

# IS BLENDED-LEARNING HERE TO STAY? PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION EDUCATION IN ROMANIA

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## **Abstract**

*So far Covid-19 has brought serious turbulences to the higher education system be it in the form of substantial drops in research founding and international student enrolments or increases in expenses associated with digital solutions for teaching and learning, as well as funding for bridging social gaps between different categories of learners. However, while building on existent scholarship, the authors look at the Covid-19 crisis as an important contextual factor for integrating more practical skills in the public administration curriculum in Romania. This article compares the Romanian expectations of public administration academics with those of the practitioners and question whether a blended approach to teaching public administration might prove beneficial to preparing more adaptable and autonomous (future) civil servants. Data collected from interviews with practitioners in public administration and a survey among public administration students is expected to indicate a potential positive correlation between blended-learning and development of transversal competencies associated to and necessary for “the craft of public administration”.*

## **1. Background**

There are already more than eight decades since scholars in politics and economics, lawyers and philosophers have ground the study of public administration and argued in favor of its enduring identity crisis. [1][2][3][4][5][6][7][8][9][10] This effervescent debate could be summarized in four intellectual traditions to the study of and discourse about government. [7] In a chronological sequence, these were: the study for the development of practical wisdom (D. Waldo, R.A.W. Rhodes), practical experience (L.H. Gulick), scientific knowledge (H. Simon), and (eventually), the study of relativist perspectives or the postmodernism (R.C. Box, D.J. Farmer). [11]

*Practical wisdom* is, at its core, an interdisciplinary approach, concerned (very broadly) with three questions: (1) Where are we going? (2) Is it desirable to go there? (3) What can we do to get there? [12]. Its overall significance to understanding government in all its intricacies is undoubtful. J. Raadschelders argues that because of its interdisciplinary basis of knowledge, *practical wisdom* has pedagogical value for students, scientists, civil servants, politicians and citizens, alike. [7] The search for applied knowledge, essential to the *practical experience* approach generated a specific interest in building case studies and designing effective tools for practitioners. Consequently, it is generally sought by policy (and decision) makers, and enjoyed by students as well, for “the real-

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world sense” it provides. [7] *Scientific knowledge* allows for experimental testing of laws or principles in a monodisciplinary manner, and so, from a pedagogical point of view, it targets mostly (early stage) researchers; however, practitioners may find it relevant as well, insofar as they accept looking for solutions by themselves. Finally, *postmodernism* accommodates the cultural diversity of today’s society and is usually more accessible to specialists, e.g. mid-career officials and doctoral students. [7]

These debates have shaped the curriculum for public administration programs on both sides of the Atlantic. [5] [10] For instance, D. Waldo considers personnel, budgeting and organization as the three major traditional curriculum “areas” for public administration education and pleads that no single discipline provides the knowledge base for public administration careers [4]. R. Rhodes argues in favour of public administration returning to statecraft, and public administration education focusing on counselling, stewardship, practical wisdom, probity, judgement, diplomacy, and political nous. [10] Finally, speaking of the future of public administration education, J. Raadschelders concludes: “skills in public budgeting and finance, program evaluation, and human resource management ought to be complemented with courses on, at least, disciplinary perspectives about modern civilization, the development of government over time, and political theories about the relation between government and citizen”. [8]

The current pandemic has risen multiple questions pertaining to the future of online education: how much is possible, effective, educationally healthy [13], and would blended education become mainstream? [14] [15] This article compares the Romanian expectations of public administration academics with those of the practitioners and questions whether a blended approach to teaching public administration is beneficial to preparing more adaptable and autonomous (future) civil servants. In doing so, it aims at providing a starting point for a more comprehensive analysis of the impact Covid-19 has had on updating public administration education in Romania and abroad.

## 2. Methodology

Our research explores two main questions: 1) what is the desired profile of a civil servant working in public administration in Romania? and 2) how are public administration academic programs accommodating it? Four limits need to be observed.

