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MSc Political Science
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

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Summary

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

According to the panel, the MSc in Political Science offered at VU University has a clear and attractive profile. Two specializations, Democracy, Power, and Inequality (DPI) and International Relations, Security and Global Order (IRSGO), cover traditional Political Science strands. A third, Global Environmental Governance, Sustainability, and Climate Change (GEGSCC), reflects current developments and debates around environmental issues through a political science lens. The panel appreciates the choice for these three tracks and agrees with the intended learning outcomes. It considers the exit qualifications to be fitting for an academic master's programme in Political Science. The MSc ensures that its profile, aims, and ILOs match the needs of and developments in the professional field through its External Advisory Board, whose composition has recently changed to include a more diverse group of alumni and external stakeholders. The panel applauds this shift.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The panel considers the MSc's curriculum to be well-designed. It is impressed with the way the curriculum design ensures that students in all specializations follow similar routes and are educated broadly, while gradually specializing at the same time. The varied and international student population needs to be brought up to speed at the start of the programme, which results in some necessary recapitulation and repetition. The panel recommends considering some additional challenge or enrichment (possibly extracurricular) for the most well-prepared students. It also learnt that some students would prefer specialization earlier in the programme, and advises monitoring the relation between breadth and specialization in the curriculum to see if this balance is optimal or if it needs adjusting to cater to the needs and wishes of all students. The panel finds that academic and research skills are a strong component in all specializations. Professional transferrable skills also receive attention within the programme. The panel appreciates this, but suggests that the programme could do more to make a direct link with the working field throughout the curriculum. A way to achieve this objective could be to include guest speakers and alumni more frequently in the courses.

The panel considers the programme to be challenging, yet feasible. It applauds the didactic vision of a personal, open and responsible approach, which is reflected in the varied teaching methods and many elective and extracurricular options used in the programme. The MSc succeeds in creating an active and open learning community where students feel welcome and challenged. The programme works hard at enhancing feasibility, for instance through a structured thesis trajectory and through extracurricular guidance options including thesis workshops and refresher courses. The panel considers the choice for English logical and fitting, since this is the language used in the academic as well as the professional field of political science.

The panel concludes that staff quality is clearly sufficient for offering the MSc. Staff quantity is a point of attention in the programme, but is dealt with thanks to extra funds available now and the fact that the management keeps the topic on the agenda and proactively supports its staff in addressing it. The panel concludes that staff numbers are currently sufficient but should remain a priority.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The panel finds that student assessment in the MSc Political Science is well-designed and well-executed. It appreciates the varied assessment forms, both summative and formative, and the various procedures in place. The Examination Board is in control of assessment quality through its regular checks on courses and theses. Thesis assessment is done in an insightful manner. The panel learnt from alumni that they usually

receive the assessment forms of the thesis by way of final feedback. A more extensive explanation is given orally when the supervisor deems this useful or necessary. The panel suggests formalizing this feedback and introducing it to all students as useful input for their future careers.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The panel finds that the final theses of the MSc Political Science demonstrate that they achieve or even exceed the level aimed for, and that they reflect the students' solid training in research methods throughout the programme. Alumni feel well-prepared for their careers and find fitting employment in the professional and academic fields. The panel therefore concludes that the learning outcomes are achieved.

Score table

The panel assesses the programmes as follows:

MSc Political Science

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

Prof. dr. Petra Meier
Chair

Dr. Fiona Schouten
Secretary

Date: 19 June 2023

Introduction

Procedure

Assessment

On 21 March 2023, the Political Science programmes of Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam were assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment Political Science. The assessment cluster consisted of 9 programmes, offered by Radboud University, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, University of Amsterdam and Leiden University. The assessment followed the procedure and standards of the NVAO Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (September 2018).

Quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment upon request of the cluster Political Science. Fiona Schouten acted both as coordinator and secretary in the cluster assessment. She has been certified and registered by the NVAO.

Preparation

Academion composed the peer review panel in cooperation with the institutions and taking into account the expertise and independence of the members as well as consistency within the cluster. On 2 April 2022, the NVAO approved the composition of the panel. The coordinator instructed the panel chair on her role in the site visit according to the Panel chair profile (NVAO 2016).

The programmes composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the coordinator (see appendix 3) and selected representative partners for the various interviews. They also determined that the development dialogue would be made part of the site visit. A separate development report was made based on this dialogue.

The programmes provided the coordinator with a list of graduates over the September 2020-August 2022. In consultation with the coordinator, the panel chair selected 15 theses per programme. She took the diversity of final grades and examiners into account, as well as the various tracks. Prior to the site visit, the programmes provided the panel with the theses and the accompanying assessment forms. They also provided the panel with the self-evaluation reports and additional materials (see appendix 4).

The panel members studied the information and sent their findings to the secretary. The secretary collected the panel's questions and remarks in a document and shared this with the panel members. In a preliminary meeting, the panel discussed the initial findings on the self-evaluation reports and the theses, as well as the division of tasks during the site visit. The panel was also informed on the assessment framework, the working method and the planning of the site visits and reports.

Site visit

During the site visit, the panel interviewed various programme representatives (see appendix 3). The panel also offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour. No consultation was requested. 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 preliminary findings.

