

**Accreditatiebesluit met een positief eindoordeel voor de opleiding Master of Laws in International and European Law (master na master) van de Vrije Universiteit Brussel**

**Samenvattende bevindingen en overwegingen**

**datum** De NVAO steunt haar inhoudelijke besluitvorming op onderstaande elementen uit het  
11 oktober 2016 **visitatierapport.**

**onderwerp**  
Definitief accreditatiebesluit *Generieke kwaliteitswaarborg 1 – Beoogd eindniveau*  
(004930) De visitatiecommissie (commissie) beoordeelt het beoogd eindniveau als goed.

**bijlagen**

- 4 According to the self-evaluation report, the overall objective of PILC is 'to provide a highly international group of students with a broad advanced education in international and European law in order to prepare them for academic, private and/or public sector employment at high levels'. In fulfilment of its objective, PILC aims to achieve sixteen interconnected learning outcomes. These learning outcomes can be divided into three groups: knowledge and comprehension, application of knowledge and skills, and attitudes.

The programme learning outcomes fully comply with the Flemish qualification framework. The targeted outcome level is demanding and at an advanced level: for example, there is an emphasis on 'thorough knowledge and understanding', 'autonomous, critical legal reasoning' and the conduct of 'scientifically sound legal research of advanced level'.

The programme learning outcomes also comply with the domain-specific learning outcomes. As a matter of fact, the former are more detailed than the latter. Moreover, a number of additional learning outcomes have been incorporated, such as the ability to 'conduct international legal negotiations' and a 'positive attitude towards and confidence in (...) a multicultural setting'.

The panel underlines that the programme learning outcomes are well in line with current international trends. The explicit combination of international and European law is a particular challenge, but the programme managers have made a well-considered choice. Overall the profile of the programme is ambitious, explicitly focusing on the higher echelons of the legal labour market.

The learning outcomes are well defined, transparent and known to the students. According to an alumni survey, only 2.6% of students who had graduated were not familiar with the programme learning outcomes.

Pagina 2 van 12 In its self-evaluation report, the programme stresses that competition for similar programmes is harsh, even within Brussels. Marketing and visibility are therefore mentioned as points of improvement. It is slightly unfortunate that no formal, explicit international benchmarking of the profile and learning objectives has been implemented in the self-evaluation report. If the programme is truly aiming for 'excellence', such an exercise is necessary.

In conclusion, the panel finds that the programme learning outcomes comply with all formal requirements. The panel is impressed by the ambitions of the programme - truly at an advanced level – and the transparent way they have been articulated. International benchmarking of the learning outcomes needs to become more visible.

#### *Generieke kwaliteitswaarborg 2 – Onderwijsproces*

De commissie beoordeelt het onderwijsproces als excellent.

The Master of Laws in International and European Law counts 60 ECTS and consists of one year. The programme is divided into three groups: compulsory courses (30 ECTS), optional courses on either Business or Public Law (12 ECTS) and the Master's thesis (18 ECTS).

The first three compulsory courses (15 ECTS) give a broad overview of the main topics of international and European law, and serve as an introduction or a refresher (depending on, and taking into account, the variance in the students' background knowledge). These courses are accompanied by a block of five compulsory courses (15 ECTS) which deepen knowledge and insights in key fields of international and European law. The optional courses on Business Law or Public Law allow students flexibility to specialise their international and European law learning paths along the track they find most suitable in light of their preferred career plans.

The assessment panel finds the structure of the programme coherent. The most *fundamental, overview-type courses in international and European law are scheduled at the very beginning to facilitate the kick-off academically.* The programme might be rather general in nature, but the introduction of two options has created sufficient depth and focus. The teaching is virtually exclusive: access to the programme is, as a general rule, limited to the selected full-time advanced Master's level students (a very limited number of students may be admitted to attend an individual course).

There is a good variety of teaching methods. Nearly all courses make use of lectures as a means of transferring information. Although some lectures have been described as rather traditional, it is obvious that the classes are in general interactive, with discussions and sharing of opinions. The teaching of 'International Law' and 'European and International Protection of Human Rights' include small research projects in a seminar-type setting to improve presentation skills. Both the Public Law and Business Law option contain a compulsory 'case study seminar'. This seminar provides the students with practical field experience, and is concluded in mid-May by drawing together and finetuning the students' analytical and presentation skills in a real-life simulation with PILC alumni and other experts from law offices, EU institutions and corporations. The first semester also offers practical experience in the form of expert-led field trips to the libraries of the EU and the VUB, the major European Union institutions in Brussels and the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg.

