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PAQUALITY

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ASSESSMENT OF METHODOLOGY AND MATERIALS OF PA TEACHING AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR PRACTICE - University Ljubljana, Faculty of Public Administration

**The analysis of practical relevance of program competencies,
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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the project in this IO1 phase is stated as: »to provide data for an analyses how the PA curricula is linked to practice, and analyses of the gap between competencies needed in practical work in public administration and those obtained in the educational programmes.« I.e., we should assess the relevance of the competences of our programmes for practice – and our programmes differentiate substantially, if you scrutinise them, which means that we have also different competences listed. Thus, programme competences are starting points. Not to mention, that needs for practice might differentiate. Furthermore, this output of IO1 serves also as **an input for IO5** (Methodological framework for development of competencies relevant for practice), finally as international evaluations of PA programmes and feasibility studies for suggested improvements.

Moreover, according to the arrangements, we should scrutinise and review only our own programmes, and, furthermore, **PA related programmes** exclusively (not as parts of mainly legally or policy or economics oriented but autonomous programmes; i.e., a rough benchmark should be EAPAA accreditation eligibility criteria – these criteria should be taken under consideration in advance). Scrutinised should be, if possible, **MA level programmes** only, due to the application's theoretical grounds (*Staronova & Gajdushek, Brans & Coenen, etc.*), a more developed PA specific competences on this level and more convergent state of the art to gain comparable results; and only **programme-specific competencies**, that is PA (in general, as stated in accredited programmes) are in the core study of this project.

1.1 PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

MA study programme Administration - Public Sector Governance (MA-APSG) is one of study programmes accredited and implemented at the Faculty of Public Administration, University of Ljubljana. It needs to be stressed that this programme is the single MA level study programme run by FPA, the other 2nd cycle programme is international joint study programme Management in Administration, run together with the University of Belgrade, and this programme has slightly more attachment to MPM philosophy, causing that we have scrutinised only MA-APSG programme.

The programme has **120 ECTS** and logically **upgrades its preceding BA programme Public Sector Governance** with 180 ECTS, therefore providing students from FPA UL and other graduates admissible to MA programme the so called **3+2** degree. This level is most often **required by employers** in PA in Slovenia.

This MA programme has been **first accredited in 2005, when new Bologna-based** study programmes at first and second cycle level started to be implemented at FPA. This programme has been also **accredited by the EAPAA since 2008**, and has been already **re-accredited by EAPAA in 2015**. Short details on the number of enrolled students in the first and second year as well as on the number of graduates are presented in the table below.

Table 1: **Basic data on the programme enrolment and graduates**

Academic year	Number of students – first year	Number of students – second year	Number of graduates
2015/16	76	71	25
2016/17	87	48	62
2017/18	47	38	29

Source: FPA (2019).

Objectives if MA-APSG are (see FPA, 2019):

- to provide graduates with quality knowledge and understanding of content in the extended field of administrative and business sciences, which, combined with the competences developed during the programme, will help ensure their immediate employability and will constitute a suitable starting point for further studies in the third cycle;
- to educate second cycle graduates with in-depth knowledge in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary administrative science (economics, law, organisation, management, politics, sociology, informatics);
- to prepare the students for the successful and effective planning, organising, managing and controlling of the tasks in key process and management positions;
- to prepare second cycle graduates for solving the most difficult problems in public and business administration;
- to prepare second cycle graduates for research and development work and to allow them to acquire knowledge, research experience and competences for independent scientific research.

Enrolment conditions

Students who can enrol in this programme are graduates of 1st cycle study programmes with **180 ECTS**, graduated in Slovenia or have completed equivalent education abroad. All candidates must demonstrate **Slovenian language** competences at level B2 of the CEFR.

In the second year, students who have completed first years can enrol but also students who are transferring from a study programme that at the end of the study guarantees the acquisition of comparable competences or candidates who are transferring from a study programme from which at least half of the obligations from the study programme, from which they are transferring, can be accredited according to the ECTS, and are related to the obligatory subjects of the other study programme. Moreover, graduates of the specialist study programme Public Administration and the previous (prior Bologna) four-year undergraduate university programme Administration and graduates of other study fields are admissible. The faculty Postgraduate Studies Committee determines the requirements for each candidate on a case-by-case basis that the candidate must fulfil before enrolment upon transferring to the new program, and determines which year the candidate can transfer into.

If the number of applicants to the master's degree programme considerably surpasses the

number of open positions or the faculty's capacity (staff, spatial, equipment, etc.), the Faculty of Public Administration, in line with Art. 41 of the Higher Education Act, may limit admissions. Here the following criteria will be considered: past academic performance at the undergraduate level: (average grade - 25%, bachelor's thesis - 25%) + elective exam - 50%.

There is no difference between regular and part-time students with regard to the conditions and recognition of credits; similarly, there is no discrimination based on sex or ethnicity. There are also no special restrictions on applications from the disabled.

The curriculum, 1st year:

1. [2000 Research methods in social sciences](#)
2. [2001 Contemporary public administration](#)
3. [2002 Economic analysis in public administration](#)
4. [2003 Leadership in public administration](#)
6. [2004 Information technologies in public administration](#)
7. [774 Administrative procedure law](#)
- 8.-9. * Compulsory elective courses (double)

1. [2005 Management of investment projects in public sector](#) and [2006 Change and risk management in government](#)
2. [2007 Human resources management in public administration](#) and [2008 Information governance](#)
3. [2009 EU law and administration](#) and [2010 Local and regional governance](#)

2nd year- joint and modular courses

1. [2022 Personal development seminar](#)
2. [2016 Master thesis](#)

Module Public administration

1. [2011 Public policy analysis](#)
2. [2012 Organisational dynamics](#)
3. [2013 Economics and business analysis](#)
4. [2014 Regulatory techniques](#)
5. Elective course 1*
6. Elective course 2* *selected among: 777 Tax procedural law, 541 International human rights protection, 542 Operation research in public administration, 544 Social security, 780 Databases and data warehouses

