

AUDIT REPORT

(2ND YEAR)

ON

Master of Philosophy in Public Administration (MPA)

**Department of Administration and Organization Theory
University of Bergen
Norway**

BY

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BACKGROUND

This 2016 Audit Report is the second year assessment report which is a follow up to the comprehensive audit report I submitted in January 2015. The 2015 report covered the academic activities of the Master of Philosophy in Public Administration (MPA) programme in 2014. While the current report covers the MPA programme and its relevant progress and development activities from 2015. The two more subsequent reports shall cover similar activities and development of the programme from 2016 to 2017.

The report is primarily based on the information and official documentations provided by the Department of Administration and Organization Theory, University of Bergen. Other pertinent information was collected through relevant secondary sources. As requested by the Department, the current report shall mainly reflect on the following three aspects:

1. Possibility of the MPA Programme to deviate from the Norwegian programme.

2. End of the Quota Scheme by the Government of Norway from 2016/17 and its implication on the MPA Programme.
3. The report shall try to provide some insight on how the MPA Programme should be redesigned and profiled to attract more self-funded students.

In addition, the report shall also reflect on the most recent students' evaluation of the core courses and on the reading materials of the MPA programme. Some relevant points regarding the above shall be discussed for possible provision for improvement and consideration.

2015 AUDIT REPORT AND THE PROGRESS MADE

Let me begin with the responses from the Department of Administration and Organization Theory regarding the progress they have made with the points raised in my Audit Report in 2015:

POINTS RAISED	PROGRESS MADE & INITIATED DURING 2015
In order to keep the MPA Programme academically viable, the Department should increase the number of students to 20.	As suggested, the intake of MPA students has increased to 18 in 2015.
First year international students find it difficult to get integrated into the MPA Programme. In order to address this issue the programme team and the Department may want to design and develop a standard 'induction week' or 'welcome-week' programme with comprehensive information where all the new students could participate and spend time with the programme team and get necessary advice from the academic and administrative staff.	The Department has prepared a project for mentoring new students, especially during their first semester and for some social activities. The Department hope to obtain some extra funding for this initiative and committed to implement this project in the coming year/s.
Having observed the programme documentation it is suggested that the programme handbook requires a major revision. To further guide the current and future students the following programme documents should be revised and developed: i.) a detailed programme handbook ii.) a complete dissertation handbook and iii.) updated reading lists for the course units.	The Department has started to upgrade the MPA Programme website and the programme and dissertation handbooks. They have started the process and have not been able to make much progress on this yet. Remarks: As agreed with the programme team, in 2015 I have provided them a few samples to look at and design their own programme and dissertation handbooks. Hope they would find the

	<p>provided documents useful. I shall be pleased to comment on these documents during my next report in early 2017, should these documents become ready by that time.</p>
<p>Almost all the international students I have met in 2014 suggested to 'bring the Norwegian and international students together'.</p>	<p>Seemingly the Department is struggling to find good ways of integrating Norwegian students and students coming from abroad to their MPA programme.</p> <p>Remarks: Increased number of students (e.g. an intake of 25-30 students every year) onto the MPA programme would bring more diversity and it shall also facilitate friendship between Norwegian and international students and contribute to develop an intercultural intellectual academic community of its own at the Department. The Master Student Committee, the Social Events Committee, and other formal and informal committees or groups at the Department should be more active to engage new international students with their activities and may organise more social events, especially during the autumn semester. The programme team and the Department should explore more possible options to bring the Norwegian and international students together.</p>
<p><u>Academic staff retirement:</u> Professor Steinar Askvik is one of the two coordinators of the MPA Programme. Over the decades he has been very instrumental and played a key role to design, develop and run the programme with Professor Ishtiaq Jamil. Professor Askvik is due to retire in 2017 which poses a real threat to the programme.</p>	<p>No feedback received – Professor Steinar Askvik has been instrumental to the MPA programme and his retirement would be a great loss to the programme team. Therefore planning in advance and finding an appropriate replacement for Professor Askvik is very crucial for the sustainability of the MPA Programme. I believe the Department is well aware about this academic retirement and have planned for the replacement process.</p> <p>Remarks: It is advisable that the Department should plan in advance and look for his replacement as soon as possible – as the new academic staff would require a year or two to fully integrate with the programme team and the</p>

	<p>Department. The prospective replacement should have the necessary qualifications required – and especially must have profound understanding in the theory and practice of various thematic areas of international development management and public administration as this relates to developing countries.</p>
<p><u>Student attendance:</u> There were also concerns regarding the attendance of students in the class. This is a serious issue – as the absence of students has a direct impact on the teaching and learning activities of the programme. It is strongly advised that the course instructors start to use a 'list of attendance' in their classes.</p>	<p>No feedback received – Students' attendance is very crucial for teaching and learning process of the MPA Programme. I believe the programme team has started to use class rosters to monitor and ensure students' class attendance.</p> <p>Remarks: It is also important that the MPhil students join and actively take part in the activities of various research groups of the Department.</p>

GENERAL REMARKS ON THE PROGRESS MADE BY THE DEPARTMENT

In my view the Department of Administration and Organization Theory has made significant progress in addressing most of the key points raised in my 2015 Audit Report. This transparent change process of the Department and the progress they have made within a year time is praiseworthy. I believe, with a continued and consistent effort the Department and the programme team shall be able to further develop and sustain the renowned MPA Programme.