Pagina 3 van 12 In preparation for thesis writing, and to gain experience in teamwork in an international context, all students write a research paper in multinational groups of three to four students. In this 'Globalisation paper' they identify and describe a particular globalisation challenge, analyse and evaluate the relevant action undertaken by the competent global governance structures and formulate recommendations for further action.

Students are expected to conduct research in an independent and scientific manner and to write an 18-22,000 word Master's thesis in the English language on a legal subject concerning international and/or European law. The ideal frame of reference is a law review article. In a special Thesis Workshop in early October the students can establish initial personal contacts with all PILC professors with regard to the areas of law they are prepared to supervise theses in. While the PILC Teaching Guidelines stress that the subject 'must preferably be selected from among the topics dealt with in the courses of the programme', the self-evaluation report mentions that PILC professors are able to supervise on a wide range of topics, 'also outside the fields of law covered by their courses'. Students have to give regular updates on the progress being made, in particular at specific control points. Apart from this roadmap, a separate set of rules applies to thesis writing.

The latter is distributed to the students at the beginning of the year and explained in (voluntary) Methodological lectures given by the Programme Director. The thesis supervisor has the main responsibility in guiding the student in his/her work. The promotership can also be divided between two people. The assessment committee finds that in this manner the programme has established a strong mix of procedural and substantive measures of supervising the thesis process.

Students eligible for PILC are graduates with a basic law degree at Master's level or equivalent degree that entitles them to practise the legal profession in their home country. A maximum of forty students are selected each year. According to the self-evaluation report, the programme typically receives around 90-120 applications. To attain the target number of 30-40, a Selection Committee chooses 50-60 students on the basis of e.g. academic merit, motivation and (international) work experience. The committee takes into account a balanced representation of geographic regions, including (when possible) the legal advancement of developing countries. The students' acceptance is also subject to an English language certificate.

The assessment panel is satisfied with the intake policy and procedures. The assessment panel understands the desire expressed by the PILC management to handle all student applications directly (instead of depending for this on the central VUB administration), as this kind of programme is situated in a highly competitive environment.

*The intensive introductory courses at the very beginning of the programme serve as early control points on language skills: in the rare instances where the students have passed the admission requirements despite insufficient oral and/or written English skills, they are directed to take English courses elsewhere. The programme itself begins with a special Welcome Week, which aims to quickly put the students on friendly terms with one another and initiate them intellectually. Due to the strength of the social bonds within the group, students feel at ease. Although the programme is seen as 'intense' and 'demanding', drop-out rates remain very low.*

Pagina 4 van 12 The PILC professors are appointed chair by chair, specifically and exclusively for the purpose of teaching the PILC course in question. The selection committees routinely contain professionals from outside of the IES so as to ensure an external input. The PILC staff currently consists of 14 members, together representing 1.6 full time equivalents. Given the relatively low student numbers, this does not negatively affect the student/staff ratio. The staff further consists of six nationalities and is divided into 8 'academics' and 6 'practitioners'. The dividing line is fluid, however: most PILC professors have elements from both profiles.

Beyond the PILC professors themselves, input from the academic and professional fields is integrated in at least four ways. First, courses on EU Economic Law and Globalisation have hosted a large number of academic and professional experts over the past years. Second, a wide range of experts has been integrated into the programme through the recurring IES Lecture Series. Third, external experts (Competition law counsels from Brussels) are involved in the Business Law Case Study, and experts from EU institutions and the IES in the Public Law Case Study. Fourth, numerous researchers from international research groups at the VUB teach on the programme. The assessment panel is satisfied that the programme employs the best legal specialists in each of the fields involved.

The classes by practitioners are highly valued by the students. These teachers give examples from their daily job experience and go – as one alumnus put it - 'straight to the problem'. Surveys among PILC students and alumni show that both groups are satisfied with the teachers' performance, in particular with regard to 'knowledge of the subject matter' and 'approachability'. 'Educational skills' score only slightly lower.

The assessment panel applauds the dedication of the staff and their attention to multicultural sensitivity. The programme cohort regularly consists of over twenty nationalities from (almost) all the world's continents, creating an ideal setting for constant, intensive interactions across multiple cultural boundaries. It is true, therefore, that students are in a multicultural environment and they come into contact with other law systems. The 'Globalisation paper' for example divides all students into groups of participants with as diverse backgrounds as possible in the very beginning of the academic year. According to the panel, this setting could be actively used to further sensitise students to working in a multicultural environment, for example by increasing the number of elements in the curriculum that explicitly address this topic.