Module Governance

1. [2015 Legal aspects of human resource management in administration](#)
2. [2017 Strategic management in the public sector II](#)
3. [2018 Mechanisms of public financing](#)
4. [2019 Methods, techniques and information tools for business process reengineering](#)
5. Elective course 1*
6. Elective course 2*

Module Public governance and the European Union

1. [2011 Public policy analysis](#)
2. [2020 Sustainable development](#)
3. [2021 European public finance](#)
4. [2019 Methods, techniques and information tools for business process reengineering](#)
5. Elective course 1*
6. Elective course 2*

1.2 LIST OF GENERAL COMPETENCIES FOR THE PROGRAMME

MA-APSG is accredited with the following list of general competences:

1. Ability to develop theoretical, methodical, and applicable findings.
2. Ability to understand complex questions, problems, and issues.
3. Capability of creative thinking and application of new findings.
4. Capability of independent research work.
5. Independently solving more demanding professional and scientific problems.
6. Capability of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.
7. Capability of self-reflection and ethical conduct in intercultural environment.
8. Ability to manage an interdisciplinary team.
9. Managerial and organisational capabilities.
10. Ability to act and make decisions independently.
11. Networking and influencing abilities.
12. Ability to use information and communication technology.
13. Capability of public speaking.
14. Ability to communicate verbally and in writing for professional needs in the native and at least one foreign language.
15. Capability for lifelong learning in knowledge-based society.

1.3 LIST OF PROGRAMME-SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES FOR THE PROGRAMME

Subject-specific competences are defined such as:

1. the ability to find joint solutions to difficult problems in the field of administrative theory and practice,
2. the ability to adapt the practice to a specific administrative context,
3. the development of knowledge and understanding of the interdisciplinary fields of administrative science,
4. the ability to identify practical problems in the field of administrative science, the ability for independent research work and the in-depth understanding and use of quantitative and qualitative research methods,
5. the ability to lead and coordinate interdisciplinary research and project teams in the field of administrative science,
6. the ability to lead people,
7. the ability to master the business systems in the public and private sector,
8. the ability to justify presented solutions to the expert public,
9. the capacity for independently solving difficult professional and scientific problems,
10. the ability to reflect on the values of ethical work,

11. the ability to promote new challenges in the field of HR development,
12. knowledge and understanding of theory, scientific paradigms and field development,
13. the ability to assess the consequences of regulatory measures on different levels of decision-making and the functioning of society,
14. the ability to understand the multidimensional process of the e-administration development and functioning
15. the ability to master the instruments, mechanisms and institutions of public finances for implementing the economic policy,
16. the evaluation of differently organised public administrations in the EU and abroad,
17. understanding and evaluating the difference in regulations, procedural arrangements, HR treatment, economic policies and the functioning of public services between different countries,
18. understanding difficult procedural situations that arise during the decision-making processes in administrative matters,
19. understanding the interdependence between economic events, social institutions and political decisions,
20. the ability to make decisions on the societal and organisational level,
21. the ability to recognise and master different types of integration processes, European institutions and policies,
22. the ability to understand the functioning of national parliaments,
23. the ability to understand European regional policy,
24. the ability to master work, civil service and social relationships,
25. the ability to understand the legal aspects of administrative functioning,
26. the ability to master different methods and techniques of IT system development and implementation,
27. understanding the informatisation of business processes,
28. mastering strategic planning and leading,
29. the ability to develop and use databases and data architectures within organisations,
30. understanding and evaluating tax systems within EU,
31. the ability to assess and master economic policies,
32. the ability to assess the functioning of public services and legal aspects related to their functioning,
33. understanding and evaluating international human rights protection,
34. understanding difficult tax procedures.

Since the suitability of the competences and/or knowledge acquired by graduates of degree programs **for the labour market** is one of the important guiding principles in the degree programs' design, it is essential even at the initial design stage to identify the competences as to fulfil present and future societal needs. The formulated competences of the degree program must thus reflect the requirements of the labour market. Specifically, for postgraduate degree programs **real practice problems** should be integrated in the learning process and problem-solving taught by research approach and scientific methods (Kovač & Stare, 2015).

2. COMPETENCE SCREENING HISTORY AT THE DEPARTMENT OR FACULTY LEVEL

2.1 HISTORY OF PREVIOUS COMPETENCE SCREENING ENDEAVOURS

Faculty of Public Administration, UL, has an established system of various analyses regarding its pedagogical activities and QA under the roof of special **Centre for Development of Pedagogic Excellence (CDPE)**.

There have been screening carried out, **mainly on annual basis since 2010**, like self-evaluations reports by programmes and courses, student surveys by courses and professors, analysis of students' learning burden, satisfaction analysis on tutoring, etc. (FA, 2019). Since 2010, special analyses were conducted regarding **competences of graduates**, however not by individual programmes but mainly jointly for all FA's programmes.

Of special interest are also analyses regarding **employability of FPA graduates** that are conducted occasionally, mainly within Alumni framework.

2.2 MAIN FINDINGS

Hereby we provide the summary of crucial results regarding aforementioned analyses (see CDPE, 2010-2017).

- **Employability of FA's graduates, 2010 (app. 180 respondents, employers and graduates)**

Based on HEGESCO international research, the respective analysis was made for FPA in 2010, which was also submitted to the FPA senate with some correctional measures taken. Simultaneously, two groups of respondents were addressed:

- (i) employers; questionnaire was sent to 210 municipalities, 58 local administrative units and 62 centres for social work since these authorities have been found as the one most often employing FPA graduates, 85 or app. 26% answers were received;
- (ii) employed graduates, with (only) 96 answers gained out of app. 2,000 addresses used (min 300 expected), that is out of 96 app. 27% holding lower managerial and others professional posts.

