

Accreditation

of the continued education programme:

Executive Master of Public Administration (EMPA)

**University of Bern,
Competence Centre for Public Management**

The Group of Experts' Evaluation Report

Preface

The following report contains the external expert group's assessment of the Executive Master programme in public administration at the University of Bern, provided at the institution's Competence Centre for Public Management.

The assessment was conducted under the auspices of OAQ, the Center for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities, following the University's request to have the programme accredited. The evaluation panel was appointed by OAQ and recognised by the University. The evaluation is conducted in collaboration with the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation.

The panel's assessments are all made in relation to OAQ's set of standards for programme accreditation. In addition, the panel has sought to make additional quality assessments beyond the accreditation standards' minimum requirements and to offer what advice we may have for the further development of the programme. However, it goes without saying that there are limits to what can come out of a one day evaluation visit, in particular if the programme is well organised, supported and furnished in the first place.

The expert panel has consisted of the following members:

Assistant director Jon Haakstad, NOKUT, Oslo (Leader)
Prof. Dr. Arthur Ringeling, Erasmus University, Rotterdam; vice-chairman Accreditation
Committee EAPAA
Prof. Dr. Adrienne Héritier, European University Institute, Florence
PhD student Christian Schneijderberg, University of Kassel

Dr. Therese Steffen Gerber, OAQ has acted as secretary for the panel.

The panel wish to thank both the representatives of the OAQ and the representatives of the Executive MPA programme for their excellent work in preparation of the accreditation procedure and for the smooth arrangement of the site visit.

Oslo, Rotterdam, Florence, Bern,

June 2008

1. Programme and provider

1.1 Executive Master of Public Administration at the University of Bern

The EMPA programme at the University of Bern is a continued education (*‘Weiterbildung’*/Master of Advanced Studies) programme of 60 ECTS credits, aimed at people who have middle to upper management jobs in public administration and who are academically qualified for work at the master degree level. The programme is organised as a part time activity with the duration of slightly more than two years, where the students continue in their jobs while following the programme. Students attend 77 obligatory study days in weekly blocks that last from Thursday morning till Saturday noon. In addition, there are four blocks that last for an entire week, plus a five-day study tour to Strassburg and Brussels. From the beginning the maximum number of accepted applicants was set at 30 per class and since the programme started up for the first time in 2003, two classes have already graduated, with a third class now in the middle of their run. The cost of attending the programme is SFr 45 000 per student, which to varying degrees is covered by the students’ employers

The EMPA at Bern is presented as an interdisciplinary programme that mainly draws on the university disciplines of economic studies, political science and constitutional law, preparing the candidates for careers in the upper echelons of the civil service at federal, canton or local level. The entrance requirements are a combination of a university degree (or documented equivalent qualifications) and several years of relevant occupational experience. The programme does not provide for specialised strands aimed at specific areas of public administration; nor does it provide individual coaching for the students in relation to specific management positions. Rather, the course aims to build broad competences in “general public administration” through the constructive interplay between several disciplines, between academic knowledge and occupational skills, and between the various occupational backgrounds of the students. It could be argued that in this sense, the programme is more ‘multi-disciplinary’ than actually ‘inter-disciplinary’, which will be commented on more in detail later in the report.

1.2 The Competence Centre for Public Management at the University of Bern

The EMPA at the University of Bern is organised and provided by the university’s Competence Centre for Public Management and managed at the practical level by the Programme Management, that consists of three academic members of the Competence Centre and two (advisory) members from institutes of law and political science respectively. The programme observes the general regulations and guidelines that are laid down by the institution’s *Weiterbildungskommission* (Council for Continued Education), among these certain standards concerning evaluations, examinations and obligatory work. The executive arm of the Council is the university’s Coordination Office for Continued Education, that provides, develops (or helps develop) and evaluates continued education programmes, carries out research related to continued education and evaluation, offers relevant advice to faculties and departments and provides a course in higher education didactics. The EMPA was developed in close cooperation between the Competence Centre and the Coordination Office.

2. The self-evaluation report

The University has presented a comprehensive self-evaluation report of 73 pages plus a comprehensive package of enclosed documentation that, as far as the panel can see, contains all vital formal documents with immediate relevance for the programme. The validity of the report is initially guaranteed by the *Studienleitung*, while an introduction to the report is presented by the Programme Manager.

The introduction quotes the vision statement for the programme:

Der Standort Bern bietet in Zusammenarbeit mit kompetenten Partnern aus Wissenschaft, Verwaltung und Wirtschaft eine qualitative herausragende, praxisorientierte, den aktuellsten Stand der Forschung einbeziehende und international anerkannte Führungsausbildung für den öffentlichen Sektor an.

The introduction then gives an account of the self-evaluation process, which has included the collection of available data, the selection of the relevant data in relation to the accreditation criteria, evaluative analyses of processes and results in workshops, a workshop with external stakeholders to analyse and discuss the self-evaluation report, and feedback loops on the draft report with members of the *Studienleitung*, the alumni association of the MPA, the *Weiterbildungskommission* and the *Universitätsstab Evaluation und Akkreditierung*.

The self-evaluation is structured after the OAQ's catalogue of activity areas (*Bereiche*) and quality standards for each of these. These areas are: "regularity of provision and educational aims", "internal organisation and quality assurance", "curriculum and educational method", "teaching staff", "students" and "infrastructure". This external evaluation report basically follows the same pattern. For a comparison with the standards of the EAPAA, see annex.

In the preface to the report the self-evaluation group expresses their view of the self-evaluation and accreditation processes as important tools for the continued development and improvement of the programme and sees the whole process as a useful opportunity for in-depth reflection on the contents and learning activities of the study programme.

The external evaluation group wants to commend the programme management for a well-structured, informative, analytical and even self-critical self-evaluation report. The report offers the programme leadership's assessment of strengths and weaknesses on each point in OAQ's catalogue of standards, ending each one with a '*Reflections of the Steering Group*', where an overall assessment is presented with a discussion of further challenges and possible improvements. If anything negative is to be said about the report, it might be that there exists a certain measure of redundancy, or repetitiveness, in the description of aims and contents for the various parts of the programme.

The evaluation panel finds that the self-evaluation report has been produced with wide participation within the organisation and with the inclusion of the relevant external stakeholder groups. The panel regards the report as a representative expression of the executive MPA's self-assessment.

3. The external panel's site visit

The external evaluation panel visited the University of Bern and the Executive MPA programme's premises in the Competence Centre for Public Management on 20 May 2008, following a briefing session with the OAQ in the evening of the 19th. Well in advance of the site visit the panel had received the self-evaluation report for the programme and the enclosed additional documentation. The panel found the documentation satisfactory and only requested to see examples of forms for the students' evaluation of the teaching in addition to the submitted material. During the site visit the panel were shown examples of the students' project work and master treatises and were also shown around the premises at the Competence Centre.

