



eusa

Annual Activity Report 2020

EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF ADMINISTRATION

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THE DG IN BRIEF

The mission of the European School of Administration is to provide high quality training and learning opportunities that meet the needs of all EU institutions and their staff in order to:

- Contribute to the **efficiency of the work of the institutions** through the continuous development of the talents of their staff;
- Help **preserve and diffuse the values** that underpin the development of the EU and the work of the European Civil Service;
- Promote **cooperation among staff of the various institutions** by providing opportunities for networking and the exchange of ideas and good practice;
- **Share experience** and provide opportunities for mutual learning by cooperating with the Schools of public administration in Member States;
- Contribute to the **optimal use of resources in the field of learning and development through the synergies** it achieves with the training departments in the institutions and the resulting economies of scale.

In fulfilling its mission, the School also contributes to the optimal use of available resources in the field of learning and development through the synergies it achieves with the training departments in the institutions and the resulting economies of scale.

The School is administratively attached to EPSO, and is therefore accountable to the same management board as EPSO and forms part of the portfolio of responsibilities of the Commissioner responsible for Budget and Human Resources.

The longstanding Head of the School retired at the end of 2016 and during 3 years the duties have been carried out by the Deputy Head of Unit as acting Head. The new Head of EuSA took up her functions on 1 January 2020. EPSO's Director, the Principal of the School, assumed her duties in mid-May 2020.

Ever since its inception, the School has been working continuously to improve skills for a high performing civil service in a fast changing and complex environment, for staff and for managers, and to integrate promptly and effectively new staff into the public sector.

In order to do this, it works in close partnership with the learning and development services of all the institutions in order to ensure that its offer is responsive to their expectations and needs and that the best possible synergies are achieved with their own activities in this field. To further promote these synergies, it also organises a number of very high value inter-institutional calls for tender, to which the institutions, agencies and bodies have access.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Annual Activity Report is a management report of the Head of the European School of Administration to the Commission (by virtue of its administrative attachment via EPSO) and EPSO's interinstitutional Management Board. Annual Activity Reports are the main instrument of management accountability within the Commission and constitute the basis on which the College takes political responsibility for the decisions it takes as well as for the coordinating, executive and management functions it exercises, as laid down in the Treaties¹.

A. Key results and progress towards the achievement of the Commission's general objectives and DG's specific objectives (executive summary of section 1)

2020 was a very significant and transformative year for EuSA, the new Head of the School took up her functions on 1 January, just in time to prepare an ambitious high level event on the occasion of the School's 15th year anniversary. The event took place in February, at the House of History of Europe with all the stakeholders of the School and high-level speakers including former Prime Minister and President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy and two young Belgian climate activists speaking on "the Europe that we want". Another 15 events were also scheduled to take place during the year. Some of them needed to be postponed due to the pandemic outbreak. The School showed its agility when in spite of the uncertainty created by the lockdown, the impossibility of holding face to face courses, and the difficulty of taking course planning decisions, it managed to switch the whole learning offer from in-situ courses to online training within three weeks. A special tailor made offer for remote working: "the survival kit for teleworkers" was created and made available to all EU staff in April just before Easter holidays so that staff left stranded at home could use their time for learning. The School managed to swiftly undertake this transformational process adapting its offer to the new needs of staff, and emerged at the end of the year in a stronger position than before.

Participant numbers slightly decreased in 2020 for the training courses, notably in the case of the Parliament and the Council due to difficulties in accessing the Zoom platform at corporate level and also due to the need to reduce groups of participants when offering the courses in a digital format due to pedagogical reasons. However, overall participant numbers increased significantly due to the innovative organisation of virtual lunch conferences "Online Talks", with more than 20000 registrations from all EU Institutions and agencies and 20000 visualisations of the recorded sessions. These are shorter, hands-on 1.5 hours condensed packages of learning with world renowned speakers. It is also a way

¹ Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union.

to respond in an agile way to needs as subjects making the headlines can be addressed almost immediately. The School continues to have an issue with last-minute dropouts and no-shows, in particular for management courses, a pattern that many other training bodies are also experiencing. The digital format also lends itself more to this circumstance given that there seems to be many more last minute issues and a certain screen fatigue.

As already noted in the 2019 AAR, the School's induction offer was renewed, as the characteristics of the target audience are changing and the institutions increasingly run internal induction programmes for their new staff. Strategic discussions with the institutions about what they need and aspire from the School in this area had been both useful and encouraging, and the new inter-institutional online induction programme was published. The School's specific offer for newcomers is now summarised in one single and easily accessible brochure. The School also acts as a centre of excellence in learning, looking for the "skills of the future", and including them in its catalogue. The catalogue now features much demanded new skills such as: creativity, critical thinking and innovation. In terms of tendering, which the School for reasons of economy of scale does on behalf of all institutions there was a new call for tender for key skills launched at the end of the year given that the current contract will expire in February 2021.