Employers have responded that they employ app. 19% of FPA graduates out of all employees, which are usually employed at appropriate level according to their education (like middle officials) but less so in managerial posts. Employers seem to cherish mostly when selecting candidates not certain degree but their experiences and practical abilities. However, mostly **legally (in 85%) and communication (61%) oriented competences** have been emphasised as the most important in these circles. On the other hand, **interdisciplinarity** was assessed as the most salient competence in 58%. Unfortunately in sum, employers reported that **IT and economics oriented knowledge of FPA graduates is under their expectations**. Among various competences, professionalism is the highest one (average 4.8 out of 5), followed by

fast learning (4.5), computer and IT (4.4), etc., but mostly there is an evident gap between declared and established competences of FPA graduates (of all study programmes included, BA and MA). **Graduates mainly confirmed these results**, stating that they **predominantly do not work according to the field and level** of their degrees. Majority responded that organisational competences (4.1) and legal knowledge (4.0) are the most important when at work (IT gained an average of 3.8 and economics 3.2 out of 5 max).

- **Competences acquired among FA's graduates, 2011 (38 respondents of all programmes)**

This analysis was targeted to up-to-date graduates, 160 of them, hence response rate with 38 answers is app. 24%. Only 8% of them were employed directly after graduation. When comparing different programmes, majority responded that **the most distinguished FPA programme is MA-APSG**. This programme was evaluated as **demanding** (average mark 4.3 out of 5), **interdisciplinary (5.0) and PA focused (4.7)**. Among the methods applied in MA-APSG, **problem-based learning** gained the highest mark (4.6). The best developed **competences listed by these respondents are for all programmes**: efficient use of time, how to motivate colleagues, IT skills, innovative approaches to interdisciplinary problems and ability of problem-solving as well independent decision-making, and presenting reasoned reports and opinions.

- **Competences acquired among FA's graduates, 2014 (370 respondents of all programmes)**

The main results of this analysis, based again on HEGESCO and 2011 FPA studies from above, exposed the following: (i) FPA graduates gain **multidisciplinary competences**, which enable them to resolve broader issues; (ii) their competences regarding **special** knowledge, managerial competences and international work are **rather low**.

However, **problem-based** learning was again emphasised as the most important one (cf. Kovač & Stare, 2015). Similar is also the prioritisation of various competences as established in 2011, that is the highest evaluated innovative problem-solving, efficient interpersonal communication, professional knowledge, but rather lower competences like critical assessment, managerial and international skills.

- **Competences acquired among MA-APSG graduates in 2016/17**

The last analysis carried out was addressing specific programmes, the MA-APSG one included. Again, all graduates in this period have been asked to assess various issues, especially acquired and lacking competences compared to declared ones and according to employers' expectations. In sum, **MA-APSG study programme was assessed highly**, with an averaged mark of 4.5 out of 5. Moreover, accordance with external context of work was evaluated by 4.5 in 2016 and 4.2 in 2017, while on the competences acquired based personal career options by 4.9 in 2016 and 2017. Specifically, the highest estimated, both in 2016 and in 2017, was given to the ability of productive cooperation with others (i.e., teamwork). The programme was again evaluated as **interdisciplinary and rather demanding** one.

2.3 CORRECTIVE ACTIONS ALREADY UNDERTAKEN

It needs to be stressed that some corrective actions based on the above stated analyses have already been implemented since the programme is carried out **since 2005** and accredited several times, on a national and EAPAA levels alike. One of the most influential factors contributing to the changes in the structure, content and the focus of the programme was indeed the international **EAPAA accreditation** gained by the programme in 2008, where valuable comments have tried to be implemented. **This has resulted in several changes of the accredited programme from the initial one**, i.e. in **2009/10** academic year, then 2011/12 and 2012/13, and the last and the most profound one in 2018/19 academic year.

The first major change, directly resulting from EAPAA-based accreditation suggestions, was to include **courses on policy-making into curricula**, which were missing, partially due to the internal overlappings with the programmes of the Faculty of Social Science, which heavily stress political science and policy-making dimensions in their study programmes that have mostly single-discipline nature. With this in mind, a new obligatory course Regulatory policies was added to the programme in the second year. Then, in **2011/12** academic year, the first year obligatory course Administrative process was replaced with the course Administrative procedural law, in order to offer a more clear focus of the course, to be in line with comparative programmes, and particularly to emphasise its relation to good administration and sound governance concepts in the programme as a whole. Further, in **2012/13** new module has been added to the programme in the second year; that is Administration-Organisational Science module to include also HR related courses in the programme.

Nevertheless, **the major change of the programme was utilised for 2018/19 academic year**, which was the result of the intensive internal self-evaluations, involvement of external stakeholders, supplement by the outcomes of the competencies screening and the suggestions of the second EAPAA evaluation during the re-accreditation of the programme. This process started in 2014 and was completed in 2017, when the new structure of the programme was approved at the university level, resulting in the implementation of this new re-developed programme in 2018/19 academic year.

Besides to change in the name of the programme, where Public Sector Governance was added in other **to capture the hierarchical dimension of the programme** in relation to the first cycle academic programme Public Sector Governance. Moreover, the content of the programme was substantially modified, where **new developments in the field of administrative sciences** tried to be acknowledged – i.e. to include topics related to the role of information technologies in PA, developments in contemporary PA, economic analysis in PA, etc. In addition, three selective double compulsory courses were added to the programme in the first year, that is double on Management of investment projects in public sector & Change and risk management in government, double on Human resources management in public administration & Information governance, and double on EU law and administration & Local and regional governance. **The purpose was to offer students more opportunities to gain additional specific competencies**, either on managerial topics, HRM and IT, or multi-level and good governance that were missing before.

In the second year, the programme was restructured into three modules, Public administration, Governance, and Public governance and the EU, where the purpose was to get more multi-disciplinary modules, **based on the developments in the field and competencies perceived to be needed by relevant stakeholders**. Specifically, the third module focuses on the European dimensions of PA, and is to be delivered only in English language based on the demand. Finally, given the previous evaluation of competencies, a new obligatory course was added, Personal development seminar, in order **to boost the students' awareness of the necessity of stated competence achievement**.