The programme for the site visit lasted from 9.00 am till 5.30 pm, starting with interviews with the Programme Leadership Group (*Studienleitung*), the Programme Management Group (*Programmeleitung*) and Module Leaders (*Modulverantwortliche*). Then followed interviews with students (both first and second year) and alumni, with representatives of relevant fields of employment, and finally with representatives of the teaching staff. After a work session of an hour and a half, during which the panel members summed up their findings and views and formed the backbone of their assessment of the programme, a debriefing session was held that was open to all informants. See site visit program in annex.

The visit was well organised, both from the side of the OAQ and by the Programme Management. No procedural problems hampered the panel's work. As must be expected when such a visit is carried out in one day, the time schedule was tight but was still kept with great punctuality. The short duration of the visit was of course a challenge for the panel but the constructive attitude and the practical support of the programme representatives helped make the process run smoothly. The interview groups numbered between 4 and 8 people (no 'repeaters') who were by and large very forthcoming and communicative. The panel was able to obtain good and informative answers to their questions. The panel will still maintain, though, that one working day for a programme evaluation like this is rather on the "thin" side. It might easily have been too short in an evaluation where more serious problems had surfaced and where the panel would have needed to obtain further information and to analyse and discuss the outcome at greater length. As it happens in this case, however, the panel are convinced that the allotted time was sufficient.

4. Assessment in relation to OAQ's accreditation standards¹

4.1 Implementation of teaching objectives

The executive Master programme in public administration has been offered without interruption by the University of Bern since 2003. The first cohort of students graduated in 2005, the second in 2007, while the third group is now in the middle of their programme and will graduate in the autumn of 2009. Therefore, the programme can be said to be carried out regularly.

The underlying objective of the programme is to equip people who are already professionally active in middle management positions in public administration with relevant knowledge and skills for their management careers in the service of local authorities, canton or federal government. The general aim is not to provide specialisation in any political or administrative field or management function, but rather to build broad, general competences through the students' exposure to varied fields and occupational backgrounds in the area of public administration. The three overarching knowledge areas are defined as 'system knowledge', 'leadership knowledge' and 'management knowledge'. The programme thus aims at developing the students' understanding of the basic legal and political themes that relate to the tasks of a civil service and the decision-making processes that take place in the border area between law, politics and administration.

The building up of the Competence Centre for Public Management and the provision of a master degree programme in the same area are the result of a needs analysis on the part of the University. No equivalent programme at university level is presently being offered in Switzerland, as the IDHEAP programme in Lausanne has a different profile, with more specific aims, and also conducts its teaching in the French language. The EMPA at Bern may be said to have a sharper national focus, in accordance with its location in an environment where federal and canton government and civil service are concentrated. Consequently, the international aspect is also more emphasised here. So the University's decision to create a programme like this agrees well with its expressed strategic aim of providing a national academic stronghold in this specific field. With its favourable location in the nation's capital, in the midst of local, canton and federal politics and administration, the University and the MPA programme may nurture close contacts with a breadth of relevant occupational fields, and is also well positioned to recruit good teachers for the programme.

More specifically, the programme is divided into a 'basic course' (*Grundstudium*) and a 'main course' (*Hauptstudium*), made up from seven separate modules. The expert panel finds that these blocks of teaching aims are well separated and balanced against each other, with little overlap. Teaching and learning aims are meticulously described for the basic course and for each individual module of the main course. Given the breadth of the programme, the catalogue of learning goals for the individual student is therefore rather massive. Some of the goals may strike one as rather ambitious, like 'knowledge of the various forms of empirical social research' and 'basic theories and themes in political science'. Aims are generally described with terms like 'knowledge of..' 'insight into...' and 'ability to...' Thus the aims definitions are generally in compliance with Bologna expectations of including learning outcome in terms of skills and qualifications, albeit in rather general terms.

¹ For comparison with EAPAA standards, see annex.

A widely recognised challenge in connection with the new emphasis on learning outcomes in the Bologna process is the documentation of the actual realisation of these outcomes in the students' learning process – and even at a specific degree level. This is reflected on in the self-evaluation, which points at the specific problems related to the documentation of learning outcomes in the area of *competences* (as different from *qualifications*) in a further education programme that builds on university (or scientific-theoretical) epistemology. A transformation of vast theoretical inputs into professional skills is not within the scope of the programme and reliable documentation of realised competences would have required a much more practice-oriented approach, with simulation training and monitored internships with other employers. This would have made it a very different programme altogether. It would also have created a not-intended competition with similar programmes in the *Fachhochschule* sector, which have a different target group and somewhat different aims. The expert panel has no problems in agreeing with the specific academic orientation of this programme.

In conclusion, the panel finds that the teaching and learning objectives of the programme are in correspondence with the stated vision of the programme, and that this in turn conforms well to the institution's mission statement and strategic plan. The panel therefore finds that the programme complies with OAQ's standards in the area "Implementation and teaching objectives", including the demand that the programme be carried out regularly.

4.2 Internal organisation and quality assurance measures

4.2.1 Organisation, responsibilities, decision-making

The Competence Centre for Public Administration has built up a many-faceted organisational structure around the EMPA that allows a large number of stakeholder bodies and people who take active part in the programme to exert their influence on it. The organisational chart shows how the programme is steered from within by the *Studienleitung* and the *Programmleitung*, with clear organisational lines 'downwards' to module leaders and representatives of teachers and students, 'upwards' to the *Weiterbildungskommission* with its Coordination Office for Continued Education, and finally 'sideways': on the one hand to the University's internal bodies (first and foremost the Competence Centre itself and the two contributing faculties of Law and Social Science) and on the other to bodies that represent external competence and interests: the *Fachbeirat* (Academic Council) and the Alumni MPA.

The central steering bodies (*Studienleitung* and *Programmleitung*) are made up of representatives that link the programme to the *Weiterbildungskommission* and the relevant discipline communities within the university. The *Weiterbildungskommission* is broadly composed with representation from the rectorate, several discipline communities, the administration and student organisations, while the *Studienleitung* for this specific programme has a more narrowly academic, curriculum-related composition. However, the expert panel finds it somewhat odd that the students are represented in the *Kommission*, but not in the *Studienleitung* of the EMPA programme.

The direct management of the programme is conducted by the *Programmleitung*, which is made up of three representatives from the Competence Centre for Public Administration and two (advisory) academic members, from law and political science respectively. Among them, they represent the main disciplines that constitute the interdisciplinary EMPA. Their task is to create and continually develop the aims and the curriculum of the programme and to lead the modules. With their substantial participation as teachers in the programme, they also provide

solid links steering and management on the one hand, and the actual execution of teaching processes on the other. The chair of the programme leadership acts as operative manager of the programme.

An external Academic Council, the *Fachbeirat*, has been set up for the programme in order to strengthen its links with relevant employment and academic fields. The *Beirat* may be said to execute a kind of external monitoring and quality assurance and can give advice to the programme management from an outside position, which yields a broader perspective and may safeguard the programme's relevance and its candidates' employability. Still, it should be added that some of the representatives from the outside has rather close links to the programme.

