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**PAQUALITY: Public Administration Education Quality Enhancement  
Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership KA203**

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**Intellectual Output 4:** *Qualitative and quantitative analyses of interactions  
of the created network*

## **EVALUATION REPORT**

Programmes under the evaluation within the project are evaluated by selected project partners based on review of their self-evaluation studies against the EAPAA accreditation criteria. Site visits were not included into the project activities; therefore, the evaluation statements are limited to the available written information in the self-evaluation study.

**Name of the programme:** Political Science (Public Administration specialisation)

**Level:** Bachelor (Bc)

**Name of the Institution:** Department of Political Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences,  
University of Latvia

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**DATE:** June 9, 2021

*Note: The report expresses an opinion of the authors. The EC doesn't have responsibility for any utilization of included information.*

<p><b>1. Mission, goals and competencies</b></p>	<p>The programme's aim is proclaimed in the SER as "to train competitive, academically educated and qualified professionals for Latvian state, society and local government; to train professionals with in-depth knowledge on domestic and international processes as well as interactions between the two; and to train researchers for both academic and professional institutions". Presumably, the mission and programme goals and competences are verified in the local environment, in particular by employers of graduates in local and national Latvian government bodies.</p> <p>However, more professional/applicable dimensions as academic orientation are revealed when this mission is compared to the structure and content of the programme, and its competences to be gained. It is also not clear whether the Bc graduates are supposed to continue studies at MA level or this programme is actually – content wise and formally – sufficient to apply for jobs in PA that require the programme related competences.</p> <p>One of the main advantages of the programme is clearly an effort to connect the Latvian and European/global public governance issues. Yet the mission and "specific" skills/competences read as too general, e.g. among 20 specific skills there are at least ¾ not related to the PS/PA content and almost none not in line with PA scope but policy/organisational/communication skills exclusively. In other words, the international relations and policymaking parts are rather strongly supported yet it is not evident through the mission nor specific competences that student acquire how policy implementation at the administrative level is covered.</p> <p>Generally, the area of Public Administration – worldwide mostly an autonomous field – is not clearly embedded in relation to Political Science, which seems to lead to lack of certain aspects, characteristic for PA in both institutional and instrumental public governance, i.e. legal and economic issues.</p>
<p><b>2. Entry into the programme</b></p>	<p>The programme accepts a broad range of candidates, requiring only general secondary education without any enrolment exam, which is an advantage unless the expectations and efforts of the enrolled students are not met with the programme content and requirements. There are special posts for persons with special needs.</p> <p>Regarding the data on the enrolled and graduated students over last five years, it is not clear if any and which strategic decisions have been made to overcome the dropout. Namely, the number of graduates annually is of a medium value compared to all enrolled students with app. 50% share (e.g. 24 graduates in 2019/20 compared to 53 enrolled in 2016/17 and 40 in 2017/18), which suggest that admission criteria might be improved in line with the programme mission.</p>

<p><b>3. Curriculum structure</b></p>	<p>The programme is licenced and accredited according to the Latvian higher education legislation as an entity with obligatory courses and further two specialisations: international relations (IR) and PA. There are 18 obligatory (compulsory) courses and 26 further (limited or restricted) in PA specialisation. The IR and PA as two programme tracks, however, do not seem to be joined up fully consistently, on the account of PA aspects. For instance, PA track still comprises of Diplomatic Protocol with the same ECTS value than Administrative Law (i.e. only 3 ECT), and there are courses only indirectly related to PA with even 6 ECTS, such as Gender and Politics, Foreign Policy, Political Ideologies, etc. Even among the obligatory courses, there are some with only 1.5 ECTS (Civil Protection), which seems questionable since the majority of others hold 6 or at least 3 ECTS.</p> <p>The general PS programme follows the semester system of regularly 40 weeks in autumn and spring (and potentially additional 8 weeks in summer), with roughly 40 hs and 30 contact hs per week. The latter amount seems over proportionate, considering the fact that this is a humanities-based programme, so more time should be dedicated to private study.</p> <p>Programme includes courses, (compulsory part A, and limited part B), examinations and elective traineeship (as part C; the latter point not fully clear). These elements mainly correspond to comparable programmes in other countries.</p>
<p><b>4. Curriculum content</b></p>	<p>As for the 18 obligatory courses, there are only some that are in line with the multi or even interdisciplinary nature of current PA; in fact, merely one, that is Introduction to PA. Further, there are 12 out of 18 courses fully or predominantly political science oriented (over three quarters of all ECTS hereby) while only two legal (7.5 ECTS altogether), one economic (6 ECTS) and two research skills (12 ECTS) oriented. Out of 26 courses within the PA specialisation, there are 22 (mainly) politically oriented, while only one legal, one economic, one managerial, and one communication related course.</p> <p>The restricted elective course Gender and Politics seems very topical and evidence that the faculty can reflect on current/recent trends and topics. The same goes for other courses, which offer not so much theory but focus on practical skills and job skills (e.g. Public Presentation Skills, Public Sector Management, Policy Internship, Project Management). Public sector management and project management are definitely not typical political science courses that can be found on offer in political science departments but instead offer great benefit to PA students who want to pursue a more public managerial career.</p> <p>The described competences to be acquired in individual courses – in terms of their relation to study programme objectives – reveal lack of cross-disciplinary approach. It is not clear whether an escalation of competences has been followed compliant to Bloom’s taxonomy since some of the stages are mixed up (e.g. “identify and</p>