2.4 BRIEF SUMMARY

MA programme Administration – Public Sector Governance is a multidisciplinary PA programme, delivered since **2005/06 academic year**. It has been accredited **by EAPAA in 2008**, and re-accredited in 2015. It represents the most important and most influential MPA programme of the FPA and the general Slovenian PA landscape. In this context, FPA has performed **several evaluations and screenings of competencies** for its study programmes, including MA-APSG programme, although the approaches have slightly differentiated. Based on these results, EAPAA evaluation suggestions, and consultations with relevant internal and external stakeholders, programme has been **amended several times**, the most profound change occurring just recently, i.e. in 2018/19 academic year, resulting into a holistic, integral, and contemporary programme fulfilling requirements of both, PA discipline and labour market.

3. METHODOLOGY

Methodological Guidelines

Study programmes' competences screening can be done with various methods, while a **combination of established** (for a comparison and theoretical soundness; see more in the following subsections) and **innovative** approaches is an optimal one.

PAQUALITY application indicates surveys and/or other research methods; nevertheless, provided that a limited set of programmes is elaborated and we prioritise in-depth approach over quantitative mass data (although this approach is not excluded). Therefore, when screening the competences of particular programme, **surveys can be used** (taking a note on the necessity to have representative sampling – i.e., standard methodological considerations for surveying), **and/or** the approach of **focus groups (FGs)** can be applied, through which surveys and structured interviews with a core focus on selected issues can be applied; in addition, data might be collected **also through specific organised events in addition** (i.e., workshops).

We applied mainly the FGs approach for this report; while some additional data were obtained through **earlier analyses and alumni online survey**. More data can be gathered later on during the project (for instance, because workshops/seminars are anticipated). We have chosen FGs since they enable simultaneously (i) identification of **problems**, and (ii) planning, implementation and evaluation of **solutions** thereof. Through FGs one can **collect and analyse data** in order to address research questions (RQs) in a structured yet highly representative way, i.e. through parallel FGs, based on different stakeholders. However, FGs **pros & cons** need to be considered in order to achieve the analysis goals.¹ Thus, typical suggested FG protocol that we have applied in February and March 2019 is structured as follows:

- **Two FGs were formed per each PA MA level programme:** A. Alumni/graduates, and B. Employers; to establish their objectives, needs, preferences and experiences, and compare them; each group consisted of **5-6 participants**.
- **Criteria for participants' selection:**
 - A. **Alumni/Graduates:** selected based on their willingness to cooperate and prior clear information what is the aim of the respective FG, but taking initially into account their **segmentation**, e.g. alumni from various modules, years, employed and non-employed (yet), etc.;
 - B. **Employers:** selected based on their willingness to cooperate and prior clear information what is the aim of the FG, but taking into account initially their reflection of actual employers of respective programme's graduate; **e.g. 1-2 from ministries or governmental offices, 2 from territorial units, 2 from autonomous agencies and institutes, 2 from municipalities**, etc. However, hereby PA structure in individual country is taken into account but any type of PA body not just the current graduates employers;

¹ See literature on FGs methodology. E.g., for brief overview, see, but do not limit yourselves, to <http://www.mmconnect.com/projects/userfiles/File/FocusGroupBrief.pdf>.

- **Procedure that has been conducted followed these steps between January and March 2019:**
 1. **in advance submission of structured questionnaires to alumni members** (only respective programme graduates);
 2. a **half-day workshop** for individual FGs; moderated by 3 qualified partner representative/s, that is the authors of this report (nominal group technique);
 3. in parts where required to get a minimal consensus, a **final round of questionnaires/survey** among FG participants.

As, such given the project focus, the main question that ought to be answered by programme **competence screening is, which of them are relevant for practice (and to what extent – i.e., competences theory-practice fit)**. Therefore, the analysis was focused on the **screening/evaluation of programme-specific competencies for practice**. It needs to be stressed that **the sole focus was on programme-specific competencies** of programmes and not on general ones, according to the project proposal, since we wanted to identify the matching of those that relate specifically to PA (MA level) programmes. Moreover, the empirical study tried also to identify **the missing competencies that** research will put forward. By doing this, we are able to identify the **gaps and variations in competencies needed** in specific countries under consideration.

Several approaches for screening competencies exist in practice. To enable theoretically sound and comparable results, the contemporary framework developed by Bergsmann et al. (2018), the so-called **Competence Screening Questionnaire for Higher Education**, was taken as a base. This framework enables flexible screening into which both alumni as well as employers, have been able to insert competencies students of specific programmes should acquire in order to fit practice. Moreover, it also enables the comparison on the level of competencies achieved at first and second cycle study programmes, general also besides specific one, since the programmes are taken as overall systems, and not summarisations of courses. This setting actually states that no single course builds the competence – i.e., course and content evaluation is thus narrow perspective, whereas this setting takes broader perspective, which enables us to extend the project after its closing to BA programmes and general competencies.

Institutions of higher education that focus on competence-based teaching usually define competences students should acquire by a specific study programme. There are several approaches to screen competences of specific programmes. Given the fact that we have mainly competence-based higher education, one contemporary approach that we applied is the **IQM-HE (2018) approach**, which was developed under the framework of *Erasmus+* co-financed project, and is thus, in its approach very generalistic as well as flexible and applicable to different fields. Thus, the screening focused on both cognitive and practical aspects of competences. Namely, this proposed model separates two dimension of competences, i.e., competences have two aspects: **a cognitive aspect (knowledge) and a practical aspect (skill)**. Furthermore, this methodological approach derives from competences and not from topics/contents of the courses within the programme, as we are (i) interested according to the project proposal to compare and screen competences; and (ii) aware that our sampled programmes differentiate substantially on their contents and structure, and we therefore

cannot assume that single-form questionnaire might be plausible for this reason. The procedure had therefore two elements.