In a matrix that shows all participating actors/bodies (11) and a detailed list of areas where decisions have to be made (32), a full picture of preparatory, decision-making and implementing functions for each area of activity emerges. The list is very comprehensive and covers all essential aspect of running a programme. The expert panel could ascertain through the interviews that there is general satisfaction throughout with the way the programme is steered and managed. The panel does not have sufficient information to make a very detailed assessment of this steering system but was convinced that the programme is managed with sufficient authority, efficiency and responsiveness on the one hand, and a wide measure of participation and transparency on the other. According to the self-evaluation report, the division of tasks and responsibilities functions very well and the expert panel discovered no indication of the opposite.

The pattern of organisation secures a strong academic influence on the decisions that are made, in particular because the five members of the *Programmleitung* make up both the academic and the managing core of the programme, including all the modules. This 'centralist' feature obviously has the consequence that the other academic staff, who are quite numerous, who typically cater for small, specific features in the curriculum, and who are often recruited outside the University, have a more distant relationship to decision-making processes. But since the programme has opted for a model with numerous specialised teachers who make their contribution beside their ordinary jobs, it could hardly be expected that these teachers would have the necessary perspective, or even commitment, to engage heavily in the running of the programme. Early ideas of including all teaching staff in an annual 'teachers' council' have therefore been abandoned.

Students have less formal influence on decision-making. As noted above, they are not represented in the *Studienleitung*, and we find no student representation in *Programmleitung* or *Fachbeirat* either. Particularly the type of experienced students that come to this programme would doubtlessly be able to make valuable contributions to the steering and running of the programme and the panel would have liked to see them included in these decision-making bodies. Representatives of the programme claimed in interviews that close and frequent contact is kept with the students through their class representatives and this was confirmed by the students and teachers that were interviewed. The panel therefore concludes that students are given the opportunity to 'play an appropriate part in conceiving and developing the programme' (OAQ standard 2.02.02), but that this is largely restricted to making responses to decisions and activities that have already taken place, rather than to actively participate in the formation and development of the programme.

4.2.2 *Quality assurance*

The programme has arranged for the following systematic quality assurance measures:

- *Evaluation of teachers*: The teachers are not systematically evaluated individually, but collectively in connection with the evaluation of the modules (See next point.). This is to avoid ‘over-evaluation’ in a programme of transparent relations between leadership, teachers and students. However, if a teacher wants an evaluation of his/her personal performance this is done by using a standardised questionnaire.
- *Evaluation of modules*: Each module is evaluated electronically at the end of the course concerning content, coordination and sequence, level in relation to students’ pre-knowledge, quality of teaching, counselling and assessment and the infrastructural conditions around the programme.
- *Feedback talks between programme management and class representatives*: Every four months such talks are held with the class representatives, following internal class discussions. The results (when this is relevant and practically possible) should influence the conduct of the programme immediately.
- *Evaluation of programme*: This evaluation, which is also carried out electronically, takes place at the end of the programme. The emphasis is on finding possibilities of improving/optimising the quality of the programme as a whole and to have the students’ assessments of the personal and professional benefits they have gained from it.
- *Evaluation of professional development by alumni*: A questionnaire is distributed to earlier candidates from the programme with the view of assessing the programme’s impact on the candidates’ career developments and finding ways of increasing it in the future.
- *Evaluation by the international ‘Fachbeirat’*: The annual meeting of the *Fachbeirat* discusses the development of the programme in broad terms and their advice provides stimulus for improvement measures.

The panel finds that the most striking feature of the internal quality assurance measures is the fact that they rely so heavily on the students’ feedback. This always involves a risk of identifying programme quality with student satisfaction, although there arguably is a relatively high correlation between the two. The panel also finds that the use of systematic talks with class representatives, as long as these are documented in written form and directed towards identified improvement measures, is a way of dealing with quality issues that is constructive, and that may reach some depth. The panel is also convinced – not least from the interviews with students and alumni – that the very mature and committed students that come to the programme can offer better contributions to the overall assessment of the programme than average students.

Representatives of the programme explain that information concerning the quality of the programme is being continually analysed and assessed by the *Studien-* and *Programmleitungen*, as well as by the *Fachbeirat*. These analyses are routinely followed by improvement measures when quality below the wished standard is revealed. An annual ‘quality wheel’ is thus operating to secure continued development.

In its discussion of strengths and weaknesses with the present quality assurance regime, the self-evaluation fails to address the absence of the wider teaching staff from the QA processes. From what came out of the interviews, the panel has the impression that the teachers’ assessments are only called for ‘when something goes wrong’ and that some of them would have appreciated a more proactive role. However, the use of many external specialist teachers

who are active in the programme for only a small amount of time obviously makes this a bit difficult.

What the self-evaluation *does* discuss, is the challenge of including the representatives of employers and working life more intimately in the QA processes. To some extent, this of course already happens through the discussions of the *Fachbeirat*, which also provides international contact and impulses. But the programme management sees the importance of keeping the programme sharply in line with professional demands and is looking for further measures. (Workshops with groups of employer representatives have been considered but not carried out yet.) The panel can only support the programme management in this, but do not see lack of professional relevance as a very threatening prospect, given the many ties to professional life.

Both the self-evaluation and the interviews gave many examples of how the programme management follows up the quality assessments with concrete improvement measures and how these measures in fact have had a beneficial effect on the programme. Although the panel would have liked to see a broader involvement in quality assurance processes among the teaching staff, their final assessment is that the programme is well – and rather intensely – quality assured.

4.3 Curriculum and teaching methods

4.3.1 Structure of the curriculum

OAQ's standard for the accreditation of study programmes requires that the curricula are structured in correspondence with the objectives of the Bologna Declaration. The executive master in public administration is a post-graduate (continued education) degree and as such it falls outside the main Bologna degree structure. However, the programme complies well with the general intentions of the Bologna process, as it is designed to meet specific demands in the labour market and to provide increased employability for its candidates. The panel is convinced that the labour market relevance of the programme is unquestionable. The study volume of 60 ECTS credits fulfils the general obligation for Master of Advanced Studies programmes.

The panel also saw and heard evidence that the content of the programme is organised in well coordinated modules that cover the different subject areas without noticeable overlaps. A common problem with strongly module-divided programmes is the tendency for such programmes to become fragmented. This is obviously a danger with the EMPA at Bern as well. However, several features of the way in which the modules are organised are aimed at constituting the programme as a logical learning sequence – as far as this is feasible: The introductory 'basic module' prepares the students for what is to come later on in the programme, while the two first modules of the 'main course' offer basic insights that can be drawn on in the later modules, when the chronology has less importance. Also, the master thesis provides a unifying string through the programme, as the students start preparing their theses from very early on. According to the self-evaluation the build-up of the individual modules is determined in great detail and with a view to creating a logical learning sequence. The organisational pattern of 'block weeks' of teaching makes it necessary to steer the teaching progression in the modules rather carefully, which gives relatively little room for the individual teacher to design 'his/her' module freely. This, however, also guarantees that the intended balancing of curricula is assured on the module level, as does the close cooperation

of the module leaders on the programme level. The interviewed students testified unanimously to the successful and effective build-up of the curriculum.