Administrative support is in safe hands. The PILC Secretary works under an 80% part-time contract and is the first-line contact person of the students. She receives very positive feedback in both alumni and PILC evaluations for, e.g., providing individual guidance and assistance to the students and professors on a daily basis, in addition to her regular organisational and secretarial functions. While the PILC Secretariat has a central role in the programme, the IES Secretariat at large also has a role in terms of financial issues, visa and registration, etc.

The infrastructure is state-of-the-art. The programme is housed in the brand new IES facilities in Brussels, right near the VUB campus and easily accessible by public transport. All classes are organised in one, fixed classroom, stimulating the group feeling among students and their sense of cohesion. The PILC Secretariat is located on the same floor. The presentation software and other electronic devices are up-to-date. The teaching materials used in PILC receive generally a high mark in the student evaluations.

Pagina 5 van 12 The IES offers a small but focused research library specialised in international and European law. The office rooms, social spaces and modern conference rooms for up to 100 people at the IES provide a multitude of spaces for group work, seminars, case study role plays etc. PILC can also use the general VUB infrastructure (such as the library) as well as other important resources located nearby, such as the European Commission library and the library of the Université libre de Bruxelles.

The IES is with its in-house EU Modules platform a pioneer in developing on-line learning methods in European law and policy. Participation in PILC entitles the students to full usage rights in this virtual, interactive learning environment, which consists of over 400 pages divided into 5 individual EU Modules. During the on-site visit students praised the access they have to online documents.

In the previous assessment (2007), PILC received a number of suggestions on how to further refine the programme. The self-evaluation report has listed these recommendations, explaining in detail how they have been addressed. Most fundamental suggestions – such as moving away from comparative law, introducing an element of choice in the programme, but also with regard to staff, facilities and quality assurance - have been implemented since then.

The PILC Board consists of the PILC professors and two PILC alumni representatives, as well as one or two student representatives. The Board meets five to six times per year. Its main function is to determine a vision for PILC, and to take initiatives and make proposals in fulfilment of the vision. The student representatives serve as a link between the students, the programme management and the professors.

The assessment panel is convinced that the programme is adapted to current developments. The VUB organises surveys of all its alumni and the results of these have been incorporated in the selfevaluation report. A so-called e-valuation, a regular electronic student survey organised from central VUB level, has not been that successful in collecting student feedback on the professors' teaching and examinations. Despite consistent encouragement by the PILC management, the students' response rates have been poor. However, PILC itself also conducts anonymous student assessments of its professors' performance across five criteria (knowledge, presentation skills, materials, structure, accessibility). This survey is not limited to individual courses, but starts with the category 'Programme overall', where views on issues such as facilities, workload and satisfaction with PILC experience overall are collected. The PILC Survey also measures the Programme Director, not as a professor but as the manager of the programme.

Prior to the assessment, PILC students engaged in an effort to analyse the programme, which resulted in a document assessing various aspects of the programme. While highly valuing the PILC survey, the panel recommends that regular focus group interviews should continue to be organised with students to supplement the information that is already collected e.g. in the survey on the programme as a whole, on the separate courses and on the Programme director.

After the previous assessment, the alumni association APILCA was founded to form an active network between the over 1,200 PILC graduates (many of them in senior positions in EU Institutions, high-profile international law firms and organisations in the public and private sector).

Pagina 6 van 12 A number of initiatives have been introduced, such as the PILC Career lunches, at which an alumnus from a selected background (private, public, academia, NGO etc.) is invited to an IES-sponsored lunch with the current students. To get a large group of alumni together remains difficult, because many of them are living abroad.

In conclusion, the panel is convinced that the teaching process makes it possible for the students to achieve the learning outcomes. The curriculum is coherent, with a good mix of a public law and a business law track. The panel is impressed by the staff quality. The infrastructure, educational facilities and on-line learning methods are state-of-the-art. Recommendations from the former assessment have been addressed. Thanks to a streamlined organisation and procedures, the daily management is running smoothly. Having a certain status apart from the other VUB faculties, PILC is able to conduct a more independent and self-supporting course, led by a dedicated programme director. Because of the high level of legal expertise of the teaching staff, the disciplinary and attentive organisation, the excellent facilities and the challenging programme it offers to a relatively small community of motivated and qualified students, the panel stresses that this programme can be considered as a 'best practice' in international perspective.