Firstly, this article focuses on the Romanian central public administration and general civil service; in doing so it does not discuss the rules and regulations applicable to specific civil service positions relevant to the Romanian Parliament, the Presidential Administration, the Legislative Council, the diplomatic and consular services, custom border, police and other bodies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, as well as any other civil servants enjoying specific statutory norms (e.g. public managers, etc.). Secondly, the research differentiates between high civil servants and civil servants in management and execution positions (as regulated by the Administrative Code articles 389, 390, 392), as well between temporary and permanent civil service positions. We analysed only data relevant to civil servants in management and execution positions. Thirdly, the article does not account for the special situation of the personnel employed as personal members of the dignitary’s cabinets, nor of the magistrates or elected or appointed public officials; nor it considers the case of contractual staff which observe the labour law, and work for public organizations (mainly ministries), carrying out duties of secretariat, protocol, administration, maintenance-repairs and service, guarding and others. Finally, the data used to compile the profile of public administration alumni is relevant solely to graduates of bachelor programs that were successfully accredited according to the Romanian legislation.

This article draws from several sources. Firstly, international, peer-reviewed reports (such as those drafted by SIGMA-OECD or The World Bank Group) provided substantial assistance in decrypting some of the general principles of civil service, as well as in underlining the main concerns of the national government and the European Union institutions for the process of reforming the public administration system in Romania. Additionally, the human resource management literature, as well as the research on competence-driven curricula provided the arguments for considering blended learning a possible tool for a more hands-on and “real-world” orientated public administration education.

Secondly, we used the Romanian legislation relevant to contractual employment to public administration, civil service career, organization of higher-education system, design of internship programs, as well as all connected regulations to these main areas of interest. A selective list of legal documents, with their most recent updates that were considered is presented below.

Government Decision 1000/2006 on the organization and functioning of National Agency for Civil Servants, last revision: August 28, 2017.
Government Decision 611/2008 regarding the organization and development of civil servants' career, last revision: July 21, 2020
Government Decision 525/2016, Strategy for development of civil service, last revision: July 7, 2017.
Government Decision 650/2016 on training strategy for public administration 2016-2020, last revision: July 7, 2017.
Government Decision 905/2017 on the general registry of employees, last revision: August 24, 2018
Administrative Code, last revision: February 3, 2021

**Table 1: Selective list of legal documents consulted for this research**

Thirdly, in order to compile the desired profile of a civil servant working in public administration in Romania, we analysed the standards for several occupations included in the general domain entitled “administration and public services” (Table 2).

Fourthly, the official webpage of the National Agency of Civil Servants (dedicated to national competitions)<sup>4</sup> facilitated the collection of important data pertinent to the content of the recruitment tests and the expectations the system lays forward to its candidates.

In addition, 23 semi-structured interviews<sup>5</sup> were conducted with representatives from 12 ministries, the National Institute of Administration, the National Agency of Civil Servants and the Competition Council. Fourteen of the interviewees have previously served as members in recruitment commissions, and 7 performed HR tasks in the recruitment process. The distribution of the sample is presented in Table 3. Anonymity of the respondents was guaranteed; as such the table below contains no correlation between the ministries and HR representatives or members in the exam commissions.

<sup>4</sup> Official webpage: <http://www.anfp.gov.ro/Concursuri>

<sup>5</sup> The interviews took place in two phases: April 2019 (17 interviews) and January 2020 (6 interviews). The interviews conducted in April 2019 substantiated a National Report on the Recruitment of Civil Servants in Romania (authored by Diana Iancu).

Occupation	Required competencies	Available link (only for Romanian documents)
administrative officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• communication in the official language</li> <li>• communication in foreign languages</li> <li>• basic skills in mathematics, science and technology</li> <li>• IT competencies</li> <li>• learning competence</li> <li>• social and civic competencies</li> <li>• entrepreneurial competencies</li> <li>• cultural expression competencies</li> <li>• coordination of team work</li> </ul>	1
front desk officer		2
city hall secretary		3
documentation officer		4
legal councillor		5
chief account in public administration		6
public procurement expert		7
local expert on Roma		8
expert on prevention and fight against corruption		9
expert/specialist in public-private partnership		10
project evaluator		11
inspector (tutelage authority)		12
civil protection officer		13
fiscal inspector		14
inspector in labour security and health		15
inspector in labour protection		16
treasury inspector		17
inspector / referent human resources		18
manager of the labour security and health system		19
referent for civil registry		20
head of urbanism office		21
general school inspector		22
school inspector		23
school inspector for human resource development		24
school inspector for permanent education		25

