

EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE FIELD OF GOVERNANCE IN THE EU INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The development of study programmes in public administration is being adjusted to the increasing complexity of administrative science. In addition to “classic” administrative content, programmes are progressively focused on the content related to the principles of sound governance, which also includes the introduction of different approaches and concepts in the fields of governance, management, leadership, work and human resource management.

The study programmes are fundamentally focused on the characteristics of jobs in the public administration of an individual country. Despite the fact that programme descriptions often indicate that programmes are European-oriented (according to individual programme objectives and competences), they only rarely interfere in content that is essential for a successful understanding of relations and work in the EU institutions in terms of entering this labour market. The Slovenian higher education area is experiencing a vacuum effect in the field of EU studies, as no higher education institution offers a study programme that would comprehensively cover EU content aimed at pursuing career goals in the European administration. Therefore, the Faculty of Administration has drawn up a study programme that fills this gap.

The article considers case study of the process of renewal of the first cycle study programme Public Sector Governance programme by adding the European Governance module in the second and third years.

Keywords: study programme, public administration, EU institutions, public sector governance, European Governance module, EPSO.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades of reforms in the EU member states, the cost efficiency and effectiveness of public administration improved somewhat. Institutions in general became more open and transparent, while access to their services and their quality improved. On the other hand, the citizens’ confidence in the state, the social cohesion and the attractiveness of the public sector as the employer deteriorated (European Commission, 2021). The often-heard demands of the public to cut public administration represent an additional source of discouraging messages to young people who are deciding on taking administration courses. The situation described above has an impact on higher education establishments which provide education for work in public administration. This also includes the Faculty of Public Administration of the University of Ljubljana, which is the leading education facility in the field of public administration in Slovenia. Even though the total number of students in the first stage of learning did not drastically change at the Faculty of Public Administration, there is a downward trend of registered students at the university study programme. This is a programme in which every individual who has passed the general Matura examination or the vocational Matura examination in any secondary school programme and the examination in one of the general Matura study subjects can enrol. In other words, these are mostly candidates who have completed their secondary school education and have a somewhat higher-than-average level of general knowledge. In addition to the reduced number of enrolled students at the university study programme, an additional challenge is also the career orientation of the registered students. Many of them, especially in the freshman year at the first cycle degree², do not have a clear idea about their career path or what studying administration actually means. This is evidenced by the relatively low transition from the freshman to sophomore years, especially in the higher education programme. The Faculty of Public Administration has therefore faced the challenge of developing study contents that are more attractive for the more “demanding” candidates as well, i.e. those candidates that have better knowledge from secondary school.

Contemplation about new contents is also related to life in the broader society. This refers to the European Union (EU), which has also faced several problems in the last decades (financial and economic crisis, migration

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² The Slovenian higher education system distinguishes between university (academic) first cycle study programmes and professional first cycle study programmes.

crisis, rise of extremist and populist movements, etc.) In relation to the national interests of the Member States, all these problems severely alienated the citizens from the EU, which has increased the democratic deficit of the EU. On the other hand, these crises encouraged governments of the EU Member States to cooperate more closely and to support other countries and act with common interest (EC, 2021). An in-depth and enhanced cooperation, which has been seen in the last period, can have a positive impact on the resolution and reduction of the democratic deficit and therefore promote legitimacy of the entire integration. To reach this goal, the EU will need to be brought closer to its inhabitants and the inhabitants will need to be made aware of the EU, its functioning, institutions and policies. One of the means to bring the EU closer is also to educate the people about the contents related to the various forms of management and operation of the EU, including cooperation and management techniques in the EU administration. We have noticed that no higher education institution in Slovenia offers a study programme that would comprehensively cover EU content aimed at pursuing career goals in the European administration.

These findings and the fact the EU content is already included in the study programmes of the Faculty of Public Administration, that there is already a programme at the Master's Study Programme Administration – Public Sector Governance titled Public governance and the European Union (FPA, 2021), which is conducted in English, the faculty was inspired to recognise the programme that would fill in the gap in the EU administration area as one of the potentials for the development of the study programme. There were two main aims in preparing the new study programme related to the EU administration. The first one concerned the development of content related to the functioning of support services in EU institutions (EU administration), while the aim of the second one was to invite better candidates with ambitions to cooperate with the EU institutions, either in the international environment or in those domestic institutions that cooperate with the EU institutions on a daily basis.

