



**European Association for  
Public Administration  
Accreditation**

## EAPAA Accreditation Committee Evaluation Report

**Evaluation Report with respect to the request for accreditation of the Research master's programme Research in Public Administration and Organizational Science of Utrecht University, Tilburg University, and Erasmus University Rotterdam, 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	This evaluation concerns the research master's programme Research in Public Administration and Organizational Science, a two-year full time programme of 120 EC that is offered jointly by Utrecht University, Erasmus University Rotterdam and Tilburg University, with Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Radboud University Nijmegen and the University of Twente as associate partners. Utrecht University bears full responsibility for the quality assurance of the programme, while (Dutch) accreditation is granted to the universities of Utrecht, Rotterdam and Tilburg. The cooperation means that education is provided by lecturers from the six institutions involved in the programme and that the content and structure of the curriculum are coordinated in consultation with all partners.
2.1 Domain	The master programmes is a specialised academic degree programmes in public administration research. The programme fulfils this criterion
2.2 Geography	The programme formally is 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 member of the Council of Europe; therefore the programme falls within the jurisdiction of EAPAA.
2.3 Programme longevity	The programme has not been accredited by EAPAA before, but exists since 2005. The programme fulfils this criterion.
2.4 Programme variants and locations	There are no variants or other locations.
4 Category of accreditation	The master programme opts for the second cycle graduate/master level public administration programmes accreditation.

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<b>5. Standards</b>	
5.1 Domain of public administration	<p>The competencies the programme aims at are aligned with the PAGO domain-specific reference framework. The SVT learned during the visit that the learning outcomes have been updated recently to reflect the development of the programme structure and to ensure a direct link with the PAGO framework and the EAPAA guidelines.</p> <p>In the view of the SVT, these outcomes are in line with the requirements of the domain-specific reference framework and constitute a strong and precise translation of what the programme stands for, both in terms of key objective and specific characteristics.</p>
5.2 Mission of the programme	<p>The key objective of the research master's programme is to educate motivated people who are able to use their academic knowledge in the field of public administration and organisation to make a useful contribution to the solution of public issues. This objective is elaborated in three learning pathways: substance of public administration and organisation of public issues; academic research into public administration and organisation of public issues; and applied research into public administration and organisation of public issues. The SVT acknowledges the attention of the programme in several learning outcomes to acquisition, communication and dissemination of research.</p> <p>This new set-up of the programme objective with learning pathways and (intended) learning outcomes emphasises five characteristics of the research master's programme: the breadth of the field of study, the connection between research and education, the value of both academic and applied research, the methodological multiformity of the field of study, and the cooperation between lecturers and students within a master-apprenticeship relationship.</p>
5.3 Level	<p>The SVT considers that the intended learning outcomes of the research master's programme are adequate in terms of content (public administration / organization science), orientation (academic) and level (master's).</p>
5.4 Practice and internships	<p>Throughout the programme, research master's students are exposed to two types of research skills: academic research, and applied research. Students wishing to pursue more applied research can perform an internship with a research-oriented organisation or company.</p> <p>The SVT also learned from the discussions that several courses welcome guest speakers or organise visits to think tanks, knowledge institutions or consultancy firms.</p>
<b>5.5.1 Curriculum Content</b>	
5.5.1.1 Core components	<p>The research master's programme is a two-year full-time programme that amounts to 120 EC. The curriculum consists first and foremost of three types of compulsory courses, all of which are specific to the research master's: three substantive courses on governance and policy, organisations and professionals, and public organisations in a rapidly changing society; methodology courses pay attention to 'pure' and 'applied' research contexts and to both 'low-control' and 'high-control' research,</p>

	<p>and qualitative and quantitative analytic techniques; a small applied research project and the final research master's thesis.</p> <p>The SVT observed that the structure of the curriculum is coherent and that the intended learning outcomes are translated adequately in the different courses of the programme.</p> <p>Furthermore, the SVT established that research master's students are taught all disciplinary and methodological components one may expect from a Public Administration programme, and that these core components of the curriculum are taught exclusively to research master's students.</p> <p>Furthermore, the SVT understood from the discussions that the programme coordinators play an important role in safeguarding the consistency of the course contents, in ensuring that all students acquire at least the minimum standards in all research methods, and in setting the scene for students to select a thesis topic in time.</p>
5.5.1.2 Other Components	<p>Students can specialise in the research master's programme through four components: a tutorial (6EC) to explore a single topic in depth; electives (12 EC); an internship (3 or 6 EC); the thesis topic. The SVT observed that students have quite some freedom in selecting their specialisations. The SVT observed that the specialisation part of the curriculum is a relevant complement to the core part. the SVT learned that the tutorial, the elective courses and the thesis allow students to work in an interdisciplinary way applying insights from other disciplines and linking these to public administration and organisation science.</p>
5.5.1.3 Structure and didactics of the programme	<p>The SVT observed that the educational philosophy of the research master's programme is based on small-scale, motivating and intensive teaching. There is a lot of direct interaction between students and lecturers, as many courses are offered to small groups of less than ten students. Community building plays an important role. Throughout the courses, students are challenged to achieve their fullest potential: those aspiring to academic careers are challenged to write and submit research proposals together with experienced researchers, while students with consultancy ambitions can participate in real-life consultancy projects.</p> <p>The SVT considers that the teaching and learning environment of the programme is good, in the sense that its components systematically exceed the basic quality requirements: the programme is consistent and attractive in its combination of compulsory and specialisation courses; the small-scale, interactive, intensive and motivating approach to teaching fits very well with the educational philosophy of this programme.</p>
5.5.1.4 Intake	<p>The admission procedure for the research master's programme is stringent. Those students who are admitted, have been selected on the likelihood that they can complete the programme successfully. Incoming students are somewhat heterogeneous in terms of their educational background, as about half of the students have no connection to the partner institutions, but studied elsewhere in the Netherlands or abroad.</p> <p>The SVT observed that the programme structure as well as the educational philosophy with its small-scale education, intensive teaching, community building and direct contacts with staff contribute to students levelling up quite quickly, if at all needed. Hence, the drop-out rate is low. Furthermore,</p>