**Table 2: List of the occupations in administration and public services**  
(Source: Romanian Authority for Qualifications)

General Secretariate of the Government	1 interview
Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration	1 interview
Ministry of Transports	1 interview
Ministry of Internal Affairs	2 interviews
Ministry of Culture and National Identity	1 interview
Ministry of Labour and Social Justice	1 interview
Ministry of Finance	1 interview
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	1 interview
Ministry of National Education	1 interview
Ministry of Health	1 interview
Ministry of Waters and Forests	1 interview
Ministry of Research and Innovation	1 interview
Ministry of Communications and Information Society	1 interview
National Institute of Administration	1 interview
National Agency of Civil Servants	4 interviews
National Institute	3 interviews
Competition Council	1 interview

**Table 3: List of the interviews (conducted in April 2019 and January 2020)**

Finally, in order to assess the profile of the Romanian public administration graduate, we analysed the competencies higher education institutions in Romania listed as outcomes of their bachelor programs. Thirty programs were investigated, of those available in the National Registry of Qualifications in the Romanian Higher Education<sup>6</sup> (Table 4 comprises the universities included in our research).

Of these programs, only one was identified as fully operational in a blended learning approach available long before the Covid-19 pandemic. The bachelor programme in the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (Bucharest) was redesigned using a blended approach starting with 2014. Data collected by the university from two surveys on students' satisfaction (conducted in February 2018 and February 2019 on a population of 620 persons, respectively 664) were used to complement the information the authors have acquired during their own teaching experience two years before the pandemic.

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<sup>6</sup> In order for universities to receive accreditation for their academic programs, they need first to introduce their learning outcomes in the National Registry of Qualifications in Higher Education (available at: <http://www.anc.edu.ro/registrul-national-al-calificarilor-din-invatamantul-superior-rncis/>). Although the intended effect of the Registry was to assist potential candidates identify the most suitable program for them, the registration process was heavily regulated (since 2009) and so variation between the learning outcomes in public administration was minimal.

“Babeş Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca
“Ovidius” University, Constanța
Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest
“Atheneum” University, Bucharest
“Aurel Vlaicu University”, Arad
“1 Decembrie 1918” University, Alba Iulia
“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Police Academy, Bucharest
“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University, Iași
University of Bucharest
West University of Timișoara
University of Pitești
“Dunărea de Jos” University
University of Oradea
“Valahia” University of Târgoviște
University of Petroșani
“Ștefan cel Mare“ University, Suceava
Politehnic University, Bucharest
“Petrol-Gaze” University of Ploiești
“Nicolae Titulescu“ University, Bucharest
“George Bacovia“ University, Bacău
“Lucian Blaga” University, Sibiu
“Eftimie Murgu” University, Reșița
University of Craiova
“Constantin Brîncuși”, Târgu Jiu
“Spiru Haret” University, Bucharest
“Petru Maior” University, Târgu Mureș
“Nicolae Bălcescu” Land Forces Academy, Sibiu
“Constantin Brâncoveanu” University, Pitești
“Dimitrie Cantemir” Christian University, Bucharest

**Table 4: List of Romanian universities with public administration programs  
(in order of their entry in the National Registry of Qualifications in the Romanian Higher Education)**

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. The profile of the Romanian civil servant

To build the profile of the Romanian civil servant, we looked at two processes we consider equally important: the one identifying and bringing promising candidates into the public administration system (recruitment) and the one keeping the most performant ones in the system (performance appraisal). Additionally, we looked at the competencies linked to occupations relevant to public services, as reflected in the documents registered at the Romanian Authority for Qualifications.