The development of new EU study programmes would also contribute to the realisation of some other strategic goals of the faculty related to the strengthening of its position in the region. This can be in the sense of a platform to raise the awareness of the public in Slovenia and the West Balkans on European matters. This could be a motive for the EU institutions (promotion of the EU content, EU activities) and also for individual states in the West Balkans (to move the integration process closer and only to EU citizens), to support or actively participate in the programme implementation (e.g. with cooperation of the officials, decision-makers, professionals in practice).

Based on the above, the Faculty of Public Administration decided to develop new study content that is directed towards pursuing career goals in the EU administration on the university study programme (first cycle). However, because an individual may take up employment as an official or assistant in one of the institutions only after they have passed their so-called concours exam (hereinafter: EPSO exam), which is supervised by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) (European Parliament, 2021), the development of the study content relates to the idea that undergraduates of the programme would have a competitive advantage even when undergoing the EPSO exam.

2 STARTING POINTS FOR PREPARING STUDY CONTENTS

When developing new study contents, the limiting factor is represented by the fact that the University of Ljubljana, to which the Faculty of Public Administration belongs, is not keen on accrediting new study programmes due to the large number of existing programmes in the previous period (2017–2020). The University of Ljubljana recommended the development of new study contents in the framework of new modules (fields of study) within the existing programmes. The above was also considered in determining the starting points for the development of new study contents related to the functioning in EU institutions, especially the EU administration. Based on the above, some starting points were established:

- New study contents related to the functioning of the EU administration will be formed in the framework of the European Governance module within the first cycle university study programme Public Sector Governance. The module does not replace the existing contents, it only serves as an additional offer;
- Students will develop competencies in the area of understanding the functioning of the EU institutions and administration, which will be comparable to the competencies of the best comparable European programmes in this area. The developed competencies will allow students to work successfully in the EU administration. In addition, the competencies will also enable them to successfully pass the EPSO exam (and therefore take up employment in the EU institutions);
- The contents in the module will be “practical” and focus will be given on the three “central working languages” (English, French and German terminologies);

- The contents of the module will mainly attract better grammar school graduate who wish to pursue an international career path in European administrative bodies;
- To ensure quality of the contents, cooperation with the EU institutions and especially the EU House³ will be established. Cooperation will be aimed at developing study contents and providing the cooperation of professionals who have EU practical experience.

One of the goals in preparing the module is therefore directly related to the strengthening of the possibility of employing graduates in three functional employment categories⁴ in the EU institutions: (i) administrators (AD), (ii) assistants (AST) and secretaries (SC or CAST). Each functional category has its own entry requirements that must be met to gain employment, as well as the tailored exam for that purpose. In addition to the special requirements for each exam, the candidates who plan to become EU officials will also need to comply with certain basic criteria to gain employment (this applies to all functional categories), which includes an EU citizenship, impunity, the ability to speak at least two EU official language (a comprehensive grasp of the first language is required, and at least a spoken understanding of the second language) and to meet the military service requirements.

The main characteristics of the above three functional categories are (EPSO, 2021):

- Administrators (AD); they are engaged in the formation of policies, the implementation of the EU legislation, analysis and advisory services. Those who meet the general eligibility criteria and have a university degree may undertake the exam or apply for the EPSO AD tender. Additional qualifications may be required based on the AD exam mark. The EPSO AD tenders range from AD5 to AD16, whereby AD5 is the entry level that is appropriate for university graduates⁵ of the first cycle degree;
- Assistants (AST); Officials on the AST level perform similar work as administrators, albeit with less responsibility. In general, they are employed in executive and technical job positions and play an important role in the internal governance of institutions (e.g. employment, accounting and financial matters, IT and scientific laboratory work). Candidates must have successfully completed secondary school. Work experience is required based on the AST exam level or tender. The EPSO AST tenders range from AST1 to AST11. New personnel usually enters the AST1 class (candidates must have completed a secondary school and they must have some appropriate experience or professional qualifications) or AST3 (candidates must have completed a secondary school, they must have appropriate professional qualifications and/or multiple years of experience). Graduates who successfully pass the study module should meet the entry requirements for the EPSO AST1 tender, whereby it is recommended that they undergo practical training as well. They would thus obtain some experience and professional qualifications;
- Secretary (SC); Secretaries (SC) are, in general, employed in managing offices and in the area of performing administrative duties. They have a wide range of administrative tasks that differ significantly based on their job position. They ensure an undisturbed functioning of the EU institutions by arranging meetings, organising conferences, preparing various events and support duties for managers or units within the EU institutions. Those who meet the general eligibility criteria and have appropriate qualifications may apply for the EPSO SC exam. Candidates must have completed a secondary school programme. Additional work experience is required based on the SC exam level or tender. The EPSO SC tenders range from SC1 to SC6. New personnel usually enters the SC1 class (candidates must have completed a secondary school programme and they must have appropriate professional experience in this area) or SC2 (candidates must have many professional experiences, 4 years at least). Graduates who successfully pass the study module should meet the entry requirements for the EPSO SC1 tender, whereby it is recommended that they undergo practical training as well, with which they would obtain some experience and professional qualifications.