	the SVT learned that the programme offers individual targeted support for students who need to make up for deficiencies, for instance on quantitative research skills.
5.5.2 Length	The SVT confirms, based on the information materials and the discussion on site, that the research master's programme is a two-year full-time programme of 120 EC, which meets the length criteria for academic bachelor's and master's programmes in Europe.
5.5.3 Results	The SVT found that each thesis it examined, fulfilled at least the minimum requirements one would expect of a final product of an academic programme at research master's level, i.e. a thesis that is clearly of master's level quality and reflects the considerable workload research master's students are expected to invest in the thesis. While there was hardly any thesis the SVT thought was of poor quality, the SVT did observe in several instances that a thesis had been over-graded. During the discussions, the SVT was informed that the programme is aware of the grading issue and has in the meantime taken adequate measures to safeguard the reliability of the thesis assessments.
5.6 Quality Improvement and Innovation	
5.6.1 Programme accomplishment	The research master's programme prepares students for a career in research either in the form of a PhD trajectory or in a research oriented job. Based on the materials and the discussion with alumni, the SVT learned that almost half of the graduates (46%) indeed remain in academia, while the others start a professional career at consultancy companies (26%), ministries/local authorities (15%) or think tanks (13%).
5.6.2 Curriculum Development	According to the Self-Evaluation Report, the quality of the research master's programme has been monitored constantly over the past few years, leading to various adjustments and continuous improvement. To ensure the improvement of the curriculum, the programme has adopted a system of course evaluations, evaluations of the first year programme and curriculum evaluations after the second year. In addition, regular conversations are held with alumni, employers and potential employers within and outside the academic world. The results of the evaluations are discussed each year in consultation with the local coordinators, as well as in the department's Board Academic School (BAS). The SVT learned from the materials and the discussions that the programme has good connections to external stakeholders in academia; however, the ties to stakeholders in applied research are less developed.
5.6.3 External Reviews	The SVT learned that since the previous re-accreditation in 2010, two larger revisions have been made to the programme: one immediately following that visit and one at the time when three more universities were joining the programme in 2014 and beyond. These changes concerned the methodology training, the substantive courses and the relationship between fundamental and applied research.
5.7 Student Assessment	The form of testing depends on the learning outcomes and the competencies to be tested; testing is an essential element of learning, and the measurement of student competencies is valid and reliable. The SVT

	<p>has come across a wide variety of assessment methods, also within one and the same course, and observed that these tests are as much as possible spread over the teaching period in order to ensure that students receive also feedback at an early stage.</p> <p>The two coordinators of the programme monitor the quality of testing. Moreover, all courses and the quality of their tests are evaluated by students and discussed in the Board Academic School (BAS). Moreover, USG 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.</p> <p>With regard to the assessment of the research master's thesis, the programme has developed an extensive course programme to inform students and lecturers how the thesis process is arranged and how the thesis will be assessed. The SVT observed that each thesis is assessed using an evaluation form with relevant assessment criteria; in almost all cases, assessors had completed the evaluation form in an insightful way, justifying the final score in a transparent and sometimes comprehensive way. It was, however, not possible to determine on the basis of the evaluation form whether the two assessors had evaluated the thesis independently and how the final score (and the arguments underpinning this score) was established.</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>The research master's programme is embedded in the research programmes of the six participating institutions. These research programmes were assessed in the recent past by international review committees. The SVT observed in the materials that all programmes received very good to excellent scores. Lecturers on the research master's programme have been selected for their specific substantive and / or methodological expertise. All staff are members of the Netherlands Institute of Government, a research school accredited by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. The SVT thinks highly of the teaching staff, who have a good reputation both nationally and internationally. Students, moreover, indicated that they appreciate the quality of the lecturers, as well as their commitment and availability.</p>
5.9.3 Diversity: gender and minorities	<p>The programme pays attention to student diversity in the recruitment process, but makes sure that the selection is based solely on the quality of the candidates. While the number of international students (about 25%) is lagging behind, the intake is balanced in terms of gender with female students slightly outnumbering their male colleagues.</p> <p>With regard to the diversity of lecturers, most are Dutch. Although men are over-represented, women are visible in all positions as well as in various courses. Most lecturers belong to partner institutions. The disciplinary background of the lecturers differs, which corresponds to the programme's</p>

	ambition to offer a multidisciplinary perspective on the field of study.
5.10 Admission of Students	The research master's programme is a selective and small-scale programme. The admission to the programme is set up in such a way that it ensures an optimal match between students and the programme. While the programme can accept up to 25 students per year, the number of students effectively enrolling is lower. According to the programme, clear communication about the degree programme and its requirements are a driver of student self-selection with only highly qualified students applying for admission. Candidates are selected based on criteria such as academic potential, demonstrable experience with and affinity for research in the field of PAOS, communication skills, motivation and interest in the field of study, and a command of the English language. The selection process consists of instruments such as the average examination marks in the bachelor's programme, a language test, a research proposal, a recommendation letter and an interview. The SVT observed that the admission criteria are formulated clearly and adequately reflect the research-oriented nature and high demands of the programme.
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: a top-quality and selective programme with no weaknesses.

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