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## **PAQUALITY**

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**O3 - Methodological Framework for Quality Improvement of Project Partners**

### **Organisational learning during the EAPAA self-evaluation process**

**A case study of the MSc in Public Policy and Management programs of the  
Corvinus University of Budapest**

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

## 1 **Introduction**

The PAQUALITY projects aims to support changes in the area of public administration (PA) education in conformity with Bologna objectives, mainly:

- Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies, and
- Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programs of study, training and research, which haven't been fully applied in the area of the public administration high education in Hungary and the new EU states yet.

Higher education public administration programs vary a lot especially in the Central and Eastern European member countries of the EU - in the new EU member states (NMS). From this perspective it is highly relevant to facilitate quality assurance mechanism which would ensure not only comparable quality of education processes but also comparable outcomes of the education (e.g. quality of graduates, their knowledge, skills and experience) in these countries. In addition, the project aims at tackling skills gaps and mismatches in the area of public administration high education through designing and developing curricula that meet the learning needs of students that are relevant to the labour market and societal needs, including through better use of open and on-line, work based, multi - disciplinary learning and new quality assessment criteria. Simultaneously, with a view of this priority, promoting and rewarding excellence in teaching and skills development, training of academics in new and innovative pedagogical approaches, new curriculum design approaches and sharing of good practices through collaborative platforms will be in the centre of the project.

This text represents a brief case study summarizing experiences with EAPAA accreditation. It is built on experiences gained thanks to accreditation and reaccreditation of two MA programmes of the Faculty of Economics Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary.

Both MSc in Public Policy and Management (Közgazdálkodás és Közpolitika MSc, using the Hungarian acronym hereinafter we will refer to this programme as KGKP) and MSc in Public Policy and Management (hereinafter: PUMA) programmes are master level programmes and graduates receive a degree with the title: "Economist in Public Policy and Management". The KGKP programme was accredited in 2012 and successfully reaccredited in 2019. The PUMA programme was accredited by EAPAA for the first time in 2019, for a normal period of seven years.

The officially stated objective of these programmes is "to train graduates who can apply their practical and theoretical knowledge in economics, social sciences, management, and law to solve and analyse issues in public policy and state administration. The programme is designed to provide a thorough understanding of public sector structures, policies and processes, as well as a methodology for analysing and dealing with different structures and processes of public sector management, guidance and control." This objective certainly falls within the domain of Public Administration as understood by EAPAA.

The author of this case study was involved in both the round of (re)accreditation – in the first mainly as a co-author of a self-evaluation report and participant in the site visit evaluation.

This case study's ambition is to identify whether and how strategic learning – a main intended outcome of accreditation – takes place as an immediate result of the self-assessment process. Experience shows that such learning may take many different forms and may be the most visible outcome of the accreditation (next to the findings and recommendations of the site visit team).

The case studies explore, on the basis of interviews with / insights from key program personnel,

- a) whether, how and to what extent the below mentioned or other effects actually appeared during the self- assessment process (RQ1)
- b) whether negative side effects appeared and if yes which ones and how (RQ2)
- c) what internal or external contextual factors seem to moderate the emergence of these effects (or the lack thereof) (RQ3)

Bellow we answer the research questions following the analytical framework set out in the guidance document. The main sections are structured according to the areas of learning (1 to 10), whereas the subsections within the main sections are structured along the three research questions (learning outcomes / main effects, negative side effects, moderating factors – wherever applicable).

## **2 Improved communication within the education unit providing the program**

(RQ1) There have been various positive learning effects during the self-evaluation process. While some of these were confined to education unit providing the program – in this case, the Department of Public Policy and Management – others appeared in a broader scope, reaching out to the entirety of the Institute of Economic and Public Policy (encompassing the Department) or even to other academic and non-academic units taking part in the provision of the program.

- We made several written and personal rounds of communication in order to re-work our strategic vision and mission. This has proven to be more difficult as anticipated, as in the meantime (since the previous EAPAA accreditation in 2012) no major strategic review has taken place. During this period however the program environment and key operational features of the program have changed substantially (including, for example, the composition of the student intake and the intended learning outcomes and to some extent the curricula of the English language program). Moreover, whereas earlier strategic reviews and the resulting strategic cornerstones focused on the Hungarian language program, this time the strategy process had to be extended to the English language one too. Taken together, these two programs implied different and new strategic mission and vision elements.
- There were several meetings with key faculty of other departments playing a role in the provision of the program. Such meetings and discussions did not happen in a structured and focused way in the past. Placing this communication on a structured footing helped the academic staff to gain new insights on their own as well as each others' activities, problems faced, and views of the program.