The School's visibility has been greatly increased this year: a new communication team has been set up in charge of creating attractive brochures of its offer which is widely distributed in internal and external collaborative platforms and social media, EuSA's website was revamped, creating a very important increase in traffic, doubling the number of visitors (15.567 compared to 8.045 in 2019). There were also several Articles on the School activities celebrating its 15 anniversary published in the newsletters and websites of several Institutions to raise awareness about the School across services.

The organisation of the first inter-institutional Learning & Development awards, to share good practices and to further build the Learning community, was a success with 55 quality projects from several EU Institutions and agencies, submitted to an interinstitutional jury. Further achievements during the past year that are worth summarising here are:

- organisation and delivery of the 15th annual certification exercise for assistant-grade staff with the potential to become administrators. This, despite the technical challenge to organise the whole programme online for the first time ever. The School managed to deliver the training remotely so the exercise could be successfully finished before the end of the year with a satisfaction level of participants of more than 90%;
- designing and establishing a programme of more than 100 online talks with top speakers on topics of general interest covering politics, economics, and societal and health topics. The video recordings available at the School e-library were viewed by more than 20000 colleagues;
- developing the whole training offer online within three weeks. All courses were adapted and offered in virtual format and innovative new courses designed. The catalogue was tailor made to cover the new needs of the staff linked to the pandemic outbreak.

B. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Key Performance Indicator²	Baseline	Interim Milestone	Target 2020	Situation at the end of 2020
The perceived usefulness of the School's training activities in the field of leadership and management skills S.O 1.1 result indicator 1	2020: 93%	2022 94%	93%	94% (source: EULearn evaluation reports report 2020)
The perceived usefulness of the School's training activities in the field of general skills development S.O.1.2 result indicator 1	2020: 94% of satisfied participants	2022 94%	94%	95% (source: EULearn evaluation report 2020)
The perceived usefulness of the School's training activities in the field of understanding and knowledge of the EU activities S.O. 1.3 result indicator 1	2020: 95% of courses containing blended learning elements	2022 95.5%	95%	95% (EULearn)
Inter-institutional attendance in learning activities S.O. 1.4 result indicator 4	2019: 37%	2022 38%	37 %	37% (source: EULearn attendance report 2019)
The perceived usefulness of the School's training activities in the field of Certification S.O. 1.5 result indicator 1	2019: 96.5%	2022 96.75%	97%	98% (source: EUSurvey)

² For 2020, the School identified the following five key performance indicators in its Strategic and Management Plans, four of them on core learning activities ('what we offer?') and one stemming from the horizontal activity ('how we deliver?')

C. Key conclusions on Financial management and Internal control (executive summary of section 2.1)

In accordance with the governance arrangements of the European Commission, to which the European School of Administration is administratively attached via EPSO, while it provides service to all EU institutions, (the staff of) EuSA conducts its operations in compliance with the applicable laws and regulations, working in an open and transparent manner and meeting the expected high level of professional and ethical standards.

To ensure the achievement of policy and management objectives, the Commission, to which the European School of Administration is administratively attached via EPSO has adopted a set of internal control principles, based on international good practice. The financial regulation requires that the organisational structure and the internal control systems used to implement the budget be set up in accordance with these principles. The European School of Administration has assessed its internal control systems during the reporting year and has concluded that it is effective and the components and principles are present and functioning as intended. Please refer to AAR section 2.1.3 for further details.

In addition, the European School of Administration has systematically examined the available control results and indicators, [including those for supervising entities to which it has entrusted budget implementation tasks,] as well as the observations and recommendations issued by the internal auditor and the European Court of Auditors. These elements have been assessed to determine their impact on management's assurance about the achievement of the control objectives. Please refer to Section 2.1 for further details.

In conclusion, management has reasonable assurance that, overall, suitable controls are in place and working as intended; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated; and necessary improvements and reinforcements are being implemented. The Director of the European Personnel Selection Office, in her capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

D. Provision of information to the Commissioner(s)

In the context of the regular meetings during the year between the DG and the Commissioner on management matters, the main elements of this report and assurance declaration, have been brought to the attention of Commissioner Johannes Hahn, responsible for Budget and Human Resources.

EPSO also sought guidance from its Management Board on main elements of this report. Regular meetings were held with recruiting institutions through bilateral senior-level contacts and the EPSO Working Group.

E. Specific actions on COVID-19

In 2020, Europe was strongly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Commission has proposed a strong and coordinated response to the health crisis as well as to the impact on Europe's economy and society. Covid-19 also posed challenges as regards performance, control, audit and assurance in relation to the 2020 EU budget. In an exercise coordinated at corporate level, all Commission services have promoted the consistent and rigorous protection of the EU budget ensuring that appropriate mitigating measures were put in place.