A significant part of human resource scholarship portrays the recruitment as a component of the talent acquisition management, alongside screening of candidates and selection interviews. According to J. Daly, „recruitment is the process of identifying and securing a pool of qualified job candidates for employment consideration” and includes the review of the sought position, the scope of the search and the methods to be considered. [16] The screening consists in reviewing applicant

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files and resumé, conducting appropriate testing (e.g. ability testing, knowledge testing, general aptitude testing, behavioural testing, etc.), and separating promising candidates from marginal ones. Finally, the step of selection interviews consists in establishing an interviewing methodology, conducting interviews and administering post interview testing when needed (medical exams, security and reference check). For the purpose of this article however, recruitment will refer to talent acquisition management. With reference to the Romanian case, the recruitment signifies all procedures implemented by public authorities and institutions in order to: 1) obtain the assent of or send the notification to the National Agency of Civil Servants; 2) identify and attract candidates for filling vacant positions (permanent or temporary) by advertising the job vacancy; 3) select the files of the candidates eligible to participate to the recruitment tests; 4) organize the recruitment tests and deliver their final results.

Performance appraisal on the other hand is understood as „the process by which the employees’ performance is based on clearly stated appraisal criteria”. [17] Usually, some of these criteria may be linked to the achievement of performance targets and some refer to the employees’ competences and ability. In the Romanian case, the Administrative Code stipulates that civil servants are assessed based on their performance, using the criteria presented in Table 5.



<i>Performance criteria for civil servants in:</i>		<i>positions</i>	
		<i>execution</i>	<i>management</i>
1. Implementation capacity	Capacity to implement their own solutions and those agreed in order to achieve the organisational objectives	yes	yes
2. Capacity to effectively solve problems	Capacity to overcome the obstacles or difficulties encountered in the current activity by identifying the appropriate solutions and assuming the identified risks	yes	yes
3. Capacity to assume responsibilities	Capacity to conduct, at the request of hierarchical superiors, activities that go beyond the responsibility as defined in the job description; the ability to accept errors or, as the case may be, the deficiencies of their own activity and account for thereto; the ability to learn from their own mistakes.	yes	yes
4. Capacity to self-refine and capitalize on the acquired experience	Capacity to permanently increase the professional performance, to improve the results of the current activity by putting into practice the acquired knowledge and skills	yes	yes
5. Capacity to analyse and synthesize	Capacity to interpret a large amount of information, to identify and capitalize on common elements as well as new ones and to select the essential aspects for the analysed field	yes	yes
6. Creativity and spirit of initiative	Active attitude in solving problems and achieving goals by identifying alternative ways of solving these problems; inventiveness in finding ways to optimize the activity; positive attitude towards new ideas	yes	yes
7. Capacity for planning and strategic action	Capacity to anticipate requirements, opportunities and possible risks and their consequences; capacity to anticipate solutions and to organize their own time or, as the case may be, others time (depending on the level of competence) for the efficient performance of their duties.	yes	yes
8. Capacity to work independently	Capacity to carry out tasks to perform their job duties without requiring coordination, except for the cases where the activities envisaged extend outside the limits of their competence	yes	no
9. Capacity to work in a team	Capacity to integrate into a group, to make their contribution through effective participation, to efficiently convey and to allow the development of new ideas, in order to achieve the objectives of the team	yes	no



10. Capacity to manage the allocated resources	Capacity to efficiently use the allocated material and financial resources without any prejudice to the activity of the institution	yes	yes
11. Capacity to organize	Capacity to identify the activities to be carried out by the organization, their delimitation into responsibilities; to set objectives; to achieve a balanced and equitable distribution of responsibilities and objectives according to the level, category, class and professional rank of the subordinate staff	no	yes
12. Capacity to lead	Capacity to create a realistic vision, to translate it into practice and to support it; the ability to plan and manage the work of a team of different personalities with a different level of ability to collaborate in fulfilling an assignment; the capacity to adapt the management style to different situations, and to act for conflict management and resolution	no	yes
13. Coordination capacity	Harmonization of staff decisions and actions as well as activities within a compartment in order to achieve its objectives	no	yes
14. Capacity to control	Capacity to monitor how decisions are transformed into realistic solutions, to identify deficiencies and take the necessary measures to correct them in time	no	yes
15. Capacity to achieve the best results	Capacity to motivate and encourage the development of staff performance by: knowing the collective aspirations and providing a development perspective and a trusting attitude; the skill to listen and consider different opinions, as well as to provide support in achieving positive collective outcomes; recognition of merits and cultivation of performances	no	yes
16. Decision-making competence	Capacity to make prompt decisions, with sense of responsibility and within the framework of the law	no	yes
17. Capacity to delegate	Capacity to transfer competencies to subordinates respecting the law and their own competencies in order to achieve the objectives of the managed organization in a timely manner	no	yes
18. Skills in Human Resources Management	Capacity to efficiently plan and manage the work of the subordinates, while providing appropriate support and motivation	no	yes