	<p>evaluate” or separated “Knowledge” and “Competences”) and numerous not prioritised accordingly (e.g. students “are able to analyse critically” is put before “are familiar with...”). Obviously, the individual professors formed individual descriptions without an overall programme guideline taken into account – neither content nor methodology related.</p> <p>In sum, it is highly evident that despite PA is embedded in, basically, political science programme, PA is not considered as multidisciplinary as it should according to global theory, practices and classifications. Consequently, the graduates are probably only partially capable of carrying out governmental jobs or can fit merely in some positions out of otherwise heterogeneous and complex PA structures, in both domestic and European/international administrative bodies/organisations.</p>
<p><b>5. Didactic approach</b></p>	<p>SER is very modest and too general regarding the didactics. “Modern”, “different/various”, “innovative” and “participative” teaching methods are mentioned yet without any elaborated description thereof nor assessment of their usage, which should be crucial for PA as a discipline combining theoretical and empirical approaches, and qualitative with quantitative research. Especially innovative teaching is much more than “using multimedia and internet” and Moodle provided materials.</p> <p>It is commendable to emphasise practical orientation, albeit according to the programme mission the practical and academic orientations should be evident, more tangibly and distinctively to each other.</p>
<p><b>6. Student assessment</b></p>	<p>SER is in this part not written in line with the subquestions, like referring to students’ assessment of the programme instead of the assesment of students’ performance. Students participate in faculty management bodies and final evaluation; thus, they express their voice. However, it is not clear how quality cycle is run to incorporate evaluations in future implementation of the programme.</p> <p>Regarding the assessment method in individual courses, there are “exam” and “test” listed in SER, but it is not clear what is the difference; they are also not elaborated, for instance, what kind of exam is conducted among numerous possibilities of modern teaching (e.g. partial grade acquired through real life problems or an open book exam). Research projects are in place but it seems that more options and ESTS points out of all in the programme could be attributed to these (only two) courses, particularly in relation to proclaimed practical orientation of the studies. Students can hardly be expected to show independent research skill in the phase of the bachelor thesis if not experienced by them beforehand.</p> <p>Ethics is described in the SER in one sentence by “It is though throughout the process of studying.”, which is highly insufficient.</p>
<p><b>7. Preparation for the labour</b></p>	<p>Critical remarks from above are relevant hereby as well since SER is rather general on the subject of labour market preparation (just</p>

