INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

FACULTY OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN

CONTENTS

This report was finalized on 27 February 2020

REPORT ON THE MASTER'S PROGRAMME INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN

This report takes the NVAO's Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands for limited programme assessments as a starting point (September 2018).

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE PROGRAMME

Master's programme International Relations

Name of the programme:	International Relations
CROHO number:	60734
Level of the programme:	master's
Orientation of the programme:	academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Specializations or tracks:	
Location(s):	Groningen
Mode(s) of study:	full time
Language of instruction:	English
Submission deadline NVAO:	01-05-2020

The visit of the assessment panel History to the University of Groningen took place on 15-17 April 2019.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE INSTITUTION

Name of the institution:	University of Groningen
Status of the institution:	publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	positive

COMPOSITION OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The NVAO has approved the composition of the panel on 4 February 2019. The panel that assessed the master's programme International Relations consisted of:

- Dr. J.W. (Jan Willem) Honig (chairman) is senior lecturer in War Studies, Department of War Studies, King's College, London and visiting professor of Military Strategy at the Swedish Defence University in Stockholm;
- Prof. dr. W.J.H. (Jan Hein) Furnée is full professor European Cultural History at Radboud University;
- Prof. dr. P. (Peter) Bursens is full professor at the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Antwerp;
- Prof. dr. R. V. (Violet) Soen is associate professor Early Modern Religious History at KU Leuven;
- Mel Schickel MA, alumnus Master History of Society from Erasmus University Rotterdam. He is now working as a Research Assistant at the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences at the University of Amsterdam.

The panel was supported by dr. A.H.A.M. (Alexandra) Paffen, who acted as secretary.

WORKING METHOD OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The site visit to the master's programme International Relations at the University of Groningen was part of the cluster assessment History. Between April 2019 and December 2019 the panel assessed 24 programmes at eight universities. The following universities participated in this cluster assessment: Erasmus University Rotterdam, Maastricht University, Radboud University, University of Groningen, Leiden University, Utrecht University, University of Amsterdam and VU Amsterdam.

On behalf of the participating universities, quality assurance agency QANU was responsible for logistical support, panel guidance and the production of the report[s]. Dr. A.H.A.M. (Alexandra) Paffen was project coordinator for QANU. Dr. A.H.A.M. (Alexandra) Paffen, dr. F. (Floor) Meijer en J. (Jaïra) Azaria MA acted as secretary in the cluster assessment.

During the site visit at University of Groningen, the panel was supported by dr. A.H.A.M. (Alexandra) Paffen a certified NVAO secretary.

Panel members
The members of the assessment panel were selected based on their expertise, availability and independence. The panel of the whole cluster consisted of the following members:

- Dr. J.W. (Jan Willem) Honig, senior lecturer and programme director in War Studies at King's College Londen (United Kingdom) and visiting professor of Military Strategy at the Swedish Defence University (Sweden) [chair];
- Prof. dr. I.B. (Inger) Leemans, professor in Cultural History and director of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) Graduate School [chair];
- Prof. dr. J.F.J. (Jeroen) Duindam, professor of Early Modern History at Leiden University;
- Prof. dr. W.J.H. (Jan Hein) Furnée, professor and chair of European Cultural History at the Radboud University;
- Prof. dr. P. (Peter) Bursens, professor in Political and Social Sciences at the Politics and Public Governance Research Group at University of Antwerp (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. W.P. (Wim) van Meurs, professor and chair of the Political History at Radboud University;
- Prof. dr. E. (Eric) Vanhaute, professor in Economic History and World History and co-chair of the research group Economies-Comparisons-Connections (ECC) at Ghent University (Belgium);
- V. (Vicky) Marissen LLMis, Managing Director at PACT European Affairs and partner at consultancy company EPPA;
- Dr. N. (Nico) Randeraad, associate professor in History and European Studies at Maastricht University and interim director at the Social Historical Centre Limburg;
- Prof. dr. N. (Nanci) Adler, professor in Memory, History, and Transitional Justice at the University of Amsterdam Program Director Genocide Studies at the Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD);
- Prof. dr. K. (Koenraad) Verboven, professor of Ancient History at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. V. (Violet) Soen, associate professor in Early Modern Religious History and chair of the research group Early Modern History at KU Leuven (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. C.A. (Claire) Dunlop, professor in Politics and Public Policy and head of research at the Department of Politics of the University of Exeter (United Kingdom);
- Prof. dr. E.B.A. (Erik) van der Vleuten, professor in the History of Technology at the School of Innovation Sciences of the Eindhoven University of Technology and Scientific Director at the Foundation for the History of Technology;
- Mel Schickel MA, alumnus of the master's programme History of Society at Erasmus University Rotterdam. He is now working as an external relations officer at the Faculty of Science and Engineering of Maastricht University (MU) [student member];
- Rikst van der Schoor BA, student master's programme Intellectual History, University of St. Andrews (United Kingdom) [student member].

- Rico Tjepkema, bachelor's student International Relations & International Organisation at the University of Groningen [student member].

Preparation
On 11 March 2019, the panel chair was briefed by QANU on his/her role, the assessment framework, the working method, and the planning of site visits and reports. A preparatory panel meeting was organised on 14 April 2019. During this meeting, the panel members received instruction on the use of the assessment framework(s). The panel also discussed their working method and the planning of the site visits and reports.

The project coordinator composed a schedule for the site visit in consultation with the Faculty. Prior to the site visit, the Faculty selected representative partners for the various interviews. See Appendix 4 for the final schedule.

Before the site visit to University of Groningen, QANU received the self-evaluation reports of the programmes and sent these to the panel. A thesis selection was made by the panel chair and the project coordinator. The selection existed of 15 theses and their assessment forms for the programmes, based on a provided list of graduates between 2017-2018. A variety of topics and tracks and a diversity of examiners were included in the selection. The project coordinator and panel chair assured that the distribution of grades in the selection matched the distribution of grades of all available theses.