19. Capacity to develop the skills of the staff	Knowledge of the competencies of the subordinate staff; the capacity to create, implement, and maintain effective policies to motivate the staff; the ability to identify the training needs of the subordinate staff and to formulate proposals on the theme and the concrete forms of training	no	yes
20. Mediation and negotiation skills	Capacity to organize and lead a meeting, as well as to guide discussions towards a commonly agreed solution, considering the different positions of the parties; the capacity to plan and conduct interviews	no	yes
21. Objectivity in judgment	Fairness in decision-making; impartiality in evaluating the subordinate staff and in awarding the staff for outstanding performance results	no	yes

**Table 5: Performance criteria for civil servants in Romania**

Data collected shows that although a formal (legal) coordination of the recruitment exists (as exercised by the National Agency of Civil Servants), there is a significant procedural, as well as cultural fragmentation in the process. Firstly, there is little (if any) coordination in central administration with regard to evidence-based analysis of human resource demand and supply, planning of recruitment and selection of “best to fit the job description”. Secondly, while the legislation on civil service recruitment is unitary (with tuned specifics depending on the position's typology and requirements), there is little evidence of professionalization in the case of exam commissions and appeal boards and testing the candidates may differ from memorizing legal texts to solving complex problems that may arise in a working environment. Thirdly, there is a considerable fragmentation in central administrative capacity: different budget allocations and organizational cultures impact the ways human resources bureaus are organized and their capacity to recruit. In what performance appraisal is concerned, it is usually perceived as an additional (bureaucratic) burden, reflecting very poorly the link between responsibilities and competencies necessary to perform the job and having little (or no) relevance to the career of the civil servant. As indicated in the interviews, human resources bureaus usually act as “gate keepers”: they are competent and also administratively accountable for their (mis)interpretation of the provisions pertaining to the organization of the recruitment process. As such, the core functions of human resources officers are to observe the intricacies of the legislation, while working in a context of legal inflation (e.g. Governmental Decision 611/2008 was modified 8 times, while the former Statute of the Civil Servant, enacted in 1999, was amended 28 times before being replaced in 2019 by the Administrative Code). This may translate in a protective attitude of human resources offices towards legal compliance, especially in cases where there are hierarchical / political pressures to solve “the vacancy puzzle”.

As the relevant literature argues, building a talent pool and selecting “the best of the best” for public recruitment are core objectives for any efficiency-driven organization. To this end, having well-trained professionals involved in pooling talent and selecting the candidate that is matching the job requirements and excels in a competition designed to operationalize those requirements in needed competencies, skills and abilities seems a legitimate expectation for central administration in Romania. The current legislation partially meets this expectation, as described by the interviewees. It does offer a framework for filtering candidates: first in the selection of application files and

secondly during the recruitment tests (written test and/or interview, as well as additional tests – measuring specific proficiency of candidates – e.g. in foreign languages, IT, etc.).

However, all the interviewees debate the relevance of the recruitment tests: all agree that knowledge of the law is important, but also argue that memorizing it says nothing about the capacity to understand it and correctly execute it. In fact, after analysing examples of tests we could conclude that none of the competencies included in Table 5 are, for instance, clearly and unequivocally assessed during the recruitment stage.

Talent pooling is simply not an issue for central public administration at this time: considering the need for transparency and neutral-based selection criteria, as well as the risks for clientelism and politicization, the legislation allows limited paths for organizations (public authorities or institutions) to (early) identify talents. For instance, the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on transnational mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility, and the Ministerial Order 3955/2008 regarding the organization of internships in bachelor and master programs and the Framework Convention on internships in bachelor or master programs do provide a favourable context for screening possible, future applicants. The specialized training program for high civil servant provides a precedent for any other similar programs open to interested parties willing to work in management and/or execution positions in civil service. Additionally, existent faculties and departments of public administration may provide further possibilities for talent pooling. With the exception of two respondents that remotely discussed the issue of internships, no other interviewee identified the topic of talent pooling as a concern for the public recruitment process in Romania.

