committee concludes that this programme meets the criteria for accreditation conditionally, for a period of one year.

To fulfil the criteria of accreditation fully, the Accreditation Committee places particular value on the third and fourth recommendations.