After studying the self-evaluation report, theses and assessment forms, the panel members formulated their preliminary findings. The secretary collected all initial questions and remarks and distributed these amongst all panel members.
At the start of the site visit, the panel discussed its initial findings on the self-evaluation report(s) and the theses, as well as the division of tasks during the site visit.

Site visit
The site visit to University of Groningen took place on 15-17 April 2019. Before and/or during the site visit, the panel studied the additional documents provided by the programmes. An overview of these materials can be found in Appendix 5. The panel conducted interviews with representatives of the programmes: students and staff members, the programme's management, alumni and representatives of the Board of Examiners. It also offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour. No requests for private consultation were received.

The panel used the final part of the site visit to discuss its findings in an internal meeting. Afterwards, the panel chair publicly presented the panel's preliminary findings and general observations.

Consistency and calibration
In order to assure the consistency of assessment within the cluster, various measures were taken:
1. The panel composition ensured regular attendance of (key) panel members, including the chair;
2. The coordinator was present at the panel discussion leading to the preliminary findings at all site visits

Report
After the site visit, the secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to the project coordinator for peer assessment. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel. After processing the panel members' feedback, the project coordinator sent the draft report(s) to the Faculty in order to have it/these checked for factual irregularities. The project coordinator discussed the ensuing comments with the panel's chair and changes were implemented accordingly. The report was then finalised and sent to the Faculty and University Board.

Definition of judgements standards

In accordance with the NVAO's Assessment framework for limited programme assessments, the panel used the following definitions for the assessment of the standards:

Generic quality
The quality that, from an international perspective, may reasonably be expected from a higher education Associate Degree, Bachelor's or Master's programme.

Meets the standard
The programme meets the generic quality standard.

Partially meets the standard
The programme meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard.

Does not meet the standard
The programme does not meet the generic quality standard.

The panel used the following definitions for the assessment of the programme as a whole:

Positive
The programme meets all the standards.

Conditionally positive
The programme meets standard 1 and partially meets a maximum of two standards, with the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel.

Negative
In the following situations:
- The programme fails to meet one or more standards;
- The programme partially meets standard 1;
- The programme partially meets one or two standards, without the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel;
- The programme partially meets three or more standards.

SUMMARY JUDGEMENT

Standard 1
The MA programme in International Relations (IR) of the University of Groningen (RUG) is a fulltime academic programme that aims to train "internationalists", who have the ability to bridge theory and practice. It prepares its students for professions and research positions where knowledge of international political developments, and the ability to analyse and assess complex issues and to form grounded judgements, are relevant. The panel accepts that the profile of the programme represents a distinctive combination of research-based and practice-oriented teaching and learning. Furthermore, it thinks the programme is clearly focused on the expectations of the professional field with its emphasis on the training of both research and academic skills, a mandatory placement and the societally relevant tracks.

According to the panel, the programme offers students, next to an overview of the current state of affairs within the field of IR, a number of specialized IR tracks on an advanced level: (1) International Security, Geopolitics & Connectivity, (2) International Political Economy, (3) European Integration, (4) East Asian Studies, and one general track (5) International Relations and International Organization. The track East Asian Studies is unique in the Netherlands.

The panel believes the ILOs are adequate. They have been developed and adapted by making use of the second cycle (MA) of the Dublin Descriptors (DD). Through the alignment of ILOs and DD, the academic orientation as well as the higher level, compared to the BA programme, is made clear in terms of depth and complexity of skills and independence. However, in contrast to the ILOs of the BA programme, the MA-level ILOs are somewhat less well-defined and specific, and the link with the general profile as well as with the tracks is also less clear. The programme could consider adjusting the ILOs in these respects.

Standard 2
The panel thinks the content of the programme is truly international – as is visible in both the tracks and the courses - and in that sense it is perfectly aligned with the profile. In view of its current dominance in international relations, English is understandably the main teaching language in the programme, enabling students to share and communicate in an international classroom setting. Although the programme, according to the panel, wholeheartedly and rightly embraces the international classroom, it nonetheless seems to struggle with the great diversity in academic, cultural and national backgrounds of its incoming students. The panel urges the programme to keep a close eye on this issue and especially watch over any quality gaps opening up among the master's theses.

The students and alumni spoke of an interesting and appealing IR programme and also highly appreciated both the quality and quantity of the courses and the lecturers, as well as the small-scale teaching. The panel believes the programme possesses a clear and convincing setup with a strong emphasis on theory and research along with due attention paid to both professional skills and professional practice. It studied the study guide and some selected courses and found the level and social relevance, especially of the Capita courses, impressive. This also applied to the number and diversity of the research seminars offered. The panel thinks that some improvement can be made in the attention paid to the critical reflection on scholarly (theoretical) literature and the methods that students apply to their thesis research.

There is a clear link between the learning goals of the courses and the ILOs. The programme has also created a matrix in which the connection between the courses and the ILOs is visualized. The matrix is insightful, even though the panel thinks it is too general and should be more consonant with the elaborate matrix of the BA programme.

The completion of the thesis is an important reason for study delay. To improve timely completion rates, the thesis process has been restructured. The panel would advise the programme to have

another look at the thesis manual though. A further point worth considering is revisiting the permitted word-length of the theses. Another point requiring attention, and one that is clearly connected to timely completion rates, is the supervision of students before, during and after their internship. Students, especially international ones, clearly need more help and supervision in spite of an existing internship manual, internship database and placement coordinator.

The panel thinks the mixed composition of the staff, the diversity of its expertise and the level of current research knowledge are among the main assets of the programme. Most staff members are in possession of a UTQ. The lecturers are –also according to students and alumni- very driven, committed, enthusiastic, and eager and willing continuously to improve and develop the curriculum. Furthermore, they are very open and adaptive to suggestions of students and colleagues. Their English language skills are also much valued.