4.3.2 *Range of contents*

The content of the programme is described and ordered in great detail and covers wide areas of disciplines and fields that impinge on the administration and management of public affairs. The 'basic course' (*Grundstudium*) is divided into six areas (Requirements of various management disciplines; Introduction to methodology, Market economy and business management, Political science, Constitutional and administrative law, State and macro economy). Each of these areas is further regulated into 3 – 8 sub-fields. An even greater degree of detail is provided in the description of each of the seven modules of the 'main course' (*Hauptstudium*): The modules are: The state in a changing environment; Structures, processes and instruments of public management; The management of performance and finances; Management, innovation and ethics; Federalism and the management of selected political areas; E-Government and communication in public management; International organisations and Europe.

A particular challenge with a wide-ranging, modularised programme like this, with a large number of external 'specialist' teachers, is to create coherence in the students' learning processes. Many students stated that it was sometimes difficult to see the links between the different lectures but would not characterise this as a serious weakness in the programme, but rather as an appreciated intellectual challenge. 'In the end it all fits rather well together', but making it fit obviously demands a certain effort on the part of the students as well.

The expert panel considers the range of topics that are addressed in the curriculum to be broad and representative. The programme is in heart of public administration teaching and the modules cover the field in a satisfactory way. In the first two runs of the programme there was little emphasis on the international dimensions of public administration, but since a seventh module was added to cater for this obvious need the broad scope of the programme looks very satisfactory (although the panel heard several statements in favour of an even deeper international agenda). Given the Programme Management's personal engagement in the teaching of the programme, as well as their close associations with both the relevant research arenas and the world of professional practice, the management is in a good position to fine-tune the contents of the programme in accordance with developments in research and comparable programmes, developments in professional practice and the experience of what works well or less well in the curriculum. The only instance the panel heard of something that was missed (by the students) in the programme was within the area of financial management and accounting.

It may rather be a 'problem' that the ambition level of the programme is on the high side, and that consequently the total volume of the curriculum may be rather too large. This is also shown in the teaching schedule, with its 77 obligatory 'course days' plus a one-week excursion to Strassburg and Brussels and the fact that the programme stretches over somewhat more than two years. In addition, much work must be spent on the Master thesis. The interviews made it clear that the programme managers, as well as the teaching staff and the students, were very much aware of this. Compared to the workload of many other similar programmes it would not be unfair to say that the credit count might well have been set somewhat higher than 60 ECTS.

The high workload is defended on the grounds that any credit definition between 60 and 90 would be asymmetric in the relation 'normal' course definitions (90 would obviously be too much.) and that this course can tolerate a high workload because it recruits very motivated, talented and mature students who are ready to accept the extra effort for the benefit of added learning value. All the students and alumni the panel talked to endorsed this policy strongly. The question is, however, if it is tenable in the long term. So far, the programme has only been running with three classes of around 30 students each. It is a common experience that such a new and much-demanded programme will attract the most talented and motivated students in its 'pioneer' years and that the pool of such 'exceptional' applicants may run dry after a while. With more 'average' recruitment, the scope of the programme may well prove too much for many students. Against this it can be argued that the programme is actually bound to aim at an intake quality above the average, as it will only be a natural option for people who have already made some success in their educational and professional lives. Also, given the scarcity of similar programmes at university level in Switzerland, the pool of prospective applicants is quite large. But the programme will then be dependent on a well-advertised 'elite' profile of high quality and usefulness in furthering professional careers. In this context, the clearly falling number of applicants for last year's intake is an early warning of problems that may arise. However, the panel gained the impression that the programme management are very much aware of this problem, and are convinced that the programme should be able to keep its position in such a favourable environment where the strategic efforts of the university and the needs of the nation's and canton's capital converge to create a unique arena for a programme of this kind. However, the panel is also of the opinion that the programme cannot take very much more cargo on board without shedding some of the existing content. A possible solution may be to keep the greater part of the programme as a solid core, while some other parts (such as a deepening of knowledge about regulatory/administrative links with the European Union) are branched out into elective modules that reflect broad, but different professional areas. But the programme would then lose some of its generalist character.

4.3.3 Relation to relevant scientific knowledge

The acquisition of scientific knowledge is claimed to stand at the centre of the learning aims of the programme. In their daily lives of professional work managers in public administration must be able to solve problems and make decisions with the support of research-based knowledge. The programme aims at preparing its students for this, first of all through the use of teachers who are themselves active researchers, and who teach parts of the curriculum where their own research is relevant. The self-evaluation also gives several examples from most of the modules of how scientific knowledge and the use of scientific method are integrated in the learning process. The introduction to scientific method starts in the 'basic course', where students are introduced to the theory of science and empirical social research. At the same time, students are directed to relate this theoretical knowledge to the domain of professional practice through the choice of theme and preparatory work for their master thesis. For this reason, and probably because the students continue in their jobs while following the programme, most students choose to write their thesis on a topic that is relevant for their own occupational position.

The master thesis makes up an important and sizable part of the students' workload. Work on the thesis takes place parallel to the ordinary course work throughout the greater part of the programme. The students were generally quite satisfied with the counselling and other support they receive in connection with thesis work and the quality of the end products seems to be

high. During the site visit the panel were given the opportunity to look at a number of theses and although the panel was not in a position to study them closely enough to make any real assessment, the general impression was very positive. Several of the theses that had received high marks had been published in an internal publication series.

Still, the integration of scientific method always has a practical aim: the usefulness of such knowledge and skills in relation to public management. The students of the EMPA programme are therefore not being systematically prepared for scientific work. It should also be kept in mind that nearly all students are holders of academic degrees, some of them even doctorates, which calls for a flexible and individualised attitude to the different learning demands of the students in this respect. However, the programme management stresses the importance of maintaining close links to the world of research, as this must always characterise higher education at the post-graduate level. The students that were interviewed supported this and expressed the view that the students valued the opportunity to theorise over the more practical areas that make up the domain of public administration and to get close to real research within the relevant fields.

4.3.4 Interdisciplinarity

In the self-evaluation the EMPA programme is described as interdisciplinary and functionally oriented. This means that the content is determined by the various needs and challenges that confront managers in the public domain and is therefore drawn from a variety of academic disciplines and professional competence areas. Partly, the curriculum is also decided on the grounds of what is considered crucial, or basic, themes within each of these academic disciplines.