The idea of developing contents within the European Governance module is therefore related to the development of competencies of graduates to work in the above three categories, which is the main focus in preparing the module. The module is to be carried out in the Slovenian language in the first period (first implementation cycle) and it would be financed with public and own funds. Following the successful development and expansion of the programme, the programme would also be carried out in the English language and it would be targeted at candidates from the region. The implementation would also be financed with EU funds and funds obtained from the candidates' countries⁶, presumably from the West Balkans.

³ With the logistical and infrastructural help from the Faculty of Public Administration, the EU House could carry out its projects and help the faculty in developing the study module and extracurricular activities in the area of EU contents.

⁴ Officials who are employed full-time in the EU administration are divided into various functional categories.

⁵ AD6/AD7 are specialised job positions that require multiple years of appropriate experience, AD9/AD12 are job positions on the level of middle management and require prior experience in management.

⁶ Enrolment fees.

To prepare detailed starting points for the preparation of the module, the faculty management authorised a working group in autumn 2018, which was formally recognised by the Senate of the faculty in spring 2019 as a body that manages and directs the preparation of the new study module.

2.1 Content

The formation of the content of the European Governance module began with the analysis of the area. The methodological approach was initially of comparative nature. The analysis compared the competencies of comparable study programmes, the curriculum contents, descriptions on websites and internal documents of institutions that carried out comparable programmes, and other accessible materials. We were especially interested, from the quality point of view, which content is being offered by education institutions that are the carriers of the European study programme, especially in relation to supporting or administering working processes.

The model or the draft of the study contents in the framework of the European Governance module was designed in multiple phases. Firstly, an analysis of the comparable international study and education programmes and contents was carried out, where more focus was given to programmes of the European School of Administration (europa.eu, 2021), College of Europe (college of Europe, 2021), University Leiden (University Leiden, 2021), European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA, 2021), The Schools of political studies of the Council of Europe (COE, 2021), European Personnel Selection Office-a (EPSO, 2021), University of Ljubljana (FDV) and York University, Toronto (York, 2021). Some results were also analysed regarding the contents of EU that officials from the West Balkans need to integrate into the EU more quickly. Some directions from the EPSO office were also analysed, and directions given by the EU institutions with which we planned to cooperate were also considered. Specific focus was given to the overview of the various evaluation reports and studies, especially the accessible working documents and self-evaluation reports of the targeted institutions. The deficit of programmes in the area of working in the EU administration was seen as a special challenge. Some “EU programmes” were more focused in studying the European cultural space, while others were placed more in the context of developing European integrations as part of the international political arena. Few programmes focused on the EU administration.

If we mention some findings from the analysis of materials of the aforementioned universities and institutions, then it is true that the programme at the European School of Administration is focused mainly on educating public employees who are working in European institutions and agencies. A minor share of students also come from administrations of other Member States by means of a special invitation issued by the school. Study programmes at the College of Europe are on the postgraduate Master’s study level and include economics, diplomatic studies and international relations, European interdisciplinary studies, European law, European policies and European management and transatlantic studies. The programme at the University Leiden (International and European Governance MSc) is designed based on two directions: public institutions and public policies and values. The European Institute of Public Administration offers a combination of obtained in-depth (theoretical) know-how on EU matters and practical know-how for individuals who are dealing with EU issues. Education is meant for public employees in national administrations and for employees in European institutions, especially the European Commission. European studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana focus on the importance of interdisciplinary learning and understanding of European matters and public political processes on the first and second study degree. The peculiarity of the European studies programme (undergraduate programme spanning 4 years) at the York University, Toronto, is that it is largely focused on intercultural topics that students study through an interdisciplinary approach.

In addition to the analysis of the existing comparable programmes, accessible information and documents provided by the EU employment office, EU institutions and the service responsible for carrying out Concours (entrance examination for EU administrative staff) were also analysed. The comparative analysis included an overview of the general and area-specific competencies of those employed in the EU administration in order to expose those that would bring future graduates closer to the “reality” of administrative work in European institutions. Thus, the idea was pursued that the programme must be practically oriented and harmonised with the needs on the labour market (EU administration). This was also confirmed as reasonable in subsequent talks with professionals in the chosen countries and European institutions who have experience in cooperating and deciding in matters concerning the employment of administrative staff in the EU institutions.