Standard 3
The Teaching and Examination Regulations (OER) of the MA programme IR contain (1) a matrix linking the Dublin Descriptors of the programme to the ILOs and the specific courses and (2) an assessment plan with detailed information per course about the type of assessments and the weeks in which exams and resits take place. This information is also made available and transparent to the students through the course manuals. The ILOs are assessed by different assessment methods, both formative and summative. All examiners must ensure that an assessment dossier is made available to the Board of Examiners (BoE) after a course is completed.

The system of assessment is adequate according to the panel and the assessment matrix is insightful. The assessment information is transparent and on the basis of the module assessment samples inspected, the panel found no cause for concern.

The MA thesis assesses many of the programme's ILOs. Every thesis is submitted to the plagiarism detector Ephorus and is graded by the supervisor and a second reader. They assess the student's performance independently based on a standardized assessment form. The panel considers the assessment procedure of the thesis thorough and the assessment form as such as good, although the panel missed a clear link with the ILOs under 'Making Judgements'. For an MA thesis it is not only important that students critically reflect on their research, but also that supervisors assess whether students meet this ILO. Furthermore, the panel observed a great variety in the quantity and quality of the feedback (especially by the second reader). It was sometimes difficult to see how the grade was established. Fortunately, the assessment form was recently adjusted so that the second readers have to deliver a more explicitly qualitative judgement.

The BoE acts in accordance with a three-yearly cycle as laid down in the quality assurance protocol of the RUG. This means that the quality of the assessment of all courses (based on the assessment dossiers supplied by lecturers) is guaranteed once every three years. In addition, each semester the Board evaluates a number of MA theses and courses. The panel thinks the current BoE functions adequately and performs its statutory duties.

Standard 4
According to the panel, the programme demonstrates that it meets the ILOs. Even though the panel judged marks as tending to be on the high side, all 15 sample theses were of a passable level and met the specific requirements associated with a IR MA thesis. The theses addressed an impressive range of interesting and relevant topics and issues, doing justice to the breadth and ambition of the programme. However, the theses were quite lengthy. In general, they showed a strong empirical quality and, despite the overall emphasis in the programme on IR theory, students often found the application of theory, method and critical analysis overly challenging. Furthermore, quite a number of students did not critically reflect on or take a position in the debates regarding the thesis research.

The alumni with whom the panel spoke were positive about the programme and especially about the mandatory placement: it was important for their career and useful for their current jobs. According

to a recent alumni survey, most graduates work in the public sector (40%; e.g., in national and regional government, education or international organizations), followed by the private sector (34%), the non-profit sector (10%) and other (16%).

The panel assesses the standards from the *Assessment framework for limited programme assessments* in the following way:

Master's programme International Relations

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes meets the standard

General conclusion   positive

The chair, dr. J.W. (Jan Willem) Honig, and the secretary, dr. A.H.A.M. (Alexandra) Paffen, of the panel hereby declare that all panel members have studied this report and that they agree with the judgements laid down in the report. They confirm that the assessment has been conducted in accordance with the demands relating to independence.

Date: 27 February 2020

DESCRIPTION OF THE STANDARDS FROM THE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK FOR LIMITED FRAMEWORK ASSESSMENTS

> **Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes**
> The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

Findings

Profile

The master's (MA) programme in International Relations (IR) of the University of Groningen (RUG) is a fulltime academic programme that aims to train "internationalists", who have the ability to bridge theory and practice in order to engage in the continuously changing field of international relations. The programme prepares its students for professions (e.g., in national governments, NGOs, and international organizations) and research positions, where knowledge of international political developments, and the ability to analyze and assess complex issues and to form grounded judgements are relevant.

The profile of the programme follows the general teaching philosophy of the Faculty of Arts of RUG, which is characterized by a research driven, student-oriented focus and active learning. The interrelated nature of education and research is an important point of departure for the programme, which feeds through into the different curriculum parts. The curriculum consists of a combination of a theory-based research orientation (expressed in research papers and the thesis) and a more practice-based professional orientation (for instance, by means of a mandatory placement). The small groups and the large offer of specialized advanced research courses contribute –in line with the teaching philosophy of the Faculty- to a student-centred focus and active learning environment. The programme is taught in English, although some of its parts can be taken in Dutch. The international profile and ambitions of the programme are also reflected in the composition of its international student body and staff.

The programme is methodologically and theoretically grounded in the discipline of International Relations and includes five specialized tracks: (1) International Security (2) Geopolitics & Connectivity, (3) International Political Economy, (4) European Integration, (5) East Asian Studies, and one general track (6) International Relations and International Organization. The latter track is meant for students with a non-IR academic background. This range of specializations enables students to explore various developments and phenomena in international relations and thus follow their specific interests. To maintain and strengthen the link with the professional IR labour market and explore potential growth markets, the specialization tracks 5 (from September 2014) and 2 (from September 2018) were added to the profile. A new track, European Politics in a Global Perspective, reorganizing the current track 3, is being prepared for September 2020. Especially within the track East Asian Studies the possibilities of a placement abroad and the study exchange to East Asia appear to be, according to the self-evaluation report, attractive for (prospective) students.

According to the self-evaluation report, in comparison with other MA programmes in IR, such as offered by the University of Leiden and the University of Utrecht, Groningen offers a range of unique specialization tracks (e.g., Geopolitics & Connectivity, East Asian Studies, IRIO). Compared to Leiden, there also is a more pronounced emphasis on advanced theory of IR in Groningen.

The panel accepts that the profile of the programme represents a distinctive combination of research-based and practice-oriented teaching and learning. It found during the site visit that this is one of the main reasons students choose and appreciate this particular IR programme. According to the panel, the programme offers students both an overview of the current state of affairs within the field of IR, including attention to the historical background of the debates, and specialized and relevant IR tracks on an advanced level. The track East Asian Studies is unique in the Netherlands. The panel

appreciates the flexibility of the programme management in keeping up with both the changing interests of the students and the ever-changing field of IR. It is clear to the panel that the programme benefits from the current research of the staff.