Report

The secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to a colleague in Academion for peer assessment. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel for feedback. After

processing this feedback, the secretary sent the draft report to the programmes in order to have it checked for factual irregularities. The secretary discussed the ensuing comments with the panel chair and changes were implemented accordingly. The panel then finalised the report, and the coordinator sent it to the Faculty of Social Sciences at VU Amsterdam.

Panel

The following panel members were involved in the cluster assessment:

- Prof. dr. Petra Meier, Professor in Politics at the University of Antwerp, Belgium (chair);
- Dr. Chris van der Borgh, Associate Professor at the Centre for Conflict Studies Utrecht University;
- Prof. dr. Stefan Rummens, Professor in Philosophy at KU Leuven, Belgium;
- Prof. dr. Marijke Breuning, Professor of Political Science at the University of North Texas, USA;
- Prof. dr. Peter Bursens, Professor in Political Science at the University of Antwerp, Belgium;
- Prof. dr. Maarten Vink, Professor in Citizenship Studies and chair of the Global Citizenship research programme of the Robert Schuman Centre at the European University Institute, Italy;
- Prof. dr. Sofie Marien, Associate Professor in Comparative and Historical Political Science at the University of Leuven, Belgium;
- Prof. dr. Amy Verdun, Professor of Political Science at the University of Victoria, Canada;
- Dr. Laura Horn, Associate Professor in Political Economy at Roskilde University, Denmark;
- Fee A'mema MSc, Political Science graduate at Leiden University (student member);
- Elsbeth de Vries, MSc student in Political Theory at Radboud University;
- Mark Dzoljic BSc, MSc student in Political Science at the University of Amsterdam.

The panel assessing the Political Science programmes at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. Petra Meier, Professor in Politics at the University of Antwerp, Belgium (chair);
- Prof. dr. Peter Bursens, Professor in Political Science at the University of Antwerp, Belgium;
- Prof. dr. Amy Verdun, Professor of Political Science at the University of Victoria, Canada;
- Dr. Laura Horn, Associate Professor in Political Economy at Roskilde University, Denmark;
- Elsbeth de Vries, MSc student in Political Theory at Radboud University.

Information on the programmes

Name of the institution:	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Programme name:	Political Science
CROHO number:	60203
Level:	Master
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Specialisations or tracks:	Democracy, Power and Inequality (DPI) Global Environmental Governance, Sustainability and Climate Change (GEGSCC)

	International Relations, Security and Global Order (IRSGO)
Location:	Amsterdam
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Language of instruction:	English
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2023

Description of the assessment

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

The central aim of the MSc Political Science offered at the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) at the VU Amsterdam is to teach students to make critical analyses of political issues at a high level of abstraction, and to conduct independent in-depth social science research around political and social problems in a context of globalization. The programme has a strong scientific character, while also preparing students to independently apply their knowledge and skills at an academic level in professions within government, public sector, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. Students acquire knowledge and understanding of core debates and theories of Political Science and political science methodology and learn how to apply this knowledge. In addition, students acquire (specialized) knowledge and understanding of the subdisciplines Comparative and Normative Political Science, International Relations, or Global Environmental Governance. The programme enables them to analyse complex societal and political problems and value solutions from a political science perspective, to make an original contribution to solving societal problems and to apply these in a professional context.

The MSc's profile is characterized by a strong foundation in the breadth of political science as a scientific discipline, with a substantive emphasis on the entwined nature of national and global politics. The programme focuses on the deepening interaction between the sub-national, national, European, and international levels of politics and policymaking in the context of the processes of Europeanization and globalization. The intersection between (sub)national and international politics is at the substantive core of the MSc. The programme starts from a shared basis in Political Science and branches out into three thematic specialisations:

1. Democracy, Power, and Inequality (DPI) focuses on institutions, democratic processes, and representation in Europe and beyond.
2. International Relations, Security and Global Order (IRSGO) focuses on international relations, transnational processes and actors, international security, and global order.
3. Global Environmental Governance, Sustainability, and Climate Change (GEGSCC) covers the unique field of global environmental issues, climate change, sustainability, and its governance, from a political science perspective.

The MSc's profile and aims have been translated into 14 intended learning outcomes (ILOs, see appendix 1). These reflect the Dublin descriptors for master's programmes and reflect the Domain-Specific Reference Framework agreed upon by the Dutch Political Science programmes.

The panel considers the three specializations to be well-chosen. The first two reflect the more traditional strands in Political Science. The third, GEGSCC, reflects current developments and debates around environmental issues through a political science lens. This specialization is quite attractive for students wanting to contribute to solving such urgent issues. The panel agrees with the intended learning outcomes and find that they are fitting for an academic master's programme in Political Science. The panel does point out that the use of terms such as 'Global Order' is currently being problematized within the field of Political

Science. The programme might therefore consider reformulating such terms in its profile and exit qualifications.

The MSc ensures that its profile, aims, and learning outcomes match the needs of and developments in the professional field through its External Advisory Board (EAB). The EAB consists of Political Science alumni and other professionals working in local or national governments, Europe, or semi-public and private companies. Recently, the composition of this Board has changed to include a more diverse group of alumni and external stakeholders. The Board is now composed of both senior and more junior Political Scientists with more varying backgrounds both culturally and in terms of positions in the working field. The panel applauds this shift and appreciates the importance that the programme attaches to the EAB's input.