As stated in my 2015 report that based on my experience of external examinations and audits of Postgraduate programmes in UK universities and based on my personal observation on the MPA programme at Bergen, I feel the Department needs to create and sustain a more vibrant and active academic environment for the MPhil programme with increased engagement of dedicated staff and students. An increase in number of students onto the MPA Programme is vital in this regard. Intake of MPA students has increased to 18 in 2015 – this is a welcome move by the Department. However, a further increase in student numbers (e.g. an intake of 25-30 students every year) is highly recommended.

Obviously the increase in number of students would also require more active engagement of the Department staff in terms of teaching and supervision. Therefore the Department should incentivise the contributing staff members and encourage and recognise their additional contribution into the MPA Programme as part of the reward strategy.

MPA PROGRAMME AND THE NORWEGIAN PROGRAMME

It has been reported that the Department now has the possibility to let the MPA Programme deviate from the Norwegian programme concerning the choice of literature. As a result, the Department would be able to incorporate thematic aspects that might be more relevant to further develop the MPA Programme. This deviation means that the revised and reformed MPA Programme and the literature associated with the courses would be somewhat different from a traditional Norwegian perspective.

The above changing scenarios provide opportunities to the MPA Programme to fine-tune its programme contents and catch up with contemporary MPA programmes around the world. Apparently it may look like a deviation from the established Norwegian programme at this stage; but in practice both programmes (i.e. the MPA and the Norwegian programmes) would benefit from such a move in the long run. However it all depends on what provisions would be made available to the students in both groups and how the revised MPA Programme is designed and which new thematic areas would be incorporated and which ones would be abandoned. Incorporating any generic, skill based and emerging thematic aspects relevant to comparative and international public management; global governance and administration; and public and international development affairs would be a smart move. A good number of students from the Norwegian programme would also be interested to attend such courses – as there would be generic and contextual aspects both group of students would benefit from. The MPA Programme team may lead or supervise curriculum revision and development of such courses as they are familiar with the similarities and differences of the course contents in Norway and abroad. Ideas can easily be taken from similar international PPM/MPA programmes from UK, EU and USA. The following programmes which are similar to the MPA Programme and combines public administration and international development affairs may provide some ideas and insights:

- Public Policy and Management (PPM), International Institute of Social Studies, The Netherlands:
http://www.iss.nl/education/ma_programme/governance_and_development_policy_gdp/public_policy_and_management/
- MSc Public Policy and Management, SOAS University of London, UK:
<https://www.soas.ac.uk/defims/programmes/msc-in-public-policy-and-management/>
- Masters in Public Administration (MPA), University of Birmingham, UK:
<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/postgraduate/courses/taught/govsoc/public-administration.aspx>
- Master of Public Administration (MPA), Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh, USA:
<https://www.gspia.pitt.edu/Academics/Degree-Programs/Master-of-Public-Administration>

DISCONTINUATION OF THE QUOTA SCHEME BY THE GOVERNMENT OF NORWAY

The Government of Norway has decided to phase out the Quota Scheme which started from October 2015. Up until now some 8 students admitted to the MPA Programme every year under this scheme to pursue their degrees with Norwegian funding. However there will be no admissions to the MPA Programme under the Quota Scheme, as the Norwegian Parliament has decided that the scheme will be phased out from the 2016/2017 academic year.

This change in policy shall have a direct impact on the MPA Programme at Bergen, as the programme has depended on the Quota Scheme over a very long period of time. International master degree applicants shall only be able to apply for admission as a self-financing student. This means that the Department would be obliged to continue the MPA Programme without the quota students. The immediate challenge the Department has to face is that the MPA Programme has to be attractive to international self-funded students.

It is very unfortunate that the Government of Norway has decided to end the reputed and well regarded Quota Scheme from 2016/2017 academic year. However the scenarios without Quota Scheme might be very new to the higher education industry in Norway – but many Nordic and EU countries have a long tradition in successfully offering similar masters' degrees in various disciplines without any government-sponsored quota schemes.

Under these circumstances, the MPA Programme shall not be limited only to a very small number of students supported by the Quota Scheme. From now on the Department of Administration and Organization Theory shall have an opportunity to increase the number of students onto the MPA Programme to make the programme more diverse, attractive and academically vibrant. Due to its tuition-fee free status, the MPA Programme shall still have a competitive edge over similar programmes in Australia, Canada, UK, USA and other programmes with tuition-fees in Europe. However to sustain its ongoing reputation in a changing economic environment, the programme team would be required to revise and advertise the MPA Programme in developing and transitional countries with a systematic effort. The Department and the MPA Programme team could exchange knowledge with universities in other Nordic/EU countries – especially from Denmark, Finland and Sweden where a good number of international masters' programmes is being offered with instructions in English.

