



**European Association for
Public Administration
Accreditation**

EAPAA Accreditation Committee Evaluation Report

2016

Evaluation Report with respect to the request for accreditation of the bachelor programme “Public Administration and Governance” and the master programme “Public Administration” of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Tallinn University of Technology.

In consideration of the Self-Evaluation Report of the above programme, the Site Visit Report of July 29, 2016, 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 in Utrecht, The Netherlands, has evaluated this programme against the EAPAA Accreditation Criteria.

1. Accreditation Criteria

2. Applicability/Eligibility	
2.1 Domain	The two programmes are eligible for EAPAA re-accreditation.
2.2 Geography	Estonia is a member of the Council of Europe, therefore the programme falls within the jurisdiction of EAPAA.
2.3 Programme longevity	Both programmes have more than two cohorts of graduates and are, therefore, eligible for EAPAA re-accreditation.
2.4 Programme variants and locations	There are no variants.
4 Category of accreditation	The accreditation is applied for in the following categories: - The first-cycle bachelor-level public administration programme for “Public Administration and Governance” (3 years). - The second-cycle master-level public-administration programme for “Public Administration” (2 years). Both programmes fall within the Bachelor/Master terminology used by EAPAA and are, therefore, eligible for EAPAA re-accreditation.
5. Standards	
5.1 Domain of public administration	Both programmes teach Public Administration as a major subject, multidisciplinary in character, including various aspects of management and policy as well as the social and economic environments, embracing the understanding of democratic values, and at the level of academic standards based on theory and empirical research. Therefore, they are eligible for EAPAA re-accreditation.
5.2 Mission of the programme	The programme has a clear mission that is consistent with the multidisciplinary focus of the BA programme and the PA focus of the MA

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	programme. However, the mission is rather in the heads of the programme staff and faculty than in a written formal mission statement. The educational philosophy and its core values fit to the mission of the programmes and are further developed in learning goals and results at the level of a programme, of curricular entities, and of each course.
5.3 Level	The level of the two programmes is consistent with the internationally accepted descriptions of the qualifications of an academic bachelor and master degree.
5.4 Practice and internships	The link with practice is sufficiently strong.
5.5.1 Curriculum Content	
5.5.1.1 Core components	The core elements of public administration education are well covered in the bachelor programme and the learning objectives are sufficiently defined. There is a logical cumulative build-up of knowledge and skills in the programme. A weak point is the lack of attention for quantitative methods. The core components of the curriculum are consistent with the mission of the programme and the generally accepted requirements and curriculum contents of a PA programme.
5.5.1.2 Other Components	Optional courses and their learning goals are sufficiently defined.
5.5.1.3 Structure and didactics of the programme	The structure and didactics of the programmes are coherent and in line with the mission and learning goals of the two programmes. However, workload across courses and drop-out rates need to be reflected.
5.5.1.4 Intake	The structure, contents and the didactic of the programme are in line with the qualifications of the students that enter into the programme. The entrance requirements are carefully checked before students start the programme.
5.5.2 Length	The curriculum length is in line with the objectives of the programme and in accordance with the accreditation category that is applied for.
5.5.3 Results	The quality of graduates is good. The learning objectives defined by the programme are achieved. Grading scores for master theses needs to be reflected against the background of the programmes mission, as one of the few highest-level research oriented educational programmes in the country.
5.6 Quality Improvement and Innovation	
5.6.1 Programme accomplishment	The evaluation framework of TUT is coherent and the program directors have a clear vision of their role in the process of curriculum evaluation and quality assessment. Often, the management data relevant for curricular development, collected at the higher administrative levels (university and department) are not sufficient for deployment at the program level.
5.6.2 Curriculum Development	The management and the program directors are both highly motivated and willing to establish tight relations to the relevant local stakeholders. The position of the institute and university as the core providers of

	curricula in the area of public administration is an important one and imposes certain obligations to the Estonian society that has to be aligned with the ambition to improve the international relevance of the programs.
5.6.3 External Reviews	The self-evaluation report provides modest information about the impact of the previous reviews on the curriculum development apart from the previous EAPAA evaluation.
5.7 Student Assessment	Both of the programs assess the individual performance of students in a substantive way with respect to the objectives of the curriculum.
5.8 Programme Jurisdiction	Three faculty members are part of the steering bodies at university and faculty level which is important for the long-term jurisdiction of the school and its programmes. The responsibility for the programmes is clearly located at the school level.
5.9.1 Faculty nucleus	The nucleus faculty members are highly motivated, mostly young, and show eagerness for both involvement and taking responsibility for the success of the study programmes under evaluation.
5.9.2 Faculty qualifications	The teaching activities of the academic staff is nicely balanced and complemented by research work.
5.9.3 Diversity: gender and minorities	The self-evaluation report and the on-site interviews reveal no evidence of an institutional policies toward gender equality or minority representation. Despite that, the gender balance among employees seem appropriate, while males seem to prevail the faculty nucleus.
5.10 Admission of Students	Admission procedures and criteria are in line with the mission and objectives of the programme.
5.11 Supportive Services and Facilities	Financial resources available to the programme are sufficient to support its objectives, as are the material facilities available to both staff and students.
5.12 Student Services	Student services, including career development support, is adequate in relation to the programme mission and objectives.
5.13 Public Relations	The programme provides future students and others, who already have some interested in the programme, with adequate information on the programme. The programme is perceived as making a contribution to public service beyond placing its graduates, e.g. by producing valuable research and consulting, which is both locally and internationally relevant.
6 Additional Criteria Score: N.A.	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 programme has made significant changes to its curriculum since the previous evaluation. There have been in recent years strong changes in the bachelor programme, while the master programme is currently being re-developed. This is leading to

a shift in the overall substantive focus of the programmes, with less emphasis on local government and more on technological governance.

