PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION
Curriculum alignment and professionalisation across European administrative traditions

Maria Asensio
Iscte — University Institute of Lisbon, Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology (CIES-Iscte); National Institute of Administration (INA, I.P.), Lisbon, Portugal

Abstract The study examines education and training in Public Administration and Public Policy as an institutional mechanism for developing administrative capacity and, indirectly, state capacity. Based on a documentary analysis of 32 European programmes and a Competency-Based Curricular Alignment Index, it compares four administrative traditions. The findings show that the language of competencies has become widespread, but its translation into experiential pedagogy, authentic assessment, and evidence of learning outcomes varies institutionally. Professionalisation becomes more observable when competencies, experiential learning, and assessment are aligned.

Keywords: administrative capacity, state capacity, Public Administration education, Public Policy education, curriculum alignment, professionalisation, administrative traditions.

Formação em Administração Pública e Políticas Públicas: alinhamento curricular e profissionalização nas tradições administrativas europeias

Resumo O estudo analisa a formação em Administração Pública e em Políticas Públicas como mecanismo institucional de desenvolvimento da capacidade administrativa e, indiretamente, da capacidade do estado. Com base na análise documental de 32 programas europeus e num índice de alinhamento curricular baseado em competências, compara quatro tradições administrativas. Os resultados mostram que a linguagem das competências se generalizou, mas a sua tradução em pedagogia experiencial, avaliação autêntica e evidência de resultados varia institucionalmente. A profissionalização torna-se mais observável quando competências, aprendizagem experiencial e avaliação estão alinhadas.

Palavras-chave: capacidade do estado, formação em Administração Pública, formação em Políticas Públicas, alinhamento curricular, profissionalização; tradições administrativas.

Formation en Administration publique et en Politiques publiques: alignement des curricula et professionnalisation dans les traditions administratives européennes

Résumé L'étude analyse la formation en Administration publique et Politiques publiques comme mécanisme institutionnel de développement de la capacité administrative et, indirectement, de la capacité de l'État. A partir de l'analyse documentaire de 32 programmes européens et d'un indice d'alignement curriculaire par compétences, elle compare quatre traditions administratives. Les résultats montrent une diffusion du langage des compétences, mais une traduction inégale dans la pédagogie expérientielle, l'évaluation authentique et les preuves de résultats.

Mots-clés : capacité de l'État, formation en Administration publique, formation en Politiques publiques, alignement curriculaire, professionnalisation, traditions administratives.

Formación en Administración Pública y Políticas Públicas: alineación curricular y profesionalización en las tradiciones administrativas europeas

Resumen El estudio analiza la formación en Administración Pública y Políticas Públicas como un mecanismo institucional para desarrollar la capacidad administrativa y, de manera indirecta, la capacidad estatal. A partir de un análisis documental de 32 programas europeos y de la aplicación de un índice de alineación curricular basado en competencias, el estudio compara cuatro tradiciones administrativas. Los resultados muestran que el lenguaje de las competencias se ha generalizado en los programas analizados, pero su traducción en prácticas de aprendizaje experiencial, modalidades de evaluación auténtica y mecanismos para generar evidencia sobre los resultados de aprendizaje presenta importantes variaciones institucionales. La profesionalización resulta más observable allí donde existe una mayor alineación entre las competencias definidas, las experiencias de aprendizaje y los sistemas de evaluación.

Palabras-clave: capacidad estatal, educación en Administración Pública, educación en Políticas Públicas, alineación curricular, profesionalización; tradiciones administrativas.

Introduction

Governments are increasingly expected to act under conditions of complexity, interdependence and contestation. Climate adaptation, digital transformation, demographic change, migration, public health crises and democratic distrust require public organisations able to learn, coordinate and implement (OECD, 2017; OECD, 2021). These pressures have renewed interest in state capacity, but they also sharpen a more specific question concerning administrative capacity: whether public organisations possess the professional, analytical and organisational capabilities needed to translate political authority and resources into effective public action (Cingolani, 2013; Fukuyama, 2013; Lodge and Wegrich, 2014; OECD, 2023). Recent work on public-sector skills and professional roles likewise emphasises increasingly hybrid demands that combine domain expertise with management, collaboration, digital literacy and adaptive problem solving (Kettl, 2002; Dunleavy, et al. 2006; OECD, 2017; OECD, 2021; Netra, Sørensen and Nejstgaard, 2022; O'Neill, 2022; Haruna, 2023).

A comparatively underdeveloped part of this debate concerns the educational infrastructures through which public professionals acquire and demonstrate these capabilities. Here, Public Administration (PA) education and Public Policy (PP) education are related but not identical. PA education typically centres on public organisations, administrative law, management, implementation and public-service values; PP education more strongly foregrounds policy analysis, design, evaluation and problem solving. Many contemporary programmes combine both orientations, alongside Public Management and executive education. For analytical purposes, the study uses public affairs education as an umbrella term where the distinction is not empirically consequential, while retaining PA and PP

when programme orientation matters. Recent curriculum research confirms that public affairs programmes increasingly promise broad competency repertoires but differ in how those competencies are specified and taught (Christensen, Laegreid, Roness and Rovik, 2007; Rainey, 2014; Peters, 2015; Brans and Coenen, 2016; Overton and Kleinschmit, 2022; Göçoglu and Demirkol, 2024; Reed and Houston, 2024).