Though the Quota Scheme has ended, but a new inter-institutional cooperation programme is supposed to replace the scheme. However it is too early to predict how this inter-institutional cooperation programme would look like and how would the students from developing countries benefit from such cooperation programme. Once initiated, the MPA Programme may again be benefitted some way or other from the planned new inter-institutional cooperation programme.

In order to retain its unique tradition and reputation, the University of Bergen may also want to help the Department with extra funding so that some promising students from developing countries may still be offered a number of scholarships to attend the MPA Programme. Termination of the Quota Scheme shall have a direct impact on the demography of the students. Therefore the provision of alternative scholarship by the University should be a serious consideration for the University of Bergen so that the mobility of students from developing countries does not completely disappear from its campus.

HOW THE MPA PROGRAMME SHOULD BE REDESIGNED AND PROFILED TO ATTRACT MORE SELF-FUNDED STUDENTS

Indeed, discontinuation of the Quota Scheme throws some basic challenges to the sustainability of the MPA Programme at Bergen. However it also opens a window of opportunities to the Department and programme team to entirely redesign the programme and make it a vibrant MPA programme for students from developing and OECD countries. Once successfully revised and redesigned, the MPA Programme shall definitely be able to attract a large number of self-funded international students. The Department may find the following suggestions useful regarding profiling the MPA programme in a different way:

- Currently the MPA programme is too heavy on research and very light on course work. The Department and the programme team should try to find a right balance between the course work and research. I would suggest that the MPA Programme should consist of at least four independent modules (i.e. courses) and an M.Phil. dissertation at the end. Additional courses should be offered which cover globally regarded and skill-based generic aspects in public management e.g. organizational behavior, human resource management and development, performance management, and public sector reform and management. The programme team should be able to find a way to incorporate these generic and thematic areas and personalize these into the redesigned MPA programme at Bergen. Currently offered research seminars could also be reduced – rather a set of revised seminars can be integrated into the newly designed courses. Programme details from the above mentioned MPA and PPM programmes from the Netherlands, UK and USA should be helpful in re-profiling the MPA programme at Bergen.

- Seemingly the Department shall struggle to cover the cost of students' field research visits to collect data and information in their home countries or countries of research. Termination of the Quota Scheme may also mean that no extra funding will be available for field study in their target countries of research. Conducting field research in Norway may also not always be possible for international students for various reasons. Therefore the Department and the programme team should take initiatives to train all the MPA students on how to carry out independent research and collect primary data through distance learning methods (e.g. online survey, questionnaire, interviews and thematic discussion through Skype, telephone or other online methods, etc). The Department may also encourage students to carry out field research and collect primary data and information during personal holiday visits to their home countries or countries of their research.

- It should also be noted by the Department and MPA Programme team that most of the students would return to their home countries upon completion of their degrees in Norway and shall work as professionals in public, private or non-profit sectors. Therefore too much emphasis on research may not be equally useful for all the MPA students, except very few of them who would plan to pursue their PhDs after the completion of their M.Phil. The vast majority of students would be benefitted if they could be introduced with relevant 'case-studies' from various contexts. If relevant case-studies could be integrated into the newly designed courses, this shall facilitate their learning and prepare them for real life work as professionals. Experience from case-studies should also help them in building their hands on knowledge and further develop their professional skills in policy formulation, policy implementation, project evaluation, and policy analysis.

- Finally, securing a proper job on completion of their degrees is usually the prime target for self-funded students. If the MPA Programme could be re-designed according to the need of the contemporary job market in public and international affairs, the programme shall likely to attract a large number of self-funded international students. It is also very likely that a good number of Norwegian students would attend the MPA Programme, especially the ones who are planning an international career.

STUDENT EVALUATION AND COURSE CURRICULUM

The Department has shared and provided me the opportunity to reflect on the most recent student evaluation and course documents regarding 'AORG320 Organization and Politics' and 'AORG 321: Methodology'. Overall student evaluation of the course units is very positive and both of the courses were ranked very high by the students. In addition, they also praised the courses by providing

qualitative feedback. The academic team should be commended for their excellent effort in providing and ensuring high quality teaching and learning. It has been well noted that many of the suggested literature has been updated since the last audit visit. As the contents and reading materials go through a constant change and updating process in the academia, I would suggest the academic team to incorporate more updated literature in the curriculum.

FINAL REMARKS

The overall achievements towards MPhil awards which I have observed over the last two years suggest that the programme team has been very effective in providing and ensuring high standard teaching and learning to ensure an appropriate level of progression for its students.

Over the years I also found the programme administration very sincere and effective in carrying out their responsibilities (i.e. in making paper works available on time, presentation of various items, organisational assistance, etc.) with a high degree of professionalism. I look forward to our continued cooperation.
