

Besluit

Accreditatiebesluit met een positief eindoordeel met beperkte geldigheidsduur voor de opleiding Bachelor in Communication Studies (academisch gerichte bachelor) van Vesalius College

datum	Samenvattende bevindingen en overwegingen
15 maart 2016	De NVAO steunt haar inhoudelijke besluitvorming op de onderstaande elementen uit het visitatierapport.
onderwerp	
Accreditatiebesluit	
(004123)	<i>Generic quality standard 1 – Intended exit level</i>
bijlagen	The assessment panel evaluates the intended exit level as satisfactory.
5	<p>The Bachelor in Communication Studies (hereafter CMM) is a three-year academic bachelor's programme in the area of the humanities and social sciences, comprising 180 ECTS. It is organised by Vesalius College, an American-style liberal arts college which was founded in 1987 by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and Boston University's Metropolitan College. Vesalius College became fully independent in 2000.</p> <p>CMM offers students a broadening knowledge and insight into various sub-disciplines, related to the subject of their study, and is oriented towards conceptual understanding of human, mass and organisational communications and their social, economic and political dimensions. It aims at developing the applicability of communication theories to the understanding of events and contexts, allowing the graduates to investigate the function and organisation of political institutions and business industries as well as the social responsibilities of professional communicators. Furthermore, CMM also aims at the application of practical presentation skills to address a variety of audiences. The liberal arts philosophy is an important aspect of the study programme. This is reflected in the curriculum (a broad view on the humanities and social sciences) and in the teaching and evaluation methods (small groups, interactive teaching, focus on written assignments).</p> <p>The average student number is about 35 students in CMM. Students who have graduated secondary school are eligible, and their academic performance, English skills and personal character are taken into account with regard to admissions. Vesalius College explicitly aims to attract an international student body and English is the official language in the whole College. The Brussels location is often cited as a main strength of the College, because of the proximity of international institutions and companies for internships.</p> <p>With respect to the targeted learning outcomes, CMM makes reference to the 11 discipline-specific learning outcomes (DLO) of the 'Bachelor in Communicatiewetenschappen' composed by VLIR and developed these into 12 programme-specific learning outcomes</p>

Pagina 2 van 13 (PLO). The DLO for the 'Bachelor in Communicatiewetenschappen' are in line with the aspirations of an academic bachelor, with a strong academic research component.

In summary, the panel is of the opinion that the intended learning outcomes are adequate. The programme aims at offering undergraduate students a broad education in communication studies. The intended learning outcomes are situated at the threshold level for bachelor's programmes and are sufficiently in line with the requirements set by the international community. The learning outcomes for CMM need to better reflect the particular position ('the Bachelor' and 'vocational orientation') of the programme.

Generic quality standard 2 – Teaching and learning process

The assessment panel evaluates the teaching and learning process as unsatisfactory.

The programme consists of 180 ECTS, comprising 120 ECTS worth of compulsory courses and 60 ECTS of electives. The core courses are logically structured and their level is built up gradually, from 'general skills' over 'pillars' and 'intermediate courses' to 'advanced courses'. Additionally, the electives can be clustered in minors. The programme includes an internship.

CMM is structured along four thematic 'pillars': a research pillar, a theory pillar, a business pillar and a politics pillar. The student is thus schooled in different communications theories and also in business and politics (with a focus on European Union politics). A broad, multidisciplinary understanding of the relevant fields of study is the main aim of the programme, although the panel recommends a stronger focus on research methodology for the CMM programme to achieve a higher academic level.

Students appreciate the hands-on approach and small class sizes which are typical of Vesalius College. A wide variety of teaching methods is used, including student-activating methods and a focus on presentations and written assignments. There is a strong interaction with the teaching staff and feedback is normally ample. The panel is of the opinion that there might be too many assignments, which do not always add value to the programme. Students estimate the overall workload at about 45 hours a week, although an objective measurement system is not in place.