The panel has certain problems in seeing that the programme is really organised as an interdisciplinary unit, as there seems to be little interaction between the various disciplines; they are not to any great extent integrated with each other in the learning processes. The panel would therefore suggest the term ‘multi-disciplinary’, which would describe a course where the various disciplines work side by side or in a chronological sequence rather than in integration. When asked about this, both the programme management and the students answered that interdisciplinarity is treated as a theme at the beginning of the programme, but that further on the integrating processes take place mostly in the reflective minds of the individual students, but also to some lesser extent in the teaching and student counselling. It is particularly in their master theses, in the project work and in some case studies that the students have an opportunity to integrate content from different disciplines. The multi-disciplinary composition of the classes (i.e. the students’ educational and professional backgrounds) also helps students to look beyond their own narrow professional field. In any case, the panel does not consider this an important quality issue. An interdisciplinary programme would not intrinsically rank above a multi-disciplinary one, and the multi-disciplinary approach is always the safer procedure as it can rely on well-established formats of knowledge and knowledge presentation.

4.3.5 Teaching methods

The self-evaluation explains that the EMPA at the University of Bern is a programme that is strongly based on the transfer of knowledge, and that consequently the greater part of the teaching is carried out by researchers or other specialists in the form of class lectures. This also underlines the fact the programme, in spite of its clear orientation towards the practical-

professional world, is a continued education programme at university level, with an academic-intellectual attitude to content and learning. At the same time, it is documented how a range of other teaching and learning methods are employed: team teaching (two or more teachers at the same time), partner/group work, case work (organised as intensive group work or 'station circuit' work), podium discussion (where more than one expert discuss in front of the students) and single work (in the teaching context; not the reading of course literature). Like the content volume of the programme syllabus, the total load of obligatory teaching lessons for the students is quite high – much higher than the usual load for a 60 credits course. (77 course days with 485 contact hours for teaching or other organised learning activities, which equals some 15 – 18 weekly lessons in a one-year full-time course, depending on the number of teaching weeks.) The total number of student working hours is set at a maximum of 1800, in accordance with the ECTS expectancy for 60 credits, but no monitoring/evaluation of hours actually spent has been carried through. Obviously, there will be great individual variations but the panel is inclined to believe that many students must spend more than 1800 hours.

The use of the different teaching methods is not arbitrary. On the contrary: for the basic course and all the seven modules of the main course, there is a division of the content into (typically around 12 – 15) sub-fields, which is each given a defined number of 'contact' (teaching) hours and a reference to the teaching methods that will be employed. The choice of teaching/learning method is decided with reference to how the subject content is related to the acquisition of professional competences. The panel must commend the programme management for its conscious and considered attitude to the use of teaching methods, so that all is not left to be decided by the individual teacher. On the whole, the panel finds that the choice of teaching and didactic methods is reasonable. There was ample evidence that students were motivated by the teaching and spurred on to work independently and take responsibility for their own learning. The programme management should reconsider the number of taught lessons in view of this fact.

Still, the panel challenged programme managers, teachers and students with questions why there were not more interactive study methods and received fairly unanimous replies from all groups that the present dominance of lectures was perceived as functioning well for this type of programme. In fact we heard 'light' criticism of group work sessions that did not always work well, and were therefore seen as a (relative) waste of time, when there would have been more to learn by listening to the teacher. No doubt this has a connection with the fact that this programme employs a large number of external, often highly profiled, experts in various fields that the students find interesting and inspiring.

The self-evaluation discusses briefly the effectiveness of different interactive study methods in relation to class lecturing and gives an account of how case studies that cut across several modules were introduced in order to further the integrative and work-oriented skills of the students. However, after the first run with these case studies, this model was soon found to be too time-consuming and burdensome in an already pressed timetable, so case studies were only continued in the management module. It is interesting to note, by the way, that the initial suggestion of more case studies originated in the *Fachbeirat*, which indicates that external stakeholder and academic representatives can fertilise a programme with new ideas, although in this case a commendable initiative led to a work overload.

The panel heard that the programme management is continually considering opportunities for an increase in interactive study methods. The panel supports this, although there seems to be general satisfaction with the teaching profile as it now is. Also, an increase in more time-

consuming methods must be compensated through a reduction in frontal teaching, as the total teaching load shouldn't get any higher than is now. Obviously, the favourable situation with a class that spends much time together during the teaching blocks will lead to much informal discussion outside the lessons, which may to some extent reduce the need for interactive lessons. But there is always the danger that students will 'hide' passively behind a too teacher-centred approach. An 'easy' way of securing interactivity is systematically to demand or expect that students are well prepared for the lessons and that time is allowed for class discussions on the subjects that are treated in the lectures. The panel agrees that much reliance on group work, with consecutive presentations in class, may often be rather inefficient, although there were statements by some students that too little attention was given to students' presentations. The panel would consider the 'art' or 'method' of making public oral presentations a skill that is generally important for public managers to master.

The possibility for students to make personal (formative) self-assessments of their progression is secured in the basic course. A tasks-and-questions catalogue has been developed for each content area (by former students themselves!), against which the students may exercise self-control of how well they are faring. Their answers and solutions will then be assessed by the teachers who are responsible for the basic course module.

There is no similar arrangement in the seven modules of the main course. These all have summative, formal assessments at the end and the feeling is that the additional introduction of formative self-assessment procedures would mean an overburdening of the course with evaluative activities. There is also a discussion whether the students should be organised in learning groups, for this and other learning purposes. This has proved difficult to arrange systematically, since the students come from all corners of Switzerland, but in actual fact most students find together in informal groups. It is the panel's opinion that further use of interactive study methods would have to be of the oral type, as the students are also occupied with project work and master thesis throughout the duration of the course. These also provide opportunities for interactive relations between teacher and student.

On the whole, it is the panel's assessment that 'the forms of teaching and didactic methods used support the achievement of the programme's goals and objectives. The forms and methods of teaching that have been chosen are suitable for conveying the material in question and motivate students to learn independently and on their own responsibility. The variety of methods used makes allowance for the different learning types in the student population.' (The OAQ Accreditation Guide's wording.). The panel would like to add that some more use of interactive learning methods would have been beneficial from a didactic point of view, but that this can only find place in the programme at the expense of other activities.

Further, it is the panel's clear impression that the programme manages the dual task of holding a high academic level, while at same time bringing its students in rather close contact with the living world of public management. The excursion to Brussels and Strassburg is a good example of this, as is the widespread use of external experts from the various public administration areas. The panel almost exclusively were given positive statements about the quality of teaching.

4.3.6 Assessment of students during the course

Students are formally assessed at the end of each module through different types of tests that are communicated at the beginning of the programme. All these module tests are 'open book'

tests and they are assessed by the teacher who is responsible for the module, often together with other teachers. The module exams, which all of them receive marks and are weighted in accordance with their number of ECTS credit points, are mostly of relatively brief duration and there is considerable variation in form. Some are oral and some written; some contain a large number of questions that require the production of short, precise answers under time pressure, while the project work and the master thesis require work in depth over a long period of time. The final exam is a discussion on the basis of the master thesis (*Masterprüfung*). The panel was convinced that the varied examination forms will test a broad range of skills and knowledge that are relevant to the learning aims of the programme. The many formative tests that students take as part of the obligatory course work receive feedback from the module teachers and are often marked with grades. They help the students gain a good impression of what is required in the formal exams and where they currently stand in relation to the learning aims. The panel heard from the students that were interviewed that there is general student satisfaction with the scope and format of examinations.

