

Master of Science in
European Union Policy
Vesalius College

26 August 2011

Initial accreditation

Panel report

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1. Executive summary

The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) has received a request for an initial accreditation procedure, including programme documents, regarding the proposed Master of European Union Policy programme. The expert panel was convened by the NVAO. The panel has studied the information available and discussed the proposed programme with representatives of the institution and the programme during a site visit.

Below, the panel presents the considerations which have led to the assessment.

The objectives of the programme are clear and internally consistent. The orientation of the programme is clearly and definitely on the EU policy-making process. The interdisciplinary approach of the programme is appropriate, as political science, economics and law are combined to address the different aspects of the EU policy-making process. The academic level the programme intends to attain is adequate. The programme management should, however, review the research component and the interdisciplinary aspect of the programme on a regular basis, to prevent the programme from becoming too ambitious. The learning outcomes are focussed. The learning outcomes reflect the objectives adequately and match the descriptions of a masters' degree. The programme management has presented the matrixes, indicating the matching of the learning outcomes and the Vlaamse Gemeenschap learning outcomes descriptors. The comparison with the Tuning-framework, the VLIR-criteria and the criteria of Umbach and Scholl is valid for the assessment of the learning outcomes. The learning outcomes meet these requirements and criteria. Looking at the programme's orientation the programme management has made a plausible choice for political science as the main discipline of the programme. The law and economics disciplines support the objective of the programme, as these are meant to assist in understanding the EU policy-making process. The graduates will have been taught to apply theory to issues, which are relevant to the professional practice.

The required and optional literature of the programme is entirely appropriate. The Institute for European Studies of Vrije Universiteit Brussel will be actively involved in the programme, thereby ensuring the research component of the curriculum. The contents of the curriculum reflect the current developments in the disciplines. Concepts and theories from these disciplines are offered to the students in the courses. The students are, rightly, introduced to social science research tools at an introductory level and are taught to construct research questions for their master's thesis. In the curriculum current developments in the EU policy-making process are addressed, thereby introducing the students to the professional aspects of this process. In the internships the students acquire first-hand experience in a professional environment. The curriculum will be regularly updated.

All of the learning outcomes of the programme have been appropriately translated into the curriculum. The course descriptions are elaborate and provide clear information on the essentials of the courses. The curriculum reflects the interdisciplinarity of the programme, in the courses as well as in the master's thesis. The variety of study methods used in the curriculum, being case studies, group learning processes and presentations, provides the students with ample means to master the contents of the courses, on the cognitive level as well as on the skills level. The assessment methods are varied and provide adequate tests of the knowledge, skills and attitudes the students should have acquired.

The coherence of the curriculum in the first and the second semester is appropriate, as is the relationship between the first and the second semester, the first semester mainly offering theoretical insights and the second semester linking theory and practice. The course convenors and the learning and teaching working group of the programme are important safeguards to monitor the coherence of the curriculum and the courses. The workload for the curriculum is evenly distributed over time. As the curriculum is ambitious and demanding, the programme management's intention to monitor the workload carefully is to be appreciated. The admission requirements of the programme are sound. The number of credits of the curriculum is 60 ec. The number of credits of the master's thesis is 18 ec, meeting the requirements. The master's thesis is well-integrated in the curriculum. The students are given the opportunity to build their thesis in a number of consecutive stages.

The lecturers have either a research or academic background or substantial experience in the professional practice. The qualifications of the teaching staff meet the academic and professional standards. The number of staff is sufficient to meet the demands of the curriculum. The staff members are qualified as lecturers and/or researchers.

The housing and facilities are adequate for the programme. The counselling and tutoring services provided will match the requirements of the students.

The programme is well-organised. The courses of the programme are evaluated regularly and the results of these surveys are carefully monitored. The quality assurance system ensures the involvement of staff, students, alumni and professionals from the field.

Vesalius College guarantees the students to be able to graduate. The investments are sufficient to realise the programme. The financial provisions are sufficient to cover the initial losses, if any, during the first years.

Given these considerations, the panel advises the NVAO to take a positive decision regarding the quality of the programme Master of European Union Policy.

The Hague, 9 September 2011

On behalf of the Initial Accreditation panel convened to assess the Master of European Union Policy of Vesalius College in Brussels, Belgium,

Prof.dr. S. Vanhoonacker
(Chair)

drs. W.J.J.C. Vercouteren RC
(Secretary)

2. Introduction

2.1. The procedure

NVAO has received a request for an initial accreditation procedure including programme documents regarding the programme Master of European Union Studies. The request was submitted by Vesalius College in Brussels.

An initial accreditation procedure is required when a recognised institution wants to offer a programme and award a recognised bachelor's or master's degree. To a certain extent, an initial accreditation procedure differs from the accreditation procedure for programmes already being offered. Initial accreditation is in fact an *ex ante* assessment of a programme, and a programme becomes subject to the normal accreditation procedures once the initial accreditation has been granted.

NVAO has convened a panel of experts. The panel consisted of:

- Prof.dr. S. Vanhoonacker, chair
- Prof.dr. J. Orbie, expert
- Prof.dr. P. Periton, expert
- G.J. Wijnen, student

On behalf of the NVAO, J.W. Meijer was responsible for the process-coordination. Drs. W.J.J.C. Vercooteren RC has drafted the panel's report.

The composition of the panel reflects the expertise which NVAO deemed necessary. (please refer to Annex 1: Composition of the panel). All the panel members have signed a statement of independence and confidentiality.

The panel has based their assessment on the standards and criteria of the NVAO Initial Accreditation Framework (date of publication 14 February 2003).

The following procedure has been adopted. The members of the panel studied the documents presented beforehand by the programme management (please refer to Annex 3: Documents reviewed).

On 4 July 2011 the panel held a preparatory meeting. In this meeting the panel members shared their first impressions, based upon the documents the panel had received, and drew up a list of questions to be discussed with the representatives of the programme during the site visit. This list was compiled on the basis of the questions the individual panel members had drafted beforehand. The panel outlined the questions within the NVAO accreditation framework. The questions served as a guide for the panel to conduct the interviews during the site visit.