The core faculty of the College comprises 21 professors teaching in the three degree programmes of the Bachelor of Business Studies, the Bachelor of Communication Studies, and the Bachelor in International Affairs (12,68 FTE in terms of full professors, professors, associate and assistant professors). In addition there are 5 lecturers and 22 adjunct faculty teaching in the programmes. The College hired some excellent teaching staff in recent years in answer to the needs of the College and in line with the recommendations made by the 2007 review panel. Research as well as education, are considered upon contracting new lecturers. The College follows the VUB rules for staff development and promotion. Almost all lecturers hold a PhD and conduct research and/or work in industry in branches related to their teaching assignment. Some staff members also teach as guest lecturers in other institutions or universities. The self-evaluation report signals that there is little money to be invested in staff development. Lecturers may follow professionalization courses at the VUB, but only few seem to be applicable to the College's teaching strategy. The panel is of the opinion that, in view of the formation of a true core faculty for the College and the programmes, and in order to gather around the challenges ahead (see GQS 3 and GQS 4), it seems wise to invest in a common training for all staff members for various elements (e.g.

Vesalius College is located in the Karel-Van-Miert Building in Etterbeek, Brussels. The facilities are good though limited in size, so students have to attend classes on the nearby VUB campus as well. Also, students of Vesalius College use the VUB library, which has a good collection and is fairly accessible. There are computer facilities available with wireless internet access all over campus. The bulk of student counselling is performed by the academic staff, in line with the American tradition. Students are positive about this system, which leads to very personal guidance and tutoring.

In summary, the panel is of the opinion that for CMM the content as well as the academic rigour of the programme need to be thoroughly strengthened before the level expected from an academic bachelor's programme can be attained. Students do not use the academic skills they are meant to achieve in the Bachelor's programme, notwithstanding the 'Bachelor' signature of the programmes. Consequently, the panel evaluates the learning process as below threshold level. The College has an adequate number of lecturers committed to teaching. In recent years good people have been contracted and some very recent new initiatives have been undertaken to move the College in the right direction. Despite the lack of progress on the majority of the 2007 recommendations, the panel is firmly of the opinion that substantial changes have to be made, not only in the programme, but also in the managerial structures of the College (see GQS 4) in order for the College and its programme to remedy for the shortcomings in CMM.

Generic quality standard 3 – Exit level achieved

The assessment panel evaluates the exit level achieved as unsatisfactory.

A variety of formative and summative evaluation methods are used in the programme. For each course, the lecturer determines the evaluation methods and these are mentioned in the course information file. The final exams are mostly written, oral exams are rare. There are also mid-term evaluations to stimulate students to study and to improve their in-class performance. The small scale of the College supports this type of continuous evaluation, with many papers and presentations. As a result, writing and communication skills are frequently tested. The panel is of the opinion that when it comes to this continuous assessment, less might be more, and the level and depth of the assignments might benefit from limiting their number. The panel thinks that, overall, the examination level should be higher. Grades are, on average, relatively high, and there is a need for common marking standards. There is currently no coherent evaluation and testing policy, although there are several committees in place to monitor the progress of students. The panel has recommended giving more attention to the validity and reliability of testing and developing a coherent evaluation policy.

The programme includes a capstone and/or honours essay which is meant to integrate previously acquired knowledge and prove the achieved outcome level of the student. The panel read several of these essays and found that their level of analysis, statistics and research could be significantly more advanced.

In recent years, because of curriculum reforms, the student retention rate has been improved and the dropout rate has declined. The average study progress (i.e. the proportion of students who obtain their degree within six or less semesters) is about 75% over the last

Pagina 4 van 13 8 years. This indicates an effective learning environment. The panel notes that a fair number of alumni who continue a Master's programme after completion of their CMM programme are doing well. The panel signals that this does not diminish the fact that the evaluation standards at the College need to be improved significantly.

