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O3 - Methodological Framework for Quality Improvement of Project Partners

Organisational learning during the EAPAA self-evaluation process

**Experiences with EAPAA accreditation
A case study of Masaryk University's programmes**

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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.

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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 Slovakia 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 and Administration, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic: accreditation of the programme "Public Economy and Administration" (PEaA programme) (based on application in November 2010), and reaccreditation of this programme and accreditation of the programme Public Administration (Administration Publique, MFTAP) (based on application from December 2018).

The author of this case study was involved in both the round of accreditation – in the first mainly as a co-author of a self-evaluation report and participant in the site visit evaluation; in the second as a so-author of self-evaluation reports and the main coordinator of the project.

The text is structured as follows:

- First, this case study introduces to the context and summarizes main developments of the programmes prior to the EAPAA accreditation.
- Second, it outlines the process of EAPAA accreditation – introduces main findings as presented by the EAPAA in its evaluation reports and also deal with changes that were based on these findings. This point is concluded a summary of effects of the accreditation, summarizing:
 - whether, how and to what extent several types of effects actually appeared during the self- assessment process;
 - whether negative side effects appeared and if yes which ones and how;
 - what internal or external contextual factors seem to moderate the emergence of these effects (or the lack thereof) (RQ3)
- Third, it presents recommendations and lessons learned that may be inspiring for those who want to apply for the EAPAA accreditation.

2. BRIEFLY ON DEVELOPMENTS OF THE PROGRAMMES PRIOR TO EAPAA ACCREDITATION

2.1 PUBLIC ECONOMY AND ADMINISTRATION PROGRAMME

The main purpose of the current programme Public Economics and Administration is to prepare graduates for academic level roles in the public sector - students of this programme are trained predominantly for managerial and policy making positions in the public sector. They also receive skills to work in similar positions in the non-governmental non-profit sector.

Originally, the programme was established as a five-year Master degree study in 1991. In the beginning the mission of the programme was to produce universal public economists who might find their place in the newly formed public sector, i.e. with the knowledge of its laws and functioning, awareness of its specifics, being sensitive to the social aspects and capable of providing a range of practical activities such as accounting, budgeting etc.

Due to changes in legislation, the continuous Master degree was implemented in late 1990s – in accordance with the adoption of the Bolognese process, the portfolio of the programme was amended with a three years Bachelor and two years continuous Master programme in 2001.

The content of the study field has been innovated on a continuous basis. Important changes were made as a consequence of the division of the former continuous five-year study into a 3+2 model and the implementation of a combined form of study. The curriculum has undergone various continuous innovations since that time with respect to the needs of the practice, especially in connection with the integration of the Czech Republic into the EU structures and increasing the importance of programme financing. The dominating theoretical character of the studies has been systematically amended by elements that allow for the obtaining of practical experience (adding a practice class, changes in the content of subjects, accenting the active forms of teaching).

During 2008-2009 the faculty adopted the policy of increasing the average amount of credits for a passed course so that the final version more accurately reflects the principles of the ECTS. It was necessary to reduce the number of individual courses. This led to modifications of the content and merging of some courses as well as to adoption of the philosophy of optional blocks aimed at creating the following three specialisations within the programme: Public Economy or NNO, Public Finance, and Public Administration.

In November 2010, the programme management applied for its accreditation by the EAPAA (accreditation of both forms of study – full-time and combined – was intended).

2.2 ADMINISTRATION PUBLIQUE (MFTAP) PROGRAMME

From the very beginning, the mission of the programme was to produce highly qualified universal graduates (generalists) who may find their place in public administration and public organizations.

The programme started as an annual programme called DFTAP in 1999. This reflected French annual Master 1 degree and Master 2 degree models. Later on, the programme was accredited by the national accreditation bodies as the 2 years Master programme providing graduates with two diplomas – French and Czech – on the joint double-degree agreement between the Masaryk University and the partner French University – Université Rennes 1: its institute IPAG. IPAG (Institut de préparation à l'administration générale) in Rennes is part of the Université Rennes 1 established in 1962. It aims at preparation of students for entry exams into French public administration and offers also courses focusing on continual education of French civil servants based on demand of self-governments. The staff involved in the programme MFTAP consists of professionals and academicians.

The content of the study programme has been innovated on a continuous basis reflecting requirements of the national evaluation bodies in the Czech Republic and France and decisions made and recommendations prepared on the University, Faculty and Department level. First changes were made in 2006 based on recommendations of the internal accreditation initiated by the dean of the Faculty in 2005. Especially revisions were made of which the aim was to reduce duplicities in courses and involve more practitioners in courses. The programme was internally accredited for 5 years in 2006. Other changes were made especially in 2011 and 2015. Some courses were merged or abolished and new courses were established.