*Generieke kwaliteitswaarborg 3 – Gerealiseerd eindniveau*  
De commissie beoordeelt het gerealiseerde eindniveau als goed.

There is a clear central policy which guarantees the monitoring of evaluation methods. This policy builds on the key aspects of the VUB's Vision of Evaluation, but also received specific attention of the PILC Board which is consciously aiming at striking a balance between the advantages and disadvantages that each of the methods have. As a result, there is a rather even spread of the use of oral (12 courses) and written (all 17 courses) forms of evaluation. In 12 cases – e.g. in the case studies - both oral and written forms of evaluation are in use. Within written evaluation forms, there is an even split between closed-book exams with open questions (8), case studies (6) and open-book evaluations (5). The choice of the evaluation methods employed is discussed between the PILC board and the professors.

Students told the assessment panel that they are satisfied with the examination process. Much effort has been put into transparency and validity. The specific means of evaluating the students, including model questions, are communicated as mandatory parts of the course content descriptions. Professors also explain the means of evaluation as a part of their course. The course syllabi contain detailed information on the exams. In the oral examinations, a policy of accompanying the professors with a third-party assistant is in force to allow for a verification of the procedure.

While all professors use evaluations in one or more summative ways to check whether learning outcomes have been reached, they also provide feedback on students' progress. On the basis of the on-site visit and the interviews with students and teachers, the panel is convinced that the further development of this formative evaluation is in safe hands with the PILC board.

Regarding the Master's thesis, each member of the Reading Committee (a Supervisor and two readers) prepares an evaluation report on the student. The evaluation criteria to be considered are outlined in the PILC Master Thesis Evaluation Template. The thesis also has to be defended orally. Students confirm that the evaluation criteria are known to them.

Pagina 7 van 12 In addition to the evaluation template, the grading itself is explained in 'thesis assessment guidelines'. Prior to the on-site visit, the assessment panel read a relevant sample of Master's theses. Overall, the quality is satisfactory and corresponds to the grades that were given.

When interviewed by the assessment panel, students and alumni both praised the 'practical applications' of the programme and the fact that it is 'not overly academic'. The positive results regarding employability seem to confirm the practical nature of the programme. The PILC alumni survey indicates that in 2008-2011 a third, and in 2011-2013 a half of the graduates had been employed in less than one month. Over the six-month period following graduation, the rate of becoming employed increased from 66% to 83% in the same timeframes. Among the alumni are a prime minister, directors of EU institutions and employers at international law firms. The assessment panel feels that the high level of the legal professions in which the graduates are employed reflects on the quality and good reputation of the programme.

Only 5-10% of the surveyed alumni were dissatisfied with their current job. During the on-site visit alumni stressed that it may take some time to find a job in the EU Institutions, as competition is harsh. Graduates acknowledge, however, that a PILC degree always 'opens the first door' for an internship. The programme is also considered a good preparation for the European Commission concours.

Some measures have been taken to enhance the employability of the graduates, such as the (already mentioned) career lunches, a PILC Job Applications Workshop and a PILC Job Market. Participation in PILC also gives access to the VUB Career Centre, which specifically takes into account international and European lawyers' profiles and job opportunities. Nevertheless, according to the self-evaluation 'there is room for improvement in informing the students of professional opportunities and in supporting their recruitment'. The study yield of the programme is good. The average mark of the graduating PILC students has varied between 70% and 77%. In 86-100% of cases students graduate within the intended one-year timeframe. It is obvious that these figures are strongly related to the adequate selection policy (see GQS 2).

In conclusion, the assessment panel finds that the learning outcomes are achieved. According to the alumni survey, only 3% of the graduates feel that the programme objectives have not been met. PILC has a clear, reliable and transparent system of assessment, testing and examination. Clearly, the PILC board is giving much thought about the evaluation policy, including formative evaluation, and has developed a strong vision on this. As a result evaluation methods are varied and embedded within a solid policy framework, in particular with regard to the Master's thesis. The student pass rates are high. Although competition on the labour market can be harsh, graduates are well positioned and rightly qualified to enter (whether or not via internships) international law firms and international organisations.

#### *Eindoordeel commissie*

De commissie heeft vastgesteld dat de opleiding Master of Laws in International and European Law (master na master) voldoet aan alle generieke kwaliteitswaarborgen. Ze beoordeelt de kwaliteit van de opleiding als goed.