In summary, the panel is of the opinion that there is currently no coherent evaluation policy at the College. The panel sees a significant task to be taken up by the Academic Standards Committee (or a new Quality Management Committee) in the support and development of a genuine assessment policy for the College and all its programmes. At the time of the site visit, the outcome level achieved by the three programmes is situated below the threshold level expected from an academic bachelor degree as the current testing system is inadequate to safeguard the quality of evaluation. The quality of testing is too diverse and overall too low. The grading is often too high and the 'evidence' for critical thinking and application of research methods is in general too poor in the capstone and honours papers. Although the alumni are pleased with their education and are able to start a professional career or continue a master's programme, the panel is not convinced that all the intended learning outcomes are acquired at the bachelor's level. The College needs to develop a genuine evaluation and assessment policy, particularly addressing the validity and reliability of the testing and evaluation methods. The staff should then adopt this strategy in its everyday teaching and evaluation practice. The panel saw some good examples and the beginning of a true assessment policy at the IA Department. The panel encourages the College to learn from this and develop an evaluation and assessment policy in the next few years, strengthening the College's position on the international market for academic study programmes.

Generic quality standard 4 – Set-up and organisation of the internal quality assurance

The assessment panel evaluates the set-up and organisation of the internal quality assurance as unsatisfactory.

All courses are evaluated by the students, halfway through (in group) and at the end of the semester (individually). The remarks feed into the revision process of the courses. The lecturers are required to write a reflection report that outlines remedies to address the remarks made. Currently, there is no programme evaluation, as there is no quality management system operational at the College.

The panel has taken note of the many different recent actions (e.g. effective follow-up of evaluation of courses and examiner's reports), along with new positions established for key staff to push necessary changes forward (e.g. the associate deanship for research and the associate deanship for teaching practice), which begin to move the College towards achieving improved standards (especially at course level) and to help students acquire appropriate skills. However, the assessment panel finds that too few of the recommendations from 2007 have been taken up in time to remedy and improve the curriculum of CMM.

In summary, the panel is of the opinion that the College has some pieces of the puzzle and some rudimentary mechanisms in place to start building an internal quality assurance mechanism, but it is convinced that these still need to be fitted into one coherent approach. Currently there is no coherent system in place to safeguard the internal quality assurance and its core processes at the College level, nor at the programme level.

Pagina 5 van 13 Moreover there is an urgent need to establish a quality culture at the College, gathering all staff members and supporting them in the deployment of the everyday quality functioning of the College. Particularly the different stages of the PDCA-cycle need to be defined, appropriate mechanisms need to be designed, and action to be taken based on the measurements and knowledge gained from the internal quality assurance instruments, all of which need to be fed into the system to improve the quality of the programmes. The panel therefore repeats that it acknowledges that the Vice-Deans pointed to ways in which the quality of teaching and research might be improved and believes that this is a good starting point from which to remedy for the current shortcoming at the College.

Eindoordeel commissie

De commissie heeft vastgesteld dat de opleiding Bachelor in Communication Studies (academisch gerichte bachelor) niet voldoet aan alle generieke kwaliteitswaarborgen. Ze beoordeelt de kwaliteit van de opleiding als voldoende met beperkte geldigheidsduur.

Herstelplan

Het 'Reglement tot bepaling van de bestuursbeginselen die van toepassing zijn bij de besluitvorming inzake accreditatie, instellingsreview en toets nieuwe opleiding' (13 mei 2013) van de NVAO stelt dat "Een accreditatieaanvraag die gestoeld is op een visitatierapport dat aangeeft dat de opleiding op één of meerdere opleidingsvarianten slechts voldoet aan één of twee generieke kwaliteitswaarborgen, is voorzien van een herstelplan dat betrekking heeft op de als onvoldoende beoordeelde generieke kwaliteitswaarborgen voor de betrokken opleiding(s)variant(en)." (Art. 28.§1)

De NVAO heeft vastgesteld dat de opleiding aan haar accreditatieaanvraag een herstelplan heeft toegevoegd. Conform het reglement bestuursbeginselen (Art.28.§1.) heeft de NVAO het herstelplan voorgelegd aan een beoordelingscommissie, bestaande uit: prof. dr. Rudy Martens (voorzitter), prof. dr. Geoffry Edwards (domeindeskundige), prof. dr. Steven Eggermont (domeindeskundige), en prof. dr. em. Hans van Hout (onderwijsdeskundige).