In addition to the analysis of the existing comparable programmes, special focus was given to contents and competencies that are expected by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) from candidates. It was found that EPSO does in fact determine many main groups of career possibilities for future public employees

(accounting (supervision), communications, economy/statistics, European public administration, foreign relations, finances, information technology, language, law, support to staff, etc.), however it is much more focused on the competencies that candidates must demonstrate during the competition tests when choosing their candidates (EPSO, 2020):

- Analysis and Problem Solving: Identify the critical facts in complex issues and develop creative and practical solutions;
- Communicating: Communicate clearly and precisely both orally and in writing;
- Delivering Quality and Results: Take personal responsibility and initiative for delivering work to a high standard of quality within set procedures;
- Learning and Development: Develop and improve personal skills and knowledge of the organisation and its environment;
- Prioritising and Organising: Prioritise the most important tasks, work flexibly and organise own workload efficiently;
- Resilience: Remain effective under a heavy workload, handle organisational frustrations positively and adapt to a changing work environment;
- Working with Others: Work cooperatively with others in teams and across organisational boundaries and respect differences between people;
- Leadership (for administrators only): Manage, develop and motivate people to achieve results.

In order to form the module, it is important to know how the content of the EPSO exam and how it is carried out. Candidates are tested in three steps. First, they undertake a pre-selection test that is basically a computer test and is carried out in several hubs in various countries. It has three stages: verbal understanding, numerical test and the ability of abstract thinking. During the verbal understanding test, the candidate is given a text from which they must be able to extract important information. They may select one of the several given options. A shorter task is given to the candidate during the numerical test where, similarly as before, the candidate may select one of the several given options. The abstract thinking test may, for example, demand an understanding of certain geometric shapes and a selection of the right answer among many. The second level of testing is the so-called “E-tray exercise”, which may be pursued by candidates who have successfully passed the first part of the test. The test includes 15–20 questions where assessors focus on the ability to analyse and solve problems, the ability of quality performance of tasks with visible results, the ability of giving priorities in selecting working tasks and working with other employees in the institution. Candidates who scored the highest number of points in the previous stage are invited to the third, selection stage. The assessment of candidates is comprised of a case study, a group task, structured interview and oral presentation.

In addition to the above, the current activities of the Republic of Slovenia and some education institutions in ensuring support to West Balkan states to join the European Union were additionally analysed during the preparation of the draft study module. In many of its documents⁷, the Republic of Slovenia also noted the issue of students from former Yugoslav republics being prevented to study (e.g. Republic of Slovenia (2011) also on the basis of scholarships of the Public Scholarship, Development, Disability and Maintenance Fund of the Republic of Slovenia. The analysis also focused on the various, more specific indicators in the chosen West Balkan countries that are faced with the European integration challenges. The challenges and obstacles brought forward by the adoption of the European legislation and the EU administrative environment are a vast undertaking for the West Balkan states, which are usually based on a different tradition. The analysis exposed some major deficiencies in the administrative functioning or the lack of competencies of officials in the West Balkan countries. The identified deficiencies or required competencies were reasonably included in the material for the preparation of the study programme, which could be used later as an additional element for obtaining students from West Balkans.

2.2 Analysis results and open questions

The main aim of the analysis was to form an appropriate basis for the preparation of the study contents in the area of the EU administration. The intention was for the programme (study module) to be competitive to the similar programmes at comparable education institutions, as well as original in the sense of offering new contents.

⁷ The National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia adopted the Declaration of the Western Balkans in order to affirm its commitment to cooperation, aid and development of the West Balkan region in 2010, and the government adopted the Operating Guidelines of the Republic of Slovenia in relation to the Western Balkans (Republic of Slovenia, 2020, p. 3).

The common finding of the analysis of the comparable study contents, especially regarding the expected competencies required to work in the EU administration (EPSO) and focused on the employment entry requirements for the positions of administrators, assistants and secretaries (AD5, AST1 and SC1), is reflected in interdisciplinarity and practical orientation. General competencies and the discussed contents are similar to the contents of the study programmes of the Faculty of Public Administration in some parts, which facilitated the understanding of the analysed content. More “surprising” was the discovery regarding the relatively high expectations of practical orientation. As well as the fact that the core of the selection procedure (EPSO exam) is largely focused on the skills and developed general competencies of future officials and relatively less on the knowledge of how the European Union functions.⁸ The formed competency framework (euphorm, 2021), which is aimed at assessing candidates (Analysis and Problem Solving, Communication, Delivering Quality and Results, Learning and Development, Prioritising and Organising, Resilience, Working with Others, Leadership), has become the primary guide in choosing employees, while the knowledge of the EU processes and policies is second nature.