Considerations

According to the panel, the MSc in Political Science offered at VU University has a clear and attractive profile. Two specializations, Democracy, Power, and Inequality (DPI) and International Relations, Security and Global Order (IRSGO), cover traditional Political Science strands. A third, Global Environmental Governance, Sustainability, and Climate Change (GEGSCC), reflects current developments and debates around environmental issues through a political science lens. The panel appreciates the choice for these three tracks and agrees with the intended learning outcomes. It considers the exit qualifications to be fitting for an academic master's programme in Political Science. The MSc ensures that its profile, aims, and ILOs match the needs of and developments in the professional field through its External Advisory Board, whose composition has recently changed to include a more diverse group of alumni and external stakeholders. The panel applauds this shift.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 1.

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

Curriculum

The English-language MSc Political Science (60 EC) offers the specializations Democracy, Power, and Inequality (DPI); International Relations, Security and Global Order (IRSGO); and Global Environmental Governance, Sustainability and Climate Change (GEGSCC). The programme setup allows students to get acquainted with all specializations through a joint introduction in period 1 and then a gradual thematic specialization culminating in a thesis written in one of the three specializations. All students start in the first period with two common courses: Core Debates in Political Science and Applying Core Debates in Political Science (6 EC each). The first deals with the foundational debates in the three specializations, while the second trains students to apply this knowledge to empirical cases, and addresses methodology and academic writing. In these two courses, students are introduced to all specializations. In the second period, students choose two Selected Issues (SI) courses out of three, each of which represents a specialization. They thus choose two out of three specializations, narrowing their profile. In period 3, all students follow Political and Policy Research: Philosophy and Design (6 EC), to get started on their master's thesis. Period 4 offers students a course in methodology and a choice between three Workshops that correspond with their

chosen specialization, providing them with a path towards finalizing their specialization. Students then write their thesis (18 EC) within their specialization. See appendix 2 for an overview of the curriculum.

The panel studied the curriculum and discussed it with the programme management, students and staff. It concludes that the MSc is well-designed. The panel is impressed with the way the curriculum design ensures that students in all specializations follow similar routes and are educated broadly, while gradually specializing at the same time. The student group has a shared start, begins diverging in the second period, is brought together in periods 3 and 4 and ends up specializing in 4, 5 and 6. In this way, it is ensured that all students achieve the intended learning outcomes and benefit from each other's varied backgrounds and perspectives. Coherence between courses and specializations is safeguarded through frequent and regular meetings between lecturers and course coordinators, for instance through regular teacher meetings. In this way, the course guides and content are well-attuned and build upon each other.

At the same time, the panel understood from students and alumni that some of them regret the late specialization within the MSc curriculum. This complaint is made especially by students who know from the outset what they want to specialize in, or have chosen the programme especially because of one of its specializations. These students would prefer a more in-depth focus from the start. The panel advises the programme to monitor the relation between breadth and specialization in the curriculum to see if this balance is optimal or if it needs adjusting to cater to the needs and wishes of all students.

The courses at the start of the programme, Core Debates in Political Science and Applying Core Debates in Political Science, have been designed to create a level playing field among students coming in with various backgrounds (see also 'Feasibility and guidance'). As a result the programme start contains some repetition for students entering with a Political Science degree. Students pointed out to the panel that elsewhere, too, courses may start with a brief recap of BSc materials. They do not experience this as problematic, however. The panel also considers this degree of repetition understandable and necessary to bring together the varied and international classroom. It does recommend considering some additional challenge or enrichment (possibly extracurricular) for the best-prepared students from their own, or a similar, BSc.

The MSc offers much attention to academic and research skills, including both quantitative and qualitative, as well as mixed methods. Students are challenged to reflect on methodological choices and societal relevance of research. Academic skills are advanced and practiced throughout the year, starting in the period 1 course Applying Core Debates in Political Science. Research and methodological skills then take centre stage in the course Political and Policy Research: Philosophy and Design (6 EC). Here, students start preparing their master's thesis, working on the research question, hypotheses, design, and the philosophy of political science that it implies. The methodological training continues in period 4 with Applying Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in Political Science and the Workshops. Students choose a particular (set of) methods in a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed approach (e.g. survey research, discourse analysis, social network analysis) with regard to which they acquire the state of the art knowledge and research, learn about and justify the methodological choices involved, and learn how to independently master and apply the method and its appropriate techniques to a (limited) empirical analysis. The panel finds that academic and research skills are a strong component in all specializations.

The curriculum also incorporates professional skills training. Professional transferrable skills such as presentation skills, judgement forming, critical reflection, communication skills (e.g. giving peer feedback in a constructive manner), cooperation skills, and leadership and coordination skills are practiced in various ways. Increasingly, courses incorporate non-academic writing skills such as policy advice and blogs into their teaching methods and assessment types. The programme also offers extracurricular excursions to potential

employers, with the help of two student community coordinators who help organize events and field trips and mobilize students for these events. The panel appreciates the attention paid to professional skills, but suggests that the programme could do more to make a direct link with the working field throughout the curriculum. A good way to achieve this would be to include guest speakers and alumni more frequently in the courses. In this context, the programme's recent efforts to formally organize its alumni community in the Amsterdam Political Science Alumni Network (APSAN) are much appreciated by the panel.