- **Element 1: Screening of existing competences of specific programmes:** The first element focuses on the screening of the existing competences, both their cognitive and practical aspects, where we specifically focus only on programme-specific competences, given the purposes of the study, and thus omit the general competences from screening. Since the PA MA programmes under screening have different competences defined, we should incorporate and evaluate them accordingly. Namely, we focused on a specific programme, and competences listed. This holds in particular from the perspective of alumni's and employers' practical needs. Besides, screening enables variations in estimations of competence achievement, from level none to level generation, as in the tables from appendix to this document.
- **Element 2: Evaluation of programmes – missing competences and framework non-alignment:** The second element involves the reporting on the missing elements and competences' address in the existing programmes. This involves both alumni and employers' perspective, cognitive and practical, on existing competences listed in the specific programme under screening.

Specific methodological utilisation description

Regarding **MA-APSG competences we have opted for a parallel approach**. That means that we have applied **survey method among alumni** but conducted **focus groups method among their selected representatives as well**. Alumni has 255 members as of January 2019, among these there are **55 MA-APSG graduates**, which we have found as a sufficient and still various enough group to conduct an online based survey. Namely, due to the GDPR legislation, all the data on the alumni existing prior to 2018 needed to be deleted, and correspondingly, new approvals need to be collected, which has decreased the membership in the alumni substantially.

As already noted, **a mixed approach has been utilised** when screening the competencies of graduates of the targeted programme. For the alumni, two approaches have been utilised, i.e. online survey and focus group analysis, whereas **for the employers, we only utilised focus group approach**. To start with, on November 8, 2018, a workshop was organised by the alumni club of the FPA, on the topic “+/- of the Graduate of the FPA”, where selected former graduates of all study programmes shared their experiences. Given the start of the project PAQUALITY, we visited this roundtable, and this workshop provided some valuable inputs for the organisation of focus groups, as the speakers stressed that most valued competencies needed in their professional careers.

As already noted, we have utilised **on-line survey for alumni**, where we have asked all 55 members of the alumni club that graduated at the selected programme to screen the competencies according to the proposed IQM-HE (2018) methodology. The survey was open **from February 18 till March 4, 2019**. In total, out of the population of **55 graduates, 31 (= 56% response rate) responded** to the survey and answered the screening questions, which is sufficient response rate and sample for statistical issues. An important issue was related to

translation of the level of competence achievement, i.e., what should the respondents understand under threshold, foundation, etc., so we have approximated this levels with the Likert scale.

Finally, we have also utilised **focus group approach**, were we have selected and contacted specifically selected graduates of the programme, based on their above the average success at the studies, different modules and years of graduation, and based on their various areas of work and employment, in order to scrutinise the competencies needed in different sectors and fields of work. Thus, we have selected the graduates that work both in private and public sector, in different positions (from managerial ones, to professional ones), as well as in different countries. The first stage of **FG approach, starting on February 27, involved 6 participants**, and the last stage, which was conducted on **March 5, involved 3** participants.

Finally, **for the employers, we have utilised only FG approach**. The procedures lasted from **March 7 till March 13, 2019, and involved 5 employers** that have experiences both with the faculty programmes as well as with the graduates of the faculty. The single limitation that was utilised when selecting the group was that the employers represent various public sector organisations (the affiliations of participants are available at authors of report), in order to get as holistic range of employment possibilities and related needs for competencies as possible. All member of this FG are familiarised with study programmes, and they also have rich experience with our graduates.

4. QUESTIONNAIRES – RESULTS & DISCUSSION

4.1 RESULTS – COMPETENCES SCREENING BY ALUMNI

Table below shows the results of competences screening by alumni, before the enrolment and after the completion of the programme, were both knowledge and skills part of the competencies are considered.

Table 2: Screening of competencies by alumni²

Competencies	Cognitive aspect				Practical aspect			
	Before		After		Before		After	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
the ability to find joint solutions to difficult problems in the field of administrative theory and practice	3.258065	1.390	5.684211	1.108	3.2	1.361	5.842105	1.302
the ability to adapt the practice to a specific administrative context	2.935484	1.237	5.631579	1.165	3.25	1.251	5.684211	1.455
the development of knowledge and understanding of the interdisciplinary fields of administrative science	3	1.265	5.578947	1.305	3.1	1.294	5.842105	1.385
the ability to identify practical problems in the field of administrative science,	2.903226	1.248	5.736842	1.147	3.1	1.294	5.631579	1.300
the ability for independent research work and the in-depth understanding and use of quantitative and qualitative research methods	3.133333	1.432	5.421053	1.170	3.2	1.576	5.368421	1.461
the ability to lead and coordinate interdisciplinary research and project teams in the field of administrative science	2.733333	1.311	5.263158	1.284	2.857143	1.352	5.421053	1.465
the ability to lead people	3.758621	1.244	5.052632	1.433	3.380952	1.564	4.842105	1.537
the ability to master the business systems in the public and private sector	2.933333	1.172	4.944444	1.211	3.1	1.294	4.631579	1.499
the ability to justify presented solutions to the expert public	3.166667	1.085	5.315789	1.293	3.15	1.226	4.947368	1.715
the capacity for independently solving difficult professional and scientific problems	3.333333	1.322	5.263158	1.327	2.9	1.119	4.947368	1.779

² Legend of values, screening framework restructuring approximation: 1.5-2.49 (Threshold); 2.5-3.49 (Foundation); 3.5-4.49 (Interconnection); 4.5-5.49 (Contextualisation); 5.5-6.49 (Expansion); 6.5- (Generation).