Intended learning outcomes
The programme management consulted similar programmes in the Netherlands and Belgium when it defined the intended learning outcomes (ILOs). They have been developed and adapted by making use of the second cycle (MA) of Dublin Descriptors (DD). Through the alignment of ILOs and DD, the academic orientation as well as the higher level is made clear in terms of depth and complexity of skills and independence in comparison with the BA International Relations and International Organization (IRIO) ILOs. In addition, the ILOs have been guided by the internationally agreed Tuning Sectoral Framework for the Social Sciences as well as compared with corresponding programmes in the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States.

The panel believes the ILOs are adequate. However, in contrast to the ILOs of the BA programme, the MA-level ILOs are somewhat less well-defined and specific and the link with the general profile is also less clear. The programme might consider to avoid the suggestion in ILO 2.2. that students should mainly learn to reproduce and apply theories by adding a phrase such as 'in order to generate deeper understanding of specific cases and critically reflect on the advantages and limitations of existing theories'. Another suggestion would be setting specific ILOs for each track or explain for each ILO the particularities of each track. An adjustment of the ILO's could also be an opportunity to make the claim of multidisciplinarity of the programme more explicit. The programme has an Advisory Board that could maybe advise on these issues.

Connection with the professional field
To maintain and strengthen the link with the professional IR labour market and explore potential growth markets, the programme adjusted and added new specialization tracks. The panel thinks the programme is clearly focused on the expectations of the professional field with its emphasis on the training of both research and academic skills, a mandatory placement and the societally relevant tracks.

Considerations
The MA programme in International Relations (IR) of the University of Groningen (RUG) is a fulltime academic programme that aims to train "internationalists", who have the ability to bridge theory and practice. It prepares its students for professions and research positions, where knowledge of international political developments, and the ability to analyse and assess complex issues and to form grounded judgements are relevant. The panel accepts that the profile of the programme represents a distinctive combination of research-based and practice-oriented teaching and learning. Furthermore, it thinks the programme is clearly focused on the expectations of the professional field with its emphasis on the training of both research and academic skills, a mandatory placement and the societally relevant tracks.

According to the panel, the programme offers students both an overview of the current state of affairs within the field of IR, including and specialized IR tracks on an advanced level: (1) International Security, Geopolitics & Connectivity, (2) International Political Economy, (3) European Integration, (4) East Asian Studies, and one general track (5) International Relations and International Organization. The track East Asian Studies is unique in the Netherlands.

The panel believes the ILOs are adequate. They have been developed and adapted by making use of the second cycle (MA) of Dublin Descriptors (DD). Through the alignment of ILOs and DD, the academic orientation as well as the higher level –compared to the BA programme- is made clear in terms of depth and complexity of skills and independence. However, in contrast to the ILOs of the BA programme, the MA-level ILOs are somewhat less well-defined and specific and the link with the general profile as well as with the tracks is also less clear. The programme could consider adjusting the ILOs in these respects.

Conclusion
Master's programme International Relations: the panel assesses Standard 1 as
'meets the standard'.

Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment
The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Findings
Vision on education and curriculum
The programme aims to prepare its students for a role in society that fits the profile of the programme. Its vision on education, as presented in the self-evaluation report, is student-centred, employs active and research-based learning methods, and develops professional skills. This student-centred approach presupposes that the teaching, learning, and assessment methods are not only activating in nature, but that the student takes significant responsibility for his or her own learning process. Most courses are either designed in the form of small-scale seminar teaching of 10-15 students per group (e.g., the research seminars) or adopt one-on-one teaching (e.g., placement, thesis) in order to enable the student to actively shape her or his own learning process.

The programme is research-based, in the sense that courses – particularly the research seminars and thesis supervision – establish links between the specialization of the staff members and the interests of the students, and in the sense that students are taught research, presentation and writing skills that are put to use in the various assignments throughout the different courses. Apart from the thesis, two mandatory research papers and a Capita assignment (see study programme) have to be written and presented in work groups.

In view of its current dominance in the field of IR, English is understandably the main teaching language in the programme, enabling students to share and communicate in an international classroom setting. Dutch is also allowed, specifically in the final thesis. The panel considers this a defensible approach.

To implement this vision, the 60 EC curriculum was developed around two main learning trajectories (see scheme below):
-   A learning trajectory on theory: all students follow *Advanced Theory in International Relations* (ATIR 5 EC). It offers students an overview of the current state of affairs of the discipline, including its most important debates and their historical backgrounds. After ATIR, the *Capita* modules focus on more specific (theoretical) knowledge and understanding of the state of affairs in the track specialization areas, including the academic debates therein. This is to prepare students for the theoretical framework of the thesis.
-   A learning trajectory in the specific research field of the track: according to the self-evaluation report students follow two out of about 27 research seminars within their track, which centre on deepening research skills and knowledge. This includes developing skills such as presenting research results both orally and in writing, as well as discussing papers among peers. Students can opt to replace one of the research seminars either with an IR research seminar outside their track or with one or more alternative course units that provide a deepening of content. Subsequently, they further their research focus in the thesis.

Study programme:

Semester I		Semester II	
block 1	**block 2**	**block 3**	**block 4**
Adv. Theory in IR (5 ECTS)	Capita for track (5 ECTS)	Placement (10 ECTS)	
Research Seminar (10 ECTS)		Master's thesis (20 ECTS)	
Research Seminar (10 ECTS)			

The panel thinks the content of the programme is truly international – as is visible in both the tracks and the courses studied by the panel- and in that sense it is perfectly aligned with the profile. As mentioned under Standard 1, the track East Asian Studies (EAS) offers a unique selling point. Students of this track can replace the placement by an extra EAS research seminar or by a study period at one of the East Asian partner universities in Japan, China and South Korea. This kind of experience in the region is supported by the Centre of East Asian Studies Groningen through its network.