<b>market</b>	<p>mentioning “cooperation with industry” with guest lectors) and not directly connected to the programme mission/objectives.</p> <p>Rather no competences analyses among the employers of the graduates have been provided to be carried out; just “employers’ survey” is mentioned but not revealed what it incorporates and if/how the findings have been included in the programme.</p>
<b>8. Results</b>	<p>This part of SER is practically non-existing, stating “no data regarding professional path of the students after graduation”, which is highly unsatisfactory in terms of minimum quality standards in teaching. The faculty could have mentioned at least considering and planning to collect the relevant data in this regard (for example, via LinkedIn or other social media), particularly since this aspect is one of the key ones of the report and any such evaluation.</p> <p>The bachelor theses defended in 2020 reveal almost none to be PA focused; adequate as “Digitalisation of PA in Latvia”, serve as an exemption only.</p>
<b>9. Quality monitoring and improvement</b>	<p>The quality monitoring seems to be implemented mainly on the university level – with a positive usage of EFQM model, but there is an obvious gap on the level of department carrying out the programme in question. It is not clear how the many listed students surveys are taken into account when improving the programme.</p> <p>Last external review was done in 2012; that is almost a decade ago.</p>
<b>10. Faculty</b>	<p>Faculty of Social Sciences brings together experts from various social disciplines, which enables more multidisciplinary research and study programmes. Seven fulltime professors and eight other members of staff carry out this study programme, in sum of 7 FTE altogether. This manpower seems sufficient, taking into account guest lectures from practice, albeit there might be broader possibilities on professors from other PA closely related disciplines inclusion on the level of the faculty, that is (much more than existing) from law, economics, and public management.</p>
<b>11. Diversity</b>	<p>Diversity is understood in SER just from a nationality aspect. Hereby, SER points out 34 foreign students out of 138 in year 2019/2020, which seems a commendable share (25%). However, there are usually Ukraine students (in 2020 despite pandemics still 15 of them) participating the programme due to bilateral cooperation. Nevertheless, it is not clear how foreign students study, e.g. what is the language of tuition, or how is tuition organised for them (under normal non-pandemic circumstances).</p>
<b>12. Responsibility and autonomy</b>	<p>Department carrying out the programme is naturally a part of the faculty and university; therefore, being autonomous in terms of profession but sharing managerial dimensions. As stated by the SER itself, there are some inconsistencies regarding the division of work in the field of research in relation to LU Scientific Institute.</p>
<b>13. Supportive services and</b>	<p>Library is organised on the level of the faculty as expected, encompassing 84 workspaces with 18 computers for the students. It</p>

<p><b>facilities</b></p>	<p>covers policy science, sociology and communication science but there is no mention of PA sources nor legal or economical apart from the LU Library's-resources.</p> <p>Teaching venues are equipped with standard IT/media support; there are two classes of total 75 workspaces and multimedia studio. Student's office seems appropriate to process the students from the respective and other departments of the faculty, including the Mobility Division and the Career Center.</p>
<p><b>14. Research basis</b></p>	<p>Research is carried out via five exposed projects and programmes listed in the SER but only one – and just at the level of the University funded by National Science Foundation and covering security politics – is still in run in 2021. Regarding the scope and development intensity of PS and PA, this is highly underestimated activity, also revealing no knowledge transfer to pedagogics.</p> <p>There are some international publications of researches named; among these also monographs at international publishing houses of Palgrave and Springer, and a few articles in high-ranked journals such as EJournal of Government and Economics, but these are rare.</p>
<p><b>15. International liaison</b></p>	<p>As pointed out above regarding research activity, internationalisation is underestimated indeed. The SER offers almost none data upon it.</p> <p>The report misses the internationalisation aspect of its programme also in terms of the basic possibility of teaching selected modules in English or other foreign languages and the possibility of further opening and internationalising the programme. The international accreditation would increase the international reputation of the programme and the potential marketing use of it, mostly towards international students that are presently only more like Erasmus and other exchange students while there is no international full-time enrolled students.</p> <p>Mobility of both trainers and Erasmus students is rather low even before the pandemics if compared to possibilities and experiences of similar institutions in the CEE region.</p>
<p><b>16. Joint programmes (if applicable)</b></p>	<p>/</p>
<p><b>17. SWOT analysis</b></p>	<p>Strenghts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Inter- and national orientation of the programme;</li> <li>– Covering theoretical &amp; practical dimensions of the content;</li> <li>– Incorporation of courses that cover strategic governance, communication and similar as soft skills, required in PA;</li> <li>– The possibility of specialisation through selective PA modules gives students the possibility to choose what they are interested in and what will be useful for them in the future;</li> <li>– A period of successfully run programme with the cohorts of</li> </ul>