Op 1 december 2015 heeft de commissie haar oordeel over het herstelplan aan de NVAO doen toekomen. De commissie beoordeelt het herstelplan als toereikend en haalbaar.

Aanbevelingen

De NVAO onderschrijft de aanbevelingen van de commissie.

Bevindingen NVAO

- Het visitatierapport is opgesteld en onderbouwd overeenkomstig het toepasselijke Kader voor de opleidingsaccreditatie 2de ronde (8 februari 2013).
- De commissie heeft voor de externe beoordeling het visitatieprotocol gevolgd zoals vastgesteld door de Vlaamse Universiteiten en Hogescholen Raad (augustus 2013).
- Het visitatierapport geeft inzicht in de samenstelling van de commissie.
- Het visitatierapport bevat een onderzoek ten gronde naar de aanwezigheid van voldoende generieke kwaliteitswaarborgen.
- De NVAO stelt vast dat het herstelplan gemotiveerd en op navolgbare wijze door de commissie als haalbaar en toereikend is beoordeeld.

De NVAO volgt het eindoordeel van de visitatiecommissie: voldoende met beperkte geldigheidsduur.

betreffende de accreditatie van de Bachelor in Communication Studies (academisch gerichte bachelor) van de Vesalius College.

De NVAO,
Na beraadslaging,
Besluit:

Met toepassing van de Codex Hoger Onderwijs, in het bijzonder de artikelen II.133-II.149, besluit de NVAO accreditatie met beperkte geldigheidsduur te verlenen aan de opleiding Bachelor in Communication Studies (academisch gerichte bachelor) georganiseerd door Vesalius College. De opleiding wordt aangeboden te Brussel zonder afstudeerrichtingen. De kwaliteit van de opleiding is voldoende met beperkte geldigheidsduur. De NVAO kent een accreditatie toe voor een periode van twee jaar.

De accreditatie met beperkte geldigheidsduur geldt van 1 oktober 2016 tot en met 30 september 2018.

Den Haag, 15 maart 2016

De NVAO
Voor deze:

Dr. A.H. Flierman
(voorzitter)

¹ Het ontwerp accreditatiebesluit werd aan de instelling bezorgd voor eventuele opmerkingen en bezwaren. De instelling heeft op 2 maart 2016 van de gelegenheid gebruik gemaakt om te reageren en heeft laten weten geen opmerkingen te hebben.

De onderstaande tabel geeft per generieke kwaliteitswaarborg het globaal oordeel van de NVAO weer, alsook het eindoordeel.

Generieke kwaliteitswaarborg	Oordeel
1. Beoogd eindniveau	Voldoende
2. Onderwijsproces	Onvoldoende
3. Gerealiseerd eindniveau	Onvoldoende
4. Opzet en organisatie van de interne kwaliteitszorg.	Onvoldoende
Eindoordeel opleiding	Voldoende met beperkte geldigheidsduur

Naam instelling	Vesalius College
Adres instelling	Pleinlaan 2 B-1050 BRUSSEL België
Aard instelling	geregistreerd
Naam associatie	nvt
Naam opleiding (Graad, kwalificatie, specificatie)	Bachelor in Communication Studies
Niveau en oriëntatie	academisch gerichte bachelor
Bijkomende titel	BA in Communication Studies
Opleidingsvarianten: – Afstudeerrichtingen – Studietraject voor werkstudenten	– geen – geen
Onderwijstaal	Engels
Vestiging(en) opleiding	Brussel
Studieomvang (in studiepunten)	180
Vervaldatum accreditatie, tijdelijke erkenning of erkenning nieuwe opleiding	30 september 2016
Academiejaar(en) waarin opleiding wordt aangeboden ²	2015-2016
(Delen van) studiegebied(en)	Social Sciences, Business and Law
ISCED benaming van het studiegebied	032 Journalism and information