- 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.

### **Besluit<sup>1</sup>**

betreffende de accreditatie van de Master of Laws in International and European Law (master na master) van de Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

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 te verlenen aan de opleiding Master of Laws in International and European Law (master na master) georganiseerd door de Vrije Universiteit Brussel. De opleiding wordt aangeboden te Brussel zonder afstudeerrichtingen. De kwaliteit van de opleiding is goed.

De accreditatie geldt overeenkomstig artikel II.147§2 van de Codex Hoger Onderwijs vanaf 1 oktober 2016 tot en met 30 september 2024.

Den Haag, 11 oktober 2016

De NVAO  
Voor deze:

  
Ann Verreth  
(vicevoorzitter)

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<sup>1</sup> Het ontwerp accreditatiebesluit werd aan de instelling bezorgd voor eventuele opmerkingen en bezwaren. Bij e-mail van 28 september 2016 heeft de instelling gereageerd. Dit heeft geleid tot enkele aanpassingen in het ontwerpaccreditatiebesluit.



Pagina 9 van 12 **Bijlage 1: Globale oordelen NVAO**

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

**Generieke kwaliteitswaarborg**

<b>Oordeel</b>	
1. Beoogd eindniveau	Goed
2. Onderwijsproces	Excellent
3. Gerealiseerd eindniveau	Goed
<b>Eindoordeel opleiding</b>	<b>Goed</b>

Naam instelling	Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Adres instelling	Pleinlaan 2 B-1050 BRUSSEL
Aard instelling	ambtshalve geregistreerd
Naam associatie	Universitaire Associatie Brussel
Naam opleiding (Graad, kwalificatie, specificatie)	Master of Laws in International and European Law
Niveau en oriëntatie	master na master
Bijkomende titel	geen
Opleidingsvarianten: – Afstudeerrichtingen – Studietraject voor werkstudenten	– geen – geen
Onderwijstaal	Engels
Vestiging(en) opleiding	Brussel
Studieomvang (in studiepunten)	60
Vervaldatum accreditatie, tijdelijke erkenning of erkenning nieuwe opleiding	30 september 2016
Academieja(a)r(en) waarin opleiding wordt aangeboden <sup>2</sup>	2015 - 2016
(Delen van) studiegebied(en)	Rechten, notariaat en criminologische wetenschappen
ISCED benaming van het studiegebied	Business, administration and law - Law

Onderstaande leerresultaten bouwen voort op deze van de Master of Laws in de Rechten.

1. Een brede en diepgaande kennis hebben van en inzicht hebben in de rechtsdomeinen van het internationaal en/of Europees recht, de totstandkoming en de dynamische ontwikkeling van de regelgeving.
2. Zelfstandig een binnen het domein van het internationaal en/of Europees recht relevante onderzoeksvraag formuleren, kaderen in de bestaande regelgeving, uitwerken en de onderzoeksresultaten kritisch evalueren met het oog op het leveren van een eigen bijdrage aan het vakgebied.
3. Een complex feitelijk en/of juridisch, internationaal en/of Europees, probleem vatten in een juridische vraagstelling en op basis hiervan een doordachte oplossing uitwerken.
4. Een kritische analyse en synthese van eigen onderzoeksresultaten helder en gevat rapporteren en presenteren.
5. In staat zijn nieuwe kennis op basis van zelfstudie te verwerven en deze op wetenschappelijk verantwoorde wijze aan te wenden in het domein van het internationaal en/of Europees recht.

Pagina 12 van 12 **Bijlage 4: Samenstelling commissie**

Voorzitter:

- Prof. dr. Gijs Vonk, gewoon hoogleraar Europees en Internationaal Recht aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen;

Leden:

- Prof. dr. em. Jenneke Bosch-Boesjes, hoogleraar burgerlijk procesrecht en gewezen directeur onderwijs juridische faculteit aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen;
- Prof. dr. Ellen Hey, hoogleraar Internationaal publiek recht aan de Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam en coördinator van het LLM-programma in Internationaal en Europees publiek recht, aan de Universiteit Rotterdam;
- Mevr. Sarina Wolfs, studente master rechten aan de Universiteit Hasselt (student lid).

De commissie werd ondersteund door Dhr. Peter Daerden, stafmedewerker kwaliteitszorg bij VLUHR Kwaliteitszorg, secretaris.