

AUDIT REPORT

(4TH YEAR – FINAL REPORT)

ON

Master of Philosophy in Public Administration (MPA)

Department of Administration and Organization Theory

University of Bergen

Norway

BY

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This 2018 Audit Report is the fourth year and final assessment report which is a follow up to the three comprehensive audit reports I submitted in January 2015, February 2016 and May 2017. The 2015 report covered the academic activities of the Master of Philosophy in Public Administration (MPA) programme in 2014; 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 2017 report covered the MPA programme and its relevant academic progress and development activities in 2016.

Including the programme enhancement activities undertaken during 2017, the current report summarizes the three previous audit reports and provides an overview on the review and progress of the MPA Programme over the last four years.

The report is based on the information and official documentations provided by the Department of Administration and Organization Theory, University of Bergen and the information I have collected during my audit visits to the University of Bergen in 2014 and 2017. These visits allowed me to interact with the faculty, students and administrative staff of the MPA Programme and the University. The current report mainly reflects on the following aspects:

1. Review on the MPA programme development
2. Remarks on the previous Audit Reports and the reform initiatives by the Department of Administration and Organization Theory
3. Current academic standing and competitiveness of the MPA programme
4. Final remarks

1. REVIEW ON THE MPA PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

In my view the Department has made significant progress in addressing most of the key points raised in my 2015, 2016 and 2017 audit reports. Despite some genuine challenges, the MPA programme has developed and re-established in a positive way during my tenure as a Programme Auditor. Let me summarise these achievements below. In order to avoid duplications, some of the key aspects shall also be categorically elaborated further in other relevant sections.

The academic standard and intensity of the MPA Programme has continuously grown over the last four years. The Programme now has a clear structure with well-designed taught modules and research project which are central to the discipline of Public Administration. All the 120 ECTS have now been re-organised around a range of relevant thematic areas and important courses and master's thesis.

The programme documentation has also improved to a great extent. The MPA Programme now has a well-designed web presence for its current and prospective students. Academic programme development is a continuous process and I believe that a number of well-designed handbooks (i.e. programme handbook and dissertation/master's thesis handbook in electronic or print version) with key information and instructions shall be helpful for students.

2. REMARKS ON THE PREVIOUS AUDIT REPORTS AND THE REFORM INITIATIVES BY THE DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZATION THEORY

The sincerity and open-mindedness of the MPA Programme Team and the Department of Administration and Organization Theory in addressing the suggestions outlined in previous Audit Reports are commendable.

The greatest setback the MPA Programme has faced since its inception in 1994 was the complete termination of scholarships and quota schemes by Norad and the Government of Norway in 2015. As a result, unfortunately the Department had to face a high degree of uncertainty and confusion regarding its MPA and other academic programmes. Indeed, the MPA Programme was almost at the brink of

collapse and sustainability of the Programme became very uncertain as a direct impact of the termination of scholarships and quota schemes. Amidst this confusion and chaos, the Department and the Programme Team positively and hastily supported my suggestion to re-design and attract self-funded international students and bring independence and a greater degree of sustainability to the MPA Programme. It was a true pleasure to observe that despite these major financial cuts, the MPA Programme has started to grow and recruit self-funded international students. The following table may provide some insights regarding the downward trajectory of sponsored and upward trajectory of self-funded student numbers on MPA Programme:

ACADEMIC YEARS & FUNDING SOURCES	STUDENT INTAKE IN THE INTERNATIONAL MPA PROGRAMME
Over the years – pre-2014 Academic Years [With Norwegian scholarships and quota schemes]	Approximately 20 each year
Academic Year: Autumn 2014 [With scholarships and quota schemes]	18
Academic Year: Autumn 2015 [With scholarships, quota schemes & self-funded]	19
Academic Year: Autumn 2016 [Self-funded]	9
Academic Year: Autumn 2017 [Self-funded]	12

However, termination of Norwegian scholarships and quota schemes and the rise of self-sponsored students may have a negative impact on student recruitment from developing countries. In order to retain its unique orientation, tradition and reputation of the MPA Programme at Bergen, mobility of students from developing countries (i.e. Africa, Asia and Latin America) must be ensured and should no way be compromised. In this regard Associate Professor Ishtiaq Jamil's success to attract the highly competitive grant of NOK 4 927 425.00 for their project entitled '*Policy and Governance Studies in South Asia*' from the Norwegian Partnership Programme for Global Academic Cooperation (NORPART) is ensuring a cohort of 12-15 Bangladeshi, Nepali and Sri Lankan students to spend one semester in Bergen and attend three courses from the MPA Programme for three years (i.e. 2017- 2019). Likewise a cohort of 2-3 Norwegian students also has the opportunity to spend a semester at North South University (NSU) in Bangladesh until 2019. The Department and the MPA Programme Team should continue to explore, encourage and support such initiatives in the future. As indicated in my 2017 Audit Report, the Department and University must recognise this remarkable success by Associate Professor Jamil at this very time of financial constrain.