Based on the analysis of the materials, it was found that the learning methods and the exam methods (e.g. EPSO exam) must also be taken into consideration in the preparation of the module, for example:

- Abstract understanding test: it tests the candidate’s ability to think logically and to understand relations between terms that have no language, spatial or numerical value;
- Case study: a computer test which exposes candidates to solve a certain problem in a certain case or to respond to the problem, whereby they may only be aided by the provided information and materials;
- E-simulation of tasks: a computer test where candidates must find answers to multiple questions, whereby they may only use documents submitted via email;
- Group task: each candidate studies a certain quantity of information for themselves, then they are paired with other candidates in a group in which they discuss their reasonings and reach a common decision;
- Numerical reasoning test: the candidate’s ability to think logically and understand numerical information is assessed;
- Oral presentation: an individual analysis and presentation test that requires from the candidate to propose solutions for an imaginary working problem; the candidate must study/analyse the provided documents and then present their proposals to a smaller group of people;
- Situational test: the candidate’s typical behaviour is assessed in a working situation;
- Verbal reasoning test: the candidate’s ability to think logically and understand verbal information is assessed.

The evaluation process of the comparative programmes also included the analysis of contents obtained from available documents, which show the ability of placing education institutions in the internationalisation process – student mobility, qualitative comparison and placement in the international environment, language compatibility and implementation of programmes in several global languages. It was also found that the programme of European studies (VLIR, 2009) should relate to at least two academic disciplines and students should be able to link the knowledge of at least two academic disciplines and they should be able to combine the methodological approaches of at least two different groups at the end of the study programme. Based on the interdisciplinary focus of the Faculty of Public Administration, this was seen as a confirmation of the existing approaches in the formation of the study programmes.

Since March 2019, the group responsible for the preparation of the study module also carried out several interview with representatives of the various EU institutions, i.e. with representatives of the European Parliament in Slovenia, with high officials of various EU institutions (e.g. the former Advocate General of the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg), and the former and current members of the European Parliament.

3 PREPARATION OF THE CURRICULUM, EVALUATION AND METHODOLOGY

On the basis of the performed analyses and interviews, a set of broad contents was initially formed under the interdisciplinary principle. Some determinants were formed (i.e. consideration of the EPSO exam characteristics or employment requirements for AD5, AST1 and SC1) and demands (practical orientation, cooperation with the practical sphere of work). An additional challenge was also the issue on how to incorporate the very broad interdisciplinary direction of the Faculty of Public Administration into the programme planning context, the aim of which is to educate people to work in the EU administration. The broad spectrum of contents can cloud the need to develop new contents that may be very similar to the existing ones, but need to be tuned to the note of functioning in the EU administration.

⁸ Which was increasingly exposed until 2010.

Due to the committed work, the working group obtained confirmed guidelines regarding the preparation of the module by the faculty management already in autumn 2019 based on the performed analysis. What followed was the preparation of the document with the defined “internal logic” of preparing the module and the main contextual sets. Thus, the draft of the module’s curriculum was created.

A broad circle of employees at the Faculty of Public Administration was invited to participate in the project. After which meetings with the interested colleagues with appropriate references followed. During these meetings, they were presented the work that was already carried out (analyses) and the framework of the module’s preparation was explained. Work continued in narrow interdisciplinary peer groups. Based on the requirements and identified expectations regarding the competencies of undergraduates, they linked or placed their discoveries into the defined contextual context. What followed was the preparation of the curriculum proposal and the formation of the draft curriculum for the study module. Cooperation is required in at least two “areas” (teachers) in all contents where this is appropriate and possible. Thus, an additional incentive was given for the interdisciplinary cooperation and the development of new study contents. During the preparation of study contents, colleagues from other members of the University of Ljubljana with references for each contextual area also took part in certain peer groups, as well as some employees in EU institutions.

Peer groups then formed descriptions and the structure of potential study contents and potential topics. Work was carried out in line with the agreed frameworks as regards to the scope and division of each content. Each content was reasonably divided into the theoretical part, experience part (content that would be meant for visiting professionals who are experienced in the area of working in the EU institutions) and practical part. During the design of the practical part, the link of the experience and practical parts⁹ was allowed.