On 5 July 2011 the panel conducted a site visit at the premises of Vesalius College in Brussels. The site visit was conducted in accordance with the schedule drawn up beforehand (please refer to Annex 2: Agenda of the site visit).

Immediately after the site visit the members of the panel shared their considerations for each of the themes and each of the standards of the NVAO Initial Accreditation Framework. These considerations were based on the findings during the site visit, building upon the evaluation of the documents submitted by the institution.

A draft version of this report was finalised by the secretary taking into account the information presented as well as the findings and the considerations of the panel. The draft report was then sent to the members of the panel. The panel members corrected and amended the draft report. Finally, the secretary drew up the final report.

2.2. Panel report

The first chapter of this report is the executive summary, while the current chapter is the introduction.

The third chapter gives a description of the programme including its position within the university and the higher education system of Flanders (Belgium).

The panel presents its assessments in the fourth chapter. The programme is assessed by examining the themes and standards in the Initial Accreditation Framework. For each standard the panel presents an outline of its findings, considerations and a conclusion.

The *outline of the findings* are the objective facts as found by the panel in the programme documents, in the additional documents and during the site visit. The panel's *considerations* are the panel's subjective evaluations regarding these findings and the importance of each. The *considerations* presented by the panel logically lead to a concluding assessment.

The panel concludes the report with a table containing an overview of its assessments per theme and per standard.

3. Description of the programme

3.1. Overview

- Country: Belgium
- Institution: Vesalius College
- Programme: Master of European Union Policy
- Specialisations: n.a.
- Level: Master
- Orientation: Academic
- Degree: Master of Science
- Location: Brussels
- Mode of study: Full-time
- Field of studies: European Studies

3.2. Profile of the institution

The proposed Master in European Studies is organised by Vesalius College in collaboration with the Institute for European Studies (IES) of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Vesalius College is an English-speaking university college in Brussels with an accredited Bachelor degree course in International Affairs. IES is a Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence and has a strong research tradition in European Studies.

3.3. Profile of the programme

The proposed Master in European Union Policy programme is meant to offer an academic programme on European integration and the institutions of the European Union, at the level of an initial master. The programme will focus on international affairs at its core and will reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the European studies by including advanced policy-oriented courses in political science, economics and law.

The programme does not constitute a new programme for Flanders. In Flanders a number of similar programmes are already offered, like the Master of European Integration and Development of the partner institution IES, the Master of European Urban Culture of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, the Master of European Studies of the Catholic University of Leuven, and the Master of European Interdisciplinary Studies of the College of Bruges. The proposed programme, nevertheless, differs in focus and contents from these existing programmes.

The programme is new for Vesalius College, as the institution does not yet have a European studies programme at the master's level.

4. Assessment per theme and per standard

In this chapter the panel assesses the programme according to the six themes and nineteen standards of the Initial Accreditation Framework.

4.1. Aims and objectives of the programme

4.1.1 Level and orientation (Standard 1.1)

The intended learning outcomes of the programme correspond with the following descriptions of a master's degree:

- *general competences at an advanced level such as the ability to reason and act in an academic manner, the ability to handle complex problems, the ability to reflect on one's own thoughts and work, and the ability to convert this reflection into the development of more effective solutions, the ability to communicate one's own research and solutions to professional colleagues and laymen, and the ability to develop an opinion in an uncertain context*
- *general academic competences at an advanced level such as the ability to apply research methods and techniques, the ability to design research, the ability to apply paradigms in the disciplines of the sciences or the arts and the ability to indicate the limits of paradigms, originality and creativity regarding the continuously expanding body of knowledge and insight, and the ability to collaborate in a multi-disciplinary environment*
- *advanced understanding and insight in scientific, discipline- specific knowledge inherent to a certain domain of the sciences or the arts, insight in the most recent knowledge in the subject/discipline or parts of it, the ability to follow and interpret the direction in which theory formation is developing, the ability to make an original contribution towards the body of knowledge of one or several parts of the subject/discipline, and display specific competences characteristic for the subject/discipline such as designing, researching, analysing and diagnosing*
- *the competences needed for either independent research or the independent practice of the arts at the level of a newly-qualified researcher (in the arts), or the general and specific professional competences needed for independent application of academic or artistic knowledge at the level of a newly-qualified professional*

Findings

The objective of the programme is to provide a policy-oriented, interdisciplinary programme at an academic master's level. This objective may be divided into three more specific objectives, being:

- The programme has a definite policy-oriented profile, since it will concentrate on teaching the students to analyse and handle the major topics in the European Union (henceforth: EU) policy-making process.
- This EU policy-making process will be addressed from a political science perspective, an economics perspective and a law perspective, thereby achieving an interdisciplinary-oriented approach to this process.
- The programme is meant to attain an academic level, since the students will acquire theoretical and conceptual knowledge and skills by means of which they will be able to address the professional and practical issues regarding the EU policy-making process.

The programme management has translated these objectives into a set of learning outcomes. For these learning outcomes (see annex 4).

The programme management has drawn up a series of matrixes, indicating the relationships of the learning outcomes of the programme to the learning outcomes descriptors of the Vlaamse Gemeenschap (see annex 5).

Considerations

The panel considers the objectives of the programme to be clear and internally consistent. The panel, especially, approves of the focus of the programme on the EU policy-making process. The panel finds the interdisciplinary approach of the programme to be appropriate, as political science, economics and law are combined to address the different aspects of the EU policy-making process. The academic level the programme intends to attain is adequate. Nevertheless, the panel would advise the programme management to review the research component and the interdisciplinary aspect of the programme on a regular basis, to prevent the programme from becoming too ambitious.

The panel considers the translation of the objectives into the learning outcomes to be appropriate. The learning outcomes reflect the objectives adequately. The learning outcomes match the descriptions of a masters' degree. The competencies required at the master's level are all covered by the learning outcomes of the programme. The students will, among other things, be able to handle complex problems and to apply research methods and techniques, will have advanced insight in discipline-specific knowledge and will have the professional competencies needed for the application of academic knowledge.