In the following period 2011-2016, changes were made especially with regards to internships. A project focused on internships was realized from 2011 to 2014 with the aim to improve the internships of students of the programme in Czech public administration and public sector organizations using experiences from France which has a different culture of internships and much longer experiences (because internship is a precondition for entering the civil service which is not the case of Czechia). Another aim was to share and diffuse experiences of Czech authorities of which the internship practices and processes were developed more in that time. Also, a network focusing on internships have been developed and contacts on member public authorities have been used in a list with public authorities recommended to students for their internships.

Based on discussions with partners from France the programme evaluation was prepared during Autumn 2017, as the part of the new accreditation processes initiated by the University and its main accreditation body (Council for Internal Evaluation - the RVH) (within its institutional accreditation tasks). Following this, changes were made in the structure of curricula in order to

- concentrate French parts of the programme into the third semester when students of the programme are in France
- reflect changes agreed between partners of the programme concerning organization of this third semester - students are now required to attend lectures and seminars during the first month of their stay in France and the following two months as interns in public authorities or public sector organizations. This enables better separation of the educational block and internship block of their stay in France
- to reduce the content of EU-oriented courses and related duplicities.

Following the changes in legislation on HEIs and their accreditation, that are described in more detail in another report prepared within the PAQUALITY project – Špaček, D., Nemeč, J. the report on PA education in the Czech Republic, February 2019), the programme was accredited by the Masaryk University internal accreditation body in 2018 and obtained the accreditation in August 2018.

In December 2019 the programme management applied for EAPAA accreditation of this programme.

3. THE TWO PROGRAMMES AND EAPAA ACCREDITATION

3.1 FIRST ROUND OF ACCREDITATION, ITS RESULTS AND FOLLOWING CHANGES

As presented in the introduction, the first round of the EAPAA accreditation was initiated by application of accreditation submitted in November 2010. The main aim was to obtain international feedback on full-time program Public Economy and its slightly modified version – the program Public Economy and Administration that was being delivered in a combined form of study. Another motive was to be the first program in Czechia that is, potentially, accredited by the EAPAA. It was also anticipated that during the process experiences of one of the faculty members who was involved in EAPAA accreditation (as a member of EAPAA as well as a member of faculty core of another program that underwent the EAPAA accreditation) would be used.

As required by the EAPAA accreditation, self-evaluation reports on both the programs were prepared. It was coordinated mainly by the program manager (a head of a responsible department) and professor Juraj Nemec who had former experiences with the EAPAA accreditation. But the main team consisted of another three persons who were involved in collection of data and preparation of draft texts of individual parts of the Volume I and Volume II of the report. These members of the project team were represented by faculty members who were directly involved in the program (as lecturers, researchers etc.). Administrators (e.g. employees from the department for studies, economic department, and HR department) were involved only indirectly – they were asked for necessary data when needed for the self-evaluation reports. The team started to work on the self-evaluation report mainly in October 2010 and the report was finished and submitted in January 2011.

After this preparation for the visit of EAPAA's Site Visit Team started. A Site Visit Team (SVT) was set up by the EAPAA and assigned with the task of discussing this report with faculty and students of the program and representatives of the university. Some additional supplementary documents were prepared for it as required by the EAPAA – additional and updated information to Vol. I of the self-evaluation report, on learning outcomes, international cooperation, research and teaching experiences of staff abroad, membership in international organizations, new faculty members, revised curriculum content, workload information, student/teacher ratios, relationships with alumni; some missing course descriptions; and also curriculum structure of the Bachelor program. Later on, on request the SVT was also provided with some additional information concerning internships, student workload and dropout ratios.

The site visit took place from the evening of May 9th, 2011 to the afternoon of May 11th, 2011. First findings were presented and discussed at the very end of the site visit. This was followed by the draft site visit report that was sent for comments to the program management, based on which the SVT prepared the final version of the evaluation report. This report was rather critical. The main criticism referred to insufficient PA-related content, misbalance in composition of the core faculty (PA expertise) and different titles of programs.