The *Reglement über das Weiterbildungsprogramm Public Administration der Universität Bern, Art. 13, Abs. 1* states that the students' master theses will be revised and marked by one or two teachers. During the interviews it became clear that in actual practice this generally means one rather than two, due to the workload of the teaching staff. In the panel's view, thesis work is such an important part of the programme that the products ought to be assessed by two examiners. It might also be worth consideration to let people from the professional world outside give their appreciation of the theses. This would agree well with the mission and aims of the programme.

The self-evaluation discusses the question to what extent practice-related competences should have an even greater place in the curriculum, and consequently also in the tests, - or whether many such competences are more effectively learned in the job environment. *If* practice-related competences were to be given even more weight than they presently have in the programme (and the panel agrees with the self-evaluation that the value of this is doubtful, as it would be at the expense of the theoretical orientation of the programme) this would require that new test formats had to be developed.

As a general conclusion, the panel finds that the assessment arrangements in the programme comply with the standard that requires that 'objectives, content, methods and frequency of the continuous assessment of students' performance and of the examinations are in keeping with the educational objectives and the teaching content. Students are informed periodically about the results they have achieved during continuous assessment and in exams.'

4.3.7 *Conditions for acquiring certificates of achievement and academic degree*

The OAQ standard requires that these conditions are regulated and published. The panel finds that the proceedings for quality assuring the award of the Executive Master Degree in Public Administration at the University of Bern – or any credited part of that programme – is taken care of through a detailed Regulation that is published and made known to the students. The Regulation lays down examinations and assessment guidelines for the programme and all its constituent parts. The Regulation was recently (autumn 2007) evaluated internally, with the result that certain changes were made. The panel finds that the programme complies with the OAQ standard.

4.4 Teaching staff

4.4.1 *The teachers' qualifications*

The EMPA programme relies to a great extent on a high number of external teachers who lecture in restricted fields where they possess expert competence. The main criterion for selecting teachers is their expertise in the relevant field, which however also means that some of the teachers will lack formal qualifications and/or long experience in university teaching. The panel finds that this is a wise policy in a programme that covers such broad and different content areas and that places such high value on first hand knowledge of the different areas of professional practice. The alternative would have been to use only trained university staff, which probably would have meant more competent teaching, but also less profiled expertise and less proximity to the world of professional practice. As stated above, the students gave unanimous expression to the view that the opportunity to listen to so many top experts in the various fields was perceived as one of the most inspiring features of the programme.

This is not to say that educational competence and teaching experience are not borne in mind when selecting and employing teaching staff (ref. OAQ standard 4.01.01). Many of the externally recruited teachers do have teaching experience. The programme management are very much aware of the challenges that are connected with the use of such a high number of teachers without formal educational training. By taking actively part in the teaching themselves, they see to it that 'an appropriate proportion of the teaching is carried out by permanent staff' (ref. OAQ standard 4.01.03). As teachers themselves, they also keep good contact with students and fellow teachers in a rather transparent small community, so that externally recruited teachers who function less well will soon be 'found out'. As external teachers are never recruited for more than one year at the time, weak performers are not asked to take part the following year. Recorded instances of such 'teacher failure' are however few and far between, so most external teachers continue from one year to the other, which secures a good measure of stability. The panel were also told that the programme management is very determined to use all teachers precisely in the areas where they hold strong qualifications: basic theory and methodology is preferably covered by permanent staff teachers, while practical experience and examples are provided by practice teachers.

Nor does the widespread use of external teachers from the professional fields mean that the level of academic qualifications is substantially lowered. On the contrary, of all the 55 presently active teachers (internal and external) only 5 do not possess a doctoral degree or a professorial status. More than half are professors. In other words, formal qualifications are very high.

In the self-evaluation a comment is made on the problems associated with recruiting female teachers to the programme. The programme management maintains that considerable efforts have been made to increase the number of women, but with little success. This is said to mirror the general situation in both academia and professional practice. The panel finds this a little bit odd, as one might expect that women are now well represented in both the social sciences at the university and in several of the relevant professional fields, although maybe not so much in top positions. But the panel do not have sufficient information to really contest this argument.

According to the self-evaluation and the programme management, recruitment to the teaching positions has never been a problem. The programme is said to enjoy a good image throughout

Switzerland and external specialists are attracted to the programme exactly because they are allowed to teach in their specialist field. The university is also able to pay adequate salaries. Recruitment takes place partly through the networks of the module leaders but there is also a high instance of external specialists applying for a position on their own initiative.

4.4.2 *Consequences of evaluations*

The self-evaluation gives examples of how the module and programme evaluations have led to changes in the teaching programme. It is also claimed – and interviews confirmed this – that module evaluations on several occasions have led to contracts with individual teachers being terminated or abridged. Conversely, particularly good evaluation feedback has led to the extension of contracts. Still, permanent university staff and contracted teachers alike are treated with respect, and ‘without overreactions’. Normally, the first indications of weak teaching performance will lead to a talk between the teacher in question and the module leader, where one tries to identify the problem and find remedial measures.

The programme management do not see it as their responsibility to recommend specific continued education courses for their (internal and external) teaching staff in order to enhance their teaching competence, although such a course is being offered at the University and several course teachers have actually attended it. As a basic rule, the teaching qualifications of the University’s permanent academic staff are regarded as given. The panel are inclined to think that the programme management could afford to be somewhat more demanding towards its teachers in this respect, especially since the programme enjoys such a favourable recruitment situation.

4.4.3 *Balance of teaching and research among teaching staff*

The balance between the teaching staff’s activities in teaching and research (and other activities, particularly administrative duties) is usually not regulated at programme level, nor is that the case for the EMPA at Bern. For those teachers who are members of the permanent staff of the University of Bern, this is balanced through the general policy of the University. The panel regards it as outside their mandate to discuss this aspect of the University’s policy but consider it a given fact that the academic staff of the University are generally active researchers. Moreover, a programme like this is in a particularly difficult position in this respect, as it recruits a relatively high proportion of its teachers externally. As it is pointed out in the self-evaluation, the programme management cannot regulate the research activities of its externally recruited staff. However, the volumes of their teaching contracts are in no way so extensive that they stand in the way of research activity. What the management can do, is to see to it that the *former* research activity of those who are recruited is not too distant in time or outdated – in broad terms. In the more practice-related parts of the programme, research activity should not be regarded as essential.