The panel has studied the matrixes, relating the discipline specific learning outcomes of the programme to the Vlaamse Gemeenschap learning outcomes descriptors (please refer to annex 5). According to the panel, the learning outcomes of the programme match these of the descriptors of the Vlaamse Gemeenschap.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 1.1 *Level and orientation* as satisfactory.

4.1.2 Subject/ discipline specific requirements (standard 1.2)

The intended learning outcomes of the programme correspond with the requirements set by professional colleagues, both nationally and internationally, and the relevant discipline concerned (subject/discipline and/or professional practice or practice of the arts). In the case of regulated professions, the requirements correspond with the regulation or legislation concerned.

For academic master's programmes the learning outcomes stem from requirements set by the academic and/or artistic discipline, international academic practice and, for programmes to which this applies, practice in the relevant professional field.

Findings

The programme management has compared the intended learning outcomes of the programme to the criteria of the VLIR (Flemish Interuniversity Council) for European studies programmes, to the requirements of the framework of the Tuning – educational structures in Europe-programme and to the criteria of Umbach and Scholl (as laid down in their publication *Towards a Core Curriculum in European Studies*, 2003). The programme

complies with the rather broad requirements of the Tuning-framework, with the more specific criteria of the VLIR as well as with the criteria set out by Umbach and Scholl.

The programme complies with each of these sets of requirements or criteria as follows:

- As the programme is directed towards the study of institutions and policies of the EU, the programme management has chosen to situate the programme in the political science domain.
- The programme complies with the requirement of more than one discipline to be addressed in the programme and with the requirement of interdisciplinarity by introducing the students to law and economics topics and by combining these with political science.
- The students are taught to apply conceptual and theoretical knowledge to practical topics and problems.
- The programme prepares for high-level policy- and research-oriented positions at European institutions, in national administrations requiring knowledge of the EU or in non-governmental organisations dealing with EU-policy issues.

Considerations

The panel considers the learning outcomes to be focussed.

The panel considers the comparison made by the programme management with the Tuning-framework, the VLIR-criteria and the criteria of Umbach and Scholl to be valid for the assessment of the learning outcomes. These sets of criteria and requirements are an appropriate representation of the academic and professional requirements for European studies master's programmes.

The panel assesses the learning outcomes of the programme to meet these requirements and criteria. Looking at the programme's orientation the programme management has made a plausible choice for political science as the main discipline of the programme. The law and economics disciplines support the objective of the programme, as these are meant to assist in understanding the EU policy-making process. The panel feels the graduates will have been taught to apply theory to topics, which are relevant to the professional practice.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 1.2 *Subject/ Discipline specific Requirements* as satisfactory.

4.1.3 Summary of the judgments of Theme 1 "Aims and Objectives of the programme"

The panel has assessed the standards of this theme to be satisfactory. Overall, the panel assesses the theme 'Aims and objectives of the programme' as satisfactory.

4.2. Curriculum

A general overview of the curriculum is included in Annex 4 of this document.

4.2.1 Requirements for academic orientation (standard 2.1)

The proposed curriculum meets the following criteria for an academic orientation:

Academic orientation (bachelor's and master's programme):

- *Students develop their knowledge through the interaction between education and research (including research in the arts) within relevant disciplines;*
- *The curriculum corresponds with current developments in the relevant discipline(s) through verifiable links with current scientific theories;*
- *The curriculum ensures the development of competences in the field of research and/or the development and practice of the arts;*
- *Where appropriate, the curriculum has verifiable links with the current relevant professional practice.*

Findings

The programme management has listed the required and optional readings for the courses.

The programme will be offered by Vesalius College but will be carried out in very close collaboration with the Institute for European Studies, which is a Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence specialised in European Studies. Through this collaboration the programme will confront students with the most recent developments in research on the EU, and with the on-going scientific debates on the state of the art of the European integration process.

In each of the courses the students are presented with current developments in the programme's disciplines. The course Theories of EU Integration, for instance, introduces a number of theoretical perspectives concerning integration. The course Legal Foundations of European Integration, to give another example, addresses the legal foundations of the EU.

The students will be taught methods and techniques for social research in the course Tools and Methods for European Policy Analysis, which spans two semesters. In the first semester the students will be taught topics such as data collection, literature analysis, and comparative research methodologies. In the second semester the students prepare for their master's thesis, by drafting their research questions and by presenting a draft of the first two chapters of the thesis.

About 10 % to 15 % of the courses are left open to allow recent developments in theory and in practice to be included. In the IES Lecture Series the students are introduced to current issues in European studies, from an academic as well as a policy-making perspective.

The students will take an internship (Brussels Graduate Internship) in the second semester, during which they will become acquainted with the professional practice. The internships will be in organisations of the European Union or in organisations like lobby groups, think tanks or non-governmental organisations. Vesalius College has ample experience in organising the internships in these types of organisations.

The curriculum will be updated regularly by input of the lecturers of Vesalius College and of IES, these lecturers being in touch with the current scientific developments.

Considerations

The panel considers the required and optional literature of the programme to be entirely appropriate.

The panel considers the involvement of IES in the programme to be crucial to ensure the research component in the curriculum. The panel is convinced of IES's commitment to the programme, as the IES representatives have confirmed their commitment and as a number of IES staff members will be actively involved in the programme.

The contents of the courses reflect the current developments in the disciplines. Concepts and theories from these disciplines are offered to the students in these courses.

The students are introduced to social science research tools at an introductory level. Also, they are taught to be able to construct research questions for their master's thesis. The panel feels this is what the students ought to know and what they ought to master with regard to social research tools and methods.

In the courses as well as in the IES Lecture Series the programme addresses current developments in the EU policy-making process, thereby introducing the students to the professional aspects of this process.

The panel considers the internship to be an appropriate means for the students to acquire first-hand experience in a professional environment. The panel is convinced Vesalius College will succeed in organising these internships at the required level.