Excellent progress has also been made in mentoring and induction activities. As a result, all the new students from 2016 found the induction activities by the University and mentoring initiatives by the Department supportive and helpful.

The Department's initiatives to find suitable ways of integrating local students on the Norwegian Programme and international students on the MPA Programme and bring them closer are praiseworthy. As highlighted in my previous reports that increased number of students onto the MPA Programme would bring more diversity at the Department. It would also facilitate friendship between Norwegian and international students and contribute to develop an intercultural intellectual academic community of its own at the Department. The newly designed MPA and the corresponding Norwegian programmes would continue to mutually and meaningfully contribute to the academic and social life of fellow students.

During my tenure as Programme Auditor, I also had the opportunity to make suggestion on retirement and replacement of academic staff. Professor Steinar Askvik and Associate Professor Ishtiaq Jamil have been instrumental to the MPA Programme over a very long period of time and Professor Askvik's recent retirement is a great loss to the MPA Programme Team. I believe that the academic staff recruitment is still in the process. Once appointed the newly recruited faculty member would be expected to make intellectual contribution in the theory and practice of various thematic areas of public administration and international development management with particular reference to developing and transitional countries.

By referring the above, I do believe that even under challenging circumstances, the Department and MPA Programme Team have listened and paid attention to the advice and suggestions I have made over the years.

3. CURRENT ACADEMIC STANDING AND COMPETITIVENESS OF THE MPA PROGRAMME

The newly designed MPA Programme offers courses which are consistent with the scope of the degree programme and relevant to their areas of specialisation. Overall coherency of the MPA Programme and its constituent courses and their learning outcomes align with relevant master's level descriptors specified by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). As a research-intensive MPhil degree, the basic characteristics of the MPA Programme at Bergen are also very similar to the basic standards of research-led master's degrees specified by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, UK.

Among other academic programmes in social sciences and liberal arts, MPA programmes are highly regarded around the world. Employability of MPA graduates is much higher than graduates from other disciplines. I also believe that due to its current free-tuition fee status, the MPA Programme at Bergen would still have a competitive edge over similar programmes with tuition fees in Australia, Canada, Europe, UK and USA. I truly believe that during my tenure as Programme Auditor, the MPA Programme Team has designed an international-standard MPA Programme and has also developed a sensible and practical recruitment strategy to make the Programme attractive and sustainable.

In order to gain further international reputation and make the MPA Programme even more attractive, the Department and the Programme Team may like to explore possibilities of academic accreditation by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA), USA.

4. FINAL REMARKS

The Department of Administration and Organization Theory and the University of Bergen must make genuine efforts to replace the retirement of Professor Steinar Askvik and recruit a suitable faculty member to be an integral part of the MPA Programme Team. Indeed the MPA Program should continue, but the Department and the University ought to ring-fence and dedicate some resources for its continued operation and success. In the absence of such firm commitment, the MPA Programme would be weakened and may fail to exist in near future.

As stated in my previous reports 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 be more pro-active in creating and sustaining a vibrant and active academic environment for the MPA Programme with increased engagement of dedicated staff and students.

In the absence of scholarships and quota schemes by Norad and the Government of Norway, increase in number of students onto the MPA Programme is vital to make the Programme sustainable. Intake of self-funded MPA students has increased during my four-year tenure. However, a further increase in student numbers (e.g. an intake of around 40 students every year) is highly recommended. As indicated in my 2017 Audit Report that in order to ensure a healthy number, the Department should be generous in making new offers – as statics 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. With the rise of self-funded students, the Department should also be prepared for possible uncertain scenarios e.g. interruption, late completion and quitting from the Programme. With more sincere and consistent effort, the Department and the Programme Team should be able to further develop and sustain the renowned MPA Programme.

In the 2017 Audit Report I have also suggested that student recruitment from the top 200 universities from China should be explored. In this regard, exploring student recruitment from the continent of Africa; South Asia (e.g. Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka); East Asia (i.e. China and other ASEAN countries e.g. Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand); Eastern Europe; GCC countries (i.e. Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE); and from Latin America for admission onto the MPA Program are vital.

As always, I found Denise Fewtrell Flatmark and the Programme Administration Team very sincere and effective in carrying out their responsibilities with a high degree of professionalism. Their consistent help in making the paper works available on time, presentation of various items, organisational

assistance and other supports are commendable. Above all, I do appreciate their sincerity and unfailing readiness in helping me to perform my responsibilities over the last four years.

Finally, it has been an immense pleasure in becoming the first Programme Auditor for the MPA Programme at the University of Bergen. I have tried to serve my role in a conscientious and diligent manner and leaving this responsibility with a greater sense of positivity. Undoubtedly the sustainability and academic standing of the MPA Programme has improved over the last four years. I truly believe that the Programme in its current form shall be able to meet the aspirations of the new generation of MPA students.