The programme, according to the panel, possesses a clear and convincing setup with a strong emphasis on theory and research along with due attention paid to both professional skills and professional practice. The panel studied the study guide and some selected courses and found the level and social relevance of especially the Capita courses impressive. This also applied to the number and diversity of the research seminars offered. They fit in well with the different tracks. There is a clear link between the learning goals of the courses and the ILOs. The programme has also created a matrix in which the connection between the courses and the ILOs is visualized. The matrix is insightful, even though the panel thinks it is too general and can be made more consonant with the elaborate matrix of the BA IRIO programme.

During the site visit students and alumni spoke of an interesting and appealing IR programme and also highly appreciated the quality and quantity of the courses. They valued the small scale teaching, but refer to the group size as between 15-20, instead of the 10-15 mentioned in the self-evaluation report.

The panel thinks that some improvement can be made in the attention paid to the critical reflection on scholarly (theoretical) literature and the methods that students apply to their thesis research. The panel studied some theses in which students took the scholarly (theoretical) literature too easily for granted and in which the methods students chose did not always tie in with their research (question). It wonders whether students can be methodologically better prepared for their thesis and more encouraged to reflect on the advantages and limitations of existing literature and create new insights that transcend the actual case studies.

Feasibility
The study success rates of the MA IR are low. The programme management states that finishing in one year is currently not the norm. Students often choose to extend their placement or do a second placement. The completion of the thesis is another important reason for delay. To improve timely completion rates, the thesis process has been restructured as of September 2018 with a clear timeline and deadlines. The panel can only support this, since the students told the panel that although in general they are positive about the thesis supervision, the current process is sometimes too haphazard and as a result too dependent on the specific supervisor. It would also in this regard advise the programme to have another look at the thesis manual. It is very thorough and extensive, but contains too many repetitions. A further point worth considering is revisiting the permitted word-length of the theses. In many cases the theses studied by the panel were very long – with too many pages devoted to general context rather than deep analysis of the case study - and the added learning value was often not clear (other than maybe adding to both student and staff workload).

Another point requiring attention, and one that is clearly connected to timely completion rates, is the supervision of students before, during and after their internship. Students told the panel that the mandatory internship is very much valued and one of the main reasons they choose this specific MA programme. The panel also sees the mandatory placement as one of the main assets of the programme, but it is also one of the main reasons for severe study delays. It believes students need more help and supervision, especially international students who have to pay significant additional fees when they face an extra year to complete their studies. This last point was also highlighted in the student-chapter. It is appreciated by the students that in the Asian track the internship can be substituted with an extra research seminar. The guidelines in the internship manual should be synchronised for all tracks, with possible exemptions for each track clearly highlighted. The IR programme should consider exchanging best practices with the History department on this.

Intake

In contrast to the BA IRIO, the MA IR has no *numerus fixus* and all applicants that meet the eligibility criteria are admitted. Students with a BA degree IRIO have direct access, while students with a BA degree from the RUG in related disciplines are admitted via the Admissions Board under condition they follow a pre-determined compensation programme. For students with degrees from other universities in the Netherlands or abroad, the Admissions Board decides on a case-by-case basis whether the prior education is sufficient for direct admission or a compensation programme is required. In addition, an English language test is required for applicants whose degree does not show sufficient mastery of the English language. As of 2017/2018, the Admissions Board also considers students with a University of Applied Sciences (HBO) diploma in a discipline related to IR eligible for the MA IR, provided that a compensation programme is followed.

The composition of the cohort of incoming students has changed considerably over the years. There is more variety in terms of the (international) backgrounds of students. Their familiarity with the academic traditions at the RUG and the Netherlands differs more greatly, as does their knowledge and skills regarding research methods, methodology and paper writing, as well as their ability to engage with debates and theories of IR. For this reason, all applications are checked with regard to knowledge of methods, research practice and theories relevant to the field of IR. In case of deficiencies, the applicant is required to follow (parts of) a pre-master programme.

Although the programme, according to the panel, wholeheartedly and rightly embraces the international classroom, it nonetheless seems to struggle with the great diversity in academic, cultural and national backgrounds of its incoming students. The panel urges the programme to keep a close eye on this issue and especially watch over any quality gaps opening up among the master's theses.

Staff and supervision

The teaching staff is mostly drawn from the five Chair Groups from the Cluster IRIO/NOHA (Network of Humanitarian Action). According to the self-evaluation report, staff members actively participate and shape academic debates in their respective fields and build a bridge between their own research interests and their teaching. 39% of the members of staff are Dutch, 47% hail from other EU countries, and 14% are non-EU. In terms of teaching expertise, 75% of the teaching staff is in possession of a University Teaching Qualification (UTQ) and 13% is in the process of obtaining the UTQ. Of the people who do not have a UTQ, the majority are temporary staff with a one-year contract.

The panel thinks the mixed composition of the staff (Dutch, EU and non-EU), the diversity of its expertise and the level of current research knowledge are among the main assets of the programme. From the meetings with the staff during the site visit, it became clear that the lecturers are very driven, committed, enthusiastic, and eager and continuously willing to improve and develop the curriculum. Furthermore, they are very open and adaptive to suggestions of students and colleagues. Specifically in the MA, they view their students as peers and fellow researchers. Students told the panel they see themselves as part of a research community. The English language skills of the lecturers are also much valued by the students.

What struck the panel was that within this open atmosphere, lecturers openly share their issues with work pressure with their students and that students are concerned about this. This became clear both from the student chapter as well as the interviews with students. Although the panel agrees that workload is an important issue that needs to be addressed by the Faculty, it is of the opinion that students should not need to have to worry about this. The panel was relieved to hear that measures to decrease the workload have been and will be taken and that teaching capacity has already been increased and will be increased even further.

The Master IR is a programme in which self-study and discipline on the part of the student play an important role. Consequently, the number of contact hours is relatively low (8.5 hours per week in the first semester). In the second semester, students have their placement and work on their thesis project. In terms of supervision time, the programme offers 25 hours per thesis and 11 hours per placement. The panel finds these supervision hours sufficient since MA students need less supervision than BA students and independence is an important MA ILO. It did however learn from both the interviews and the student chapter that especially international students and perhaps students from a different academic background need more guidance respectively with their internship and their thesis.