Activity reports for the year 2007 show that the programme teachers who are employed at the Competence Centre for Public Administration spend an average of 40 per cent of their working hours on teaching-related activities, another 40 per cent on administration and services, while research takes up 20 per cent. The panel regards the relatively low research input as a challenge for the Centre and the programme, as the programme is strongly profiled as research-informed. This is also discussed as a critical point in the self-evaluation, with the conclusion that it must be an objective for the next years to reduce the relatively high number of hours spent on administrative activities in order to increase steady activity in research. The

panel can only endorse this view. The need for extensive efforts in the administrative area can be explained with reference to the needs that relate to the building up of the programme, so far. The entrepreneurial phase now being over, the programme should look for ways to shift some resources from administration to research and programme development.

4.4.4 Opportunities for mobility

Like in the field of regulating the basic activities of the teaching staff (ref. 4.4.3), the question of arranging for mobility opportunities – and to actually achieve mobility – among the teaching staff is made problematic by the fact that roughly three quarters of the staff are recruited externally. Thus, the basic arrangements that regulate their jobs and opportunities are decided elsewhere. To some extent, the same applies to most of those who are employed by the University of Bern, as their jobs are regulated partly by the University, and partly by some faculty or institute. In other words, the opportunities of the programme management to actively promote staff mobility are limited.

In a different perspective, the programme itself is an exercise in mobility, as it draws teachers from all over Switzerland and from several academic disciplines and professional areas. Also, nearly one fifth of the teachers come from outside Switzerland, which must be regarded as a fairly high proportion and helps to ‘internationalise’ the programme.

According to information given in the self-evaluation, further opportunities for mobility will be created through the participation of the Competence Centre for Public Management in the Swiss Public Administration Network (SPAN). The network was established in 2007 and includes corresponding academic communities at the universities of Lausanne and Lugano, in addition to Bern. In the panel’s view, the total mobility situation in relation to the programme is satisfactory, given its special position.

4.5 Students

4.5.1 Admission

Criteria for the admission to the EMPA at Bern are laid down in the internal Regulation document for the programme. There are three basic requirements:

- A university degree. (Exception from this criterion is possible on grounds of proven qualifications via other routes. Conditions for exception are formulated and actively communicated on the programme’s website and in the programme leaflet)
- 3 years of employment in a leading or managing position in the public sector
- Sufficient command of French and English to be able to follow teaching in those languages.

Prospective students apply by means of a standard form and admission is competitive in the sense that the best applicants will be admitted in accordance with their score on a set of criteria. In addition to the three requirements mentioned above the criteria include:

- Assessment of performance in selection interview, by programme management
- Integration in the class
- Age (Preferred: 30 – 55)
- Documentation of optimal conditions in personal and job life, including support by employer in terms of time and/or finance.

On the one hand, these criteria seem fairly robust; on the other they may be applied with certain flexibility, so that the class may be composed with a favourable diversity in terms of age and occupational/geographical backgrounds in mind. So far, the programme has been successful in this. However, this also means that there is no '100 % fairness' in the admission process. The average student age is 42 and recruitment is fairly heterogeneous both in terms of geographical and educational/professional backgrounds.

The panel concludes that the conditions for admission are regulated and clearly communicated externally.

4.5.2 Gender equality

For idealistic as well as practical reasons, the programme management declare themselves as committed to the furthering of gender equality in the programme's admission policy. Not only is gender mainstreaming a general aim in society; a good mix of the two sexes will also provide the best socio-cultural environment for learning. Consequently, a mild form of 'affirmative action' procedure will prevail within the general principles gender-neutral admission, so that woman will be preferred for a man with equal qualifications. Maybe as a result of this policy, the percentage of admitted women has risen from 23 in 2003 to 31 in 2005, and then again to 34 in 2007. Still, these figures are not regarded as wholly satisfying when one keeps in mind that women now outnumber men in higher education. The (allegedly) low percentage of women among the programme's main target group (higher management) is given as the main reason for a (correspondingly) modest number of females who apply and are admitted to the programme. This explanation is perceived as plausible by the panel, who will also commend the programme management for its conscious efforts in this area and the results they have achieved so far. On the other hand, the panel also notice the fact that no woman is represented in any of the programme's steering or advisory councils and consider this a weakness.

The panel concludes that the conditions affecting the programme ensure equal opportunities for men and women, in particular with a view to 'the special need of people in part-time employment and those with family responsibilities' (OAQ standard 5.02.02).

4.5.3 Mobility opportunities

There is an exchange agreement between the IDHEAP programme at Lausanne and the Bern EMPA that is actively promoted by the management. But so far only a handful of students have used this opportunity – all of them coming to Bern from the IDHEAP programme, which by the way has a looser structure that makes the exchange a more attractive option. One Bern student is now scheduled to visit IDHEAP in 2009.

There are several reasons why the EMPA programme does not lend itself too easily to student mobility. For one thing, the typical student at the programme is over 40 years of age and working part time. Many have family obligations and the majority also live outside the city of Bern. Thus the programme itself will create sufficient 'mobility' in the daily lives of most of them. In any case, students who come to the University just to take a 60 credits course are not likely to be the most eager users of mobility opportunities. Secondly, the programme, although it is divided into modules, to a certain extent also relies on continuous progression and the benefits of keeping the students together in a coherent class situation throughout. International mobility, too, is less relevant because of the programme's focus on Swiss

conditions. The management therefore does not actively promote other types of mobility than the exchange programme with Lausanne but the panel still finds that sufficient opportunities for mobility exist for the Bern EMPA students.

4.5.4 Learning support and counselling

According to the self-evaluation, the programme management places great emphasis on the students' access to counselling. In addition to the introductory orientations, the class organisation gives ample opportunities for clearing up practical problems and to offer advice on a general level. Individual academic counselling is mainly the responsibility of the programme manager and the module leaders. This makes up a team of five responsible members of staff to cater for 30 students – a ratio of 1:7. Students are offered rather intensive counselling in connection with their project work and master theses, while the module leaders have to be present and available for private counselling for a certain time that stretches beyond their own lessons (60 per cent of the sessions). The programme has also arranged for the opportunity to speak to alumni, if a student for some reason wishes to consult someone with previous student experience from the programme.

The quality of counselling is one of the themes of the different evaluation procedures, especially in the discussions with the class representatives and in the module evaluations. The self-evaluation gives examples of how evaluation results concerning the quality of counselling have led to changes and increased student satisfaction. On the whole, students express great satisfaction with the readiness of responsible teachers to offer advice and guidance, even outside sessions, and the panel conclude that this aspect is very well taken care of.

4.6. Facilities and premises

4.6.1 Infrastructure

The question of suitable infrastructure is one that the panel can deal with very briefly, as there was ample documentation that the EMPA students at the University of Bern are offered very good conditions for their study work. Their 'study base' is located in the modern and well-equipped *UniSchanzeneck (UniS)* building, in close proximity to the Competence Centre. The panel were taken on a guided tour through these premises and were able to see what rooms and equipment are available for teaching, group work and recreational purposes. The self-evaluation gives further account of the opportunities that are given for using the library facilities of the Competence Centre and other University libraries, including access to the University's data bank. Easy access to the internet and to reading desks in the Law Library in the Main Building is also part of this infrastructural package.