Didactic approach and teaching methods
The educational vision of the programme is linked to the educational vision of the VU, in which the core values of *personal*, *open* and *responsible* serve as guidelines for staff and students. The MSc fosters a personal, open and responsible (engaged) learning environment. Teaching therefore takes an activating learning approach and incorporates interactive components where possible and appropriate. In the MSc, teaching methods include seminar-based courses that are based on intensive interactive teaching. Students lead discussions and debates in class, give each other feedback, hold presentations and engage in case-based learning, simulations, flipped classrooms, student-take over sessions, mind-mapping, and providing constructive feed-back. Blended learning is incorporated more since the Covid-19 pandemic, and is used for student peer review, knowledge clips, or quizzes. The programme also activates students through extracurricular options, organized with the help of student coordinators. These include social events, current affairs events, career events and a student-led online magazine, *Politeia*. In this way, the programme invests in creating a close-knit and active community and learning environment.

The panel highly appreciates the MSc's didactic vision and approach, as well as the varied teaching methods and many elective and extracurricular options used in the programme. During the site visit, the panel learnt from students and alumni as well as staff members that the programme succeeds in creating an active and open learning community where students feel welcome and challenged. The extracurricular activities contribute to this sense of community, as does the teaching staff, whom the students consider accessible and involved. Another important aspect in creating a sense of community is the open and proactive attitude of the members of the programme management. They offer students a weekly online consultation hour, and host an annual 'speak your mind session' where management and students exchange feedback and ideas. This personal approach works very well in creating the desired activating and open community. The panel applauds the programme for achieving such a community.

Feasibility and guidance
The MSc directly admits students with a BSc in Political Science or equivalent, or a BSc programme in the Faculty of Social Sciences with a Political Science minor. For other students, there is a premaster of 30 EC. The programme's admissions committee can also determine that students are first to follow some additional courses (e.g. in methods) in order to be admitted, based on an assessment of the application portfolio. The programme also admits a limited number of students each year who participate in the Transatlantic Master of the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill (USA). These students study for a year at Chapel Hill first and then need to be admitted and enrol on the same basis as other international students in the VU MSc. They subsequently follow the same programme as other students, including the thesis, and receive a VU Political Science MSc degree upon completion.

Once the students embark on their studies, the programme has various measures in place to support them. As mentioned above, the programme management offers students a weekly (online) consultation hour (open office). This is an effective guidance and support mechanism which is frequently used. Through the student community, activities such as 'New to Amsterdam', onboarding programmes, and alumni events are organized to create a social environment in which Dutch and international students feel at home and

supported. At the faculty level there is support from academic advisors, a psychologist, and an elaborate student well-being programme (with e.g. buddies and workshops). Student guidance is enhanced by extracurricular options. These include the Stats Café for students needing a small refresher course before embarking on their thesis, and the MSc Thesis Support Programme offering mini-workshops and recurring support sessions including peer review, time management or mental health courses, writing marathons and a buddy system. Another extracurricular guidance option is the Political Science Methods Library, which was created for all students and teachers as a digital resource on methods.

Over the past years, the MSc enhanced its feasibility by restructuring its first period. Students are now introduced to the foundations of the three specializations and offered training in academic writing at the start of the programme. In this way, the MSc wants to create a level playing field among the diverse students entering. This restructured first period enables students to make informed choices in the programme, which in turn reduces uncertainty and stress around their options after graduation.

The thesis trajectory of the MSc is also structured clearly. Following the advice of the previous panel, students are now guided towards choosing a thesis topic that matches their specialization and the expertise of the staff. Students are assigned a supervisor with the relevant expertise, taking into account their preferences and research topic as much as possible. The orientation for this matchmaking already starts before Christmas during the Thesis Market, where students can discuss their ideas with all available supervisors. Alumni mentioned to the panel that they considered the Thesis Market a very useful initiative that really helped them along. Supervisors mostly work with groups of students varying in size (from a few up to 10), formed around themes that are closely related to the research and (methodological) expertise of the supervisors, so that the link between research and education is ensured. In addition, supervisors will make sufficient room for individual feedback and consultation. The thesis trajectory takes the form of a course, with clear demands and deadlines.

The panel applauds the MSc's efforts to guide all students through the programme and ensure feasibility. It learnt from students and alumni that in addition to the measures mentioned above, the open and welcoming community contributes to student well-being and therefore feasibility of the programme. Students find their lecturers as well as the programme staff to be friendly, helpful, accommodating and approachable. Thesis supervision is adapted to the specific needs of the student, and in individual cases deadlines can be moved upon request to avoid study delays. The extracurricular guidance options are much appreciated, both by students benefiting from them and by teaching staff, who can refer students to these options so that their workload is alleviated. The panel concludes that the MSc programme is clearly feasible for all students.