The panel is confident the curriculum will be regularly and adequately updated.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 2.1 *Requirements for academic orientation* as satisfactory.

4.2.2 Correspondence between the aims and objectives and the curriculum (standard 2.2)

- *The intended curriculum, the educational concept, the study methods and the learning assessments reflect the intended learning outcomes.*
- *The intended learning outcomes are adequately transferred into the educational goals of the curriculum or parts thereof.*

Findings

The first semester of the programme offers the students four courses, each of which addresses one of the elements of the EU policy-making process, being integration theory (Theories of EU Integration), political analysis (EU Redux: The Politics of European Integration), law (The Legal Foundations of European Integration) and economics (The Economics of European Integration). These courses cover the cognitive and, partly, the attitudinal learning outcomes of the programme.

In the courses of the first semester the issues of the EU policy-making process are presented to the students from different perspectives. The students, therefore, are confronted with different approaches to these topics, reinforcing their understanding of the multi-faceted nature of this process. This way the programme management intends to

achieve the interdisciplinarity of the curriculum. In the master's thesis the students are required to treat the thesis' subject in an interdisciplinary way.

The methodological aspects in the cognitive and skills learning outcomes are mainly covered by the Tools and Methods for European Policy Analysis course and the master's thesis. As the master's thesis is meant to be an integrative project, all of the learning outcomes will be addressed. The internship the students take corresponds to the skills and attitudinal learning outcomes of the programme.

The programme management has drafted course descriptions of each of the courses of the curriculum. In these course descriptions the course objectives, the contents, the study methods, the course material, the course assessment, the course schedule and the required and optional readings are presented.

The study methods of the courses comprise lectures by the course convenor and other lecturers who may teach in the courses, compulsory weekly readings and seminars, consisting of student's presentations of the weekly readings.

The course assessments are class participation, writing an essay of a specific number of words (about 3,000 words) and a written examination, the latter consisting of knowledge questions and essay questions. The assessment of the IES Lecture Series includes student's attendance and participation (in various roles such as the role of rapporteur) and a written examination, to be assessed by the course convenor and the IES Lecture Series organiser.

The members of the staff will supervise the internships, thereby taking care the internship meets the academic level. The assessment of the internships consists of the evaluation by the manager of the internship organisation, the student's internship report and the course convenor's assessment.

The master's thesis has to comprise 10,000 to 12,000 words. The assessment is done by two supervisors, one of Vesalius College and one of IES, although two of Vesalius College may be the case. The students have to meet specific deadlines for their research proposal, their draft version and their final version. Non-compliance with these deadlines will have an adverse effect on the grade.

Considerations

The panel has found all the learning outcomes of the programme to have been appropriately translated into the curriculum. The courses are relevant for attaining the learning outcomes.

The panel is positive about the course descriptions, as these are elaborate and provide clear information on the essentials of each of the courses. Through the course objectives the relation between the learning outcomes and the course contents is made visible.

The curriculum appropriately reflects the interdisciplinarity of the programme, in the courses as well as in the master's thesis.

The variety of study methods used in the curriculum, being case studies, group learning processes and presentations, provides the students with ample means to master the contents of the courses, on the cognitive level as well as on the skills level.

The assessment methods of the courses, the internship and the master's thesis are varied and provide adequate tests of the knowledge, skills and attitudes the students should have acquired.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 2.2 *Correspondence between the aims and objectives and the curriculum* as satisfactory.

4.2.3 Consistency of the curriculum (standard 2.3)

The contents of the curriculum are internally consistent.

Findings

The curriculum has been divided into two semesters. The first semester consists of the courses which address the EU policy-making process from different disciplinary perspectives. As the courses all take this process and the different topics which are part of this process as the object of study, the students are over the courses confronted with the same topics, thereby experiencing coherence between the courses.

In the second semester the EU policy-making process remains the core subject. In this semester the students are required to apply the knowledge they have gained in the first semester to problems as they occur in the professional practice. Examples of this are the internship and the master's thesis.

For the coordination of each of the courses a course convenor will be responsible. The programme management has set up a number of working groups. The learning and teaching working group will have regular meetings, will evaluate the students' papers and will also monitor the coherence of the curriculum. Overlaps of courses or gaps between courses will be remedied.

Considerations

The panel considers the coherence of the curriculum in the first and the second semester to be appropriate. The relationship between the first and the second semester is sound as well, the first semester mainly offering theoretical insights and the second semester linking theory and practice.

For the panel, the course convenors and the Learning and Teaching working group are important safeguards to monitor the coherence of the courses and the curriculum and to adjust possible deficiencies.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 2.3 *Consistency of the curriculum* as satisfactory.

4.2.4 Workload (standard 2.4.)

The programme meets the legal requirements

Findings

Each of the courses in the first semester has a workload of 6 ec and will take 14 weeks of 3 hours of class per week, being a total of about 40 hours of class. The students are required

to write a course-specific paper. In the course The Economics of European Integration the students have to write their paper half-way through the course in order to balance the workload. The students also have to attend the IES Lecture Series, taking them about 75 to 90 contact hours.

In the second semester the students are required to take their internship and to write their master's thesis in the same period of time. The internship will take two days per week, being between 225 and 270 hours, including the internship report. The master's thesis will require between 450 and 540 hours. The students have to meet strict deadlines, for their internship as well as for the master's thesis.

The programme management intends to monitor the actual workload through surveys and by means of asking selected students to keep a diary.

Considerations

The panel finds the workload for the curriculum to be well coordinated and to be evenly distributed over time.

Nevertheless, the panel considers the curriculum to be ambitious and demanding. The panel appreciates the programme management's intention to monitor the workload carefully.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 2.4 *Workload* as satisfactory.

4.2.5 Admission requirements (standard 2.5)

The structure and contents of the intended curriculum are in line with the qualifications of the incoming students¹:

- *A bachelor's degree, with a qualification or qualifications specified in more detail by the management of the institution, possibly supplemented with an individualised curriculum, a preparatory programme or a bridging programme.*

Findings

The programme management intends to admit about 40 students.