The argument deliberately connects public-management scholarship and educational scholarship through a mechanism-based account. Public-management research identifies the capabilities required for implementation, coordination, integrity, digital government, collaboration and public value; educational research explains how intended capabilities become learnable and observable through constructive alignment and authentic assessment. State-capacity scholarship provides the broader institutional outcome, but the immediate object is administrative capacity. State capacity is understood as the wider ability of public authority to formulate and realise collective goals across multiple domains; administrative capacity is the narrower organisational and professional ability of public administrations to design, coordinate, implement and adapt public action. Curricula cannot by themselves create state capacity. They can, however, contribute to administrative capacity by (1) specifying professional competency expectations, (2) providing opportunities to develop them, (3) verifying them through assessment, and (4) updating professional repertoires as governance demands change. This is the sense in which PA and PP education are conceptualised as governance infrastructure (Evans and Rauch, 1999; Ansell and Gash, 2008; Bekkers, Edelenbos and Steijn, 2011; Bryson, Crosby and Bloomberg, 2014; Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh, 2012; Osborne, 2006; Osborne, 2010; Provan and Kenis, 2008; Torfing, et al. 2012; Bouckaert, Peters and Verhoest, 2010; Fukuyama, 2013; Wu, Ramesh and Howlett, 2015; Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock, 2017; Netra, Sørensen and Nejstgaard, 2022).

The empirical puzzle is that competency language is now widespread in PA and PP education, yet its administrative significance remains uncertain. Programmes promise leadership, policy analysis, digital competence, collaboration, ethical judgement and public-value orientation, but declared learning outcomes do not demonstrate that competencies are practised or assessed. Contemporary scholarship on curriculum design has therefore shifted attention from competency lists to the relationship among learning outcomes, pedagogy and assessment (O'Neill, 2022; Haruna, 2023; Göçoglu and Demirkol, 2024). If professional competence is one component of administrative capacity, the mechanisms through which that competence is developed and verified deserve systematic comparative analysis (Adam, 2006; Haupt, Kapucu and Hu, 2017; Rubaii and Calarusse, 2014).

The research question is: How do competency-based curricula in Public Administration and Public Policy education contribute to professionalisation and administrative capacity across European administrative traditions? The analysis compares 32 programmes across four traditions: Napoleonic, Prussian or continental-professional, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian. It develops a Competency-Based Curriculum Alignment Index (CCAI) to assess documented alignment between programme objectives, competency models, pedagogical design, assessment strategy and evidence of

learning outcomes. The index does not rank institutional prestige or measure realised organisational performance; it assesses the observable curricular mechanisms through which professional competence is specified, practised and verified.

The argument has three parts. First, PA and PP education can function as governance infrastructure when curricula specify, develop and verify competencies relevant to public administration. Second, administrative traditions mediate the content and institutional meaning of competence, so similar competency labels may support different professional models. Third, professionalisation is more strongly documented where declared competencies are connected to experiential pedagogy and authentic assessment. These claims locate curriculum design between educational alignment and administrative-capacity formation rather than treating education as a direct or sufficient cause of state capacity.

The contribution is therefore interdisciplinary but bounded. For public-management research, the study adds an educational mechanism to explanations of administrative capacity and professionalisation. For educational research, it applies constructive alignment and authentic assessment to a comparative governance setting. For comparative Public Administration, it examines whether administrative traditions continue to shape competency profiles even as programmes converge around a common language of skills and learning outcomes. The empirical contribution is a transparent, replicable index of documented curriculum alignment across 32 programmes.

Policy education, professionalisation and state capacity

Policy education as governance infrastructure

PA and PP education have usually been analysed as fields of higher education, professional preparation or civil-service training. Treating them as governance infrastructure requires a more precise mechanism than the claim that education simply "builds capacity". The mechanism proposed here has four linked functions. First, curricula specify what competent public action is expected to involve. Second, pedagogical design creates opportunities to practise those competencies. Third, assessment makes competence observable and, where authentic, tests judgement in tasks resembling public-sector work. Fourth, periodic curriculum revision can adapt professional repertoires to changing governance demands. Through these functions, education contributes directly to professionalisation and administrative capacity; any contribution to wider state capacity is indirect and depends on recruitment, organisational deployment, institutional incentives and the authority available to public organisations ((Besley and Persson, 2011; Bason, 2010; Moore, 1995).

This formulation clarifies the relationship between state and administrative capacity. State capacity is multidimensional and includes more than bureaucratic competence: it may encompass extractive, coercive, legal, political and implementation capacities (Cingolani, 2013). Administrative capacity refers more specifically to the organisational and professional capabilities through which public

institutions formulate, coordinate and implement action (North, 1990; March and Olsen, 1989; Scott, 2014; Hall and Taylor, 1996). Evans and Rauch (1999) emphasise meritocratic bureaucracy, Fukuyama (2013) administrative quality, and Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock (2017) problem-driven learning and adaptation. Policy-capacity scholarship further distinguishes analytical, operational and political competencies at individual, organisational and system levels (Wu, Ramesh and Howlett, 2015). Education sits upstream of some of these capabilities by shaping individual and professional repertoires, but it is neither equivalent to administrative capacity nor sufficient to produce it.

The governance literature specifies why the repertoire of public professionals has broadened. Networked, collaborative and digital forms of governance require boundary spanning, evidence use, citizen engagement, data literacy and judgement alongside traditional legal and administrative expertise (Meijer and Bekkers, 2015; Mergel, 2019; Van der Wal, 2017). Recent scholarship on public-service education mirrors this shift: curriculum debates address post-crisis resilience, digital and data competencies, interdisciplinary integration and the continuing importance of legal foundations (Overton and Kleinschmit, 2022; Haruna, 2023; Reed and Houston, 2024). The governance-infrastructure claim therefore rests on a two-step logic: changing governance arrangements alter competency demands, while curriculum alignment determines whether programmes merely declare those competencies or organise credible opportunities for their development and verification (Meijer and Bekkers, 2015; Mergel, 2019; Van der Wal, 2017).

Professionalisation, integrity and administrative capability

Professionalisation refers here to the institutional formation of specialised knowledge, role expectations, ethical standards and practical competencies that can be recognised within a field of public service. It is distinct from occupational closure or status alone. In public administration, professionalisation has democratic significance because officials exercise authority affecting rights, resources and services. Professional competence therefore combines technical and analytical expertise with legality, accountability, integrity and public-service values. Recent evidence also suggests that the type of education held by public managers is associated, albeit modestly and contextually, with different dimensions of organisational performance, reinforcing the need to theorise the mechanisms linking education and administrative practice rather than assuming a simple causal effect (Bowman and West, 2014; Bovens, 2007; Denhardt and Denhardt, 2003; Svara, 2001; Netra, Sørensen and Nejstgaard, 2022).