The report and was considered by the EAPAA's accreditation committee and the accreditation was not provided in 2011 and the accreditation decision was postponed. Formal decision was sent by the EAPAA in December 2011 in which it was announced that the committee would reconsider the accreditation of the program in its 2012 meeting, under the following conditions:

1. The programs show that decisions are taken in order to include sufficient content of PA-related study fields into the programs;
2. An active policy is implemented in order to make the composition of the core faculty more balanced into the direction of public administration expertise.
3. The titles of the programs better reflect the content of their programs, either by making the Public Administration specialization compulsory in the Master's degree in Public Economy and Administration, or by merging both programs into one Master's degree in Public Economy

This initiated internal discussion about changes. Finally, the following changes were implemented about which the EAPAA was informed on regular basis:

- Titles of the programmes were changed and unified in order to better reflect their content.
- The mission of the programme was revised.
- Curricula of the programmes have been amended with changes implemented from the academic year 2012/2013. Changes were made in order to improve the potential of the programmes to prepare students to become public administration scholars for wide engagement in the public sector and public administration in the multidisciplinary way. New courses were introduced (Governance and Public Policy, Public Choice), course on evaluation methods was modified and individual courses that were formerly called (Economics of

Housing, Sport, Education etc. which was a kind of legacy) were renamed to “Housing Policy”, “Sport Policy” etc. and their content was modified and to some extent also unified (in terms of structure). Some courses (like Public Management or Public Administration II) became compulsory for all specializations that existed that time.

- The management of the programme strived to improve the composition of the faculty and its publication and the research profile. Two top public administration scholars joined the programme in 2012. Also, a motivation system was introduced in order to motivate staff to publish research in more internationally recognized journals.

Based on the supplementary information it was decided by the EAPAA that the programme would be conditional accredited for three years (till 2015), and three main concern areas for future development were defined:

- 1) Active policy for changes in the curricula to bring the programme more in line with the main goals of public administration;
- 2) Active policies to increase the international visibility of the faculty;
- 3) Active policies to improve the composition of the faculty, including changes in qualifications and promotions and results of new motivation instruments

In 2013, the programme management reported to the EAPAA about the progress of the programme. The report was not formally discussed at the 2013 EAPAA Accreditation Criteria meeting. The programme management received brief feedback stressing the need for further progress and requesting clarification in two of the three indicated main concern areas – curricula and faculty. To discuss the situation, an EAPAA delegation visited Brno in April 2014. Prior to this, supplementary documents outlining main changes and additional documents were prepared (e.g. changed curricula, lists of publications and projects etc.).

Following the discussions and recommendations of the EAPAA delegation, a report was prepared and submitted to the EAPAA documenting recent programme developments and are submitting it for the 2014 EAPAA meeting for consideration and, if possible, for the decision to award full accreditation to our programme. The main points of the self-evaluation report as required in the EAPAA accreditation framework were followed, and limits and possibilities for improving the programme's multidisciplinary nature were discussed. Taking into account the valuable feedback received during the visit, the programme management decided to further improve the curricula. The following changes are expected and in preparation:

- Reduction of specializations
- Replacing some courses with a more focused courses on PA and PP
- Making internships compulsory

Finally, in autumn 2014 the Accreditation Committee of the EAPAA found that the study programme had several very positive features that exceed the respective basic evaluation standard, namely, student assessment; students' admission; support services and facilities; student-related services; and public relations. However, the Accreditation Committee identified three more problematic aspects: The domain, the curriculum structure, and the faculty composition and orientation. Although broadened after the 2012 revision, the focus of the programme is a bit one-sided on “Public Economics”. Other disciplines and fields of Public Administration, Public Management and Public Policy were still not as much in the centre as desirable according to the AC. The AC was of the opinion that a mandatory introductory course in public administration for all students would be an essential improvement of the programme.

Furthermore, law and political science could be more visibly represented in the mandatory part of the programme according to the 2014's evaluation of the AC. The AC was also concerned about the composition and orientation of the core faculty: The majority of academic staff had a background in Economics and they had graduated from the same Faculty where they were teaching. The AC also pointed out that there was a need to diversify the sources of academic qualifications and to refresh the teaching faculty pool. Despite the recruitment of two internationally recognized scholars, the involvement of full-time professors into the academic leadership and steering of the programme could be improved. Finally, according to the AC, faculty could continue its already initiated efforts to become more internationally visible and to intensify their participation at international conferences and to publish more extensively in international journals.

Based on the additional information and the second Site Visit, the Accreditation Committee eventually granted unconditional accreditation until 2019.

3.2 THE SECOND ROUND OF ACCREDITATION AND CHANGES DISCUSSED

The second round of the EAPAA accreditation was initiated by the application for accreditation of the two MA programmes – PEaA and MFTAP – submitted to the EAPAA in December 2018. It was decided that the PEaA programme would undergo reaccreditation and the MFTAP would strive for the first accreditation. The motive was to use a possibility that two programmes may be accredited for the same fee. Also the feedback received during the first time was considered as rather valuable and facilitating also for internal discussions about developments of the programmes within the faculty and the university.