² Betreft het lopende academiejaar, op het ogenblik van de accreditatieaanvraag

1. Een grondige wetenschappelijke kennis hebben van niveaus, types en componenten van (technologisch gemedieerde en niet gemedieerde) communicatie.
2. De verschillende media kritisch en genuanceerd onderscheiden op basis van kenmerken, publiek, gebruikers, gevolgen en toepassingsmogelijkheden.
3. Beschrijven en vergelijken van theorieën, concepten, auteurs en paradigma's van de deeldomeinen binnen de communicatiewetenschap.
4. Kennen en toepassen van de meest gebruikelijke kwalitatieve en kwantitatieve methoden van onderzoek in de communicatiewetenschap.
5. Meewerken aan het initiëren, plannen en uitvoeren van fundamenteel en toegepast onderzoek rond communicatoren, kanalen, boodschappen of ontvangers, vertrekkend van een afgebakende opdracht en hierover rapporteren aan vakgenoten en leken.
6. Detecteren en analyseren van organisatorische en maatschappelijke communicatieprocessen ter ondersteuning van probleemoplossing.
7. De structuur, organisatie, werking en ontwikkeling het medialandschap kennen en duiden en de implicaties ervan inschatten, ook in een communicatie-strategische en beleidsmatige context.
8. Kritisch reflecteren over de rol van media en communicatie in sociale, culturele, economische, psychologische, technologische, politiek, juridische en andere contexten.
9. Inschatten van de impact van sociale, culturele, economische, psychologische, technologische, politieke, juridische en andere factoren op communicatieprocessen.
10. Toepassen en transfereren van modellen, methoden en theorieën uit hulpwetenschappen.
11. De ethische dimensie van een communicatieprobleem onderkennen en verschillende standpunten herkennen.

Voorzitter:

- Prof. dr. Rudy Martens, professor in strategic management and, since 2011, dean of the Faculty of Applied Economics at the University of Antwerp;

Leden:

- Prof. dr. Geoffry Edwards (domeindeskundige), Senior Fellow in the Department of Politics and International Studies in the University of Cambridge and Reader Emeritus in European Studies in the University and an Emeritus Fellow of Pembroke College;
- Prof. dr. Steven Eggermont (domeindeskundige), research director of the Leuven School for Mass Communication Research and programme director of the Bachelor and Master in Communication Sciences at the KU Leuven;
- Prof. dr. em. Hans van Hout (onderwijsdeskundige), emeritus professor in Higher Education, University of Amsterdam, department of Educational Sciences University of Amsterdam;
- Anneloes Hoff (student-lid), alumna University College Roosevelt (Middelburg).

De commissie werd ondersteund door Els van Zele en Aljosja Van der Straeten, secretaris.

Programme: Bachelor in Communication Studies

Institution: Vesalius College

Dossier number: 004123

Generic quality standard(s) assessed unsatisfactory:

- GQS 2: Teaching and learning process
- GQS 3: Outcome level achieved
- GQS 4: Set-up and organisation of the internal quality assurance

Committee:

- Chair: Prof. dr. Rudy Martens
- Domain expert: Prof. dr. Geoffry Edwards
- Domain expert: Prof. dr. Steven Eggermont
- Educational expert: Prof. dr. em. Hans van Hout

Explanatory notes:

The committee assesses whether the improvement plan is adequate, meaning that it is sufficient and feasible. To this end, the improvement plan indicates the following elements for each generic quality standard which was assessed as unsatisfactory:

- the actions which the programme will take to alter the negative judgment and to implement the recommendations of the committee;
- the necessary resources which the programme will deploy to realise these actions;
- the indicators which the programme will use to evaluate the improvements;
- a realistic time-frame spanning a maximum of three years to realise these improvements.

The committee assesses whether the improvement plan complies with each of these criteria, and provides a concise description of the considerations leading to this assessment. In its final conclusion, the committee assesses the adequacy of the improvement plan in its entirety.