The MSc's nominal success rate is 52%, with 71 % graduated after two years. The panel learnt from students and alumni that many students prolong their programme purposefully. Increasingly, students want to do an internship or an extra master's programme for which they need to be enrolled at a university. The panel appreciates that this is a personal choice and does not reflect on feasibility. However, it recommends investigating whether other solutions are possible here. For instance, alumni could be registered as 'non-degree students' to allow them to graduate while still being able to do an internship immediately after graduation.

Language

The MSc in Political Science is offered in English and has an English name. The panel considers this a good and positive choice, which is logical considering that the English language is used in both the professional and the academic fields that the programme trains the students for. The majority of the teaching staff has

ample international experience and the level of proficiency of English is generally high, allowing the programme to be taught in English unproblematically. Students are satisfied with the programme language and consider the international classroom to be of added value due to the breadth of perspectives it brings to the programme.

Teaching staff

The MSc is taught by a core staff of 30 political science lecturers within the Department of Political Science and Public Administration. The courses taught in or related to the GEGSCC specialization are taught in cooperation with political science staff from the Institute for Environmental Studies (Faculty of Science), who are part-time members of the department. The expertise of the staff members in Political Science covers all the core areas identified in the domain-specific framework of reference: Comparative Politics, International Relations and (normative) Political Theory, as well as Global Environmental Governance, International Political Economy and International Security, areas in which several staff members are internationally recognized. All of the teaching staff hold a University Teaching Qualification (UTQ). In order to ensure the scientific orientation and the link between education and research, all teaching is conducted by (senior) lecturer-researchers holding a PhD. If necessary, the team is expanded with experienced part-time lecturers for thesis supervision, who have the right expertise to tailor to themes and topics pertinent to the three specialisations. They are engaged on a structural basis on a smaller contract to the department and often hold other academic or non-academic research and teaching jobs elsewhere.

Staff quantity is a point of attention in the programme, as the experienced workload among staff members is high, particularly since they also teach in other programmes, such as the inter-faculty PPE programme (Philosophy, Politics and Economics) and the joint master's programme with the Law faculty: Law and Politics of International Security (LPIS). On the one hand, this issue has been addressed through a recent increase in funds, which has allowed the programme to hire more staff members and provide support (secretarial or student assistance) to those already at work in the programme. On the other hand, the programme management addresses it continuously by raising the subject in the annual individual meeting between the programme director and each lecturer; through regular (bilateral) consultations and mentoring among lecturers/colleagues; through organizing the teaching allocation according to the lecturers' preferences; through ensuring that everyone has a yearly teaching-free period; through introducing a 'reading and reflection week' for students as the first week in some of the periods, which means there are no lectures that week and students have time to prepare; through facilitating the ambitions and development of the lecturers who are in the most precarious positions; and through providing budget and hence time to innovate courses and for staff development.

The panel discussed the quantity of staff with management, staff, students and lecturers of the programme. It found that the programme management's efforts to reduce the workload in constant conversation with the lecturers are considered positive and even crucial to address such issues. The management consistently places workload at the top of the agenda and asks staff members what concrete help they need to deal with it. Staff members with a teaching load peak are proactively provided with teaching support. Due to the extra funding, the programme management has been able to provide more teaching staff for thesis supervision, easing the burden of its tenured staff. The panel praises the positive role of the management here. It found that the management's role in workload mitigation is highly appreciated by staff members. The panel concludes that staff quantity is sufficient, but should remain a priority.

Considerations

The panel considers the MSc's curriculum to be well-designed. It is impressed with the way the curriculum design ensures that students in all specializations follow similar routes and are educated broadly, while

gradually specializing at the same time. The varied and international student population needs to be brought up to speed at the start of the programme, which results in some necessary recapitulation and repetition. The panel recommends considering some additional challenge or enrichment (possibly extracurricular) for the most well-prepared students. It also learnt that some students would prefer specialization earlier in the programme, and advises monitoring the relation between breadth and specialization in the curriculum to see if this balance is optimal or if it needs adjusting to cater to the needs and wishes of all students. The panel finds that academic and research skills are a strong component in all specializations. Professional transferrable skills also receive attention within the programme. The panel appreciates this, but suggests that the programme could do more to make a direct link with the working field throughout the curriculum. A way to achieve this objective could be to include guest speakers and alumni more frequently in the courses.

The panel considers the programme to be challenging, yet feasible. It applauds the didactic vision of a personal, open and responsible approach, which is reflected in the varied teaching methods and many elective and extracurricular options used in the programme. The MSc succeeds in creating an active and open learning community where students feel welcome and challenged. The programme works hard at enhancing feasibility, for instance through a structured thesis trajectory and through extracurricular guidance options including thesis workshops and refresher courses. The panel considers the choice for English logical and fitting, since this is the language used in the academic as well as the professional field of political science.

The panel concludes that staff quality is clearly sufficient for offering the MSc. Staff quantity is a point of attention in the programme, but is dealt with thanks to extra funds available now and the fact that the management keeps the topic on the agenda and proactively supports its staff in addressing it. The panel concludes that staff numbers are currently sufficient but should remain a priority.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 2.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

Findings

Assessment policy and practice

Student assessment of the MSc Political Science follows the VU Assessment Framework and the Assessment Policy of the VU Faculty of Social Sciences, and is laid down in an assessment plan. This plan shows the alignment of the MSc's exit qualifications with the learning objectives of the courses and the distribution and structure of the assessment methods in the curriculum. It also describes the policy on monitoring the quality of assessment.