The programme starts with a one-week session, which is partly allotted to information and initial guidance. As part of this 'kick-off package' students are given an introduction to research method and information about the use of the libraries, in particular the electronic catalogues. The panel conclude that the infrastructural conditions around the EMPA programme are excellent.

4.6.2 Financial resources

The programme is basically financed through the admission fees that students pay. The fee amounts to SFr 45 000 per student, which is quite high compared to other continued education

programmes in Switzerland. So far, the income has been sufficient to pay off a loan that was taken when the programme was initiated and to achieve a balance with the surplus of SFr 56 000 is achieved after two runs of the programme. The break-even point is calculated to lie with a student number of 24 per intake, so the third intake of only 26 students was perhaps a warning sign that the programme must make every effort to keep the intake as close to 30 as possible. However, for the purposes of this evaluation, there is no doubt that the programme has adequate resources to obtain its objectives over several cycles.

5. Concluding assessments

5.1 All round assessment

It is the expert panel's judgement, based on observations and assessments that are recorded earlier in this report, that the Executive Master in Public Administration at the University of Bern is a programme that is very well organised, managed, resourced and delivered. The programme answers an obvious national and local demand within the area of public administration and is well profiled in relation to a defined target group, with a comprehensive and relevant curriculum.

The programme can draw on considerable resources, both in terms of the qualifications of its teaching staff and in terms of the infrastructural and organisational conditions that prevail in the context of the University of Bern, its Centre of Continued Education, its Competence Centre for Public Management and a highly competent programme leadership. This infrastructural and organisational support offers favourable conditions for the programme's long-term stability and development. The programme has so far been able to recruit very able students within its main target group, and to deliver correspondingly good results. The panel have particularly noticed the high degree of satisfaction among alumni and current students.

The panel's general assessment is that the EMPA at the University of Bern is a programme of predominantly high quality throughout and that it meets all the accreditation standards of the OAQ and the EAPAA.

5.2 Special features; strengths and weaknesses

As a 60 credits continued education programme that is delivered over two years, and with its teaching organised in two-and-a-half days' teaching blocks (occasionally one-week blocks), the programme shares many characteristics with other similarly organised courses: the programme recruits mature and motivated post-graduate students who take the programme while staying on in their jobs and with the specific aim of furthering their management careers. The considerable cost in time and money that is invested by the individual student and his/her employer is also a strongly motivating factor. The programme can therefore benefit from an intake quality that will be higher than for the average higher education programme, while the typical 'class' organisation of the teaching and learning activities makes for a coherent and stimulating student environment, close connections between students and the programme leaders and its 'core' teachers and a "secure" situation for the individual. This type of programme obviously also carries risks and drawbacks: students may miss opportunities of partaking in normal campus life and they may find the total workload of combining job, travel and study effort too burdensome. However, the panel found no indication that this was actually impairing the quality of this programme.

The programme has many strong features and the panel would like to draw attention to some of them. For one thing, students are very well taken care of and followed up by the programme management and the module leaders. This is particularly evident in the counselling that accompanies the production of the master theses, so that this becomes a real learning experience. From what the panel could see, the best theses held a very high standard. Another strong point is the programme's high relevance quality, with its closeness to the professional sphere of public administration. This is partly secured thorough the curriculum, partly through the varied – and often practice-oriented – work methods, and not least through

the widespread use of external teachers who are real experts in their fields. At the same time, the formal academic qualifications of the teachers are high throughout. The curriculum also manages to balance quite well the two aims of securing closeness to the practice field while at the same time maintaining a theoretical-academic orientation that agrees with the programme's status as a university provision at Master Degree level. Finally, the panel would like to mention the extensive teaching programme, which actually secures a density of teaching that is higher than for most ordinary full time programmes.

Of weak points the panel noticed fewer. Rather, these are risks and challenges; problem areas that the programme leadership must continually keep an eye on. First and foremost, the ambitious curriculum and teaching programme seem to be threatening to break the natural boundaries of a 60 credits course. While this of course also is a 'strength' (ref. the previous paragraph), it burdens the students with a workload that actually might correspond to 70 or 80 credits in stead of the 60 they are getting. With a slightly weaker intake quality this may become more problematic than it presently seems to be. Further, the use of a large number of external teachers (also noted as a positive factor in many respects!) without formal pedagogic qualifications carries the danger of didactically weak teaching. The panel heard statements that referred to teachers who functioned less well, although the general picture is positive. A third point concerns the combination of a high academic level and an orientation on the practice of public administration. This is a characteristic feature of PA programmes: to hold a high level academically, while also being meaningful for people who are working in the field. Although the panel on the whole find these two aspects to be satisfactorily balanced, it is always a contestable issue – and one that may become critical if the curriculum is reduced (ref. statements above) and sharpened. As a fourth point, the panel would like to mention that while the quality assurance routines seem to rely a bit too much on student opinion, the student influence is rather too weak in the programme's decision-making and consultative bodies. Finally, the panel has noticed the clearly falling application rate for the programme. Although this is not a threat to the quality of the programme at present, it might well be if the rate continues to drop and differently composed student groups would require accommodating measures in curriculum and teaching in the future.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Recommendations on enhancing quality

Although the panel studied extensive documentation about the EMPA programme at the University of Bern it had only one day at its disposal for interviews during the site visit. On this background, and particularly since the assessment of the programme is generally very positive, the panel wish to be modest in its recommendations concerning measures that might further enhance the quality of the programme. It is the panel's clear impression that the programme management is continually making competent reassessments of strengths and weaknesses, including the consideration of appropriate measures. The few recommendations are therefore more put forward as suggested ideas for the programme management to consider:

- The programme management should consider the total workload of the programme, as this strikes the panel as rather stretching beyond the boundaries of a 60 credits course.
- In so doing, the programme management has several options: it may reduce the volume of the programme by seeking to 'shed possible overweight' throughout the modules; or a reduction might take place through a sharpening its focus, in which case a keen eye must be kept on the balance between practice-orientation and academic level; or the volume might be kept, albeit not for the individual student, who would be given the choice between elective modules in part of the programme; or, finally, the conclusion may be that the programme is best kept with the volume it now has.
- Although there is a well-functioning system of internal quality assurance for the programme, the panel would like to recommend the inclusion of some other mechanism that is less connected with student appreciation, and more based on the collective participation of the teaching community.
- The panel recommends the consideration of increased student participation in the decision-making and counselling bodies that relate to the programme.
- The programme leadership is recommended to keep a keen eye on recruitment and to make every effort to stimulate a high quality intake. While a high quality intake has a positive effect on the quality of any programme, this is particularly the case with a programme that demands so much of its students and that aims at qualifications for leadership positions in public affairs.
- The programme leadership should consider enhancing the international orientation of the programme. The practice of public administration is becoming more and more international. An elective visit to Strasbourg and Brussels is a little bit too modest.

6.2 Recommendation on accreditation

The panel recommend that the programme Executive Master in Public Administration at the University of Bern is granted unconditional accreditation.