1.1 Criterion 1: Actions

The programme indicates the actions it will take to alter the negative judgment. Taking these actions, the programme implements the recommendations of the committee.

Assessment: satisfactory

Considerations:

During the visit it was clear that some actions were already undertaken but not yet (fully) implemented.

In the "Remedial Action and Improvement Plan" of May 2015 a lot of different actions are listed to remedy for the shortcomings in the quality management systems, as well at the College-level as at the Departmental level.

For all Generic Quality Standards with an unsatisfactory score the College proposes several actions to remedy for the shortcomings.

The College has also set up a very detailed Teaching Manual (drafted by the Teaching Excellence Committee) in which several issues are discussed: procedures for quality

Pagina 12 van 13 control, criteria for assignments and assessments, criteria for course levels, regulations about fraud, and many more. Many issues are spelled out in detail. If they are dealt with and action taken to implement them, then Vesalius College will take a big step forward.

The CMM department is to be commended for having decided on a clear focus for the CMM program, i.e. global communication. An integral part of the implementation of such focus is having a clear (not necessarily narrow) definition of this focus. The department should be well aware of and be able to communicate clearly about the different components and consequences of this focus. This will also help monitor the build-up of the different courses throughout the program more intensively.

Overall, however, it seems that if all the actions and suggestions can be implemented, the College will be able to reach the required quality level.

1.2 Criterion 2: Resources

The programme indicates the necessary resources which it will deploy to realise these actions. These resources are adequate and sufficient to realise the intended improvements.

Assessment: satisfactory

Considerations:

Vesalius College has the intention to hire more staff to address all quality issues. By the end of 2015 three new persons will be hired: one Student Counsellor and two persons for enhancing the recruitment policy. Additionally funds will be invested in several actions: 30.000€ will be invested for stimulating research, 70.000€ will be invested for refurbishment of teaching rooms/research offices, 15.000€ will be invested in alumni management, the aim is to increase the marketing budget with 15%. Course relief will be given for those involved in quality control. Specifically for the CMM department, additional efforts will be made. These actions will help realize the intended changes.

Criterion 3: Indicators

The programme provides adequate indicators which it will use to evaluate the improvements.

Assessment: satisfactory

Considerations:

Many indicators are mentioned to illustrate how the actions will be monitored/evaluated. Although some indicators for GQS2 and GQS4 are rather general, we consider them suitable to be used for assessing the improvements. For example:

- for GQs 2-R22: references to quality rather than quantity of assessments is to be welcomed.
- for GQS2-R25 “Introduction of BA thesis with strong research methods requirements”: “Strong” is a relative concept and might need to be specified to clearly indicate what is expected in the BA thesis. Guidelines such as the ones given in the teaching manual for the honours essays might be needed to be written out to be able to monitor the progress.

Pagina 13 van 13 For GQS3 indicators are spelled out in more detail. Several specific actions (for e.g. rubrics, marking standards) are planned to be implemented before the end of 2015. We therefore consider the proposed indicators as satisfactory.

Criterion 4: Time-frame

The programme places the remedial actions within a realistic time-frame spanning a maximum of three years. The planning fits the intended actions (not too long, not too short).

Assessment: satisfactory

Considerations:

Taking into account the relatively large numbers of issues to be addressed the College has correctly proposed a three year period for implementing all the needed actions for remedial actions. By the end of the academic year 2017-2018 all proposed actions should have been implemented. This is acceptable, but opportunities to introduce remedial actions more rapidly should not be missed.

Final conclusion: Adequacy of the improvement plan in its entirety

The improvement plan is sufficient and feasible.

Assessment: adequate

Considerations:

The PRT is impressed by the thoroughness and completeness of the Remedial Action and Improvement Plan and the accompanying Teaching Manual. On every comment on behalf of our committee they give a valid and clear remark and provided concrete improvement plans. If Vesalius Colleges succeeds in implementing their improvement plan, the concerns will be addressed satisfactorily.

