



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

PAQUALITY: Public Administration Education Quality Enhancement,

Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership KA203

No 2018-1-SK01-KA203-046330

Multiplier Event for ROMANIA - Virtual

Summary

Title: The quality of public administration study programs in ROMANIA – perspectives and challenges within the European context

Term: May 28th, 2021

Platform: Zoom meeting hosted by Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Objectives of the event: The main objective of the online event was to discuss the current status of PA teaching in Romania and its quality, challenges within the European context and ways how to address these challenges. Furthermore, the event served for the presentation of the PAQUALITY project intellectual outputs, promotion of the EAPAA accreditation and certification as a tool for the quality improvement and their comparison with the national accreditation requirements. The organizing project partners also received valuable feedback from the event participants which could be utilized for the finalization of the last project outputs. The event was organized online due to the current pandemic situation in Romania, national public safety guidelines and university regulations vis-à-vis the organization of conferences, workshops, work meetings and other events in the pandemic context.

Participants: There were 40 participants at the event including participants from the Romanian project partner (Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca), from the Bucharest

Academy of Economic Studies, from the National School of Political and Administrative Sciences, from the „Stefan cel Mare” University of Suceava, from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, from Constantin Brancusi University of Targu-Jiu and from the University of Bucharest – all participating institutions organize Master and Undergraduate study programs in public administration. Three representatives from universities are also evaluators for the Romanian National Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (ARACIS) and all the participants from the academic environment had experience with the national accreditation process – three participating organizations also experienced EAPAA accreditation; their views and feedback were especially useful for the project team. Other participants included representatives from the practice, from central as well as local public administration institutions, a few relevant NGOs and alumni of PA programmes.

This composition of participants served very well for the purpose of the event. Programmes from HEIs learned about the project outputs and EAPAA opportunities which could serve them for their further quality enhancement and other participants from the practice provided a valuable feedback to the presented outputs and pointed out the current and ever changing needs of the practice. Some representatives of the practice emphasized that alumni of PA programmes miss some core competencies for the professions, such as analytical, innovative and critical thinking, as well as soft skills and communication (these are skills and competences which are more valued in the EAPAA accreditation process than in the national one). Representatives of PA programmes argued that they try to create a better connection to the practice, by inviting practitioner lecturers and organizing internships but many times these opportunities are not utilized in a good way by employers who only involve students in underqualified and repetitive tasks. However, all participants agreed that the relationship to the practice is essential for ensuring a good quality of a programme and increasing the employability for alumni.

Programme: The agenda of the event included several core presentations and based on these we conducted group discussions and individual consultations with individual PA programmes. Presentations started with a comprehensive overview of the PAQUALITY project, discussing its scope, rationality and activities, partners and the main results (Intellectual outputs) obtained. The event continues with presentations and discussions on the following issues:

- The main problems and deficiencies of PA study programs (their content and relevance for practice);
- How the quality of PA programs can be improved;
- The national accreditation system and its relationship (similarities and differences) with EAPAA accreditation;
- External evaluation and accreditation: EAPAA and ARACIS;

An extensive discussions on the above topics contributed to finalize a background document on ROMANIA for IO7 (*Methodological approach to the European public administration accreditation in the new EU member countries*) of the project after the event. The document titled “*Feasibility study on an acceptance of EAPAA accreditation on national levels - ROMANIA*” is attached to this summary below.

The afternoon of the event was devoted to individual consultations and communications with Romanian PA programmes. The major questions discussed with the programmes were the following:

1. Their views on EAPAA accreditation/certification criteria, relevance of the EAPAA evaluation in the Romanian national context and an interest in EAPAA evaluation on short/medium/long term.
2. Strengths and weaknesses of programmes from the EAPAA evaluation criteria point of view.

Programme representatives also agreed that EAPAA accreditation could be a very valuable tool for further development of their programmes, to promote their programs and increase their intake, but they could be interested in it only if it would be certainly recognized by the national accreditation bodies. Most representatives cited both the workload (related to the Self-evaluation report and site visit) and the financial costs as main deterrents for having both evaluations/accreditations.

The main ideas brought up during these discussions referred to the following issues:

- The need to avoid the recreation a unique curricula at the national level and emphasize the current structure of mandatory core courses and flexibility for other program defining elective courses;