In order to guarantee business continuity and be able to address the learning needs of all the EU staff, the School decided to switch all the training offer from face to face courses into online training on the eve of the lockdown. All EU staff were therefore able to benefit from the School's online offer and its "Survival kit for teleworkers" as from April.

An ambitious programme of Online talks on topics of general interest was also designed and put in place in a very short time. The events were recorded and the video records remain available for all EU Staff, they have been followed by more than 40000 staff. High-level speakers were invited to give insightful presentations on EU policies and political priorities, Brexit, resilience and well-being, management in challenging times, key skills, scientific research and vaccines, among other trending topics. The speakers came from the public and private sector, and from all over the world, thanks to the virtual format (Harvard university, Stanford, Washington DC, Buenos Aires, Mexico...) The conferences were held in English and French to reach out all EU staff.

The great success of this initiative, with more than 20000 registrations, proved the need of such timely offer in this difficult and challenging period serving also as a way to sustain a virtual community of learners. The recognition by EU staff of such a wide and useful programme is well documented with a big number of messages from the participants expressing their gratitude and its usefulness.

The School was also proud to reinforce its social vocation by supporting the European School and its teachers in the design of hybrid and distance courses. A mixed team of EuSA course designers and European School teachers delivered two webinars for nearly 400 teachers from the European School of Uccle, sharing tips and tricks for making lessons more informative and engaging, in English and French. Its great impact was covered in several newsletters from the Institutions and the School was invited to offer two new webinars this time for the 13 European Schools across several countries. Both webinars were recorded and published at the European Schools website and EuSA website for all EU staff. It was a very valuable and practical experience for teachers, students and parents.

The unprecedented effort to shift the whole training offer from the School in such limited period of time required also important negotiations with the contractors to ensure optimal financial management and protection of the EU budget, which resulted in a full execution of the 2020 appropriations. The School had to manage the uncertainty of planning courses several months in advance without knowing what the sanitary situation would be so it

needed to put also in place mitigating measures in case of new changes that might require a change of course format.

1. Key results and progress towards the achievement of the Commission's general objectives and DG's specific objectives³

The School with its five specific objectives, outputs and actions, contributed to the general objective of a modern, high performance and sustainable European Commission. 2020 was a challenging and unprecedented year, the whole training offer from the School had to be adapted to a new different format and digital platforms which were unknown to the participants. A communication campaign showcasing the new offer was launched to reach out all EU staff. Specific guidelines were also created with clear instructions on how to use the new platform. These were also published on the School website.

As can be seen from the performance indicators, the School ensured a good interinstitutional balance as regards the number of participants, whilst at the same time guaranteeing that whenever an individual institution needed a larger than usual number of places its demand could be satisfied. This occurred particularly when an institution made a certain programme part of its mandatory training path as was the case for many management programmes.

The global number of courses increased in all programmes during 2020, notably for key skills and well-being (from a total of 503 to 555 courses). All the conferences and lunch time events were organised in the format of Online Talks.

The new format of Online Talks, EuSA significantly increased the number of participants (more than 40000 registrations and visualizations). However, participant numbers for the training courses slightly decreased, from 7.615 to 6.649, last year. This slight decrease in numbers comes mainly from the Parliament and the Council, which had limited access to the common digital platform zoom, for administrative reasons at the beginning of the lockdown. On the other hand, there was a marked increase of registrations from the Agencies possibly given the fact that the virtual format reduced travel costs and proved to be very convenient. The same explanation applies as well to the External Action Service and its delegations. Participants continued to be extremely satisfied with the School's programmes. Evaluations of the transfer of the skills and knowledge acquired to the workplace (impact assessment) also show that a high number of participants find that they are able to transfer their learning to the workplace.

The School is satisfied with the extent to which it has been able to diversify its delivery with diverse course formats and the increasing use of a blended approach. In order to support a successful transfer of learning to the workplace, the School has made a point of making many of its newer courses modular, interspersing moments of virtual classroom learning

³ An Executive Agency uses as heading: "Implementation of the Agency's Annual Work programme - Highlights of the year".

with tasks to do at home, group coaching, etc. Although this makes the courses more challenging to manage administratively, research shows that this approach is more effective in making the new skills and learning “stick”.

The School is actively looking at ways in which it can enhance its blended approach, and has engaged a seconded member of staff from the External Action Service to assist with the internal development of courses and its communication. We have started experimenting with videos and filming of events and more will undoubtedly happen in this area in the future.

At the same time, there is clear evidence that a large part of the added value of the School’s programmes stems from the opportunities they afford participants from different institutions and with different professional experience to meet, although only virtually for the moment. The School is always looking for new formats for its courses that can also be offered outside the classroom such as the leadership walking seminars for managers, the possibility for small groups of managers to meet out in nature and connect and learn together, which has received very good feedback from participants. A dedicated session for 8 Director Generals was organised but had to be postponed.