Due to the aforementioned restriction of the University of Ljubljana concerning the formation of new study programmes, the decision was made that the contents of the existing study programme Public Sector Governance are to be included in the curriculum of the first year of the programme. These contents offer good basic knowledge in Theory of Public Administration, Constitutional Law, Legislative Regulation of the EU, Organisation Economics, Informatics, Statistics and Foreign language (English or German). Therefore, the proposal of the second and third years of the first cycle university study programme Public Sector Governance was given, namely in the framework of the new European Governance module. The proposal of the module also included content concerning career development, through which a student would be able to plan their study (e.g. choice of elective subjects, choice of seminar paper topics and projects, practice, topics for the Bachelor’s thesis, etc.) and career path easier.

3.1 Feedback to the EU module draft from employees in European institutions

After the curriculum of the study module was drafted, the planned competencies and contents were checked in direct practice of EU’s operations. Thus, the group responsible for the preparation of the study module continued with the interviews conducted in March 2019 with representatives or individuals, persons who are experts in working in EU institutions and administration, in order to analyse the first draft of the study module’s curriculum. More than 20 in-depth interviews were carried out with representatives of the EU in Slovenia¹⁰ and European officials¹¹ who are employed at various European institutions (various departments of the European Commission, the European Parliament, Committees of Regions, EU Court of Justice, representatives of European institutions in the Republic of Slovenia, etc.) The analysis also included officials employed at various job positions (e.g. career officials that passed the EPSO exam and temporary officials who got their job position through “politics”; officials at AD5-AD9, AST, SC positions, department heads, unit heads, and heads of representatives). A broad sample of those included in the analysis also includes the different professional backgrounds of European officials (lawyers, doctors, professors of the Slovenian language, philosophers,

⁹ E.g. case study, supported with the visit of an EU institution or body that cooperates with the EU institution.

¹⁰ Even the head of the representation of the European Commission in the Republic of Slovenia and the acting head of the office and representative for the media at the representation of the European Parliament in the Republic of Slovenia.

¹¹ Legal and Policy Officer (DG Justice and Consumers at the European Commission), International Relations Officer (DG Home and Migration at the European Commission), Assistant to the EU Commissioner at European Commission, member of the EU Commissioner’s cabinet, Personal assistant to the EU Commissioner at European Commission, Political Advisor of a political party at European Committee of the Regions, two translators at the European Commission, Head of Language Department at the EU Commission, Lawyer Linguist Terminologist at Court of Justice of the European Union, secretary of the head of the Slovenian translation department, Administrator at the Court of Justice of the European Union, Linguist Terminologist at Court of Justice of the European Union, and the official of the secretariat of the Court of Justice of the European Union.

habilitated lecturers, etc.) and their level of education (university degree, Master's degree, ILM, Doctorate, etc.). Interviews were carried out at the seats of institutions in Brussels and in Luxembourg.

Responses of co-speakers to the draft of the programme were very positive. The common characteristic was the design of the module that provides the know-how and competencies which are also suitable for the continuation of the programme on the second cycle degree programmes (Master's level), the requirements for "practical" competencies expected by the labour market, and the identified needs of employees in specific practice. The practical orientation of the module (participation of foreign professionals in practice¹² in providing up-to-date issues they are faced with during their work, study work at European institutions, etc.) was also seen as positive, as well as the fact that the programme may also be used as a preparation tool for the EPSO exam. They especially noted that the programme (module) is also attractive for students in other study branches (e.g. medicine, law) because their study programmes do not include any bases for employment in European institutions or for undertaking the EPSO exam.

Many co-speakers said that the proposed draft of the module could be improved by focusing less on one part of the contents, especially those that are more "theoretical", that relate to the role and position of the EU in the international environment and formation of policies, and to replace those with some of the more practical contents. An individual who seeks employment in the administration of EU institutions is required to have a basic or general understanding of the aforementioned contents, but these are not contents they would face every day during their work.

Interviewed officials also gave several other comments and proposals, which are given below. In the area of foreign languages, they stressed an excellent understanding of the mother (Slovenian) language and the English language, and the knowledge of the French language¹³. The German language, which was defined in the draft module, was seen by these speakers as a "dead language" in terms of direct participation in the working environment of the European institutions, which is why they said more focus should be given to the English and French languages. Speakers also said that more focus should be given on contents that are related to the development of skills, not only in the framework of one study topic, but rather this should be included in multiple subjects. They said that reasonable focus should be given to:

- written and communication skills: e.g. the ability to prepare a summary of longer texts (briefings, tweets, public statements, website texts, etc.), especially in stress situations, the ability to speak publicly, to represent their own views, interview skills, visual presentation skills, networking, etc.;
- information skills; e.g. computer literacy, advanced work with spreadsheets, computer analysis of texts, have command of the practically oriented digital skills (twitter, social media, online cooperation platforms, managing and storing documents, etc.);
- group work where practical cases are solved (part of the EPSO exam). Various simulations and case studies are desired where specific cases are resolved and discussed with experts (officials);
- functioning in stress situations; e.g. time management, concurrent realisation of various tasks and prioritising;
- focus on operating in a multicultural environment; e.g. to know how members of various nations or cultures think and communicate.