To conclude, before entering the system, the candidate to a Romanian civil service position needs to master the legislation, be proficient in Romanian, be a good communicator and show capacity of learning and working in a team, under a democratic setting. After at least one year in the system, he/she needs to have developed the capacity to work independently, analyse and implement solutions, assume responsibility for his/her results and plan ahead. When assuming a management position, the civil servant requires in addition, to have learnt to organize others, mediate different interests and negotiate with different parties, take fair and impartial decisions, coordinate, control and lead.

### **3.2. The profile of the Romanian civil servant**

Currently, the framework law regulating the Romanian education system is Law no. 1/ 2011 which affirms the principle of academic autonomy, and regulates the structure of the academic year, the management of programs (including those pertaining to human resource management and payment), the academic governance and the system of awarding diplomas. Additionally, The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (RAQAHE) regulates the standards for the accreditation of universities and their programs. In 2019, RAQAHE and its Commission on administrative sciences, education and psychology introduced new standards for quality assurance. These standards regulate aspects relevant to faculty, syllabi contents, curriculum (mandatory and elective courses), learning outcomes, research, and campus facilities. Table 6 gives an overview of the curriculum standards in place for bachelor programs in public administration, in Romania.

RAQAHE standards	Public Administration degree
Core courses. At least 5 should be included in the curriculum (as mandatory)  Total weight in the curriculum: 25-30%	Administrative science
	Administrative Law
	Constitutional Law
	Public Management
	Public Policy
	Public services management
	Economics
	Sociology
	Logics
	Strategic planning
	Public finance
	Ethics and deontology in public administration
	Applied informatics
	Specialisation courses. At least 7 should be included in the curriculum (as mandatory or elective)  Total weight in the curriculum: 60-65%
Urbanism	
Comparative administrative systems	
Public relations	
Human resource management in public administration	
Administrative litigation	
Public procurement	
Public accounting	
Project Management	
Quality in public sector	
Communication in public administration	
Techniques and methods for formulating public decisions	
Internship (mandatory)	
Projects in public sector	
Complementary disciplines (mandatory or elective)  Total weight in the curriculum: 5-10%	Business law
	European law
	Financial law
	General theory of law and state
	Law-Drafting techniques
	Civil law
	Criminal law
	Formal drafting of legislation
	Public marketing
	Psycho-sociology of leadership
	Political science
	Urban development and planning
European Public Policies	

**Table 6: RAQAHE standards for bachelor programs in public administration**

Data we analysed show that the Romanian public administration education is quite unitary: the curriculum requirements set by RAQAHE heavily (yet to some extent understandably) limit the innovative capacities of universities and their faculty. More than 80% of the courses are similar to

all thirty bachelor programs we investigated. Consequently, the competencies public administration alumni acquire by the end of their studies are over 95% identical to all universities. The list includes the following competencies (C1... C10):

- [1] C1: Knowledge of the theory of public administration, and the capacity to analyse operational concepts relevant to the field, with a particular focus on the European Administrative Space for the European Administration specialization;
- [2] C2: Ability to use the fundamental principles and concepts of organization and functioning of administrative structures for the professional insertion in public and/or private institutions that are related to the public sector;
- [3] C3: Capacity to identify and implement legal acts and policies regarding the administrative system, including the initiation and design of legislation and administrative regulations at the national level, respectively EU level for the European Administration specialization;
- [4] C4: Expertise in elaborating and implementing institutional development strategies in central and local public administration, consistent with European public administration developments;
- [5] C5: Ability to use standard decision-making methods and instruments to write, evaluate and manage policies and administrative projects, as well as EU-funded projects, for the European Administration specialization;
- [6] C6: Capacity to use quantitative and qualitative research methods, as well as normative and conceptual analysis in order to engage in administrative science-related research activities;
- [7] C7: Ability to communicate on public administration affairs in the language of the curricula and in an international language;
- [8] C8: Capacity to perform professional tasks on time, thoroughly, effectively and responsibly, by following the ethical principles characteristic for the public sector;
- [9] C9: Knowledge in the use of IT systems and platforms, as well as IT instruments relevant for the process of e-governance;
- [10] C9: Develop teamwork skills, acquired through various teamwork exercises performed and through the enhancement of interpersonal skills.
- [11] C10: Capacity for critical thinking and the ability to identify, analyse and solve a wide range of administrative, organizational and policy-related problems.