Applicants with a bachelor's degree in International Affairs from Vesalius College will be admitted to the programme without an intake procedure. Other graduates with a bachelor's degree will be admitted on the basis of a dossier. The criteria for acceptance are a working knowledge of the English language, having taken courses in the methodology of the social sciences, on the subject of the European Union and in an introduction to economics. The Summer school of the programme offers the applicants courses by means of which they may remedy deficiencies in statistics, economics and their knowledge of the European Union.

The admissions commission of the programme assesses previously acquired competencies or qualifications. The commission may grant exemptions.

Considerations

¹ The admission requirements are laid down in the Act on Higher Education in Flanders. Starting in 2005-2006 these requirements are laid down in the Act on Flexible Pathways in Higher Education. These requirements are identical.

The panel considers the admission requirements of the programme to be sound.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 2.5 *Admission requirements* as satisfactory

4.2.6 Credits (standard 2.6)

The programme meets the legal requirements regarding the range of credits

- *Master's programme: at least 60 credits*

Findings

The number of the credits of the programme is 60 ec.

Considerations

The panel has reviewed the curriculum and has concluded that this requirement is met.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 2.6 *Credits* as satisfactory

4.2.7 Master's thesis (standard 2.7)

The master's programme is concluded with the master's thesis.

The master's thesis corresponds to at least a fifth of the total number of credits with a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 30 credits.

Findings

The master's thesis is the last part of the curriculum of the programme. The number of credits of the thesis is 18 ec.

Considerations

The master's thesis number of credits corresponds to the requirements.

The panel finds the master's thesis to be well-integrated in the curriculum. The students are given the opportunity to build their thesis in a number of consecutive stages, starting with the Tools and Methods course, constructing their research questions, writing the draft version of the first two chapters, receiving feedback from their supervisors and, finally, presenting the final version of the thesis.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 2.7 *Master's thesis* as satisfactory

4.2.8 Summary of the judgments of Theme 2 "Curriculum"

The panel has assessed all of the standards of the theme to be satisfactory. The panel, therefore, assesses the theme 'Curriculum' as satisfactory.

4.3. Staff

4.3.1 Requirements for academic orientation (standard 3.1)

- *The programme meets the following criteria for the deployment of staff for a programme with an academic orientation:*
- *Teaching is principally provided by researchers who contribute to the development of the subject/discipline (including research in the arts)*
- *In addition, and where appropriate, sufficient staff will be deployed with knowledge of and insight in the professional field or practice of the arts concerned.*

Findings

The staff to be involved in the programme ought to have research capacity, knowledge, practical skills and experience in the field of European studies.

The lecturers are to be recruited from the teaching staff of Vesalius College and of IES. The lecturers of IES are all involved in European Union research, since IES is a Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence specialised in European Studies. Although Vesalius College is primarily oriented towards lecturing, the lecturers are involved in research in this field as well.

The curricula vitae of the staff show their research activities as well as their contribution to the disciplines in which they will lecture and their knowledge of the professional field.

Considerations

The panel appreciates the qualifications of the teaching staff. The lecturers have either a research or academic background or substantial experience in the professional practice. Therefore, the panel is convinced of the academic and professional standards of the staff.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 3.1 *Requirements for academic orientation* as satisfactory

4.3.2 Quantity of staff (standard 3.2)

- *Sufficient staff is deployed to be able to start the proposed programme*
- *Sufficient staff is deployed to be able to continue the proposed programme.*

Findings

A number of lecturers of Vesalius College will act as a course convenor and/or as a lecturer. Five Vesalius College staff members will be involved in the programme.

IES has a number of 43 researchers in all. Of these researchers about 10 will actively be involved in the programme. They, also, will act as a course convenor and/or as a lecturer. For one of the courses a course convenor is still to be recruited.

Vesalius College as well as IES have appointed a programme director to co-ordinate the efforts of the institutes in the programme.

Considerations

The panel considers the number of staff to be sufficient to meet the demands of the curriculum. The panel is positive about the planned recruitment of an additional course convenor.

The panel is positive about the coordination of the staff and the programme across the institutes.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 3.2 *Quantity of staff* as satisfactory

4.3.3 Quality of staff (standard 3.3)

The staff to be deployed are sufficiently qualified to ensure that the aims and objectives regarding content, didactics and organisation of the programme are achieved.

Findings

Nearly all of the lecturers have a PhD degree. They also have a substantial number of research assignments and publications in academic journals. A number of lecturers also have professional experience.

The lecturers of both Vesalius College and IES teach courses that have secured high overall student satisfaction. A large majority of the Vesalius College lecturers in the bachelor in International Affairs courses scored good or very good in the students' evaluation. The performance of the IES lecturers teaching in the IES master's programme has equally been evaluated good or excellent.

Considerations

According to the panel, the staff members are well qualified as lecturers and/or researchers. The composition of the staff is regarded to be a good combination of competencies, experiences and backgrounds relevant to the programme. For all these reasons the quality of the staff deployed in the programme is regarded to be satisfactory.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 3.3 *Quality of staff* as satisfactory

4.3.4 Summary of the judgments of Theme 3 "Staff"

The panel has assessed all of the standards of the theme to be satisfactory. The panel, therefore, assesses the theme 'Staff' as satisfactory.

4.4. Services

4.4.1 Facilities (standard 4.1)

Intended housing and facilities are adequate to achieve the learning outcomes.

Findings

All of the teaching activities of the programme will be held in the new building at the Pleinlaan 5 in Brussels. The building accommodates classrooms and offices for staff and includes a sound computer infrastructure. Having offices and courses in the same building contributes to the interactivity between students and staff and to the accessibility of the staff.

The students will be allowed to use all student-related facilities of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. These include free access to the university library, free access to the specialised IES library and access to student facilities, such as cafeteria, sports and health facilities.