Classic Public Administration theory framed administration as a problem of expertise and democratic control (Wilson, 1887; Weber, 1978; Simon, 1947; Waldo, 1948). Contemporary reforms make that problem more complex rather than obsolete. Post-New Public Management arrangements combine performance demands, coordination, network governance, digital transformation and whole-of-government ambitions. Public professionals must therefore integrate multiple role expectations: specialist expertise, managerial competence,

collaborative capability, ethical judgement and increasingly digital and data literacy (Christensen and Laegreid, 2011; OECD, 2023; Overton and Kleinschmit, 2022). Professionalisation is consequently treated as a repertoire of demonstrable competencies embedded in public-service norms, not as a single managerial model (Hood, 1991; Peters and Pierre, 2018).

Integrity and public-service values are one component of this repertoire, not a separate outcome assumed to follow from curriculum design. A programme that stresses performance or innovation without legality and accountability may produce a narrow competency profile; one that stresses formal legality without applied problem solving may underprepare graduates for complex governance settings. This tension is particularly visible in recent debates about the continuing place of law in MPA/MPP curricula (Reed and Houston, 2024). The empirical question is therefore not whether one competency family is universally superior, but how programmes combine legal-administrative, managerial, digital, relational and ethical orientations and whether those claims are connected to practice and assessment (Hartley, 2005).

Competency-based education as a response to governance complexity

Competency-based education has become influential because professional programmes are increasingly expected to make learning outcomes explicit and demonstrable. In public affairs, policy-capacity research distinguishes analytical, operational and political competencies (Wu, Ramesh and Howlett, 2015), while civil-service reform agendas emphasise leadership, collaboration, digital capability, innovation and evidence-informed policy (OECD, 2023). Recent public-affairs education research similarly documents expanding competency promises and the need to connect them to programme design rather than treating competency language as self-validating (O'Neill, 2022; Haruna, 2023; Göçoglu and Demirkol, 2024; NASPAA, 2019).

Competency language can nevertheless become symbolic. Pollitt and Hupe's (2011) warning about "magic concepts" is relevant when broad labels such as leadership, innovation or collaboration are adopted without operational definition. The same risk appears in education when programmes advertise competencies without showing where they are taught, practised or assessed. The coding framework therefore treats competency statements as only the first layer of evidence and requires additional documentary indicators for pedagogy, assessment and outcomes (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

Constructive alignment provides the educational mechanism linking competency claims to learning design. Biggs (1996) and Biggs and Tang (2011) argue that intended learning outcomes, teaching activities and assessment tasks should reinforce one another. Authentic assessment adds the requirement that learners perform tasks resembling the practices for which they are being prepared (Wiggins, 1990, 1998; Gulikers, Bastiaens and Kirschner, 2004). Recent curriculum research in public administration continues to emphasise learning-by-doing, applied research skills and competence-oriented design (O'Neill, 2022; Thani, 2024). Applied to PA

and PP education, a claim to develop administrative capacity is more credible when learners must analyse policy problems, justify decisions, work with stakeholders, interpret rules, use evidence and demonstrate judgement in observable outputs (Wiggins, 1990).

Administrative traditions and the governance of curriculum design

Administrative traditions provide the institutional context in which PA and PP education are designed and interpreted. They are treated as historically formed institutional logics shaping expectations about authority, accountability, expertise and the role of the public servant, not as static national cultures. Comparative Public Administration shows that common reform ideas are translated differently across institutional settings (Ongaro, 2009; Painter and Peters, 2010; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017; Pierre and Peters, 2020). The same expectation can be extended to curriculum design: programmes may converge in using competency language while diverging in which competencies they privilege and how those competencies are enacted.

Four ideal-typical European traditions structure the comparison. Napoleonic systems historically give greater weight to state centrality, administrative law, hierarchy and procedure; continental-professional systems emphasise legal-rational authority, career administration and professional expertise; Anglo-Saxon systems have been more strongly shaped by managerialism, performance and policy analysis; Scandinavian systems are commonly associated with trust-based, collaborative and citizen-oriented governance. These stylised expectations are grounded in comparative-administration research and are used as hypotheses about curriculum orientation rather than deterministic descriptions of individual programmes. Hybridisation, international accreditation and cross-national policy learning are explicitly expected.

The curriculum implications follow from the professional roles embedded in these traditions. Where legality and formal accountability dominate, legal-administrative competence should remain comparatively visible. Where managerial and performance logics are stronger, leadership, evaluation and results-oriented policy skills should be more salient. Where collaborative and trust-based governance is institutionalised, relational, co-creative and citizen-centred competencies should be more prominent. At the same time, digitalisation, cross-sector collaboration and common accreditation pressures should produce partial convergence. This theoretical structure underpins table 1; the propositions themselves are stated in the analytical framework, where they are linked directly to operational indicators.

Table 1 Administrative traditions, public servant and expected competencies

Administrative tradition	Conception of public servant	Dominant governance logic	Expected competency orientation
Napoleonic	Guardian of legality and administrative continuity	State centrality, administrative law, hierarchy and procedure	Legal-administrative expertise, regulation and formal accountability
Prussian / continental-professional	Professional bureaucrat and institutional steward	Legal-rational authority, career administration and technical competence	Professional bureaucracy, technical-administrative capacity and policy competence
Anglo-Saxon	Public manager, policy analyst and adaptive leader	Managerialism, performance, flexibility and results orientation	Leadership, policy analysis, evaluation, management and performance
Scandinavian	Collaborative problem-solver and public value facilitator	Trust-based governance, welfare professionalism, collaboration and citizen orientation	Collaboration, co-creation, public value, citizen engagement and innovation

Source: Authors' elaboration based on comparative administrative-traditions research (Ongaro, 2009; Painter and Peters, 2010; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017; Pierre and Peters, 2020) and public-affairs education research (O'Neill, 2022; Haruna, 2023; Göçoglu and Demirkol, 2024).