- EAPAA does not have a legalistic approach of PA and this might imply some changes of the curricula for more traditional PA programs still functioning in Romania;
- There needs to be more cooperation between PA schools – crisis situations can and should be solved by collaboration and not by competition;
- Educational national policy makers and stakeholders do not include universities in decision-making regarding PA studies (or general higher education studies);
- The civil servants core is not taken into consideration (listened to) by politicians due to their lack of expertise, but the graduates of top PA programs are not employed in the public sector, cannot penetrate the „system” and help with their knowledge – this leads to a vicious circle;
- European quality is not appreciated at the local level as the agenda of politicians often differs from that of universities („political loyalty is more valued than performance”);
- PA schools do not promote themselves as such – are often not aware of their own value;
- The curricula of top national and international PA schools should be analyzed on order to improve programs and professors need to exchange their experience and expertise (between schools);
- There is a need to organize periodic meeting and discussions between academics, students, practitioners and decision makers to ensure quality improvements;
- ARACIS needs to approve EAPAA evaluation for it to be accepted at the national level, but there is no procedure in the present;
- Following EAPAA accreditation and recommendations multiple programs confirmed that the share of legal/law disciplines was reduced (from around half to a quarter) and more emphasis was added on practice and internships, thus leading to improved overall performance and student satisfaction;
- Internships are very important for the quality of educational programs and EAPAA, but their effectiveness and efficiency depends heavily on the host organization;
- There is an obvious need to focus on increasing the quality of PA programs but there should also be specific interest and activities regarding the employability of graduates;
- There is a need to create or reactivate a national network of PA schools.

APPENDIX

Public Administration Education Quality Enhancement Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership KA203 (PAQUALITY)

No – 2018-1-SK01-KA203-046330, Slovakia, 09/2018-08/2021

Feasibility study on an acceptance of EAPAA accreditation on national levels (input for the IO7, Component 3)

Input 3 – Upgrade on the short report and collection of additional data

ROMANIA

Projected statement

This feasibility study would like to reveal current status and steps needed to achieve acceptance of EAPAA accreditation at national level. We focus on studying legal, operational and time components of feasibility.

Steps of activities

1. *First step aims at investigating the compatibility of accreditations. Methodology will consist on the comparison of EAPAA standards with national accreditation standards. Comparison should portray major differences between the standards of the two, including the content of the standards as well as the procedures of the accreditations, the second including also variations in time dimension. If national accreditation involves both institutional as well as programme accreditations, the two should be meaningfully incorporated.*

Legal, operational, time components, but also other relevant components of variations accreditation standards and procedures should be considered.

Country:	ROMANIA	
Differences in accreditations/ standards	EAPAA	National
Content	Programme (mission) focus of accreditations	Mixed institutional and programme focus, both regarding the initial authorization and ulterior accreditation and periodical evaluation. The main provider of programme accreditation/evaluation is the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), an autonomous central organization. The actual accreditation of the programme is done by Government ordinance (LAW 1/2011, article 150) following the evaluation.
	5 eligibility criteria; 13 standards (domain, mission, level, practice, curriculum, quality improvement, student assessment, jurisdiction, faculty, students' admission, supportive services, student services, public relations)	Three main dimension of evaluation: (1) Institutional capacity; (2) Educational effectiveness and (3) Quality assurance and management and a total of 15 specific standards (see footnotes). (1) Institutional capacity includes: 1.1 Mission, objectives, academic integrity; 1.2 Institutional leadership and management and 1.3 Material and technical basis (infrastructure) - property, equipment, financial resources allocated. (2) Educational effectiveness includes: 2.1 Academic content/curriculum –admission procedures, structure of program, qualifications in the field; 2.2 Results of academic process; 2.3 Research activities and results and 2.4 Financial activities. (3) Quality assurance and management includes: 3.1 Quality strategies and procedures; 3.2 Periodical evaluation and revision of study programs; 3.3 Transparent evaluation procedures for educational results; 3.4 Procedures for evaluating teaching staff activity; 3.5 Access to

		learning resources; 3.6 Continuous update of informational basis; 3.7 Transparency and public information and 3.8 Internal quality assurance structures
	Periodical monitoring – every 7 years.	The accreditation process itself (which is the same for both undergraduate programs and master’s programs) has two stages: (1) a provisional temporary operating authorization which offers the higher education services providers (Universities) to start a new program and secondly (2) final or permanent accreditation which offers the possibility to issue the educational diploma which is recognized by the Ministry of National Education and assures specific qualification of the students. Thus, we have an initial temporary authorization, followed 5 years later by accreditation and periodical evaluation every 5 years. The periodical evaluation of MA programs is made at domain level (there can be multiple MA programs in the same domain in an university, in the same faculty or different faculties), not for each individual program.
	External assessment prevails through site visits and report assessment.	Internal self-evaluation followed by external assessment site visits and follow-up report assessment.
Procedures	7 years validity	5 years period followed by periodical evaluation
	Voluntary involvement, non-administrative procedure with no appeal	Mandatory in order to receive public funding and for the diploma to be valid/recognized in the national education system and at the European level through the Bologna process. There is a simplified procedure for the initial accreditation / authorization if a new MA program is accredited by a Department/Faculty in an academic domain which has received previous accreditation.
	Main (core) three experts involve foreign	2 to 4 evaluators (three in most cases), experts in the Master degree