Competencies	Cognitive aspect				Practical aspect			
	Before		After		Before		After	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
the ability to reflect on the values of ethical work	3.833333	1.234	5.052632	1.508	3.55	1.317	5.052632	1.682
the ability to promote new challenges in the field of HR development	3.241379	1.244	5.315789	1.336	3.25	1.118	4.894737	1.524
knowledge and understanding of theory, scientific paradigms and field development	3	1.438	5.210526	1.228	2.6	1.353	5	1.609
the ability to assess the consequences of regulatory measures on different levels of decision-making and the functioning of society	2.933333	1.258	5.105263	1.197	3	1.170	5.052632	1.471
the ability to understand the multidimensional process of the e-administration development and functioning	2.758621	1.380	5.421053	1.216	2.65	1.182	5.210526	1.718
the ability to master the instruments, mechanisms and institutions of public finances for implementing the economic policy	2.7	1.291	5.105263	0.937	2.55	1.191	4.736842	1.240
the evaluation of differently organised public administrations in the EU and abroad	2.833333	1.464	5.105263	1.049	2.8	1.322	4.894737	1.197
understanding and evaluating the difference in regulations, procedural arrangements, HR treatment, economic policies and the functioning of public services between different countries	2.833333	1.315	5.157895	1.385	3	1.170	4.842105	1.537
understanding difficult procedural situations that arise during the decision-making processes in administrative matters	2.833333	1.315	5.526316	1.349	3.05	1.191	5.210526	1.437
understanding the interdependence between economic events, social institutions and political decisions	3.1	1.269	5.368421	1.116	2.95	1.276	4.894737	1.329
the ability to make decisions on the societal and organisational level	3.321429	1.124	5.263158	0.991	3.15	1.182	5.052632	1.311
the ability to recognise and master different types of integration processes,	2.857143	1.353	5.105263	1.243	2.842105	1.344	5	1.453

Competencies	Cognitive aspect				Practical aspect			
	Before		After		Before		After	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
European institutions and policies								
the ability to understand the functioning of national parliaments	3.37931	1.474	5.473684	1.073	3.35	1.309	5.263158	1.447
the ability to understand European regional policy	2.827586	1.256	4.736842	1.447	2.75	1.372	4.842105	1.537
the ability to master work, civil service and social relationships	3.37931	1.237	5	1.453	3.4	1.188	5.157895	1.302
the ability to understand the legal aspects of administrative functioning	3.206897	1.449	5.684211	1.108	3.05	1.395	5.578947	1.575
the ability to master different methods and techniques of IT system development and implementation	2.862069	1.432	4.684211	1.293	2.75	1.446	5	1.563
understanding the informatisation of business processes	3	1.336	5.105263	1.049	2.9	1.373	5.157895	1.167
mastering strategic planning and leading	2.896552	1.175	5	1.155	2.7	1.218	5.052632	1.471
the ability to develop and use databases and data architectures within organisations	2.965517	1.426	4.631579	1.422	3.05	1.395	4.842105	1.740
understanding and evaluating tax systems within EU	2.413793	1.402	4.947368	1.580	2.55	1.395	4.578947	1.677
the ability to assess and master economic policies	2.5	1.280	4.842105	1.068	2.55	1.356	4.736842	1.485
the ability to assess the functioning of public services and legal aspects related to their functioning	2.633333	1.377	5.105263	1.150	2.9	1.334	5.105263	1.487
understanding and evaluating international human rights protection	2.766667	1.331	5.157895	1.425	3.052632	1.311	5.263158	1.661
understanding difficult tax procedures	2.3	1.393	4.894737	1.823	2.45	1.468	5.263158	1.522

Sources: own calculations based on the online survey & FG inputs of alumni (2019).

The above displayed results of the on-line survey (Feb/Mar 2019) suggest that prior to enrolment, on average, for all competencies of the programme, **for both cognitive and practical** components, we can observe that **for the level of achievement, at least foundation was reported**, which might be explained that some knowledge and practice was

achieved at the first cycle studies, since the majority of the enrolled students in this programme (approximately three quarters) have already completed first cycle studies at the FPA, and these programmes involved also mandatory internship.

Furthermore, if we observe the level of competencies achieved after the completion of the programme, we can observe the **reported progress in all competencies**, which indicates that the programme does not report competencies that are not addressed in the curriculum of the programme. Yet, it needs to be stressed that the reported results were slightly different among the results reported by the survey and FG, which might be the outcome of the fact, that FG participants were selected from the group of students with better study achievements, although the variations between those two groups were not extreme.

If we scrutinise specific competencies, we might focus on those **were the highest and lowest values are reported before and after the completion of the programme, and where the differences between these two levels are larger or smaller**. This was also the starting point of the discussion within the second stage of the FG implementation. Thus, below is the report on these competencies:

- First of all, results of the survey suggest there was **the most important increase** in the level of the achievement for the competency ***“ability to identify practical problems in the field of administrative science”***, both at cognitive and practical level – potential explanation would be that **important inputs were given already in the classroom**, either with case studies and problem learning, as well as with the guest lectures from practice being involved in the delivery of some parts of the activities in the classroom, the activity which is heavily promoted also at the faculty level, e.g. with the project Administrative Consultation Wiki (2009-; see Kovač & Sever, 2015, Kovač & Stare, 2015). An additional argument is that other competences, such as a rather very specific one on *understanding tax procedures*, has been assessed among the highest due to the **concrete examples and case-studies and case-law applied at the courses**, the most closely related to this competence (like Tax procedural law). Furthermore, the majority of students were simultaneously already employed, which enable effective combination of theory and practice.
- The important increase in the **level of achievement, with initial relatively low level**, was also reported for the competency ***“the ability to understand the multidimensional process of e-administration development and functioning”*** – it was reported that the plausible explanation might be that this used to be **a relatively new field for the students**, with limited knowledge existing on this, and it was heavily stressed in the majority of IT-related courses.
- It was also reported, with **the highest level of achievements** in competency level, in particular at the cognitive level, for the competencies ***“ability to understand the functioning of national parliaments”*** and ***“ability to understand the legal aspects of administrative functioning”*** – it was reported that the explanation might be **in the volume of courses related to these topics**, so students can gain a lot of knowledge on this.
- In contrast, a relatively **modest increase** in the level of competency achievement, at both aspects, can be observed for the competencies ***“ability to lead people”*** and ***“ability to reflect on the values of ethical work”*** – plausible explanation can be that these are

soft competencies, which can hardly be taught, especially with no practical experiences, because each individual develops them mostly by themselves or they can be achieved only when put in circumstances that are applicable.