Analytical framework and propositions: curriculum alignment as capacity formation

The analytical framework translates the preceding theoretical argument into a sequence that can be observed in programme documentation: administrative tradition → competency orientation → pedagogical design → assessment strategy → documented learning-outcome evidence. The sequence does not imply that curricula directly cause administrative or state capacity. Instead, it identifies the educational mechanisms through which programmes can contribute to professionalisation: specifying competencies, creating opportunities to practise them and requiring learners to demonstrate them. Administrative tradition is treated as contextual rather than deterministic, while programme type is retained as a source of within-tradition variation.

Three levels of alignment are distinguished. Declarative alignment exists when programme objectives and competencies are explicit. Pedagogical alignment exists when teaching methods provide credible opportunities to practise those competencies. Assessment alignment exists when learners must demonstrate them through appropriately matched tasks, especially tasks approximating public-sector practice. A fourth evidentiary layer concerns whether programmes report graduate, employer, accreditation or organisational outcome evidence. Stronger professionalisation is inferred only at the level of documented curricular alignment; the study does not claim to observe actual workplace competence.

From theoretical expectations to empirical propositions

The propositions connect specific bodies of theory to observable curriculum patterns. P1–P3 derive from comparative administrative traditions and their associated professional role expectations; P4–P5 derive from constructive alignment, authentic assessment and recent competence-oriented public-affairs education research. Their empirical status is descriptive and comparative rather than causal.

- P1. Napoleonic programmes are expected to display a comparatively stronger legal-administrative orientation; continental-professional programmes are expected to combine legal-rational and technical-professional competence. Because both traditions are subject to managerial and digital adaptation, convergence on non-legal competencies is also expected.
- P2. Anglo-Saxon programmes are expected to display a comparatively stronger orientation towards management, performance, leadership, evaluation and results-oriented policy competence.
- P3. Scandinavian programmes are expected to display a comparatively stronger orientation towards collaborative, relational, citizen-centred and public-innovation competencies.
- P4. Across traditions, experiential pedagogies (for example, simulations, policy labs, problem-based learning, internships and real-world projects) are expected to co-occur with stronger documented evidence of competency development.
- P5. Curriculum alignment is expected to be strongest when declared competencies, pedagogical activities and assessment strategies are integrated around authentic or simulated public-sector problems.

To operationalise these propositions, the study develops a Competency-Based Curriculum Alignment Index (CCAI). The five dimensions were derived from the conceptual sequence above: objectives and competency models capture declarative alignment; pedagogical design captures opportunities for enactment; assessment strategy captures verification; and outcome evidence captures external or post-programme visibility. Each dimension is scored from 0 to 3, producing a total range of 0–15. Thresholds (0–4 weak, 5–8 moderate-low, 9–12 moderate-high, 13–15 strong) are interpretive bands used for descriptive comparison, not validated psychometric cut-points. Table 2 links each coding dimension to its theoretical basis and observable documentary evidence.

Table 2 Dimensions of the Competency-Based Curriculum Alignment Index

Dimension	Analytical question	Observable evidence
D1 Training objectives	Does the programme define clear public sector and professionalisation goals?	Programme aims, target group, public service orientation, reform or capacity-building objectives
D2 Competency model	Are competencies or learning outcomes explicitly defined?	Skills, competencies, learning outcomes, qualification objectives and competency frameworks
D3 Pedagogical design	Are teaching methods appropriate for competency development?	Case studies, simulations, policy labs, internships, projects, problem-based learning and real-world assignments
D4 Assessment strategy	Are competencies assessed through appropriate methods?	Exams, essays, policy briefs, portfolios, capstones, simulations, rubrics and practitioner feedback
D5 Evidence of outcomes	Are learning outcomes measurable or externally validated?	Graduate tracking, employability data, quality assurance, accreditation, employer feedback and organisational impact

Source: Authors' elaboration. D1–D2 derive from competency-based and professional-education research (NASPAA, 2019; O'Neill, 2022; Göçoğlu and Demirkol, 2024); D3–D4 from constructive alignment and authentic assessment (Biggs, 1996; Biggs and Tang, 2011; Wiggins, 1998; Gulikers, Bastiaens and Kirschner, 2004); D5 from the study's concern with externally observable evidence of professionalisation. Coding rules are reported in appendix B.

Table 3 CCAI subscores and analytical purposes

Sub-score	Purpose
Legal-administrative competency	Emphasis on law, regulation, procedure, legality and compliance
Managerial-performance competency	Emphasis on leadership, management, evaluation, performance and strategy
Digital-era governance competency	Emphasis on data, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, e-government and digital services
Relational-collaborative competency	Emphasis on collaboration, co-creation, citizen engagement, trust, networks and partnerships
Authentic assessment	Use of applied, performance-based, rubric-based or externally validated assessment
Experiential pedagogy	Use of simulations, policy labs, problem-based learning, internships, case studies and real-world projects

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the CCAI codebook. Competency sub-scores draw on policy-capacity, public-management and digital-era governance literatures (Wu, Ramesh and Howlett, 2015; OECD, 2023; Overton and Kleinschmit, 2022), while experiential pedagogy and authentic assessment follow the alignment literature cited in table 2.

Research design and methods

The study adopts a comparative documentary research design combining structured qualitative coding, index construction and configurational interpretation. The unit of analysis is the programme, not the country or institution. Countries provide the administrative-tradition context; programmes are the sites where competency expectations, pedagogy and assessment are documented. The design is "mixed" only in the limited sense that qualitative documentary coding is summarised quantitatively through the CCAI; it does not combine independent qualitative and quantitative datasets.