Assessment in the MSc aims for students to take responsibility of their own learning process. This is encouraged and supported by a strategy of intensive and activating assessment types. All courses employ a combination of written individual assignments, such as essays, research papers, policy-oriented papers, group presentations, and in-class participation. Active participation is a requirement in all courses. In some courses participation is part of the final grade, in others participation is a prerequisite for course completion. In line with the aim to allow students control of their learning process, the programme also opts for

formative assessment. Many courses incorporate a variety of formative and interim assessments, including quizzes, debates, and presentations. Students also give peer feedback among themselves.

The programme makes use of peer review and calibration among teaching staff in the composition of its assessments. It also uses grading forms, model answers, and rubrics to achieve transparency and reliability of assessment. Students are informed of the assessment types in advance.

Thesis assessment is done by two examiners, each of whom fills out a thesis assessment form independently. The first examiner is usually the thesis supervisor. The final grade is the average of both assessments, rounded to half a point. In order to increase transparency and manage expectations, students are given a go/no go moment in the first phase of the thesis trajectory on the basis of their research design. They may resubmit a revised research design for approval if the first submission is deemed a no-go.

The programme's assessment quality is safeguarded by a faculty-wide Examination Board (EB), which has appointed a subcommittee for Political Science. Once every two years, the programme-specific subcommittee of the EB randomly assesses a selection of course examinations and four theses. The subcommittee prepares a report on this sample with conclusions and recommendations to be discussed with the programme management. It meets with the management twice a year to discuss assessment in the programme.

The panel studied assessment policy and procedures in the MSc programme and discussed them with staff, students, management, and Examination Board. It concluded that student assessment is well-designed and well-executed. The Examination Board is in control of assessment quality through its regular checks on courses, theses and internship reports.

The panel also looked at the assessment forms of 15 theses. It found these and the rubrics to be extensive, detailed and insightful. The panel agreed with the grades given. It noticed that usually, the examiners provide clear feedback on the forms and substantiate well why a grade is given. It learnt from alumni that they usually receive the feedback forms, and a more extensive explanation is given orally when the supervisor deems this useful or necessary. The panel appreciates this informal feedback and wonders whether it could be formalized more, so that all students receive extra feedback that they could use when entering the job market.

One of the theses looked at by the panel was written by two students upon their request as a pilot project in the programme. The programme decided to have the students delineate clearly which part of the thesis was written by whom so that their individual contributions could be assessed. The pilot resulted in a high-quality thesis (cf. standard 4) with a larger and more ambitious research project at its centre. Individual assessment turned out to be complicated, since the students cooperated very closely, but the supervisors were able to provide each with individual feedback. The panel appreciates this as an experiment, but it agrees with the programme that a clear procedure needs to be worked out with respect to how to assess the students separately, which should also specify some guidelines as to which students should be allowed to embark on a joint thesis.

Considerations

The panel finds that student assessment in the MSc Political Science is well-designed and well-executed. It appreciates the varied assessment forms, both summative and formative, and the various procedures in place. The Examination Board is in control of assessment quality through its regular checks on courses and theses. Thesis assessment is done in an insightful manner. The panel learnt from alumni that they usually

receive the assessment forms of the thesis by way of final feedback. A more extensive explanation is given orally when the supervisor deems this useful or necessary. The panel suggests formalizing this feedback and introducing it to all students as useful input for their future careers.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 3.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

The panel studied 15 master's theses of the programme and concluded that they are all of at least sufficient, and in many cases of high quality for an MSc in Political Science. According to the panel, the strong foundation in especially quantitative methods that students receive is visible in the theses. The panel read one thesis written by two students, which was done as an experiment. This thesis attained a high level, with a more in-depth approach and a larger scope.

The MSc's alumni commonly obtain administrative and advisory positions both in the public and the private domain in national and local governments (ministries, municipalities), in political parties, in international organisations such as the European Parliament, the European Commission, in civil society organisations, in the media and communication (journalism, PR), and in private organisations and companies (such as consultancies and banks). Part of the alumni also choose a career in academia or as a researcher in more policy-oriented research organisations (e.g. think tanks or political parties). Of the programme's alumni involved with its Amsterdam Political Science Alumni Network (APSAN), one-third obtained a job in government, either at the local (9%), national (15%) or international (8%) level, 25% obtained a job in the private sector working in corporate world, banking or other industries, 15% work in consultancy jobs, and 13% embarked on a career in education and research (of which a significant share pursues a PhD). Finally, 11% work for non-profit organisations, and 3% work in media and communication.

The panel discussed the programme with recent alumni, some of whom are members of its External Advisory Board. It learnt that they look back on the programme with satisfaction and feel well-prepared for their career. Particularly the solid methodological training is mentioned as a valuable asset when entering the job market. The panel appreciates this and concludes that the programme prepares its graduates well for their future careers.