Considerations
The panel thinks the content of the programme is truly international – as is visible in both the tracks and the courses - and in that sense it is perfectly aligned with the profile. In view of its current dominance in international relations, English is understandably the main teaching language in the programme, enabling students to share and communicate in an international classroom setting. Although the programme wholeheartedly and rightly embraces the international classroom, it nonetheless seems to struggle with the great diversity in academic, cultural and national backgrounds of its incoming students. The panel urges the programme to keep a close eye on this issue.

The students and alumni spoke of an interesting, appealing small-scale IR programme and also highly appreciated both the quality and quantity of the courses and the lecturers. The panel believes the programme possesses a clear and convincing setup with a strong emphasis on theory and research along with due attention paid to both professional skills and professional practice. It studied the study guide and some selected courses and found the level and social relevance of especially the Capita courses impressive. This also applied to the number and diversity of the research seminars offered. The panel thinks that some improvement can be made in the attention paid to the critical reflection on scholarly (theoretical) literature and the methods that students apply to their thesis research.

There is a clear link between the learning goals of the courses and the ILOs. The programme has also created a matrix in which the connection between the courses and the ILOs is visualized. The matrix is insightful, even though the panel thinks it is too general and should be more consonant with the elaborate matrix of the BA programme.

The completion of the thesis is an important reason for study delay. To improve timely completion rates, the thesis process has been restructured. The panel would advise the programme to have another look at the thesis manual though. A further point worth considering is revisiting the permitted word-length of the theses. Another point requiring attention, and one that is clearly connected to timely completion rates, is the supervision of students before, during and after their internship. Students, especially international ones, clearly need more help and supervision in spite of an existing internship manual, internship database and placement coordinator.

The panel thinks the mixed composition of the staff, the diversity of its expertise and the level of current research knowledge are among the main assets of the programme. Most staff members are in possession of a UTQ. The lecturers are –also according to students and alumni- very driven, committed, enthusiastic, and eager and willing continuously to improve and develop the curriculum.

Furthermore, they are very open and adaptive to suggestions of students and colleagues. Their English language skills are also much valued.

Conclusion
Master's programme International Relations: the panel assesses Standard 2 as 'meets the standard'.

Standard 3: Student assessment
The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

Findings
System of assessment
A new type of assessment plan has been developed by the Faculty of Arts, that will be put into effect in 2019-2020. The new assessment plan provides a detailed breakdown of the course-specific learning outcomes and assessment types in each individual course, as well as a detailed overview of how each individual course contributes to the achievement of the overall programme learning outcomes. This information is currently available through the course manuals and the Teaching and Examination Regulations (*Onderwijs- en examenregeling*, OER) and available and transparent for staff and students. The current OER contains (1) a matrix for the MA programme IR linking the Dublin Descriptors to the ILOs and the specific courses and (2) an assessment plan with detailed information per course about the type of assessments and the weeks in which the exams and resits take place.

The ILOs are assessed in various courses by different assessment methods. The programme uses a variety of assessment types –e.g., papers and presentations-, including formative and summative ways of assessing.

All examiners must ensure that an assessment file is made available to the Board of Examiners (BoE) after a course is completed, including the course manual with assessment criteria, model answers, assignment instructions, grades, and the assessment forms with feedback to the students.

The panel finds the system of assessment adequate. It is apposite and transparent for students. The matrix is insightful. The panel learnt from both the self-evaluation report and the interviews during the site visit that there is a continuous and highly transparent system of quality control. Feedback from students is constantly asked, including regarding assessments. On the basis of the module assessment samples inspected, the panel found no cause for concern.

Thesis assessment
In the assessment of MA theses, a first supervisor is assigned to supervise and grade the student's performance based on a detailed standardized assessment form. A second reader double checks with a less elaborate assessment form independently whether the thesis meets the standards set for the programme. Every thesis is to be graded by both the first supervisor and the second reader. This procedure applies to both the first attempt and a possible resit, regardless of whether the grade is a pass or a fail. If the supervisor and the second reader disagree by more than half a grade point, they first see if they can come to an agreement, if not, the thesis is referred to the BoE, which appoints a third reader. Theses that are graded lower than 6.0 are not accepted as sufficient for passing. When submitting their final draft, students are required to upload the document for an Ephorus plagiarism check.

The panel considers the assessment procedure of the thesis thorough in theory. It evaluated 15 theses with their assessment forms and noticed some variety in the quantity and quality of the feedback, especially from the second reader. Second reader assessments at times had a *pro forma* quality and did not offer clear evidence of an independent judgement. The latter could be remedied if the second reader were to use a separate assessment form. The panel learnt during the site visit that the assessment form was recently adjusted so that the second readers have to deliver a more

qualitative judgement. The programme could consider - to achieve an even more independent assessment - if it is practicable to invite a second reader from a different department.

The panel found the assessment form as such to be good: the distribution of the grades in six categories ensures a good degree of nuance in the grading process . The connection with the ILOs is clear, although the panel missed a clear link with the ILOs under 'Making judgements'. For a MA thesis it is not only important that students critically reflect on their research, but also that supervisors assess if students meet this ILO. Furthermore, it would advise the supervisors, and especially the second readers, to make better use of this exemplary form and give students adequate, reasoned written feedback and avoid merely 'ticking the boxes' – although it learnt from both students and lecturers during the site visit that substantial oral feedback is habitually offered to students. Although the panel recognises that this might add to the workload, the 'zessenregeling' that is used in the History Department to assure adequately the fairness and consistency of borderline pass/fail marks might also be of value to IR.