The empirical analysis uses a purposive, tradition-stratified sample of 32 programmes across 12 European countries, with eight programmes per administrative tradition. Case selection followed two explicit criteria. First, programmes had to provide advanced education or professional formation directly relevant to public administration, public policy, public management or senior civil-service development. Second, sufficient official documentation had to be publicly available for systematic coding. The design intentionally includes university master's degrees, executive/professional programmes and civil-service schools because professional capacity is formed through multiple educational channels. Comparability is therefore sought at the level of documented curricular alignment rather than institutional type; programme type is reported for every case in appendix A and treated as a source of heterogeneity rather than ignored.

A two-stage screening process was used to finalise the sample. Candidate programmes were first allocated to an administrative tradition using country-level comparative-administration classifications and then screened for documentary codability. A programme was retained when official sources provided sufficient evidence to code at least four of the five CCAI dimensions. Where documentation was insufficient, the case was replaced by another eligible programme from the same tradition. No institution was retained because of reputation alone. Appendix A reports all 32 final cases, their programme type, CCAI score and codability status, thereby applying the same disclosure rule across traditions and avoiding selective emphasis on particular schools in the findings.

The documentary corpus comprises official programme descriptions, curriculum plans, course catalogues, module descriptions, syllabi, learning outcomes, competency frameworks, assessment regulations, accreditation and quality-assurance documents, professional-training regulations and programme handbooks. Course-level evidence was prioritised where available because it provides more granular information on pedagogy and assessment. Documents were treated as evidence of what programmes formally specify and disclose, not as direct evidence of classroom implementation or graduate performance.

Coding used a structured codebook derived from the analytical framework in section 4 and the sources identified in tables 2 and 3. Each CCAI dimension was scored from 0 to 3: 0 = no observable evidence; 1 = limited or generic evidence; 2 = explicit but incomplete evidence; and 3 = detailed, operational and clearly aligned evidence. Coding rules are reproduced in appendix B. The codebook was designed

deductively from the alignment model and competency literatures, while documentary examples were used to clarify category boundaries during application. Ambiguous cases were assigned the lower score to reduce upward inference from sparse documentation.

Coding was conducted manually by one researcher using a documented audit protocol; generative AI was not used to assign scores, classify evidence or resolve ambiguous cases. For each programme, documentary evidence was extracted into a screening matrix covering objectives, competencies, pedagogy, assessment and outcomes. Scores were assigned only when official programme- or course-level documents supported the relevant category. Borderline cases were rechecked against the codebook after the first coding pass, and the lower score was retained when ambiguity remained. Because no second independent coder was available, inter-coder reliability was not estimated; this is acknowledged as a limitation and the coding matrix, programme-level evidence and scoring rules are made available as supplementary material to enable external scrutiny and replication.

Comparative analysis proceeded in three steps. First, CCAI totals and ranges were summarised by administrative tradition. Second, competency orientations were compared using legal-administrative, managerial-performance, digital-era and relational-collaborative coding categories. Third, pedagogy and assessment evidence was examined to assess whether experiential and authentic approaches co-occurred with stronger documented outcome evidence. Given the purposive sample and ordinal coding, differences are interpreted descriptively; no claims of statistical significance are made.

Configurational reasoning was then used to identify recurring combinations of explicit competency frameworks, experiential pedagogy and authentic assessment associated with stronger curriculum alignment. With 32 purposively selected cases, this is exploratory pattern analysis rather than formal fsQCA or causal inference. The purpose is to identify plausible alternative pathways to high documented alignment and to examine whether those pathways differ across traditions and programme types.

Findings I: competency profiles across administrative traditions

The first set of findings examines whether competency profiles vary across administrative traditions. All four traditions display relatively high levels of curriculum alignment. The average CCAI score is 12.50 for Anglo-Saxon programmes, 12.25 for Scandinavian programmes, 12.00 for Prussian or continental-professional programmes and 11.88 for Napoleonic programmes. These differences do not imply a hierarchy of programme quality, but they reveal distinctive governance profiles of professionalisation.

Table 4 Curriculum alignment and dominant competency profiles by tradition

Administrative tradition	N	Average CCAI	Minimum	Maximum	Dominant competency profile
Napoleonic	8	11.88	11	13	Legal-administrative expertise with managerial and digital adaptation
Prussian/ continental-professional	8	12.00	11	14	Professional bureaucracy with technical, policy and managerial competence
Anglo-Saxon	8	12.50	11	14	Managerial performance, policy analysis and adaptive leadership
Scandinavian	8	12.25	11	14	Collaboration, trust and citizen-centred governance

Source: Authors' elaboration from programme-level CCAI coding. N = 8 programmes per tradition; scores are descriptive and not tests of statistical difference. Full programme-level data are reported in appendix A and the supplementary coding workbook.

Napoleonic curricula: legality and administrative capacity

Napoleonic programmes display the clearest legal-administrative orientation in the coded material, consistent with the expectation that administrative law, state centrality and formal procedure remain important professional foundations. Across the eight cases, however, legal-administrative content is commonly combined with management, digitalisation and reform-oriented competencies. The pattern is therefore better characterised as continuity with adaptation than as a purely legal model. Because programme types vary within the group, the finding concerns the dominant documented orientation of the tradition-level profile rather than every individual institution.

Prussian curricula: professional bureaucracy and technical-policy competence

The continental-professional group presents a more mixed profile than a strict legal-rational expectation would suggest. Its programmes combine professional bureaucracy and institutional expertise with policy analysis, governance, evaluation and management. This makes P1 only partially supported: the Napoleonic cases retain a stronger legal-administrative signature, whereas continental-professional cases show more hybrid technical-policy and managerial repertoires. The divergence is substantively important because it indicates that historically related bureaucratic traditions need not translate into identical curriculum models.