Considerations

The panel finds that the final theses of the MSc Political Science demonstrate that they achieve or even exceed the level aimed for, and that they reflect the students' solid training in research methods throughout the programme. Alumni feel well-prepared for their careers and find fitting employment in the professional and academic fields. The panel therefore concludes that the learning outcomes are achieved.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 4.

General conclusion

The panel's assessment of the master's programme Political Science is positive.

Development points

1. Consider reformulating terms that are currently being problematized within the field of political science, such as ‘Global Order’, in the MSc’s profile and exit qualifications.
2. Consider introducing some additional challenge or enrichment (possibly extracurricular) for the most well-prepared students in the programme.
3. Monitor the relation between breadth and specialization in the curriculum to see if this balance is optimal or if it needs adjusting to cater to the needs and wishes of all students, including those who want to specialize early on.
4. Create a direct link with the working field throughout the curriculum. A good way to achieve this would be to include guest speakers and alumni more frequently in the courses.
5. Keep staff workload on the agenda as a priority.
6. Provide all students with extensive oral feedback on their thesis by way of final feedback as useful input for their future careers.

Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

TABLE 1. EXIT QUALIFICATIONS BACHELOR POLITICAL SCIENCE IN RELATION TO DUBLIN DESCRIPTORS (DD) AND DOMAIN SPECIFIC REFERENCE FRAMEWORK (DSRF)

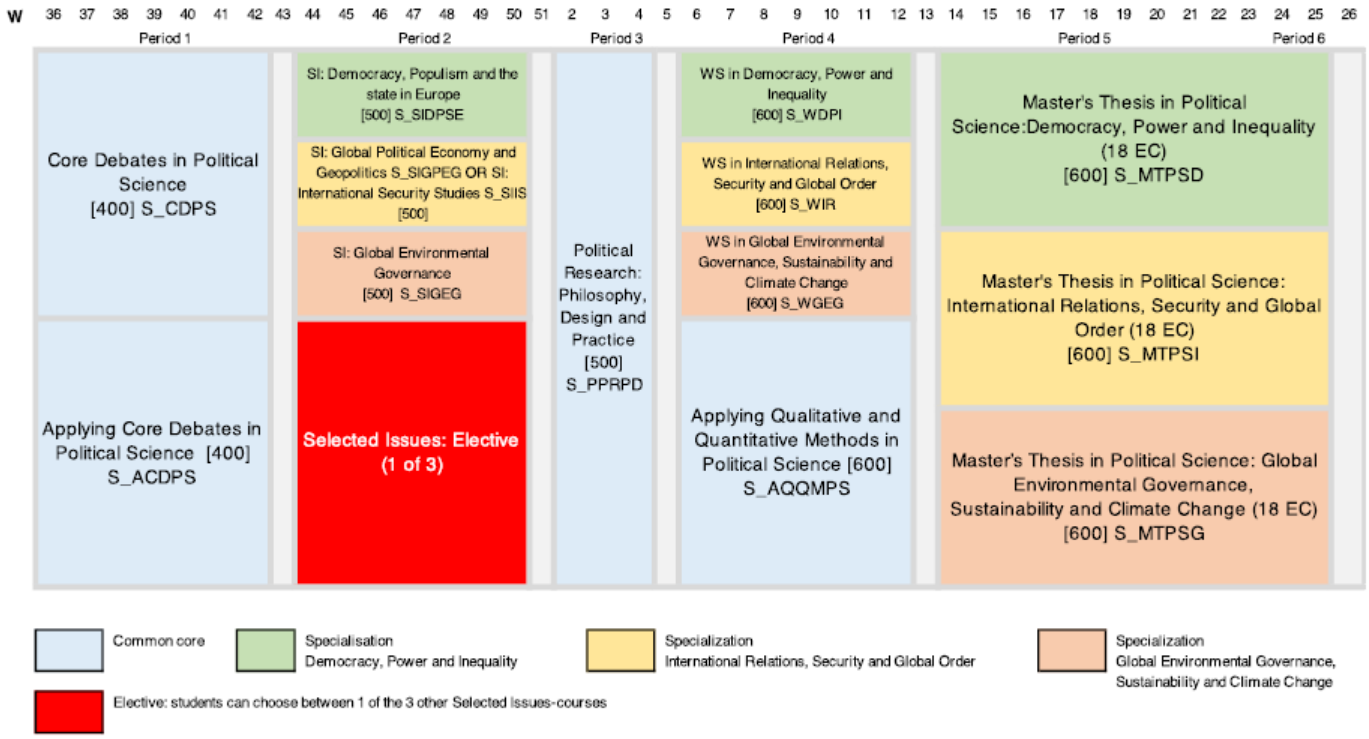
	Exit qualifications Bachelor Political Science	**DD**	**DSRF**
A. Knowledge and understanding - have good knowledge and understanding of:			
1	the core political phenomenon of social-conflict regulation by the state or by private or semi- private institutions, including the underlying power processes;	1	1
2	the increasing internationalization of the public domain and how this influences governance and policy at different, often interacting levels;	1	1
3	the most important theories in modern Political Science, especially those in respect of general and comparative politics, the doctrine of international relations and normative political theory;	1	1
4	methods and techniques in social scientific research, in particular those important for Political Science studies; and,	1	1
5	the specific position of Political Science by comparison with other social sciences.	1	1
B. Skills - be able:			
6	to analyse and interpret political data, including in the national and international context;	2,3	2
7	to assess Political Science research results for their reliability, validity and usability;	2,3	6
8	to apply Political Science knowledge and insights to current social issues;	2,3	2,3
9	to process knowledge drawn from other relevant disciplines and to apply this in the analysis of social and political problems;	2,3	3
10	to recognize, based on their knowledge of normative theories, the value ladenness of both scientific theories and policy intentions;	2,3	7
11	to function within a group and to contribute to joint research and suchlike products;	2,3	4
12	to provide clear oral and written reports of their Political Science knowledge and understanding; and,	2,4	8
13	to complete the entire empirical cycle by carrying out basic scientific research under supervision;	2,3	5
C. Attitude - displays:			
14	a demonstrable interest in the causes of and background to political phenomena;	3	
15	a critical attitude towards academic Political Science literature and towards prevailing views on politics;	3	7
16	intellectual integrity and a willingness to self-criticise.	5	