- Besides, students have also marked a relatively **modest increase** in the level of competency achievement for the competencies “*ability to master the business systems in the public and private sector*”, as well as for the competencies like, e.g., “*ability to understand European regional policy*”, “*ability to master different methods and techniques of IT system development and implementation*”, “*ability to develop and use databases and data architectures within organisations*”, “*understanding and evaluating tax systems within EU*”, “*ability to assess and master economic policies*”, etc. – for the first one, the plausible explanation lies in the **very broad nature of this competency**, since it also addresses private sector, where the focus of the programme clearly has some missing topics, and for the other topics, the plausible explanation could be in the fact that these **competencies address very specialised fields** that correspond to economics, politics, informatics etc., and multidisciplinary nature of the programme might prohibit in-depth address of these topics (respondents in the FG clearly states that they respect other specialised fields of science and they are aware of missing in-depth knowledge and practice).
- In sum, alumni emphasised that it is **not only the content but even primarily the study methods employed, i.e. the interactive and practically oriented examples that combine theory with real life situations, which contribute to achieving** certain specific competences.

4.2 RESULTS – COMPETENCES SCREENING BY EMPLOYERS

Table below shows the results of the screening of competencies by the FG of employers, and again cognitive and practical aspects are considered.

Table 3: **Competencies screening by employers³**

Specific competencies	Cognitive aspect	Practical aspect
the ability to find joint solutions to difficult problems in the field of administrative theory and practice	5.8	5.6
the ability to adapt the practice to a specific administrative context	5.4	5.2
the development of knowledge and understanding of the interdisciplinary fields of administrative science	6	5.8
the ability to identify practical problems in the field of administrative science	5.4	5

³ Legend of values, screening framework restructuring approximation: 1.5-2.49 (Threshold); 2.5-3.49 (Foundation); 3.5-4.49 (Interconnection); 4.5-5.49 (Contextualisation); 5.5-6.49 (Expansion); 6.5- (Generation).

Specific competencies	Cognitive aspect	Practical aspect
the ability for independent research work and the in-depth understanding and use of quantitative and qualitative research methods	5.4	5.4
the ability to lead and coordinate interdisciplinary research and project teams in the field of administrative science	5	5
the ability to lead people	5.4	5.2
the ability to master the business systems in the public and private sector	5.4	5
the ability to justify presented solutions to the expert public	6	5.6
the capacity for independently solving difficult professional and scientific problems	5	5.4
the ability to reflect on the values of ethical work	6	6
the ability to promote new challenges in the field of HR development	5.6	5.2
knowledge and understanding of theory, scientific paradigms and field development	5.2	5.8
the ability to assess the consequences of regulatory measures on different levels of decision-making and the functioning of society	5.8	5.4
the ability to understand the multidimensional process of the e-administration development and functioning	5.6	5.6
the ability to master the instruments, mechanisms and institutions of public finances for implementing the economic policy	5.2	4.4
the evaluation of differently organised public administrations in the EU and abroad	4.8	5.2
understanding and evaluating the difference in regulations, procedural arrangements, HR treatment, economic policies and the functioning of public services between different countries	5.2	5.8
understanding difficult procedural situations that arise during the decision-making processes in administrative matters	5	4.2
understanding the interdependence between economic events, social institutions and political decisions	5	4.8
the ability to make decisions on the societal and organisational level	5	4.4
the ability to recognise and master different types of integration processes, European institutions and policies	5.4	5

Specific competencies	Cognitive aspect	Practical aspect
the ability to understand the functioning of national parliaments	5.8	5.8
the ability to understand European regional policy	5	5.6
the ability to master work, civil service and social relationships	5.6	4.6
the ability to understand the legal aspects of administrative functioning	5.4	5.8
the ability to master different methods and techniques of IT system development and implementation	6	5.8
understanding the informatisation of business processes	6.2	5.8
mastering strategic planning and leading	5.2	5
the ability to develop and use databases and data architectures within organisations	5.4	4.8
understanding and evaluating tax systems within EU	5.2	4.8
the ability to assess and master economic policies	4.5	4.3
the ability to assess the functioning of public services and legal aspects related to their functioning	4.6	4.4
understanding and evaluating international human rights protection	5.2	5.2
understanding difficult tax procedures	4.5	4.3

Source: own calculations based on focus group inputs of employers (2019).

If we scrutinise the table above and presented results, we can observe that alumni screening of the competencies achieved by the graduates **slightly differentiates** if we compare them to the results obtained by the survey among employers, although the differences are not extreme. In general, we can see that the first half of specific competencies, which are still **more general in their nature, tend to be graded better by employers** in comparison to alumni grading. In contrast, the second half of competencies, which are **more specific in their nature, tend to be graded lower by employers vs. alumni, with the exception** of the competencies *»ability to understand the functioning of national parliaments«, »ability to master methods and techniques of IT system development and implementation«, »understanding the informatisation of business processes«, and practical aspects of the competency »ability to understand the legal aspects of administrative functioning«.*

Plausible explanation on this might be that **employers compare our alumni to graduates of other programmes with more single-disciplinary (specialised) nature**, and it is obvious that our graduates receive less knowledge and skills on this topics, with the exempt of some legal topics, which are slightly more addressed in programme due to a highly legally

determined PA in Slovenia and central Europe, and thus might form comparative advantage to our graduates since beside legal knowledge they also understand and perform other disciplinary knowledge and skills, i.e. besides law especially management and IT.