Anglo-Saxon curricula: performance governance and adaptive leadership

Anglo-Saxon programmes display the clearest managerial-performance profile. Leadership, policy analysis, strategy, economics, evaluation and evidence-informed decision making are repeatedly visible in the documentary coding, and applied

outputs such as policy briefs, capstones, projects and presentations are prominent in the assessment evidence. Relative to the Napoleonic pattern, legal-administrative content is less central to the documented professional model. P2 is therefore supported descriptively, although the overlap in overall CCAI scores cautions against interpreting tradition as a hierarchy of programme quality.

Scandinavian curricula: trust, collaboration and public value governance

Scandinavian programmes display the clearest relational-collaborative profile, with recurring emphasis on collaboration, citizen engagement, public value, co-creation, welfare governance and digital public services. Their documentary record also shows frequent use of problem-based and project-oriented learning. P3 is therefore supported descriptively. At the same time, managerial, analytical and digital competencies remain visible, again suggesting hybridisation rather than a self-contained "Scandinavian curriculum".

Across traditions, two comparative patterns stand out. First, average CCAI scores are close (11.88–12.50), so the principal differences concern competency orientation and the form of alignment rather than overall documented quality. Second, all four traditions combine inherited professional logics with newer managerial, collaborative and digital demands. The evidence therefore points to institutionally mediated convergence: programmes increasingly share a competency vocabulary while continuing to differ in which competencies are foregrounded and how they are linked to pedagogy and assessment.

Findings II: pedagogy, assessment and verifiable learning outcomes

Across the full sample, declared objectives and competency models are more consistently documented than pedagogy, assessment and outcome evidence. This creates a recurrent gradient from competency declaration to competency verification. The pattern is observed across traditions, although its curricular expression differs: legal-administrative cases more often rely on formal coursework and professional assignments, whereas managerial and collaborative programmes more frequently document simulations, projects, capstones or problem-based learning. Because the study measures public documentation, this finding should be read as a transparency and alignment pattern rather than proof of what happens in every classroom.

The most strongly aligned cases combine three features: explicit competency frameworks, experiential opportunities and assessment tasks requiring applied performance. Documentary examples include case-based teaching, simulations, problem-based learning, policy labs, internships, capstone projects, practitioner engagement and real-world assignments, assessed through policy briefs, portfolios, professional reports, oral presentations, projects or other applied outputs. This cross-tradition pattern is consistent with P4 and P5

and with constructive-alignment theory: competencies become more verifiable when practice and assessment are visibly connected to the stated learning outcomes.

Lower CCAI scores should not be interpreted as evidence of weak teaching or low institutional quality. They indicate that the public documentary record offers less evidence connecting competency claims to pedagogy, assessment or outcomes. In several cases, academic content is extensive, but documentation relies mainly on course descriptions, conventional examinations or broad learning-outcome statements. The index therefore captures documented curricular alignment and transparency, not realised graduate competence.

Assessment is the most consequential bottleneck in the documented competency chain. Competency frameworks are widespread and experiential elements are common, but fewer programmes provide clear evidence that learners must demonstrate integrated professional judgement through authentic tasks or that outcomes are externally validated. This finding strengthens the educational mechanism in the argument: professionalisation is most observable not where competencies are simply declared, but where they are enacted and assessed.

The cross-tradition implication is therefore conditional rather than universal: curricula with explicit competency frameworks, experiential pedagogies and authentic assessment provide stronger documentary evidence of professionalisation than curricula relying mainly on formal course descriptions and traditional examinations. The result extends constructive alignment into comparative Public Administration by showing that the forms through which competence is practised and verified are also shaped by administrative and programme contexts.

Comparative configurations of curriculum alignment

The CCAI should not be interpreted only as a ranking. It is more useful as a configurational tool that identifies different pathways through which programmes align competencies, pedagogy, assessment and outcomes. High alignment can be achieved through multiple institutionally embedded configurations.

The configurational interpretation provides a direct assessment of the propositions. P1 receives partial support: the Napoleonic cases display the expected legal-administrative profile, while continental-professional programmes are more hybrid and managerial-policy oriented than the original expectation implied. P2 and P3 are supported descriptively through the stronger managerial-performance and relational-collaborative orientations of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian programmes, respectively. P4 and P5 are also supported descriptively: cases combining experiential pedagogy and authentic assessment tend to provide stronger documented evidence of alignment. These findings are pattern statements within a purposive sample and are not presented as statistical or causal tests.

The comparison also cautions against treating competency-based curricula as universally transferable templates. Similar terms carry different institutional

Table 5 Curriculum alignment and dominant competency profiles by tradition

Tradition	Dominant competencies	Dominant pedagogy	Assessment pattern	Type of outcome
Napoleonic	Legality, administrative procedure, public management and formal accountability	Lectures, legal-administrative cases, executive training and reform-oriented modules	Exams, essays, projects and professional assignments	Formal administrative expertise with managerial and digital adaptation
Prussian / continental-professional	Professional bureaucracy, policy analysis, technical-administrative competence and management	Seminars, institutional analysis, policy projects and applied governance training	Formal and applied assessment, projects and policy outputs	Professional-bureaucratic capacity combined with governance competence
Anglo-Saxon	Leadership, performance, policy analysis, management and evaluation	Case-based learning, simulations, capstones, policy reports and applied projects	Applied assessment, policy briefs, capstones and presentations	Managerial capacity, adaptive leadership and results-oriented policy competence
Scandinavian	Collaboration, trust, citizen engagement, public value and public innovation	Problem-based learning, policy labs, co-creation, real-world projects and collaborative learning	Portfolios, projects, practitioner-oriented assignments and applied assessment	Collaborative capacity, trust-based governance and citizen-centred service delivery

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the comparative CCAI analysis and programme-level documentary coding. The configurations summarise dominant patterns and do not imply that all programmes within a tradition are identical.

meanings: leadership may be tied to performance management, administrative responsibility, professional stewardship or collaborative facilitation. Curriculum reform therefore involves both convergence and translation. Common competency frameworks can support professionalisation, but their design and assessment need to remain sensitive to institutional missions, programme types and administrative traditions.