On the whole, the committee agrees that these were the right choices. The programme management have sensibly moved with changing conditions and clearly taken position in the national and international field. The development of the curriculum has been driven by long-term strategy, but also conditioned by more short-term changes in funding, demographics and the sometimes limited flexibility in regulations.

The programme's mission is to strike a balance between international academic status and relevance to national practice. To a large extent this is achieved, which calls for high praise. The Ragnar Nurkse School of Innovation and Governance programmes are undeniably among the best PA programmes in the region.

The quality of the programme has been enhanced by improvements in university facilities: a new building; improved student services and more reliable, systematic course evaluations.

Strong points

- The faculty are high-quality, committed and ambitious, both at the junior and senior level. The core staff especially have a solid reputation in the academic field.
- This is not just a reflection of individual quality, but also of a programme management style that builds upon the strengths of the group culture and gives room for individual development.
- The school offers a coherent, comprehensive programme with up-to-date specializations. The change made to the programmes are logical and consistent.
- The staff have excellent relationships with the 'high end' of the Estonian public and third sector.

Weak points

- The curriculum has some minor weaknesses: insufficient training in quantitative methods; too many courses; and overreliance on group work in the assessment of students.
- There is a low international exchange at student level, especially on the outgoing side. This appears to be partly a structural problem, because of the increasing proportion of students with full-time jobs.
- The drop-out rate is too high, especially because of problems in the master thesis. Although on the later point the programme performs relatively good well within its university, it does not by the standards of programmes abroad.
- The student information system is not user-friendly.
- The university does not supply the precise management data that is necessary at the programme level.

Opportunities and risks

The school has the opportunity to set up a high-end international master programme and achieve high academic status, while not losing its close connections with national practice. The steps taken in this direction are convincing.

However, the strategy is likely to exacerbate existing dilemmas. The school should carefully consider how to handle the downsides of the path it has taken. In particular, this concerns the following points:

The move towards a more international focus is likely to strain the balance between international and national relevance. Since the school has a unique position in the Estonian PA field, it has certain obligations to Estonian society. Such obligations can conflict with the need to prioritise, since even the capacity of a talented, hard-working group is limited.

- Strains in working with students are also likely to increase when more students have full-time employment and when they come from more diverse backgrounds.

- The current organisational model to a large extent rests upon a homogeneous culture and strong informal connections, facilitated by the relatively small scale of the school. However, it can be vulnerable to staff changes (which, with a young and internationally oriented staff, are a realistic prospect) and to sudden changes in the organisational or funding environment. That makes it necessary to consider how the model can be sustained in the long run.

At the strategic level, the committee makes the following recommendations:

- We recommend **continuing on this path**. The school is well-positioned nationally and internationally; makes good use of the advantages of the small scale of the institute itself and of the country. However, it must develop efficient ways of dealing with the downsides that inevitably come with its strategy.
- The school should reflect upon a better **documentation of the mission using it as a positioning argument** of what the school and programme is and does and what not in regard **to internal and external stakeholders**.
- There is a risk that the school fails to respond to the education needs of parts of Estonian public administration, especially at the local level. **Developing low-threshold services in the Estonian language** (short trainings, online resources) would help to address this.
- Hold strong connection with the high-rank practitioners and civil service management for carrying out the mission of the programme: **to be locally relevant**.
- **Moving to a full English-language master programme** is a logical step in the development of the school. Given limits to outgoing mobility, the more important to develop incoming mobility and internationalization at home.
- The master thesis is the weakest link in the curriculum. On the one hand, we recommend the **creation of a more supportive environment** for the thesis could help to strengthen it. On the other hand, we also suggest to reflect upon the grading of master theses at its appropriate level for the quality aspirations that TUT has.
- However, given national funding conditions, some strains in the programme are likely to be structural. **Carefully managing expectations among students** is therefore important.
- More attention could be paid to the skills and competencies lacking in the field of PA: for example meeting the demand for experts with strong **analytical skills** in the field of public policy analysis and quantitative methods in PA.
- Introduce an adequate system for **quality assurance of student assessment within RNS** by documenting student feedback management.
- The programme staff has a strong identity as a group and could be better used for the purpose of **branding the programme**.

With regard to internal processes, the committee makes the following recommendations:

- The school **should aim to retain its small scale**, even in a context of organisational mergers. Scale is an important factor in its success.
- The university and/or the school should **improve the availability of performance data at the programme level**.
- The university should work on a **more user-friendly study information system**.
- Although we accept that a strong informal structure can be superior to formal procedures, measures should be taken to **enhance the sustainability of the organisational model**. This should not be read as a plea for strong formalisation, but some steps towards more structured mechanisms for interaction would build some resilience into the model.
- In particular, we recommend to **strengthen the mechanisms for input from employers** (by establishing a sounding board at the school level etc.).

- Translate the purpose of **internships** better to the students and be **more flexible** regarding the timing of carrying out internships.
- **Compare the feedback** given in Student Task Force Evaluation Report with feedback from SIS.
- **Information** about the procedures for challenging the grades and weekly open hours of instructors should be **better introduced to the students**.
- Better **distinction between the distribution of the teaching load** among the professors on the one hand and the research fellows on the other hand.
- In order to attract English speaking students and others, different **media** (incl. web-page of the programme) should be **updated** in that respect.
- We suggest publishing some respective **research results and materials in Estonian** for encouraging open communication with the public administration of Estonia.

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