Interviewed officials stressed the urgency of the practical orientation of the contents and the need to obtain international experiences. As a solution, they proposed that practicum should be carried out at EU institutions and bodies, student exchanges and professional excursions should be organised in European institutions, and cooperation with visiting experts should be organised (e.g. in the framework of the "back to school" programme). They noted the decisive role of practicum in getting to know the European institutions and recommended that practicum should be expanded in the framework of the module. They said that the key criterion for the final "success" of the programme is the fact that the competencies that students obtain during their study should be as close to the competencies the candidates need for the EPSO exam as possible because the EPSO exam is the highest restriction in gaining employment in EU institutions.

¹² In the assumed scope of up to 30% of direct pedagogical obligation.

¹³ They noted that an individual may function without the knowledge of the French language in certain institutions (but they cannot get promoted), whereas in other areas they cannot gain employment without knowing the French language (e.g. the EU Court of Justice).

3.2 Forming the curriculum

Based on the received comments, draft correction proposals were received for the curriculum of the study module. The comments and findings were presented to the faculty management and discussed on the level of all those participating in the preparation of the programme, as well as to individual peer groups. Consequently, some theoretical parts that were recognised as either too difficult for the first stage of the study by the participating officials or that deviated from the aims of the programme, were eliminated. In addition, more focus was given to the development of skills and (EPSO) competencies required for direct work in the EU administration. Regarding the issue of the German language, a decision was made that the language should be incorporated into the programme regardless because it is one of the most frequently represented other foreign languages in secondary schools. In addition, the traditionally good economic and political links with the German speaking areas represent an employment potential for those who graduate in the programme.

By considering the aforementioned discoveries, the core goals of the proposed module were defined, i.e. to ensure the knowledge and development of competencies in public administration, law, economy, organisation, informatics, management, governance, and political sciences, which are reasonably included into the activities of administrative support when working in European institutions. The expectation regarding the development of those competencies that will aid the undergraduates during their EPSO exam or employment in the EU administration has also been placed at the forefront. The study programme and curriculums were harmonised based on the above.

The Public Sector Governance with European Governance module curriculum is therefore as follows:

1st year	2nd year	3rd year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informatics (7 ECTS) - Legislative Regulation of the EU (8 ECTS) - Statistics (8 ECTS) - Economics (7 ECTS) - Theory of Public Administration (8 ECTS) - Theory of Organisation (7 ECTS) - Constitutional Law (8 ECTS) - Foreign language 1* (7 ECTS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Functioning of the European Union (6 ECTS) - EU Policies (6 ECTS) - Skills Development (6 ECTS) - Foreign language 2** (6 ECTS): - Career Development (3 ECTS) - European Tenders and European Project Management (3 ECTS) - Employment in the EU Institutions (6 ECTS) - Materials Analysis and Preparation (6 ECTS) - Foreign language A*** (6 ECTS) - Elective course 1 (6 ECTS) - Elective course 2 (6 ECTS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Status of the European Union in a Globalized World (6 ECTS) - Foreign language B**** (6 ECTS) - EU Cohesion Policy (6 ECTS) - Digital Work Skills (6 ECTS) - Elective Course 3 (6 ECTS) - EU Practicum (20 ECTS) - Diploma Thesis (10 ECTS)

* English 1 or German 1, Student chooses between English or German according to previous knowledge

** English 2 or German 2.

*** French A or English. A student who has chosen English 1 in the 1st year must choose English 2 and French A in the 2nd year. A student who has chosen German 1 in the 1st year must choose German 2 and English A in the 2nd year. A student who has chosen French A in the 2nd year continues with French B in the 3rd year. A student who has chosen English A in the 2nd year continues with English B in the 3rd year.

****French B or English B. A student who has chosen French A in the 2nd year continues with French B in the 3rd year. A student who has chosen English A in the 2nd year continues with English B in the 3rd year.

The elective courses of the programme stem from the set of more than 40 subjects offered by the Faculty of Public Administration, University of Ljubljana, elective contents of other members of the University of Ljubljana, as well as elective contents and activities in the European higher education area.