Discussion: education, professionalisation and administrative capacity

The results clarify the relationship between public-affairs education and administrative capacity in ways that neither public-management nor educational scholarship captures alone. Public-management research identifies changing capability demands—analytical, managerial, collaborative, digital and ethical—while educational scholarship explains the conditions under which intended capabilities become practised and assessable. The CCAI connects these literatures by showing that competency statements are only the first stage of a professionalisation process.

This supports the claim that PA and PP education can operate as governance infrastructure, but in a bounded sense: curricula shape professional repertoires and their verification; they do not by themselves generate organisational performance or state capacity.

A second implication concerns convergence and administrative traditions. Competency language has diffused widely across the sample, consistent with broader trends in professional and public-service education (O'Neill, 2022; Haruna, 2023; Göçoglu and Demirkol, 2024). Yet the empirical profiles do not converge on a single professional model. Napoleonic cases retain a stronger legal-administrative orientation, Anglo-Saxon cases foreground managerial-performance competencies, and Scandinavian cases emphasise collaboration and citizen orientation; continental-professional programmes show the strongest hybridisation. This pattern is consistent with comparative-administration accounts of reform ideas being filtered through institutional traditions rather than copied uniformly (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017; Pierre and Peters, 2020).

Third, the findings help distinguish administrative capacity from broader state capacity. The immediate contribution of education concerns the capabilities of public professionals and organisations: analysing problems, interpreting rules, coordinating actors, using evidence, managing performance and exercising judgement. These are components of administrative and policy capacity (Wu, Ramesh and Howlett, 2015), but their translation into state capacity depends on recruitment, organisational authority, resources and institutional incentives. This qualification is important because it prevents curriculum design from being treated as a sufficient explanation of state performance. Recent evidence that public managers' educational backgrounds are associated with different performance dimensions likewise suggests a relationship worth studying without reducing it to a direct educational effect (Netra, Sørensen and Nejstgaard, 2022).

Fourth, the assessment-centred finding extends professionalisation research. The strongest cross-tradition pattern is not a particular competency family but the alignment of declared competencies with opportunities for experiential learning and authentic assessment. This finding converges with constructive-alignment theory (Biggs, 1996; Biggs and Tang, 2011) and with recent public-administration curriculum debates emphasising applied, competence-oriented and digitally relevant learning (Overton and Kleinschmit, 2022; Reed and Houston, 2024). It also identifies a practical tension: programmes can rapidly adopt competency vocabulary, while redesigning assessment and producing credible outcome evidence is institutionally more demanding.

The interdisciplinary contribution therefore lies in specifying a mechanism rather than merely juxtaposing literatures. Comparative administrative traditions explain variation in the institutional meaning of competence; public-management and policy-capacity scholarship identify the repertoires increasingly demanded of public professionals; and educational alignment theory explains how those repertoires become teachable and assessable. The partial support for P1 is theoretically informative because it shows that traditions are not fixed containers: continental-professional programmes appear more hybrid than a simple legal-rational

model predicts. Conversely, the support for P2 and P3 indicates that historically embedded governance logics remain visible despite cross-European convergence in competency language.

Limitations and future research

The study has five main limitations. First, it relies on public documents, which may not fully represent classroom practice. Second, documentation varies across institutions, making the CCAI partly a measure of curricular transparency. Third, the sample is purposive and combines university, executive and civil-service programmes; this breadth is substantively appropriate to the research question but limits like-for-like institutional comparison. Fourth, administrative traditions are ideal types that may obscure hybridity. Fifth, coding was conducted by one researcher, so inter-coder reliability could not be estimated. Future research should validate the codebook with independent coders, enlarge the sample, compare programme types separately, and triangulate documents with interviews, classroom observation, graduate tracking and employer evidence. Formal configurational methods could then test whether alternative combinations of competency specification, pedagogy and assessment are consistently associated with stronger professionalisation outcomes.

Conclusion

This study examined how competency-based Public Administration and Public Policy curricula contribute to professionalisation and administrative capacity across European administrative traditions. It developed a CCAI and applied it to 32 programmes spanning Napoleonic, continental-professional, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian settings. The analysis deliberately distinguishes the direct educational contribution to administrative capacity from the broader and more demanding concept of state capacity.

The findings show widespread convergence in competency language but continuing variation in its institutional meaning. Napoleonic curricula retain a comparatively strong legal-administrative foundation; continental-professional curricula combine professional bureaucracy with managerial and policy competence; Anglo-Saxon curricula emphasise performance, policy analysis and adaptive leadership; and Scandinavian curricula foreground collaboration, citizen orientation and public value. These patterns coexist with substantial hybridisation and similar overall levels of documented curriculum alignment.

The strongest cross-tradition conclusion concerns alignment. Professionalisation is more convincingly documented where explicit competency frameworks are connected to experiential learning and authentic assessment. Declared competencies alone provide weak evidence that professional judgement has been developed or verified. Assessment therefore emerges as a key institutional link between education and the formation of administrative capability.

PA and PP education can thus be understood as governance infrastructure when they perform four functions: specifying expected competencies, developing them through learning design, verifying them through assessment and adapting professional repertoires to changing governance demands. This formulation avoids treating curricula as a direct cause of state performance while identifying a concrete mechanism through which education can support administrative capacity. Future research should test the model with larger and more homogeneous samples, independent coding, workplace and employer evidence, and longitudinal data on graduate trajectories and organisational deployment.

Declaration on the use of artificial intelligence

During preparation of the manuscript, generative artificial intelligence tools were used only for auxiliary language editing, structural refinement and drafting support. They were not used to select programmes, extract documentary evidence, assign CCAI scores, classify empirical material or resolve coding ambiguities. All source verification, coding decisions, interpretation and argumentation were undertaken and checked by the authors, who retain full responsibility for the final manuscript.