Nonetheless, it needs to be stressed that **employer FG participants were much less diverse than the alumni sample**, because we have excluded employers from the private sector, whereas alumni sample included also graduates who work in the private sector. Furthermore, potential bias might arise also from the fact that we could not omit possibility that employers considered also the knowledge and practice of alumni of other first and second cycle study programmes of the FPA. Moreover, between the samples comparison is also limited due to the variations in the size of both samples.

4.3 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the analyses suggest that the level of competency achievement has increased during the study process for all competencies. **Thus, the study programme under consideration does not list competencies that are not addressed** at least by one general course in the programme, given the **very diverse modular structure of the programme** – we need to acknowledge that alumni and employers responded to the previous version of the programme, since the new version of the programme started to be delivered only in 2018/19 academic year. Thus, the recommendation would be that after first cohort of the graduates finishes the new version of the programme, **similar screening procedure is implemented in 2-3 years** in order to see if all the listed competencies are achieved in sufficient manner.

Moreover, it has to be stressed that the starting point was rather good in all competences, thus the initial first level studies have obviously given sufficient knowledge to successfully continue gaining knowledge and skills in the respective MA programme, having in mind that app. $\frac{3}{4}$ of students come from 1st to 2nd cycle at the FPA directly. Hence we recommend **to continue with a vertical approach, upgrading MA studies based and elaborated on the results and study outcomes from BA programmes**.

In particular, it can be observed that **the level of competence achievement has increased substantially for all competencies** during the implementation of study process (for the majority of competencies for 2-3 levels), however, **particularly related to the practically oriented courses and professors**, which suggests an important value of the programme in terms of multidisciplinary knowledge and skills delivery with a balanced level of theory and practice. Regarding a balance among various PA disciplines, both alumni and employers reported that to pursue a general PA programme it is necessary to have several pillars, like legal, economic, managerial, IT, etc., but **to focus on problem based learning** rather than in-depth research within one PA disciplinary context only and provision of too much theory on the account of no or too little practical insights.

Consequently, also more emphases need to be given in future to even **more practical study methods**, case studies, inter-curriculum connections, resolving real life problems (within seminars, practical research work, or master theses) provided by employers, etc. regarding

the last two findings the faculty might organise more best practices transfer oriented schemes among the professors, as well as in these aspects focused self- and external evaluations.

Finally, we can observe that all the competencies, as screened by the alumni, are at least evaluated **more than 4.5**, which suggests that the competencies level meets **at least the standard of contextualisation, but the majority are in the range of expansion**. Yet the results suggest that **no single competency goes into the level of generation**, thus necessitating further learning (and practice) at the **Ph.D.** level of studies.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS & CHALLENGES

Competency screening is fairly regular task done at the FPA, although methodology applied varies. This report has focused on the competency screening for the second cycle **MPA programme Administration – Public Sector Governance, which has been delivered since 2005, and EAPAA accredited since 2008**. We have scrutinised only subject (course) specific competencies, and not general ones, given the purposes of the project.

Competency screening involved **a mixed method approach**, two main methods being on-line survey and focus groups. Each method has **pros and cons**, given the context of the research, we might point out the problem that in particular alumni population is very diverse in a sense of their study performance and present-day working environment, which creates a bias on the views of the level of competencies achievement. The same goes with the employers, since we have selected only the ones that are representatives of public administration organisations, and they evaluate competency achievement slightly differently in comparison to representatives of private and third sector organisations.

Another two issues emerge. First, **GDPR** implementation several limited the database of our alumni, as we needed to recollect their approvals for staying in our database, and till February 2019 only 55 former graduates have sent their approvals, however, more than half thereof (**56%**) offered their response to our survey so we believe the results to be sufficiently **representative**, especially when supported by alumni FG and employers response comparisons. Second, basically, **the former version of the programme was basically under scrutiny**, since the new version of the programme is running from this academic year (2018 and on), and we are far away from obtaining the data from the first cohort of the alumni of this new programme version.

Nonetheless, **major findings are:**

- the level of competency achievement has **increased** significantly during the study process **for all** programme specific competencies;
- **the highest** value is attributed to the competences where related courses were carried out based on **problem based learning and cross-disciplinary boundaries**;
- these competencies' level meets at least the standard of **contextualisation, but the majority are in the range of expansion**; while more specific competencies need to be slightly more addressed in the delivery of the programme.

Therefore, the **issues that we put forward for potential further scrutiny are** as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Main issues, findings and improvement proposals

	Main sub/issues debated	Key joint findings	Improvement proposals
A.	Utilisation of problem-based learning	Practical aspects of competencies are addressed, inter-curriculum and cross-disciplinary learning is required.	Courses starting with problems, purpose of finding solutions, problem solving approach in teaching, faculty projects merging various competences and disciplines in collaboration with employers.
B.	Addressing “softer” competencies	Difficult to teach in classroom, however also some theoretical knowledge needs to be provided (e.g. in the area of leadership, ethics, management, etc.).	Focus on the self-learning of this competencies & practical schemes to be provided.
C.	Multi-disciplinarity of programme and more specific competencies	Lower evaluation of them through screening process.	More multidisciplinary approaches within individual courses & further attention to a balanced disciplinary approach (offering legal, economic, mgmt., policy, IT, etc. outcomes) & taking into account not only the content but study methods and all programme stakeholders' cooperation
D.	Diversity of job opportunities for graduates.	Problems with defining appropriate competencies needed in the labour market in comparison to specifically oriented programmes/graduates.	Broader or more targeted programmes nexus and more problem based learning particularly on the MA level, also attracting BA more specialised programmes graduates.

Source: own.

To conclude, MPA study programmes in general as well as FPA's one need to develop as even **more interdisciplinary and practically** (real life situations) oriented ones. Particular attention needs to be given to the triple integration of specialist knowledge, methodological skills and the addressing/resolving of problems which are specific to PA as a key social subsystem and a pillar of good administration, even more in multi-level governance.

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