Considerations

The panel considers the housing and facilities to be adequate for the programme.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 4.1 *Facilities* as satisfactory

4.4.2 Tutoring (standard 4.2)

There is adequate staff capacity to provide tutoring as well as information provision for students, and these are adequate in view of study progress.

Findings

The programme management distinguishes between practical, pedagogical and pastoral guidance services for the students.

The programme management provides guidance and support services, like assistance in improving the writing skills, enhancing students' knowledge of mathematics and statistics, providing confidential help for students with personal concerns and helping students to explore their career options and search for employment. A number of courses are available on line and may be consulted by the students.

The academic advisory service offers personalised guidance to students who need help on academic matters that cannot be given by an instructor.

Considerations

The panel is confident that the counselling and tutoring services provided will match the requirements of the students.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 4.2 *Tutoring* as satisfactory.

4.4.3 Summary of the judgments of Theme 4 "Services"

The panel has assessed all of the standards of the theme to be satisfactory. The panel, therefore, assesses the theme 'Services' as satisfactory.

4.5. Internal quality Assurance system

4.5.1 Systematic approach (standard 5.1)

A system of internal quality assurance is in place, which uses verifiable objectives and periodical evaluations in order to take measures for improvement.

Findings

The governing body of the programme will manage, oversee and evaluate the programme. This body will consist of the programme directors of Vesalius College and IES, the course convenors, the lecturers and the teaching assistants involved in the programme. Students' representatives and the internship co-ordinator will be present as well. The governing body will meet prior to the beginning of the first semester and again at the end of the second semester. The first meeting is to inform the teachers about the curriculum. The second meeting is meant to evaluate the programme and to discuss improvements. Three working groups will monitor on a regular basis specific aspects of the programme, like the curriculum, the internships and the student guidance.

The governing body conducts surveys among the students to monitor the quality of the programme. In the beginning of the programme (week 4 of the study year) an in-class paper-based questionnaire is filled out by students. At the end of the first semester again an in-class paper-based questionnaire is assembled. All of the courses are evaluated. The results of these surveys are presented to the academic standards committee of Vesalius College and the IES quality control team. These bodies discuss the results of the surveys at the end of the second semester and determine whether corrective action should be taken.

The examination board sees to the academic regulations being applied. External examiners will be asked to assess the students' papers and examinations on a random basis.

Considerations

The panel finds the programme to be well-organised.

The courses and lecturers of the proposed programme are evaluated regularly. The results of the surveys are carefully monitored.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 5.1 *Systematic approach* as satisfactory

4.5.2 Involvement of staff, students, alumni and the professional field (standard 5.2)

Staff, students, alumni and the relevant professional field will be actively involved in the internal quality assurance system.

Findings

Members of staff participate in the governing body and in one of the working groups. Staff members receive feedback from student evaluations and are expected to respond to this.

The students have the opportunity to evaluate the courses. The students will also be in a position to express their views on the programme through focus groups. Representatives of the students attend the meetings of the governing body.

At Vesalius College an alumni association and network is in place that will also incorporate the alumni of this programme. Feedback sessions with alumni will be organised regularly.

Vesalius College has got extensive links with outside professionals. Several members of the staff work for the European Commission or for other international organisations. The internship programme will be further expanded for the programme.

Considerations

The programme management intends to use a quality assurance system that involves staff, students, alumni and professionals from the field. The panel is confident that the systematic involvement of the stakeholders will be safeguarded.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 5.2 *Involvement of staff, students, alumni and the professional field* as satisfactory.

- 4.5.3 Summary of the judgments of Theme 5 "Internal quality assurance system"
The panel has assessed all of the standards of the theme to be satisfactory. The panel, therefore, assesses the theme 'Internal quality assurance system' as satisfactory.

4.6. Conditions for continuity

- 4.6.1 Graduation guarantee (standard 6.1)

The higher education institution ensures that its students can complete the programme.

Findings

Vesalius College will guarantee the students to be able to complete the programme. The institution can also rely on IES and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in case a phasing out scenario would be required.

Considerations

The graduation of the students has been guaranteed by Vesalius College.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 6.1 *Graduation guarantee* as satisfactory

- 4.6.2 Investments (standard 6.2)

The proposed investments are sufficient to realise the programme (including the facilities and tutoring).

Findings

The building at Pleinlaan 5 in Brussels meets the needs of the programme. In addition, through the co-operation with IES, research facilities will be made available to the students.

Considerations

Most of the investments for the programme have already been done. The panel considers the additional investments, if any, to be sufficient to realise the programme.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 6.2 *Investments* as satisfactory

4.6.3 Financial provisions (standard 6.3)

The financial provisions are sufficient to offer the full programme.

Findings

The programme will require an estimated additional personnel cost of €250.000. Charging a tuition fee of €12.800 should allow for a break-even situation, assuming a minimum number of 20 students being registered. The programme will aim at attracting Vesalius students from the bachelor's programme, with a maximum of 40 students per year.

Considerations

The panel is confident the financial provisions will be sufficient to cover the initial operational losses during the first years.

Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 6.3 *Financial provisions* as satisfactory

4.6.4 Summary of the judgments of Theme 6 "Conditions for continuity"

The panel has assessed all of the standards of the theme to be satisfactory. The panel, therefore, assesses the theme 'Conditions for continuity' as satisfactory.

5. Overview of the assessments

The table below contains the judgments of the panel on each Theme and on each Standard in Chapter 4.