During the second round, experiences from the first round were utilized related to preparation of the self-evaluation report and organization of the site visit. The core team remained more or less the same and again its core was from the faculty staff directly involved in the programme (teaching, coordination and management).

Two self-evaluation reports were elaborated and finalized at the end of March 2019. Their preparation was following updated EAPAA guidelines for their preparation. The first self-evaluation report prepared for the first round was used only partly. The main aim was to have the reports more focused, shorter and clear which was then credited by the EAPAA site visit team of which some of the members were the same as in 2011. The content of the reports also reflected self-evaluation reports that were prepared for the internal accreditation of the programmes within the Masaryk University. As outlined in another PAQUALITY's output, based on changes of the national accreditation mechanisms, the Masaryk University obtained the called institutional accreditation and study programmes of the Faculty are subjected to accreditation and continuous evaluation by the Council for Internal Evaluation (RVH) of the university. This internal accreditation process was carried out since autumn 2017 till Spring 2018 for the first time and the programme was awarded the accreditation in August 2018 for 10 years. These internal evaluation processes also included evaluation of external expert which had a peer-review form (more information can be found in report Špaček and Nemeč, 2019).

The SV was organized similarly to the first round. It took place at the Faculty at the end of May 2019 (from the evening of May 26th, to the afternoon of May 28th). The structure of the SVT was also similar and the site visit consisted of a short welcome and meetings with University, Faculty and Program management, meeting with core teaching staff, meeting with students, meeting with graduates, meeting with employers and another meeting with the program management. The site visit was concluded by the final interviews with program managers and guarantors and discussion on preliminary findings. Based on this a draft of the site visit report was prepared by the EAPAA's SVT which was then sent to program management for comments. Based on this final SV report was prepared. Both the programs were evaluated positively. The PEaA program which was undergoing

reaccreditation was perceived as progressing. More critique was raised concerning the second program – the Czech-French MFTAP program. The main critique related to the following:

- The MFTAP program does not utilize the potential synergies of partners and of double-degree (mission, teaching, research).
- Research methods need more attention.
- Collaboration with other faculties of the MU would be beneficial.
- Length of internship in the PEeA program is shorter compared to the internship in the MFTAP program.
- International literature in programs needs attention.
- There are no electives in MFTAP.
- Only small number of students applied for the MFTAP program.
- The faculty composition is still misbalanced (with regards to PA-related persons, research internationalization).

The EAPAA Accreditation Committee, at its meeting of 10 September 2019 in Belfast evaluated the programmes against the EAPAA Accreditation Criteria and concluded that the Master Public Economy and Administration (VES) programme can be re-accredited (the program received accreditation till 2025) and the Master Public Administration (MFTAP) programme can be conditionally accredited for three years (until 2022). The final evaluation report is available on the EAPAA's web pages¹.

In the present time, possible changes are being discussed concerning

- How to reduce the amount of economics
- New course on research methods
- Electives (changes in curricula – structure of compulsory and elective courses).

The changes are challenged especially by the following:

- Collaboration between (competing) faculties in the time when there is even a rather high interdepartmental competition within the faculty.
- Employment of recognized professors and post-docs, because salaries may not be attractive enough for them.
- It is hard to attract students to PA programmes when PA is rather discredited and not attractive in Czechia. Also French language is not as attractive as in the past which may pose difficulties for the MFTAP programme.

3.3 EFFECTS

In this subsection it will be outlined 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).

a) Improved communication within the education unit providing the program

Communication within the education unit providing the program improved especially during the first round of the accreditation process. It was also inevitable in order to obtain data required for the self-evaluation report. On the other hand, the communication within the education unit was also determined by former evaluation processes (related to gathering of data for accreditation by the national body). Prior to the second round, internal accreditation was carried out within the Masaryk University which also required the self-evaluation report and intensive cooperation between the team elaborating the report and other faculty staff.

¹ Here: <https://www.eapaa.eu/accredited-programmes> (accessed 29.11.2019).

b) Improved communication between the program management and the faculty/university leadership

Positive effects of the accreditation can be identified also in the area of communication between the program management and faculty as well as university. Based on the first round of accreditation, the programme was the first of its kind in Czechia that obtained such international accreditation. Thanks to this, the second round of accreditation was also incorporated in the formal strategic document of the Faculty. Some experiences were also utilized in the process of internal accreditation.

c) Improved communication with external stakeholders (employers, alumni, or others)

It is an opinion of the author, that the self-evaluation itself did not improve communication with external stakeholders so much. On the other hand, preparation of the site visit was quite demanding for finding potential candidates between students, employers and alumni. Thanks to this some contacts have definitely improved and students, employers and alumni who participated in the site visit (meetings with the EAPAA accreditation board) were very positive and find this experience very contributing. After the site visit, some of the employers were also very positive about future cooperation in education and other projects.