Eventually, the bachelor graduate in public administration should be able to use fundamental principles and concepts of organization and functioning of administrative structures; identify and implement legal (administrative) regulations; apply strategic management tools in any public organisation; be ethically correct in identifying, analysing and solving public administration problems, and communicate the solutions efficiently in Romanian and a foreign language. Additionally, he/she should remain focused on self-actualization, and consolidate skills such as working in teams.

As presented above, there is a reasonable degree of compatibility between the expectations of the central public administration and the outcomes of the universities training public administration students in Romania. However, correlating more the profile of the Romanian civil servant with that of the graduate of public administration should represent a priority for both the National Agency of Civil Servants and other regulatory bodies of civil service and education, as well as universities.

There is, indeed, little evidence in our research suggesting such an interest exists: firstly, our interviews show that inter-connecting ministries and other central administration organizations is quite difficult, especially when recruitment and performance appraisal are considered (and although



steps in creating a unitary / national-wide recruitment process have been made, no tangible results can be observed at the time of writing this paper). Secondly, there is little to no substantial communication between central administration and universities, with regard to curriculum development. Existent legislation makes one-year internships mandatory for public administration students, yet in many cases these internships lack coordination and a strategic vision; therefore, as suggested by the interviewers, internships are seldom (or never) considered as possible indicators for the available talent pool. Thirdly, a considerable number of positions in central public administration are not open to public administration graduates: instead, alumni of economic studies and law are preferred even in general positions. Needless to say, the list of competencies specific to public administration (e.g. understanding the public administration system, using evidence-based decision making, mediate and negotiate conflicting interests, etc.) are less accommodated in programs focused on economics and general law.

### **3.3. Discussion: a blended-learning approach to public administration education**

Covid-19 prompted central administration and universities to reflect on viable alternatives to traditional, face-to-face interaction. On March 16, 2020, the Romanian Government issued a state of emergency and since, all public administration bachelor programs moved to an online education and many departments in central administration relied heavily on tele-work. In such conditions, rethinking the set of competencies public administration needs seems a reasonable expectation. For instance, the pandemic showed that public organisations need civil servants capable of coping with crisis, managing online communication, and mitigate conflictual situations. Can these types of competencies be developed using blended learning?

Looking at the only bachelor program in Romania that uses a blended approach since 2015, the answer seems positive: National University of Political Studies and Public Administration uses Moodle ([www.apcampus.ro](http://www.apcampus.ro)) and allows students to access their lectures, seminars and laboratories offline, use their own time to study and accommodate with a collaborative learning environment. These facilities have had a strong impact on the students of the programme and, we may infer that they might have contributed also, to developing competencies that presently, central public administration deem relevant. For instance, in the satisfaction surveys conducted for the class of 2017-2020 (data collected in a face-to-face interaction in 2018 and 2019, from 644 students, respectively 620 students enrolled in full-time classes in public administration bachelor programme), 98% declared that they were satisfied and very satisfied with the theoretical background received during their studies, 91% (an average of the two years) with the practical training, and over 97% with the blended teaching methods. In fact, 86% (average) declared that they considered themselves ready to a great extent to become a good civil servant once graduating the classes, and over 75% (average) thought of the Moodle platform as a way of improving substantially their education. The benefits of employing a blended approach included: working independently on some papers (36%), studying in teams, with colleagues (27%), organising his/her own study time (58%). These, in return, are connected by the literature with developing a more creative learning environment and better communication skills. [18] [19]

However, the available data is not sufficient to analyse the impact of blended learning for public administration education. A more in-depth analysis of the potential blended learning has on developing competencies needed for the “craft of public administration” and the “real world” is, however, strongly recommended: there is currently little (to no) literature analysing the outcomes of blended learning for public administration education. A better contextualisation of blended

programs in post-Covid-19 environments, may prove beneficial to better linking the theory and practice of public administration.

#### 4. References

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