General competencies of the programme relate to, among other things:

- Ability to apply knowledge in the field of public administration, organisation, economics and informatics in practice, autonomy within professional work and in making business decisions;
- Development of communication skills;
- Ability to analyse, synthesise and predict solutions and consequences of phenomena;

- Mastering research methods and procedures and processes in the field of social sciences and developing critical and self-critical judgment;
- Ethical reflection and commitment to professional ethics in public administration.

The curriculum-specific competencies also relate to, among other things:

- The capacity for professional administrative duties in the framework of the matters concerning the European Union;
- The capacity to cooperate in the execution of legal acts of the EU;
- Development of skills and abilities in the use of knowledge in an individual professional field.
- Understanding and application of critical analysis and development of theories and their use in solving specific professional questions.
- Ability to search for new information in the field of public administration, law, economics, organisation, informatics, management, governance and political sciences in literature and in practice and being able to use them efficiently;
- Identifying information in data, filtering information and identifying key information when using certain information tools;
- Ability to solve concrete professional problems using scientific methods and procedures, etc.

The European Governance module or the reformed Public Sector Governance university study programme obtained the necessary accreditation in June 2020 for the implementation of the programme, therefore all the requirements for the implementation of the new module were met in the school year of 2020/2021 (registration of students into their 2nd year of study).

4 FIRST EXPERIENCE

Six students have been enrolled into the first implementation of the module (2nd year of the programme) in the school year of 2020/21, which makes it possible to have many interactions and obtain feedback in order to monitor the first implementation of the module. Even though the analysis of the first year of the implementation cannot be carried out yet because the school year has not yet been concluded during the preparation of this article, we do have some findings on the basis of the evaluations and interviews conducted with students and colleagues that participated in the implementation of the programme.

By 7 September 2021 (the exam period lasts until 17 September 2021), all six students passed their exams and they may enrol into their 3rd year of study¹⁴, whereby four students also met all of their obligations from the 1st and 2nd years of study. The average mark of the study in the second year in all students of the module was higher than in the first grade (by 0.2 to 1.2 marks). Students praised the implementation and interesting content of the study programme and the practical orientation of the programme. This is also demonstrated through the 23 participations of experts from practice in the framework of the programme's mandatory subjects. Students also noted some challenges that need to be analysed and responded to. These include the need for a better harmonisation in some obligations where multiple providers took part, the concentration of obligations and the submission of final papers at the end of both semesters and the lack of information about the practicum that awaits in the 3rd year (the ability to undergo practicum in the EU institutions).

Those providers that covered relatively new topics warned about the challenge of obtaining visiting lecturers. Because some topics are still poorly developed or studied, this means that there is a lack of potential experts or a poor understanding of appropriate candidates who would be willing to participate. Colleagues who had problems with seeking experts generally turned to the caretaker of the programme, who helped them in making contacts. We expect fewer similar problems in the future implementations due to the established contacts. During the study year, a special forum was established for exchanging information between providers (Moodle classroom) at the request of the providers, which should have improved communications and notifications regarding visiting lectures, but the forum did not meet its intended purpose.

Multiple analyses of the first implementation of the module will be carried out at the end of the school year. However, based on the limited evaluation of the existing implementation, the satisfaction of students, providers and visiting experts can be observed, despite the fact that most obligations were carried out online due to Covid-19.

¹⁴ All 60 ECTS in the 1st year and at least 52 ECTS in the 2nd year completed.

5 CONCLUSION

The first cycle university study programme Public Sector Governance with European Governance module was developed in order to educate students on contents they will need in order to work in the administration of the EU institutions. The development of the module was also encouraged with the goal of attracting better study candidates. The target group here are secondary school students who demonstrated above-average knowledge and an interest to continue their studies in social sciences and humanities and beyond, and who are also keen on pursuing a career in EU institutions. The programme is based on practical orientation and an interdisciplinary approach which integrates the knowledge in the area of public administration, law, economy, organisation, informatics, management, governance, and political sciences, and the professional terminology of three foreign languages. The proposed module is based on high study standards in the area of public administration sciences, whereby the Faculty of Public Administration obtained the required experiences in cooperation with elite institutions in the European area and beyond. The constant interaction of the pedagogical and administrative staff with foreign institutions allows the integration of up-to-date contents and approaches into the very implementation of the study programme.

The potential of the programme is demonstrated in the additional development of contents related to EPSO exams and ensuring additional preparations for the EPSO exam, which is the prerequisite to gain employment in the EU administration. There is also potential in linking European contents with the Western Balkans and the consequent attracting of study candidates in this area. This also brings forward new challenges of the further development of the study contents in the framework of the European Governance module.

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