

AUDIT REPORT

(3rd 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 2017 Audit Report is the third year assessment report which is a follow up to the comprehensive audit reports I submitted in January 2015 and in February 2016. The 2015 report covered the academic activities of the Master of Philosophy in Public Administration (MPA) programme in 2014. While the 2016 report covered the changes and development initiatives by the Department to further develop the MPA programme and the progress they have made during 2015. The current report covers the MPA programme and its relevant progress and development activities from 2016. The next report which is scheduled in early 2018 shall cover similar activities and development of the MPA programme from 2017.

The report is primarily based on the information I gathered during my audit visit to the University of Bergen from 1st to 4th May 2017. The visit allowed me to interact with faculty, students and administrative staff of the Department and the MPA Programme. In addition, the information and official documentations provided by the Department of Administration and Organization Theory, University of Bergen was helpful to prepare this audit report. The current report reflects on the following aspects:

1. Recent development initiatives and progress made by the Department to further strengthen the MPA Programme and suggestions for possible consideration and improvement.
2. Aspects related to the MPA Programme and its integration with the Norwegian Programme.
3. Student recruitment for the MPA Programme and the Department's commitment.
4. Grant by the Norwegian Partnership Programme for Global Academic Cooperation (NORPART).
5. Student evaluation and course curriculum.
6. Final remarks.

1.) RECENT DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES AND PROGRESS MADE BY THE DEPARTMENT TO FURTHER STRENGTHEN THE MPA PROGRAMME AND SUGGESTIONS FOR POSSIBLE CONSIDERATION AND IMPROVEMENT

Let me begin with the progress made by the Department of Administration and Organization Theory in relation to the MPA Programme. In my view the Department has made significant progress in addressing most of the key points raised in my 2015 and 2016 audit reports. Let me summarise these achievements and provide some suggestions below. Some of the key aspects shall also be elaborated further in the other relevant sections.

PROGRESS MADE BY THE DEPARTMENT	SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND CONSIDERATION
<p><u>Student Recruitment:</u> Despite the uncertainties resulted by the termination of the scholarships by Norad and by the quota scheme/Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund, the Department was able to attract self-funded foreign students to its MPA programme. In 2014 some 10 students attended the MPA Programme and since then there has been a steady and gradual increase in the number of students each year with a projection that some 30+ self-funded students would attend the programme in 2017-18 cohort.</p>	<p>In order to ensure a healthy number, the Department should be generous in making new offers. Statistics suggests that 'one out of three (i.e. 1/3)' offer holders may finally come to study in Bergen and the rest would go somewhere else to attend similar programmes. Amidst this climate of confusion and uncertainty, I would suggest that the Department should endeavour to attract 30 to 40 self-funded international students. To achieve this target they would need to make around 100-120 offers. This increase in number of self-funded international students will have a positive impact on the MPA Programme, the Department and the University. This issue is further discussed in the relevant section below.</p>
<p><u>Mentoring and induction:</u> In order to welcome and integrate new students onto the MPA Programme, the Department has strengthened its induction activities and initiated a mentoring scheme for</p>	<p>In general, all the new students found the induction activities by the University and mentoring initiatives by the Department helpful. Some found the mentoring process 'too formal'.</p>

<p>new students, especially during their first semester.</p>	<p>Therefore it was suggested by the students that the process should consist of two Norwegian + two international mentors. This group of four mentors should offer help and assistance to the new students on a voluntary basis and should be more informal in nature and emphasis should be more on social activities.</p> <p>In order to manage students' expectation better, it is also important for the Department and the MPA Programme Team to make a distinction between the research-led MPhil Programme at Bergen and other traditional course-led MA/MSc programmes during the induction/welcome week.</p>
<p><u>Documentation:</u> In terms of documentation, the Department has updated its website. The Department, the MPA Programme structure and the relevant modules have a very healthy web presence with detailed information and instructions for students. This information shall be helpful for the new students and for prospective applicants.</p>	<p>Updating documentation of relevant programme information is a continuous process. In this regard, the Department has made remarkable progress within a short period of time. Yet there are areas that much progress needs to be made e.g. a <i>Programme Handbook</i> and a <i>Dissertation Handbook</i> should be prepared and made available to all the students on the MPA Programme.</p>
<p><u>Integrating Norwegian and international students:</u> The Department's initiatives to find good ways of integrating Norwegian and international students on the MPA Programme are praiseworthy. As highlighted in my previous report that increased number of students onto the MPA Programme would bring more diversity and also facilitate friendship between Norwegian and international students and contribute to develop an intercultural intellectual academic community of its own at the Department.</p>	<p>Existing Research Groups of the Department should play a significant role to bring all the students together. They should invite and engage all the students in their research seminars, student seminars, guest lectures and other activities.</p> <p>It was advised by the MPA students that Norwegian students should be invited to the thesis presentation seminars of international students. Likewise international students should also be invited into the thesis presentation seminars of Norwegian students where the language of instruction is English.</p> <p>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</p>