	scholars.	field under evaluation. If the programs is with part-time attendance (FR), one of the evaluators will come from the ID/FR Commission. The evaluators are academic peers from other universities than that which request the evaluation. Evaluators have to be registered with ARACIS, satisfy certain professional and educational requirements and pass an examination.
	Regularly re-accreditation procedures only.	Periodical evaluation every 5 years in order to maintain accreditation and continue the programme
Main similarities	Major similarities are associated with prescribed standards, which appear to be mostly aligned between EAPAA and the Romanian national accreditation. Although the structure of the initial self-evaluation reports differs and standards are under different headings/name, in a lot of cases/standards the content is the same or at least similar. Similarities can also be observed regarding the entire process: initial self-evaluation report, expert site visit and formal report.	
Main differences (summary) and implications for the EAPAA accreditation feasibility	The national accreditation system presents more emphasis for institutional elements and criteria, while EAPAA can be considered to be more mission and programme focused. According to article 150 of the Romanian National Education Law (1/2011) 'External quality assurance evaluation can be provided by ARACIS or any other organization registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education.'	

2. *Second step builds on the previous one, where ranking is performed. This ranking starts with identifying the differences; the elaboration starts with those differences that are of minor or modest nature, and thus compatibility could be potentially easy to achieve. Following, the outline continues with the ones, where the differences between the two are increasing.*

Country: ROMANIA			
Standard ranking	Difference description	Potential solution to difference accommodation	
		EAPAA perspective	National perspective
1	Contents of accreditation standards differs	Balancing of contents and instructions for self-evaluation report writing. More flexible indications/ requirements for SE reports EAPAA might be more flexible in this regard than the national accreditation agency.	Balancing of contents and instructions for self-evaluation report writing. More flexible indications/ requirements for SE reports
2	Team of experts / evaluators	/	More accent on international experts in the field. Moving beyond the expertise available at national level.
3	Re-accreditation recurrence	7 years is a period of time in which a lot can happen with the quality of the programme. An intermediary (mid accreditation), less complex, evaluation can be conducted in order to ensure that the standards are still respected. This mid-term evaluation could focus especially on the recommendations made after the initial accreditation.	/
4	Accreditation focus and validity	Better equilibrium between institutional factors and programme/mission	Better equilibrium between institutional factors and programme/mission

		criteria can be achieved.	criteria can be achieved
5	Encouraging the usage of international evaluation bodies	Could exercise more lobby at the national level, engage in direct interactions with national agencies	There is the legal possibility that `the external quality assurance evaluation can be provided by ARACIS or any other organization registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education', but more lobby is necessary for this alternative to actually be used.

3. *Third step builds on the solutions' development, and represents a core of the feasibility study. Thus, the output here reflects the potential to streamline the two accreditations, and the perspective here is national one.*
The evidence from the step 2 should be discussed with the representatives of the agency (potentially also university), and how they perceive the fit for potential recognition, also taking in the consideration potential evaluations (e.g., irregular, sample evaluations etc.). Alternative is to have focus groups based discussions with vice-rectors/vice-deans, programme directors and agency representatives on the issue.
The output should focus on measures that both national level as well as EAPAA should take to bridge the gaps/differences.

NOTE:

These recommendations are based on the interactions developed during the online Multiplier Event conducted on May 28, 2021, with representatives (decision makers and professors) from seven Romanian universities which organize MA, BA and (in some cases) PhD study programs, representative of hiring/employing organizations and two evaluators from the national accreditation agency.

Country:	ROMANIA	
Recommendations for bridging the gaps	What national level should do?	What EAPAA should do?
Increase institutional direct interaction between the two bodies in order to improve mutual trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accept discussions with foreign evaluating agency - Invite international agencies as observers (maybe online) at different event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actively initiate direct interactions - Provide expertise from the international level - Invite national agencies as observers (maybe online) at different event
Improve the legal framework for recognizing external evaluation in the accreditation process, in accordance to article 150 and 155 or the Romanian National Education Law (1/2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduce their resistance to external evaluations - Not oppose modifications in the legal framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not sure if EAPAA could influence policy makers at the national level, in this issue
	<p>OBS.: We believe that the Ministry of National Education, The Government and the Parliament are the main actors which could improve legislation and not the national/international agencies. There are, of course, vested interests of the national agency to resist these legislative changes, as each evaluation process represents a source of financial income and „soft power” over universities.</p>	

Unify evaluation and accreditation standards and criteria	- Focus more on the mission of study programs and how this mission is implemented by the curricula	- Ad some more emphasis on institutions factors, alongside programme mission / focus
	OBS: We believe that the two sets of standards and criteria, as well as the entire evaluation and accreditation procedures are rather similar between EAPAA and the national system.	
Joined evaluation missions /	Include EAPAA or other international agency experts in their evaluation procedure, alongside national experts/evaluators	Include ARACIS experts in their evaluation procedure, alongside international experts/evaluators