Supplementary materials

The supplementary files contain the CCAI coding matrix, documentary screening protocol, final programme sample, replacement logic, codability documentation and empirical analysis workbook. They are intended to support transparency, auditability and replication of the analysis.

Appendix A. Final sample, CCAI scores and codability status

The final analytical sample contains 32 programmes, balanced across four administrative traditions. The table reports the programme, country, tradition, programme type, CCAI total and documentary codability status. Full source URLs and coding notes are retained in the supplementary coding matrix.

Table A1 Final sample, CCAI scores and codability status

ID	Country	Programme	Administrative tradition	Type	CCAI	Codability status
NAP-F01	France	Sciences Po - master's in public policy	Napoleonic	University master	12	Fully codable
NAP-F02	France	INET/CNFPT - Formation initiale des administrateurs territoriaux	Napoleonic	Civil service training	13	Fully codable candidate
NAP-F03	France	INSP - Cycle supérieur de perfectionnement des administrateurs de l Etat	Napoleonic	Executive professional training	12	Fully codable candidate
NAP-F04	Spain	UCM - master's in government and public administration	Napoleonic	University master	11	Fully codable
NAP-F05	Spain	UAB/UB/UPF - Official Master in Public Administration	Napoleonic	Inter-university master	11	Fully codable candidate
NAP-F06	Italy	University of Milan - Administration and Public Policy	Napoleonic	University master	12	Fully codable candidate
NAP-F07	Portugal	Iscte - Master in Public Administration	Napoleonic	University master	12	Fully codable
NAP-F08	Portugal	IPPS-Iscte - Professional Master in Digitalisation in Public Administration	Napoleonic	Professional master	12	Fully codable candidate
PRU-F01	Germany	Hertie School - Master of Public Policy	Prussian / continental-professional	University master	14	Fully codable
PRU-F02	Germany	Hertie School - Executive Master of Public Administration	Prussian / continental-professional	Executive programme	13	Fully codable
PRU-F03	Germany	Deggendorf Institute of Technology - Public Management	Prussian / continental-professional	Professional master	11	Fully codable
PRU-F04	Austria	FH Campus Wien - Public Management	Prussian / continental-professional	Applied university programme	11	Fully codable
PRU-F05	Germany	German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer - MA Public Administration	Prussian / continental-professional	University master	12	Fully codable candidate
PRU-F06	Netherlands	Leiden University - MSc Public Administration	Prussian / continental-professional	University master	12	Fully codable
PRU-F07	Netherlands	University of Twente - MSc Public Administration	Prussian / continental-professional	University master	12	Fully codable
PRU-F08	Netherlands	Erasmus University Rotterdam - International Public Management and Public Policy	Prussian / continental-professional	University master	11	Fully codable

ID	Country	Programme	Administrative tradition	Type	CCAI	Codability status
ANG-F01	United Kingdom	LSE - MSc Public Policy and Administration	Anglo-Saxon	University master	12	Fully codable
ANG-F02	United Kingdom	LSE - Master of Public Administration	Anglo-Saxon	University master	14	Fully codable
ANG-F03	United Kingdom	University of Oxford - Master of Public Policy	Anglo-Saxon	University master	14	Fully codable
ANG-F04	United Kingdom	UCL - MSc Public Policy	Anglo-Saxon	University master	13	Fully codable
ANG-F05	Ireland	Institute of Public Administration - MA Public Management	Anglo-Saxon	Professional master	11	Fully codable
ANG-F06	Ireland	Dublin City University - MSc in Public Policy	Anglo-Saxon	University master	13	Fully codable candidate
ANG-F07	Ireland	University College Dublin - Master of Public Policy	Anglo-Saxon	University master	11	Fully codable
ANG-F08	Ireland	University of Galway - Public Policy MA	Anglo-Saxon	University master	12	Fully codable candidate
SCA-F01	Denmark	Aalborg University - MSc in Public Administration	Scandinavian	University master	14	Fully codable candidate
SCA-F02	Denmark	Copenhagen Business School - Master of Public Governance	Scandinavian	Executive master / leadership	13	Fully codable candidate
SCA-F03	Denmark	Copenhagen Business School - MSSc in Public Management and Social Development	Scandinavian	University master	12	Fully codable candidate
SCA-F04	Sweden	Stockholm University - Master's Programme in Open eGovernment	Scandinavian	University master	11	Fully codable candidate
SCA-F05	Finland	University of Vaasa - Preparedness and Resilience	Scandinavian	University master	12	Fully codable candidate
SCA-F06	Finland	Tampere University - Security Governance, Security Management and Politics	Scandinavian	University master	11	Fully codable candidate
SCA-F07	Norway	Oslo Met - Public Administration and Management	Scandinavian	University master	13	Fully codable
SCA-F08	Norway	University of Bergen - Master of Philosophy in Public Administration	Scandinavian	University master / MPA-type	12	Fully codable candidate

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the supplementary coding files. Inclusion required eligibility under the programme-domain criterion and sufficient official documentation to code at least four of five CCAI dimensions.

Appendix B. CCAI coding rules

Table B1 CCAI coding rules

Score	Meaning	Coding rule
0	No evidence	No relevant official evidence for the dimension
1	Limited evidence	Generic or weakly specified statement
2	Explicit but incomplete evidence	Dimension is documented but lacks full operational detail
3	Detailed aligned evidence	Dimension is explicit, operational and linked to public sector competence or outcomes

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the CCAI codebook; coding rules and score meanings are specified in section 5 and appendix B.

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Maria Asensio. Visiting associate professor at Iscte — Lisbon University Institute, researcher at the Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology (CIES-Iscte), and principal researcher at the National Institute of Administration (INA, I.P.), Lisbon, Portugal.
E-mail: maria.asensio@ina.pt
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3559-1237
Contributions to the paper: conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, methodology, investigation, project administration, supervision, original writing, review and editing.

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