In 2020, the School continued its communication drive. The logo and merchandising materials were updated. The website was re-vamped with a different look and feel and as a result the number of visitors doubled (from 8.045 in 2019 to 15.567 in 2020). New accounts were created in Social Media with high number of followers (Twitter, LinkedIn...). Finally, the School issued its first-ever Online catalogue, the Survival Kit for teleworkers, which was an instant success. As always, School staff participated in various learning events in different institutions, such as the Commission’s Career Day. The School also launched the first ever Learning and Development Awards in order to garner all the creative learning initiatives that have emerged during the confinement.

2. Modern and efficient administration and internal control

2.1 Financial management and internal control

Assurance is provided on the basis of an objective examination of evidence of the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.

This examination is carried out by management, who monitors the functioning of the internal control systems on a continuous basis, and by internal and external auditors. The results are explicitly documented and reported to the Director of EPSO.

This is covered in the EPSO annual activity report.

These reports result from a systematic analysis of the evidence available. This approach provides sufficient guarantees as to the completeness and reliability of the information reported and results in a complete coverage of the budget delegated to the Director of EPSO.

This section covers the control results and other relevant elements that support management's assurance. It is structured into (a) Control results, (b) Audit observations and recommendations, (c) Effectiveness of internal control systems, and resulting in (d) Conclusions on the assurance.

2.1.1 Control results

This section reports and assesses the elements identified by management which support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives⁴. The DG's assurance building and materiality criteria are outlined in AAR Annex 5. Annex 6 outlines the main risks together with the control processes to mitigate them and the indicators used to measure the performance of the relevant control systems.

This is covered in the EPSO activity report.

2.1.2 Audit observations and recommendations

This section sets out the observations, opinions and conclusions reported by auditors – including the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control.

⁴ 1) Effectiveness, efficiency and economy of operations; 2) reliability of reporting; 3) safeguarding of assets and information; 4) prevention, detection, correction and follow-up of fraud and irregularities; and 5) adequate management of the risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions, taking into account the multiannual character of programmes as well as the nature of the payments (FR Art 36.2). The 2nd and/or 3rd Internal Control Objective(s) (ICO) only when applicable, given the DG's activities.

Summaries of the management measures taken in response to the audit recommendations are also included, together with an assessment of the likely material impact of the findings on the achievement of the internal control objectives, and therefore on management's assurance.

The School is generally audited by both internal and external independent auditors: the Commission internal audit service (IAS) and the European Court of Auditors (ECA).

This is covered in the EPSO activity report.

2.1.3 Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems

The Commission, to which EuSA is administratively attached via EPSO, has adopted an Internal Control Framework based on international good practice, to ensure the achievement of its policy and management objectives. Compliance with the internal control framework is a compulsory requirement.

The European School of Administration uses the organisational structure and the internal control systems suited to achieving its policy and internal control objectives in accordance with the internal control principles and has due regard to the risks associated with the environment in which it operates.

The functioning of the internal control systems has been closely monitored throughout the year by the systematic registration of exceptions. Two exceptions were registered for 2020, the total amount (5,397.34 EUR) was very small and the impact not material.

The School considers that in general its internal control system functions satisfactorily.

With regard to non-financial control systems, the School carries out regular reviews of participants' course evaluations to ensure that the quality and number of courses provided for the target audiences is optimised and that the School adjusts its offer accordingly. It also observes courses to ensure that the quality of the delivery and content of courses is of the appropriate level and to evaluate if the content needs to be adjusted. Trainers' feedback is also obtained to ensure that the courses meet the needs of the services.

The School continues to take account of the risks involved in its activities and addresses them in its regular team meetings as and when appropriate.

The School mainly buys services/supplies in the area of training and training facilities. The contractors are mainly suppliers of training services in small to medium-sized companies within Europe. Procurement needs are clearly defined and justified from an economic or

operational point of view and approved by the AOD. In this area no significant risks have been identified.

The European School of Administration has assessed its internal control system during the reporting year and has concluded that it is effective and the components and principles are present and functioning as intended.

2.1.4 Conclusions on the assurance

This section reviews the assessment of the elements already reported above (in Sections 2.1.1, 2.1.2 and 2.1.3), and the sub-conclusions already reached. It draws an overall conclusion to support the declaration of assurance and whether it should be qualified with reservations.

This is covered in the EPSO activity report

2.1.5 Declaration of Assurance

This is covered in the EPSO activity report.

2.2 Modern and efficient administration – other aspects

This is covered in the EPSO activity report.

2.2.1 Human resource management

This is covered in the EPSO activity report.

2.2.2 Digital transformation and information management

This is covered in the EPSO activity report.

2.2.3 Sound environmental management

This is covered in the EPSO activity report.