Board of Examiners
The BoE acts in accordance with a three-yearly cycle as laid down in the quality assurance protocol of the RUG. This means that the quality of the assessment of all courses (based on the assessment dossiers supplied by lecturers) is guaranteed once every three years. In addition, each semester a number of MA theses and courses are evaluated by the Board. The panel thinks the current BoE functions adequately, although much of the interaction is informal in nature. It performs its statutory duties, thereby making a contribution to ensuring the quality of the programme and its curriculum. In addition to its statutory duties, the BoE is also proactive and regularly advises the cluster board. The panel finds this admirable, certainly in view of the aforementioned workload challenges.

Considerations
The Teaching and Examination Regulations (OER) of the MA programme IR contain (1) a matrix linking the Dublin Descriptors of the programme to the ILOs and the specific courses and (2) an assessment plan with detailed information per course about the type of assessments and the weeks in which exams and resits take place. This information is also made available and transparent to the students through the course manuals. The ILOs are assessed by different assessment methods, both formative and summative. All examiners must ensure that an assessment dossier is made available to the Board of Examiners (BoE) after a course is completed.

The system of assessment is according to the panel adequate and the assessment matrix is insightful. The assessment information is transparent and on the basis of the module assessment samples inspected, the panel found no cause for concern.

The MA thesis assesses many of the programme's ILOs. Every thesis is submitted to the plagiarism detector Ephorus and is graded by the supervisor and a second reader. The supervisor and second reader assess the student's performance independently based on a standardized assessment form. The panel considers the assessment procedure of the thesis thorough and the assessment form as such good although the panel missed a clear link with the ILOs under 'Making Judgements'. For a MA thesis it is not only important that students critically reflect on their research, but also that supervisors assess if students meet this ILO. Furthermore, the panel observed a great variety in the quantity and quality of the feedback (especially by the second reader). It was sometimes difficult to see how the grade was established. Fortunately, the assessment form was recently adjusted so that the second readers have to deliver a more qualitative judgement.

The BoE acts in accordance with a three-yearly cycle as laid down in the quality assurance protocol of the RUG. This means that the quality of the assessment of all courses (based on the assessment dossiers supplied by lecturers) is guaranteed once every three years. In addition, each semester the Board evaluates a number of MA theses and courses. The panel thinks the current BoE functions adequately and performs its statutory duties.

Conclusion
Master's programme International Relations: the panel assesses Standard 3 as
'meets the standard'.

Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes
The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings
Theses
According to the panel the programme demonstrates that it meets the ILOs. All 15 sample theses were of a passable level and met the specific requirements associated with a IR MA thesis. It was also evident that in terms of content, a higher level is expected from the students than in the BA theses. As a whole, the theses addressed an impressive range of interesting and relevant topics and issues, doing justice to the breadth and ambition of the programme. The marking was in general considered fair and consistent, even though the panel judged marks – as was also the case with the theses of the BA programme – as tending to be on the high side. The English language proficiency was generally considered good.

The panel did consider the theses to be quite lengthy. They could be made substantially shorter by focusing more rigorously on the research question and the subsequent steps required for answering that question. As with the BA theses, the MA theses in general showed a strong empirical quality although, despite the overall emphasis in the programme on IR theory, students often found the application of theory, method and critical analysis overly challenging. Furthermore, quite a number of students did not critically reflect on or take a position in the debates regarding the research they presented in their theses. The panel understands that this important ILO (1.3) is also assessed in other MA courses, but would advise supervisors to pay more attention to these matters during the supervision of the theses.

Alumni and professional field
The programme has an active alumni association. It functions as a link between the programme (both bachelor and master) and its graduates. It does so by organizing numerous social events, in which networking and experience-sharing take centre stage. In 2018, the alumni association analysed the employment of graduates among its 939 members. Most graduates work in the public sector (40%; e.g., national and regional government, education or international organizations), followed by the private sector (34%), the non-profit sector (10%) and other (16%).

The panel congratulates the programme on this pro-active alumni association. This is a true asset that perhaps can be taken advantage of more frequently. Both the programme management and the panel considered it a missed opportunity that the alumni survey did not make a distinction between bachelor and master's graduates. The panel would advise the programme to introduce its own survey and also investigate how many alumni end up working outside the Netherlands.

The panel spoke with a number of alumni. They were positive about the programme and thought it was useful for their current jobs. Most of them very much valued the mandatory placement and for some it was also directly important for their career. Again, the panel would advise the programme in collaboration with the alumni organization, to think of ways to collect this type of valuable information and also use it for the aforementioned internship database (see Standard 2).

Considerations
According to the panel the programme demonstrates that it meets the ILOs. Even though the panel judged marks as tending to be on the high side, all 15 sample theses were of a passable level and met the specific requirements associated with a IR MA thesis. The theses addressed an impressive range of interesting and relevant topics and issues, doing justice to the breadth and ambition of the programme. However, the theses were quite lengthy. In general they showed a strong empirical

quality although, despite the overall emphasis in the programme on IR theory, students often found the application of theory, method and critical analysis overly challenging. Furthermore, quite a number of students did not critically reflect on or take a position in the debates regarding the thesis research.

The alumni the panel spoke with were positive about the programme and especially about the mandatory placement: it was important for their career and useful for their current jobs. According to a recent alumni survey, most graduates work in the public sector (40%; e.g., national and regional government, education or international organizations), followed by the private sector (34%), the non-profit sector (10%) and other (16%).

Conclusion
Master's programme International Relations: the panel assesses Standard 4 as
'meets the standard'.

GENERAL CONCLUSION
The panel assesses Standard 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the master's programme International Relations as 'meets the standard'. According to the decision rules of NVAO's Framework for limited programme assessments 2018, the panel assesses the master's programme International Relations as 'positive'.