	<p>35-53 enrolments in the first year during the last five years;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support from the faculty and university regarding library and similar facilities;</li> </ul> <p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Too (purely) political science oriented for modern PA coverage;</li> <li>- The PA specialisation is too influenced by IR elements on the account of missing legal and economic content, characteristic for PA and necessary for multidisciplinary approach to contemporary public governance;</li> <li>- Competences/skills are defined too generally; in numerous courses there is no direct linkage to the programme mission/objectives evident;</li> <li>- Teaching methods are described and implemented only generally, no innovations evident; it is not clear whether eLearning (apart from the Moodle environment) is developed;</li> <li>- Exam results are not explained;</li> <li>- Not clear what jobs shall the graduates candidate for (only in practice or academia as well) and they actually get;</li> <li>- Rather high dropout of enrolled student that do not graduate;</li> <li>- Low number and level of research projects in run and no evident transfer of knowledge to pedagogic process;</li> </ul> <p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More specified competences and PA related courses content, especially on economics, public law and public management in line with scientific and practical PA definition/development;</li> <li>- An autonomous development of PA independently of international relations part of the current programme;</li> <li>- The analyses of employment should be made among the graduates and employers to verify what are the competences acquired in the programme and which are missing according to governmental needs; and these applied as data based programme improvement;</li> <li>- Research activity (applications and projects awarded) should be intensified, in both national and EU levels;</li> <li>- Internationalisation and mobility are of rather low levels, to be endorsed in future.</li> </ul> <p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Small country related brain drain to more specific and high level study programmes in the neighbouring countries;</li> <li>- If PA becomes an autonomous programme, it (or IR track) might lack the required critical no. of enrolled and graduated students.</li> </ul>
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## **Conclusions**

The PS-PA Bc programme is an option in Latvia that encompasses rather broad range of candidates and is based on strong inter- and national elements of public governance. On the other hand, it is too general in several aspects and sometimes inconsistent with the field of public administration and EAPAA scope in this framework. The programme as a whole is mainly orientated into public policy making from predominantly political science standing while not covering numerous typical PA tasks and competences even in the track of Public Administration; established in parallel with International Relations track but not clear diction thereof.

However, there are open possibilities to enrich the current PA part of the organisation with (public) law, economics, and management since these dimensions are much underemphasised or missing. This and similar other inconsistencies might result into decreasing number of enrolments and only medium level of finalisation of the programme due to the gap between the proclaimed programme mission and goals as opposed to the actual programme content and acquired competences.

The programme has many potentials yet needs to be more consistent and focused if/when covering PA, also regarding the research projects and international exchange. Especially research dimension seems highly underestimated in order to offer grounds for the knowledge transfer from research projects to students.

## **Recommendations**

The main recommendation is to redefine the key profile of graduates through more broadened competences and consequent curriculum in administrative sphere if the goals of the programme remain oriented to (predominantly) Latvian public officials' education as stated currently. The respective improvements should be carried out in order to incorporate not almost exclusively political science and predominant international relations issues but also other salient Public Administration discipline aspects, particularly legal and economic ones, which is relevant in public policies making and implementation alike. The other option forward is splitting the existing programme into IR and PA autonomous ones, and thus develop PA as more compliant to modern PA scope and trends.

Regarding a systemic progress and the possible EAPAA accreditation candidacy, several elements of the programme and its reporting should be improved, besides the main issue of lacking PA multidisciplinary to be reflected in the programme content. For instance, didactics and employment are highly underestimated (no concrete examples provided) or there is a lack of critical approach to evaluate the courses and graduates competences; that is, how they do (not) fit in the programme mission/objectives.

Almost no quality cycle is evident to be conducted by the faculty department in this sense, which is a must in accreditation process. Research and internationalising areas are highly underestimated. If applying for any international accreditation, the links with academic research and regional/global research community should be intensified and results provided.

In whole, the programme is currently taken as – and/or the SER is then written accordingly – in a rather formalistic and often far too general mode, stating the required elements as a fact but not producing evidence and critical assessment through the holistic framework of the programme. Several elements are not compliant with each other, which can be attributed to the programme's dysfunctions or purely the SER's inconsistency; in any case, such an approach should be thoroughly improved.