

GUIDANCE FOR DESIGNING AND DELIVERING MPAs

This Guidance has been approved by the Public Administration Committee (of the Joint University Council), the Public Management & Policy Association, and the Public Administration Specialist Group of the UK's Political Studies Association. The Guidance has also benefitted from contributions by staff of the National School of Government and of Government Skills.

28 January 2010

Introduction

At the Public Administration Committee's York conference in September 2008, the Committee agreed to set up a working group, chaired by the PAC Vice-Chair Teaching and Learning to formulate a statement of guidance on postgraduate programmes for public administration and management. The guidance was to build on the discussions at the conference workshops led jointly by the Public Management and Policy Association (PMPA) and the National School of Government (NSG). These workshops included contributions from the Cabinet Secretary and from staff of Government Skills.

The working group was established and early on identified the following assumptions for its activity:

1. The guidance should be expressed in an inclusive way.
2. In the university world, the guidance should prove very useful to emerging providers of MPAs and other Masters programmes in public policy and public management.
3. The guidance should offer a way of opening up and continuing a dialogue between bodies such as PAC, the PMPA, the Public Administration Specialist Group of the UK's Political Studies Association, the National School of Government (NSG), and Government Skills.

Working group events took place in December 2008, May 2009 and November 2009. They involved participants from the Public Administration Committee, the Public Management and Policy Association, the Public Administration Specialist Group of the UK's Political Studies Association, the National School of Government, and Government Skills. These events and continuing exchanges of ideas produced this statement of guidance.

The working group activity identified the following aims for the guidance:

1. To increase the quality of postgraduate programmes in public administration and management
2. To increase their credibility within the practitioner and academic communities
3. To encourage the future development of postgraduate programmes so as to better meet national, regional and local employer needs, and
4. To focus on the UK situation and also to underpin the international standing of UK programmes in public administration and management

We hope the guidelines will be useful to a variety of people:

1. Public managers at all levels of government and public services who are considering whether or not to study on an MPA or other HE postgraduate programme in public administration and management.
2. HRD professionals who are purchasers of courses from universities.
3. Providers of MPAs who might use these guidelines to review the current design of their programmes or use them to design new programmes.

We would also hope that others, including university senior managers, individual public service organisations, partnerships and multi organisational public agencies, and the Civil Service, will also benefit from the existence of guidance on MPAs.

This statement of guidance will be kept under review to ensure it continues to address and integrate the diverse contributions and demands made on higher education programmes in Public Administration and Public Management, which we assume should continue to evolve and develop as circumstances change.

This guidance is in two parts.

Section 1: General Requirements of Masters of Public Administration (MPA)

The MPA is a course that:

1. Aims to contribute to the development of greater professionalism in public services leadership and management.
2. Is designed to prepare people for careers in public services leadership and management and/or to help people accelerate their careers if they are already in leadership and management positions.
3. Is intellectually challenging and places a high priority on personal development (which includes learning how to think critically and how to be reflective).
4. Helps individuals be more effective by fostering skills in evidence-based decision making, interpreting and applying policy agendas, anticipating future trends in public services, and adapting actions and activities to suit specific public services contexts in order to support government (central, regional and local) in the development and delivery of policy goals.
5. Is an interdisciplinary programme offering an appreciative understanding of the key elements in the field of study of Public Administration and Public Management and their interrelations (see below for indicative content of an MPA).
6. Includes opportunities to explore key concepts across institutional boundaries within the public sector.
7. Uses student-centred teaching and learning activities.
8. Explores the relationship between theory and practice and does this, where appropriate, through the use of action learning methods.
9. Has at least one substantial work-focused project concerned with practical outcomes in terms of improvement and/or innovation in public services, and which may in some course specifications form the core of the MPA.
10. Is designed and evaluated with the involvement of public services employers and which is supported in its delivery by employers through the provision of guest speakers, access to organisations for purposes of work-based learning, and visits to public services organisations. It is envisaged that in some circumstances teaching and assessment on the course will be organised and provided by a team comprising university academics and public services practitioners.

MPAs may be designed for individuals looking for career preparation or for individuals seeking career acceleration. It is important, therefore, that course specifications are clear about the intended type of entrants to the MPA and that course learning outcomes and teaching, learning and assessment strategies are articulated so as to deliver coherent and satisfying experiences aligned to the type of entrants. This may have more significance for the design and delivery of teaching, learning and assessment strategies and methods than for the nature of course learning outcomes. For example, individuals being prepared for careers in public leadership and management need to be enabled to further develop the same sets of skills and personal qualities as individuals

on courses designed for experienced public services leaders and managers. However, the approaches, methods and learning activities used will probably be very different. If a single MPA course is aimed at both career preparation and career acceleration, then the course specification needs to show how these different aims can be reconciled within the same course.

Section 2 Indicative Content for Higher Education MPAs

‘Public Administration’ can include content from many different disciplines and the working party wished to encourage that. The intention of providing indicative content is to steer MPAs towards key areas of importance to student and employer needs while at the same time encouraging responsiveness to the specific and changing needs of public services at national, regional, and local level and to the specific and changing needs of the clients of specific public services areas (e.g. health, education, criminal justice).