(RQ2) In addition to the above positive main effects we have not noticed the emergence of negative side effects.

(RQ3) A key factor constraining the above positive effect was the lack of time. Key figures, especially senior ones, were difficult to involve in the process because of their tight working schedule. Therefore early commencement of these meetings, and allowing for several (repeated) rounds of communication (as new and new issues keep arising in the process, requiring new reflections) may have facilitated the effects.

### **3 Improved communication between the program management and the faculty/university leadership**

(RQ1) The program management enjoys, in terms of academic content, a significant extent of autonomy. Moreover, the communication between program management and faculty leadership was already at a reasonably good level at the beginning of the self-evaluation process. Therefore we have not experienced significant learning results in this regard.

### **4 Improved communication with external stakeholders (employers, alumni, or others)**

(RQ1) The program has already had in-depth communication with many of its external constituencies at the outset of the self-evaluation (separate mentioning of the external advisory boards – the international and the domestic one – is in order here). The very act of organising the site visit and the interviews with external stakeholders involved, by definition, a significant amount of communication. Explaining the concept of accreditation, the foreseeable questions and concepts etc. frequently triggered in-depth communication. Whether and to what extent / on what time frame these effects will last is a question at the time of writing (these acts of communication having happened about half a year earlier). Presumably most of these “extra” communication effects will nevertheless wither over time.

(RQ 2): No specific negative side effect observed.

(RQ3) Similar to the previous learning effect the tension between the time and (senior) academic / management staff availability on the one hand, and the tight schedule of preparations on the other posed a significant limit to the realisation of positive effects.

### **5 New structural or procedural solutions supporting the above improvements (for example permanent review and consultative bodies or forums)**

(RQ1) Most of the necessary structural and procedural elements had already been in place at the beginning of the self-evaluation. Some new elements – most importantly, a systemic process of linking curriculum design and oversight to intended learning outcomes – started to be implemented during the accreditation. These were nevertheless attributable not to the self-evaluation process per se; rather, a joint effect of the (preliminary) recommendations of the site visit team, and the ongoing university-wide reforms of the curriculum development process took a decisive role here.

(RQ 2 and 3): Not applicable.

### **6 Changes to the curriculum planning process and structures**

(RQ1) No significant effects took place.

(RQ 2 and 3): Not applicable

## **7 Other changes to program management**

(RQ1) The role of administrative support staff has become more visible and permanent, in some way thus gained additional importance. Links and interactions between administrative and academic aspects and actors became more expressed, accepted and permanent.

(RQ2): None

(RQ3): None

## **8 Changes to curricula**

(RQ1) In the process of curriculum review we identified some gaps as well as some overlaps between certain curricular components. For example, ethical elements were better located, and this was the case with components dealing with or related to behavior public policy and behavioral economics.

(RQ2): None

(RQ3) The scarcity of time and resources played a constraining role here too.

## **9 Changes to support services**

(RQ1) No particular effect identified.

(RQ2 and 3): Not applicable.

## **10 Changes to student assessment**

(RQ1) No significant effects.

(RQ2 and 3): Not applicable

## **11 Changes to administrative services**

(RQ1) It became clear during the self-evaluation process that the distribution of tasks related to administrative student services does not always follow a clear and recognisable logic. Students, in some cases, have to follow a “trial and error” logic in sorting out their administrative issues, thus generating an extra workload both on their own and the support services’ side. Whereas this awareness has increased during the self-evaluation process, solutions to this problem could not be initiated because of the ongoing large-scale restructuring of the University’s administrative as well as academic organisation and processes.

(RQ2 and 3): None

## **12 REFERENCES**

EAPAA’s evaluation reports on the programmes of Közgazdálkodás és Közpolitika MSc (MSc in Public Policy and Management, KGKP), Corvinus University of Budapest, 2019. (unpublished)

EAPAA’s evaluation reports on the programmes of MSc in Public Policy and Management (PUMA), Corvinus University of Budapest, 2019. (unpublished)