	of bringing the Norwegian and international students together.
<u>Staff retirement and academic replacement:</u> Professor Steinar Askvik has been instrumental to the MPA Programme since 1994 and his recent retirement is a great loss to the Programme Team. I am aware that the Department has advertised and shall be making new faculty appointments – however it is not clear whether the newly appointed members would be affiliated to the MPA Programme or not. At this very moment the sustainability of the MPA programme is in serious question if adequate staff and resources are not made available to the programme.	In order to make necessary contribution to the MPA programme, the prospective replacement/s of Professor Askvik should have the necessary qualifications and skills 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.
<u>Students' attendance:</u> In the past, there were concerns about students' attendance in the class. Indeed, this is a serious issue – as the absence of students has a direct impact on the teaching and learning activities of the programme. Students' attendance is very crucial for teaching and learning process of the MPA Programme.	I believe the MPA Programme Team has started to use class rosters to monitor and ensure students' class attendance. It is also important that the MPhil students join and actively take part in the activities of various research groups of the Department.

2.) ASPECTS RELATED TO THE MPA PROGRAMME AND ITS INTEGRATION WITH THE NORWEGIAN PROGRAMME

It has been a year now since the Department had the opportunity to independently revise, develop and re-design the MPA Programme with some deviation from the Norwegian Programme. As a result, the Department has taken an initiative to further develop the MPA Programme by incorporating a revised curriculum which is currently ongoing. Once completed, the revised MPA Programme and the associated modules and its contents would be somewhat different from the traditional Norwegian programme. As indicated by the Programme Team and the Department, the revised MPA Programme structure would be as follows.

FIRST YEAR	SECOND YEAR
<u>Autumn Semester - 3 courses:</u> Organisation Theory + Public Policy + Methodology	<u>Autumn Semester:</u> MPhil Thesis in Public Administration
<u>Spring Semester - 3 courses:</u> Advanced Methodology + Research Design + One specialised course offered by Research Groups.	<u>Spring Semester:</u> MPhil Thesis in Public Administration

Apparently the revised MPA Programme structure and the associated modules would comply with the contemporary MPA programmes around the world. Despite some deviations at this time, the MPA and the Norwegian programmes would benefit from such a move in the long run. 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.

By keeping their distinctive intellectual orientation, integration of the MPA Programme and the Norwegian Programme is vital for the Department and the University of Bergen. The Department should explore all possible means of bringing local and international students closer. As a matter of fact, keeping a strong division between the MPA Programme and the Norwegian Programme is not a healthy practice for the academic integrity and reputation of both programmes. Such division also negatively affects the students' experience and teaching and learning environment of the Department. Therefore, in order to help and guide the students more equally, the Department should build an active and common intellectual platform by engaging all of its academic staff to resource the MPA and Norwegian programmes. As indicated in the 2016 Audit Report, incorporating any generic and skill based modules relevant to public administration; governance and management; and public and international development affairs would be a smart move. Gradually a good number of prospective students from Norway and the existing students on the Norwegian Programme would also be interested in attending such courses – as students from both groups would benefit from the generic and contextual aspects of the revised curriculum. I suggest that the MPA Programme Team should lead and supervise curriculum revision and development of the revised courses as they are familiar with the similarities and differences of the course contents in Norway and abroad.

3.) STUDENT RECRUITMENT FOR THE MPA PROGRAMME AND THE DEPARTMENT'S COMMITMENT

Attracting and recruiting self-funded international students to the MPA Programme is a new phenomenon to the Department of Administration and Organisation Theory. Since its inception in 1994 and up until 2015 all of the international students onto the MPA Programme have been funded by a number of scholarships and quota schemes by Norad and the Government of Norway. As all these scholarships and schemes have now been terminated, seemingly the Department is under a high degree of uncertainty and confusion regarding the future of its MPA and other academic programmes. Despite the challenges these unfortunate changes of Government policies have brought to the Norwegian Universities, it also provided opportunities to the MPA Programme at the University of Bergen to re-design and attract self-funded international students and bring independence and a greater degree of sustainability to the Programme.

It is important that the programme remains viable by keeping a right balance of the number of self-funded international students. At the same time, in order to retain its unique orientation, tradition and reputation of the MPA Programme at Bergen, mobility of students from developing countries must be ensured and should no way be compromised. The Programme Team should consult and try to gain some experience from similar programmes from other Nordic and EU countries (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Germany and Sweden) that have successfully offered similar masters' degrees with instructions in English in various disciplines without any government-sponsored quota schemes.

Among other academic programmes, MPA programmes are highly regarded around the world. Employability of MPA graduates is much higher than graduates from other disciplines in the social sciences and liberal arts. I also strongly believe that due to its tuition-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. What is required throughout this transitional phase is to design and develop a sensible and practical recruitment strategy for the MPA Programme. Student recruitment from the top 200 universities from China should also be explored.