The working party assumed that some differentiation of MPAs is healthy. For example, differentiation and experimentation in terms of content can allow comparisons to be made between MPAs and can enable learning between MPA providers to take place.

At the same time, the provision of this indicative content should assist all the key stakeholders in their conversations about MPAs and the consequences they seek or offer in terms of the development of expertise and professionalism.

This guidance structures the content of an MPA into three core modules and proposes possible specialisations.

CORE MODULE 1: ‘Public Context’: This module aims at a general understanding of, and insights into, the big issues and challenges facing public services and key aspects of the public services context (including, the political, international, historical, legal, economic, philosophical, constitutional, and institutional) aspects in which the activities of public administration and public management take place. Its content includes:

Theory of state: including an understanding of the meaning and need for proper ‘governance’ (which should permeate all public sector work) and legitimacy/authority and outcomes/public value.

Understanding the government framework: including the civil service and its ethics, wider public sector relationships, legislation.

CORE MODULE 2: ‘Strategic Management and Public Policy Analysis and Development’: This module aims at developing capabilities in strategic thinking and policy. It looks at what happens – often behind closed doors in Whitehall and in regional and municipal centres of policy making – where politics and administration meet;

maintaining accountability and governance in a complex and complicated systems of governance, including those which involve multi-agency working. Its content includes:

Strategy in government: drivers, futures work, relationship to plans, performance management and budgets; the growth of strategic policy making.

Policy development: the cycle, tools and techniques to manage policy development, including creativity and option appraisal, and impact assessment (including risks and evidence).

CORE MODULE 3: 'Public management': This module aims to develop skills, knowledge and attitudes needed by those responsible for policy implementation and operational management of public services. The focus is on the leadership and management of public services organizations and partnerships in order to achieve public value, accountability, and responsiveness to the public. Its content includes:

Policy implementation: planning, procurement and strategic commissioning, performance measurement and evaluation, partnership working, regional government structures.

Policy operation/operational delivery: systems analysis, personnel and influencing strategies etc

Specialisations:

The working group favours differentiation of MPAs and suggests that this can occur through specialisation in core modules or through offering option modules. The following specialisations are suggested.

1. Public services areas (e.g. education, health, criminal justice, tax, etc.)
2. Managing government professionals and professional knowledge
3. Multi-agency working
4. Risk Management
5. Improving financial management in government
6. Communications and engagement of stakeholders
7. Leadership of change
8. Public Services and Ethics

The History of the Production of the Guidance

The guidance has been produced by a working group which was instigated as a result of the workshops organised by the Public Management and Policy Association (PMPA) and the National School of Government at the Public Administration Committee's York Conference in September 2008. At the third of these workshops a proposal emerged that were to be followed up by PAC. This was to set up a PAC working group to devise guidance on standards/benchmarks for MPAs and similar courses, with the working group to be chaired by PAC Vice-Chair Teaching and Learning.

The first meeting of the working group was a one day event that took place on 2 December 2008. The participants were:

Francis Coxhead, National School of Government
Graham Davies, National School of Government
George Foster, Centre for Public Services Management, Liverpool Business School
Paul Joyce (Chair), Public Administration Committee, and Liverpool Business School
Aileen Lawless, Centre for Public Services Management, Liverpool Business School
Joyce Liddle, Public Administration Committee and Nottingham Trent University
Andrew Massey, Public Administration Specialist Group of the UK's Political Studies Association, and Exeter University

The results of the Working Group were presented to the Annual General Meeting of PAC in January 2009, where the draft guidance received support and further development work was approved.

In May 2009 a further meeting on the draft guidance was hosted by the National School of Government at its offices in Victoria, London. The participants were:

Randhir Auluck, National School of Government
Francis Coxhead, National School of Government
Janet Grauberg, Public Management and Policy Association
Paul Joyce (Chair), Public Administration Committee, and Liverpool Business School
Tanya Lawes, Government Skills
Joyce Liddle, Public Administration Committee, and Nottingham Trent University

This meeting reviewed the draft guidelines in the light of the findings from research by Government Skills. This research was based on data obtained from interviews and focus groups. The research covered government departments, university business schools and candidates and recent graduates of MBAs and MPAs.

The meeting of the working group in November 2009 was again hosted by the National School of Government at its offices in Victoria, London. The participants were:

Francis Coxhead, National School of Government
Janet Grauberg, Public Management and Policy Association
Paul Joyce (Chair), Public Administration Committee, and Liverpool Business School
Colin Knox, Public Administration Committee, and University of Ulster
Tanya Lawes, Government Skills
Andrew Massey, Public Administration Specialist Group of the UK's Political Studies Association, and Exeter University

This meeting reviewed the draft guidance statement and made minor changes. The working group concluded that the draft guidance should be referred to the PMPA for approval and hoped that the guidance statement could be published in early 2010 as jointly approved by PAC, PMPA and the Public Administration Specialist Group of the UK's Political Studies Association and with an acknowledgement of the contributions made by staff of the National School of Government and Government Skills.