Theme	Judgment	Standard	Judgment
1 Aims and Objectives	Satisfactory	1.1 Level and orientation	satisfactory
		1.2 Subject/ discipline specific requirements	satisfactory
2 Curriculum	Satisfactory	2.1 Requirements for professional/ academic orientation	satisfactory
		2.2 Correspondence between aims and objectives and curriculum	satisfactory
		2.3 Consistency of the curriculum	satisfactory
		2.4 Workload	satisfactory
		2.5 Admission requirements	satisfactory
		2.6 Credits	satisfactory
		2.7 Master's thesis	satisfactory
3 Staff	Satisfactory	3.1 Requirements for professional/ academic orientation	satisfactory
		3.2 Quantify of Staff	satisfactory
		3.3 Quality of Staff	satisfactory
4 Services	Satisfactory	4.1 Facilities	satisfactory
		4.2 Tutoring	satisfactory
5 Internal Quality assurance system	Satisfactory	5.1 Systematic Approach	satisfactory
		5.2 Involvement of Staff, Students, Alumni and the Professional Field	satisfactory
6 Conditions for Continuity	Satisfactory	6.1 Graduation Guarantee	satisfactory
		6.2 Investments	satisfactory
		6.3 Financial Provisions	satisfactory

Annex 1: Composition of the panel

Chair

Prof. Dr. S. Vanhoonacker is Jean Monnet Professor and has a chair in Administrative Governance at the Department of Politics at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University Maastricht. She teaches courses on the history and theories of European integration, on European Foreign Policy, and on the role of civil servants in a system of multi-level governance. The focus of her research is on the role and influence of non-elected administrative actors on the European foreign policy process. Prior to her position at the University Maastricht she was a faculty member of the European Institute of Public Administration, Maastricht where she was part of the unit 'European Governance and Policy Processes'. Here she was involved in training of civil servants on policy-making in the EU and in the Common Foreign and Security Policy. In the period 1996-2001 she was involved in preparing EU Member States for the Presidency of the Council of the EU. Sophie Vanhoonacker holds a PhD from Leiden university (1999). She studied history (Catholic University of Leuven, 1984), European Studies (College of Europe, Bruges, 1985) and International Relations (Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1989). Her PhD focused on the reaction of the Bush Administration vis-à-vis the development of a European security identity and has been published by Ashgate Publishers (2001).

Member

Prof. Dr. J. Orbie is professor in the rank of lecturer at the Department of Political Science at Ghent University in Belgium. He received his PhD from the same institution (2005) for his dissertation on the European Union's trade policies towards developing countries. As a co-director of the Centre for EU Studies, he plays an active role in research and teaching on EU politics at Ghent University. He is also the Chair of the Faculty Committee of Internationalisation and a member of the Internationalisation Council at Ghent University. Jan Orbie lectures on Theories of European Integration, European External Policies, and Current Issues in EU Politics. His research focuses on the international policies of the EU, in particular EU trade and development policies. He edited and co-edited several books on EU trade politics and development, and the EU global politics, and is the author of numerous chapters and articles on the EU's external relations. He is also (co)supervising several research projects on EU external relations.

Member

Prof. Dr. P. Periton is Professor of Economics at Nottingham Trent University. His major interests are in the fields of labour markets and European Political Economy. He is Director of the Centre for Academic Standards and quality at the university. He has lectured extensively in the public and private sectors both in the United Kingdom and overseas. He works as an auditor and reviewer for the United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency and has undertaken a similar role in several countries.

Member

Ms. G.J. Wijnen holds an academic bachelor in "Architecture, Building and Planning" and an academic master in "Real Estate Management and Development" from the Eindhoven University of Technology. She graduated in September 2010. During her studies she was involved in several university and faculty bodies and projects concerning educational quality. From 2009 onwards she has participated as a student panel member in various initial

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accreditation panels for the NVAO. Currently she works a development manager at real estate investor Wereldhave.

Process coordinator, on behalf of NVAO
J.W. Meijer

Secretary, for NVAO
Drs. W.J.J.C. Vercouteren RC

The panel members have all signed a statement of independence and confidentiality.

Annex 2: Agenda of the site visit

The panel held a site visit on 5 July 2011 as part of the external assessment procedure regarding the programme Master of European Union Policy of Vesalius College.

Schedule of the site visit on 5 July 2011:

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 08.30 – 09.00 | Panel welcome by P. De Knop, Rector of Vrije Universiteit Brussel |
| 09.00 – 09.45 | Meeting with Vesalius College management
B. Mosselmans |
| 09.45 – 10.15 | Meeting with institute for European Studies management
S. Oberthür, B. De Schutter |
| 10.15 – 10.45 | Internal panel deliberations |
| 10.45 – 11.15 | Meeting with quality control experts
B. Mosselmans (Vesalius College), I. Scheerlinck (Vesalius College), A. Hadfield (Institute for European Studies) |
| 11.15 – 11.30 | Internal panel deliberations |
| 11.30 – 12.15 | Meeting with lecturers
M. Alfe, A. Hadfield, M. Huysseune, H. Kalimo, A. Mihai, I. Scheerlinck, J. Shanin |
| 12.30 – 13.30 | Lunch and internal deliberations panel |
| 13.30 – 16.00 | Final internal panel deliberations |

Annex 3: Documents reviewed

Programme document of the institution and accompanying documents

- Master of European Union Policy, self-evaluation report by Vesalius College and Institute European Studies
- Appendices to the self-evaluation report

Information which was available during the site visit

- Vesalius College Catalogue 2010 – 2011
- Learning outcome matrix Master of European Union Policy
- Overview of staff to be involved in the programme
- IES Quality Control
- Institute for European Studies Spring Lecture Series
- Selection of required and optional readings for each of the courses in the curriculum

Annex 4: Overview of the curriculum

Learning outcomes of the programme

The learning outcomes of the programme are divided into several categories and are listed below.

General learning outcomes

- To familiarise students with the EU by providing them with a coherent conceptual base of state-of-the-art research on EU policy;
- To endow students with a general competence in all aspects of EU policy at an advanced level;
- To enhance the ability of students to think analytically, critically, reflectively and comparatively on EU policies, through classroom teaching, individual research, group research and oral presentations;
- To familiarise students with the interdisciplinary dynamics at the heart of the EU project, and within the canon of EU studies, via a touchstone approach to the key theoretical, political, legal and economic aspects of EU policies;
- To strengthen the problem solving ability of students in being able to deconstruct, conceptualise and reconstruct key EU policies, given a robust practical dimension by virtue of an internship in the EU policy-making domain;
- To capitalise on the Brussels-based location of Vesalius College and the Institute for European Studies by providing students with first-rate opportunities for practical contact with the European policy-making community.