Despite these uncertainties and challenges, self-funded student recruitment onto the MPA Programme has been on the rise since 2015. Indeed this is a very good sign and it shows the real strengths of the MPA Programme at Bergen. Projected number of students onto the MPA Programme in 2017 intake is approximately 30+. In order to ensure a healthy number, the Department should be generous in making more offers – as statistics suggests that ‘one out of three (i.e. 1/3)’ offer holders may finally come to study in Bergen and the rest would go somewhere else to attend similar programmes. Amidst this climate of confusion and uncertainty, I would suggest that the Department should endeavour to attract 40 self-funded international students. This increase in number of international students will have a positive impact on the MPA Programme, the Department and the University.

3.1.) COMMITMENT BY THE DEPARTMENT

Obviously the increase in the number of students would also require more active engagement of the academic staff of the Department in terms of teaching, supervision and pastoral responsibilities. My understanding is that the Department of Administration and Organisation Theory has some 20+ tenured academic staff. However it is very surprising to observe that a very limited number of academic staff among these 20+ is contributing to the MPA Programme.

Seemingly the Department is very committed to retaining the MPA Programme. However it was indicated during my audit visit that the Department was in discussion with other sister departments (i.e. Comparative Politics and Sociology) to find possible academics to help with the teaching and supervision of the MPA Programme. Again, such approach is very surprising as these questions the real commitment of faculty members of the Department to resource and sustain the MPA Programme. Since 1994 the MPA Programme has been an integral part of the Department and due to its disciplinary orientation it must remain so. Curriculum development, course contents and intellectual orientation and discourses in Comparative Politics and Sociology is significantly different than in the areas of Public Administration. Also the question of ownership of the MPA Programme would also be in question with such a move. Moreover students’ satisfaction shall also be in question – as it shall not serve justice to prospective MPA students while they are taught contents which have little relevance to the study of Public Administration.

In addition, Professor Askvik’s recent retirement has further shrunk the capacity of the MPA Programme Team. Therefore the Department should recruit new academic staff designated for the MPA Programme without further delay and find ways to engage more staff from the existing 20+ academic staff at the Department of Administration and Organisation Theory with the MPA Programme. As a form of encouragement and appreciation, the Department also should incentivise the current staff members contributing to the MPA Programme and encourage and recognise their additional contribution into the Programme as part of the reward strategy.

4.) GRANT BY THE NORWEGIAN PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME FOR GLOBAL ACADEMIC COOPERATION (NORPART)

Associate Professor Ishtiaq Jamil and the MPA Programme Team must be commended for their success in securing the highly competitive grant from the Norwegian Partnership Programme for Global Academic Cooperation (NORPART). In December 2016 they secured a grant of NOK 4 927 425.00 from NORPART for their project entitled '*Policy and Governance Studies in South Asia*'.

As part of this NORPART grant, every year a cohort of 12-13 Bangladeshi, Nepali and Sri Lankan students from North South University (NSU) in Bangladesh shall spend one semester (i.e. autumn) in Bergen and attend two courses in 2017 and three courses from the MPA Programme for the next two years (i.e. 2018 and 2019). Likewise a cohort of 2-3 Norwegian students shall also spend a semester at NSU every year for the next three years.

Indeed, termination of the scholarships and quota schemes threw big challenges to the sustainability of the MPA Programme at Bergen. It also closed the traditional windows of opportunities to continue to attract students from developing countries. The Department has been struggling to attract alternative funding for the Programme. Securing a grant from NORPART has been very timely for the Department – as the mobility of a good number of international and Norwegian students are now guaranteed under this grant until 2019. The Department and University must recognise this remarkable success by Associate Professor Jamil and the MPA Programme Team at this very time of financial constrain.

5.) STUDENT EVALUATION AND COURSE CURRICULUM

In terms of the overall achievements towards MPhil awards which I have observed over the last three years suggest that the programme team has been very effective in providing and ensuring high standard teaching and learning, and an appropriate level of progression for its students. The Department has shared and provided me the opportunity to reflect on the most recent student evaluation and course documents. Overall student evaluation of the course units is very positive and the courses were ranked very high by the students. 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 my first audit visit in 2014. The revised programme structure has potentials to develop the vibrant MPA Programme with high international standard. 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.

6.) FINAL REMARKS

As stated in my 2015 and 2016 reports that based on my experience of external examinations and audits of Postgraduate programmes in UK universities and 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 during 2015 and 2016. The projected student number for 2017 intake is

also on the rise. However, a further increase in student numbers (e.g. an intake of around 40 students every year) is highly recommended. With more sincere and consistent effort, the Department and the Programme Team shall be able to further develop and sustain the renowned MPA Programme.

Finally, as always, I 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, visit arrangements etc.) with a high degree of professionalism. I look forward to our continued cooperation.