Conclusion
The panel assesses the *master's programme International Relations* as 'positive'.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Dublin Descriptors (2nd cycle)	A Master's graduate has…	
Knowledge and understanding 1. Students have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with Bachelor's level, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context.	1	Advanced knowledge and understanding of key concepts and concept structures in the study of international political phenomena at an advanced level
	2	Advanced knowledge and understanding of the theories, models and approaches in the analysis of international relations and the role of international organizations and other actors in these
	3	Specialized knowledge and understanding of, and the ability to take a position in, the major debates in one of the specialization tracks of the degree programme: track **International Security**: the latest developments in the field of international security studies, theory and methodology of social-scientific analysis of political actors in terms of mutual threats, vulnerabilities, as well as methods to translate social-scientific security analysis into security policy; track **Global Governance**: developments in global public and private administration and the study thereof, application of multilevel governance approaches to the role of international organizations, theory-formation about the global society, as well as redefining sovereignty-based analyses of world politics and economics and the role of international organizations therein; track **Geopolitics & Connectivity**: The complexity and functioning of sovereignty, territory, order and space globally and internationally, with connectivity as an active resultant of the relationship between space and power, taking place in current and past political contexts through localization, territorialization, strategization and logisticization of space; track **International Political Economy**: the complexity and functioning of interwoven markets and their consequences for states and societies in terms of steering and influence, paying attention from an institutional perspective to the dynamics of the three pillars of market, state and society, in particular processes of institutional convergence as a result of increasing globalization; track **European Integration**: the phenomenon of European collaboration and integration in past and present, its implications to the citizens of Europe and the rest of the world, as well as the functioning of the multi-layered administration and decision-making forces within the European Union and in the work of transnational and transgovernmental groups (including interest groups); track **East Asian Studies**: backgrounds to and meaning of the contemporary international relations of East Asia - especially, but not exclusively, of China, Japan and Korea - in which national and international administrative and political, social and economic developments, are approached from a regional, global and historical perspective; track **International Relations & International Organization**: backgrounds to and meaning of global changes in various fields, such as defence, administration, politics and economics, the changing relationship between international, regional and national politics, and the changing role of various non-state actors therein
Applying knowledge and understanding 2. Students can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within	1	Mastery of the methods and techniques of academic research specific to the specialization
	2	Ability to independently design, implement and reproduce theoretical or socially relevant research into international-political developments and phenomena, and to apply this in new or unknown situations
	3	Ability to analyse the various aspects of an academic problem and their mutual relationships

broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study.	
Making judgements 3. Students have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements.	1 Ability to deal systematically and creatively with complex issues and to form grounded judgements, bearing in mind social and ethical responsibilities 2 Ability to judge academic research in the field of international relations adequately, independently, critically and logically 3 A critical and open scholarly attitude
Communication 4. Students can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously.	1 Ability to report on research in an academically sound way both orally and in written form 2 Ability to present opinions clearly to an audience of both colleagues and non-specialists
Learning skills 5. Students have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.	1 The ability to independently integrate new knowledge and understanding from the field of IR into existing expertise in an effort to continuous learning. 2 Ability to read and comprehend English at a level such that an academic debate in that language can be followed 3 Ability to function in the labour market, to conduct work of academic quality within the appropriate working environment and to function in a group in a hierarchical and subject-related work environment 4 Ability to plan and implement activities independently, to learn effectively, to organize the time available and to keep deadlines 5 Ability to effectively and efficiently use IT as a study tool.

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APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

Semester I		Semester II	
block 1	**block 2**	**block 3**	**block 4**
Adv. Theory in IR (5 ECTS)	Capita for track (5 ECTS)	Placement (10 ECTS)	
Research Seminar (10 ECTS)		Master's thesis (20 ECTS)	
Research Seminar (10 ECTS)			

APPENDIX 3: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

Dag 1 Geschiedenis (voltijd en deeltijd)

10.45 – 11.00	Aankomst en welkom
11.00 – 12.30	Intern overleg en inzage documentatie
12.30 – 13.00	Lunch
13.00 – 13.45	**Interview inhoudelijk verantwoordelijken**
13.45 – 14.30	**Interview studenten bachelor (incl. OC-lid)**
14.30 – 14.45	Uitloop/pauze
14.45 – 15.30	**Interview docenten bachelor** (incl. OC-lid)
15.30 – 15.45	Pauze / intern overleg
15.45 – 16.30	**Interview studenten master** (incl. OC-lid)
16.30 – 17.15	**Interview docenten master** (incl. OC-lid)
17.15 – 17.30	Pauze
17.30 – 18.00	**Interview alumni**

Dag 2 IRIO/IR

08.45 – 10.15	Aankomst en voorbereiding
10.15 – 11.30	**Interview inhoudelijk verantwoordelijken IR**
11.30 – 12.15	**Interview studenten bachelor** (incl. OC-lid)
12.15 – 12.45	Lunch
12.45 – 13.30	**Interview docenten bachelor** (incl. OC-lid)
13.30 – 14.15	**Interview studenten master** (incl. OC-lid)
14.15 – 14.30	Uitloop/pauze
14.30 – 15.15	**Interview docenten master** (incl. OC-lid)
15.15 – 16.00	**Interview examencommissie Geschiedenis**
16.00 – 16.15	Uitloop/pauze
16.15 – 17.00	**Interview examencommissie IR**
17.00 – 17.30	**Interview alumni IR**

Dag 3

08.45 – 09.45	Aankomst en voorbereiding/overleg
09.45 – 10.30	**Slotinterview formeel verantwoordelijken Geschiedenis**
10.30 – 11.15	**Slotinterview formeel verantwoordelijken IR**
11.15 – 12.30	Opstellen oordelen
12.30 – 13.00	Lunch
13.00 – 13.30	Opstellen oordelen
13.30 – 14.00	**Mondelinge terugkoppeling Geschiedenis/IR**
14.15 – 14.30	Uitloop/pauze
14.30 – 15.30	**Ontwikkelgesprek Geschiedenis**
15.30 – 16.30	**Ontwikkelgesprek IR**
16.30 –	Afronding

APPENDIX 4: THESES AND DOCUMENTS STUDIED BY THE PANEL

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 theses of the master's programme International Relations. Information on the selected theses is available from QANU upon request.

During the site visit, the panel studied, among other things, the following documents (partly as hard copies, partly via the institute's electronic learning environment):

To be completed by the programme