Learning outcomes at the cognitive level

- Providing students with in-depth knowledge of the institutional set-up and policies of the EU (C1);
- Acquainting students with disciplinary specific approaches and interpretations, from the disciplines of political science, economics and law, on the EU and European integration (C2);
- Enabling students to develop substantiated and theory-grounded opinions and argumentations on the problems and challenges that the EU is facing, and the wider dynamics of European integration (C3);
- Acquainting students with recent and current developments in the EU (C4).

Learning outcomes at the skills level

- Developing the students' ability for independent analysis of EU policies and the economic, political, and legal dimensions of EU integration (S1);
- Developing the ability to transpose the analysis of facts and events into a scientifically sound and feasible research project (S2);
- Enhancing the students' ability to use the appropriate research methods and tools in the framework of independent research projects (S3);
- Providing students with an advanced knowledge of and practice with electronic information sources on the EU and in particular the EU websites itself (S4);
- Developing the students' ability to communicate in an effective way the acquired knowledge and the outcome of research projects, both in written form and verbally (S5);

- Developing the students' ability for group work is worked into the structure of in-class seminar presentations (S6);
- Further developing the students' skills in intercultural communication (S7).
- Developing English language skills (S8).

Learning outcomes at the attitudinal level

- To stimulate critical attitudes, and the ability to confront dominant opinions with constructive criticism. The programme intends to generate an attitude that is neither promote uncritical acceptance of all EU policies, nor generic Euro-scepticism, but a reasoned and balanced approach of the EU and its policies (A1);
- To stimulate an awareness of the normative dimension of EU policies and of the ethical problems and dilemma's that they may present (A2).

Curriculum

The credits of the programme are 60 ec in total.

The curriculum consists of the following courses in the first semester:

- Theories of EU Integration (6 ec)
- EU Redux: The Politics of European Integration (6 ec)
- The Legal Foundations of European integration (6 ec)
- The Economics of European integration (6 ec)
- Tools and Methods for European Policy Analysis (part I, 3 ec)
- Current Issues in European Studies (3 ec)

The courses in the second semester are:

- Tools and Methods for European Policy Analysis (part II, 3 ec)
- Brussels Graduate Internship (9 ec)
- Master's Thesis (18 ec)

Annex 5: Learning outcomes' reference to decret Vlaamse Gemeenschap

Descriptors of learning outcomes decret Vlaamse Gemeenschap

- 1 - integrate and reformulate knowledge and insight from a specific domain or at the border of several domains
- 2 - apply complex new skills, linked to standardised research
- 3 - evaluate critically and apply complex, advanced and/or innovative problem-solving techniques and methods
- 4 - act in unpredictable, complex and specialised contexts
- 5 - function in a fully autonomous way with right to decision making
- 6 - take final responsibility for determining collective outcomes

The number of the descriptor corresponds with the column number (for reasons of lay-out it was impossible to introduce the entire descriptor in the cells)

The matrixes are made respectively for the general learning outcomes of the programme, and for the specific learning outcomes at the cognitive, skills, and attitudinal level

Matrix 1: General learning outcomes

	1	2	3	4	5	6
To familiarise students with the EU by providing them with a coherent conceptual base of state-of-the-art research on EU Policy	X		X			
To endow students with a general competence in all aspects of EU policy at an advanced level	X	X	X	X	X	X
To enhance the ability of students to think analytically, critically, reflectively and comparatively on EU policies, through classroom teaching, interactive learning, individual research, group research, oral presentations	X	X	X			
To familiarise students with the inter-disciplinary dynamics at the heart of the EU project, and within the canon of EU studies, via a touchstone approach to the key theoretic, political, legal and economic aspects of EU policies	X	X	X			
To strengthen the problem solving ability of students in	X			X	X	X

being able to deconstruct, conceptualise and reconstruct key EU policies, given a robust practical dimension by virtue of an internship in the EU policy-making domain						
To capitalise on the Brussels-based location of VeCo and the IES by providing students with first-rate opportunities for practical contact with the European policy-making community.			X		X	

Matrix 2: Learning outcomes at the cognitive level

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Providing students with in-depth knowledge of the institutional set-up and policies of the EU	X	X	X	X	X	X
Acquainting students with disciplinary-specific approaches and interpretations, from the disciplines of political science, economics and law, on the EU and European integration.	X	X	X			
Enabling students to develop substantiated and theory-grounded opinions and argumentations on the problems and challenges that the EU is facing, and the wider dynamics of European integration	X	X	X	X	X	X
Acquainting students with recent and current developments in the EU	X	X	X	X		

Matrix 3: Learning outcomes at the skills level

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Developing the students' ability for independent analysis of EU Policies and of economic, political, and legal dimensions of EU integration	X	X	X	X		
Developing the ability to transpose the analysis of facts and events into a scientifically sound and feasible research project	X	X	X	X		
Enhancing the students' ability to use the appropriate research methods and tools in the framework of independent research projects	X	X	X	X	X	X
Providing students with an advanced knowledge of and practice with electronic information sources on the EU (and in particular the EU websites itself).				X		
Developing the students' ability to communicate in an effective way the acquired knowledge and the outcome of research projects, both in written form and verbally	X	X	X	X	X	X
Developing the students' ability for group work is worked into the structure of in-class seminar presentations					X	X
Further developing the students' skills in intercultural communication				X		
Developing English language skills						

Matrix 4: Learning outcomes at the attitudinal level

	1	2	3	4	5	6
To stimulate critical attitudes, and the ability to confront the dominant opinions with constructive criticism. The programme intends to generate an attitude that is neither the uncritical acceptance of all EU policies, nor generic Euro-scepticism, but a reasoned and balanced approach of the EU and its policies	X	X	X			
To stimulate an awareness of the normative dimension of EU policies and of the ethical problems and dilemma's that they may present	X			X	X	X

This panel report was commissioned by NVAO with a view to assessing the proposal for a new programme Master of European Union Policy of Vesalius College in Brussels.

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