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

The self-evaluation and other components of the accreditation process did not lead to new structural or procedural solutions. Nor it impacted more support services and other administrative services. It also has not influenced more methods used for student assessment. On the other, some discussions about revising of methods for student assessment were initiated during and after the self-evaluation process and in some courses number of ways students had been examined was reduced.

Many important mechanisms related to internal quality were established especially as a reaction to requirements of the national accreditation process, requirements of the university and a kind of natural development (some of the mechanisms are still rather informal – e.g. cooperation with employers and alumni).

e) Changes to the curriculum planning process and structures

As outlined in the above text, the accreditation process led to various changes in curriculum. New courses were introduced, some were revised etc. One of the aims has also been to incorporate available international literature more.

4. LESSONS LEARNED, RECOMMENDATIONS

The two rounds of EAPAA accreditation bring important experiences and lessons. They can be summarized by the following recommendations for the pre-site visit phase of the EAPAA accreditation and the site visit phase.

1. Obtain sufficient support of the Faculty / University leadership

Obtaining sufficient support from the leadership is rather important, not only for obtaining funds, but also for necessary cooperation across the faculty, obtaining the data and support from responsible departments. It is also contributing, if the EAPAA accreditation is somehow linked to the formal strategy. For communication inside the faculty it is also good to prepare a planned budget that can then be discussed inside the faculty.

2. Pay attention to the internal „accreditation team“

The “accreditation team” is the crucial element of the accreditation process. It should consist of persons committed to and actively involved in preparation of self-evaluation report and later on in preparation of the site visit. It is good to have a person with EAPAA-related experiences in the team. As outlined in the text, our core accreditation team consisted only from people directly involved in the programme (in its management, coordination and teaching), especially because they knew the programmes and could incorporate this knowledge into the self-evaluation reports. They also participated in the meetings during the site visit. Our experiences show that at least 3 persons should be actively involved in the accreditation project.

3. Pay attention to the SER

Attention should be clearly paid to preparation of the self-evaluation report. Our experiences show that it is advisable to make it short, focused and clear. For this it is necessary to read the EAPAA’s guides. Also evaluation reports that are published on the web pages of the EAPAA can be inspiring – for preparation of the self-evaluation report as well as later for the site visit.

3. Plan the SV well in advance

The site visit should be planned sufficiently. This is not only about days and times. Communication within the faculty and university is very important. You should be aware of who should be available on spot. Not everything is clearly written in the current guidelines of the EAPAA. For instance, for the SVT „outside-EAPAA-members“ are required and EAPAA wants to be provided with at least 3 CVs of practitioners and 3 CVs of students of programmes who are not directly involved in the programme that is undergoing the accreditation. EAPAA then selects from the candidates. For the meetings with students, graduates and employers you should have at least 6 or 7 persons on spot and it is advised to have more candidates because some of them may not be eventually available.

It is also good to distribute list of potential questions that they can be asked during the site visit. Their examples can be found in the EAPAA’s guidelines. Sometimes representatives of students, graduates and even employers can be nervous about the site visit and concerned about what questions can be raised. It should be clearly communicated that the site visit is not only about strengths of the programme, but also about its shortcomings.

4. Be prepared on spot

The final tasks of the EAPAA accreditation process relate to organization of the site visit. This is about people who actually come to the site visit, rooms for the meetings and also pre-meetings things (e.g. at least some basic catering for those who come to a meeting or from a meeting is necessary). The accreditation team should also plan about the time before and after meetings (e.g. making reservations for dinners of SVT).

As pointed out, preliminary findings from the site visit are discussed at the very end of the site visit. It is strongly advised to discuss the results of the site visit with SVT members because this can be then incorporated in the site visit report.

5. Read and comment the first version of the SVR carefully

The EAPAA’s site visit team provides a program management with its draft site visit report. It is strongly recommended to read it carefully and provide the SVT with a clear feedback and comments. In the present, this is the only way how certain things can be revised in the site visit report that is then communicated to the EAPAA’s Accreditation Committee and serves as a baseline for its decision about awarding / not awarding the accreditation.

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