TABLE 1. EXIT QUALIFICATIONS MASTER POLITICAL SCIENCE IN RELATION TO DUBLIN DESCRIPTORS (DD) AND DOMAIN SPECIFIC REFERENCE FRAMEWORK (DSRF)

	Exit qualifications Master Political Science	**DD**	**DSR**
A. Knowledge and understanding - A graduate of the study programme will have advanced knowledge and understanding of:			
1	the core debates in modern political science, especially those in general and comparative politics, international relations (including international security and global political economy), normative political theory and global environmental governance; and	1	1
2	social science methodology and its application in political science research.	1	1
With regard to the field that is covered by their respective specialization, a graduate of the specialization will:			
3	have a thorough knowledge of the key issues, approaches and main theories;	1	1
4	have an advanced understanding of a number of selected topics; and	1	1
5	have a thorough understanding of how the field is affected by the deepening interaction between national and international politics in the context of globalization.	1	1
B. Skills - A graduate of the study programme will have have mastered the following skills:			
6	to critically examine political issues at a high level of conceptual abstraction as well as translate them into terms understandable by a wider public;	2,4	4,9,10
7	to apply qualitative and/or quantitative methods in political science research;	2	3,7
8	to summarize, evaluate, and synthesize research results from political science and related fields and assess the policy relevance of these results;	2,3	2,4.5, 7
9	to carry out in-depth academic theoretical and empirical research on a topic within the areas of the student's chosen specialization	2,3	6
10	to produce a research-based thesis that shows intellectual rigor and proficiency in the field; and	2,3	5,6
11	to learn, collaborate and communicate in an intercultural context.	5	
C. Attitudes - A graduate of the study programme will have developed the following attitudes:			
12	intellectual integrity and a willingness to self-assess and take responsibility for their own learning process;	5	
13	a critical attitude towards advanced political science literature, in particular pertaining to the literature of the respective specialization;		8
14	an open, reflexive, and independent attitude towards prevailing views on politics and their societal context.	5	8

Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

FIGURE 1. PROGRAMME OVERVIEW MASTER POLITICAL SCIENCE, 2021-2022



Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

20 March 2023

16.00	18.00	Preliminary panel meeting / office hour	

21 March 2023

08.30	08.40	Welcome	
08.40	09.20	Interview programme management	*40 min*
09.20	09.40	Internal meeting panel	*20 min*
09.40	10.10	Interview MSc students and recent alumni	*30 min*
10.10	10.15	Break	*5 min*
10.15	10.55	Interview MSc teaching staff	*40 min*
10.55	11.25	Break	*30 min*
11.25	11.55	Interview BSc students	*30 min*
11.55	12.00	Break	*5 min*
12.00	12.40	Interview BSc teaching staff	*40 min*
12.40	13.30	Lunch (panel) and lunch programme with students	*50 min*
13.30	14.00	Interview Examination Board	*30 min*
14.00	14.05	Break	*5 min*
14.05	14.45	Interview professional field and alumni	*40 min*
14.45	15.15	Internal meeting panel	*30 min*
15.15	16.00	Final interview management	*45 min*
16.00	17.30	Preparing preliminary findings and oral report	*90 min*
17.30	18.00	Oral report	

Appendix 4. Materials

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 theses per programme. Information on the theses is available from Academion upon request. The panel also studied other materials, which included:

- Self-evaluation report BSc
- Dublin Descriptors
- Domain Specific Reference Frame
- Enrolment and student success rates
- Programme Management and coordination (2022-2023)
- Teaching Staff
- Composition of the External Advisory Board
- Overview of Internships in 2021-2022 (finalized) and 2022-2023 (in progress)
- Teaching in times of COVID-19
- Selection of courses for the Committee
- Programme changes as of 23-24, 24-25 and 25-26
- Study guide and course descriptions Bachelor Political Science
- Teaching and Examination Regulations
- Rules and Regulations of the FSS Examination Board
- Assessment Policy FSS
- Bachelor's Thesis Regulations FSS
- Internship regulation FSS
- Internship Manual Bachelor Political Science
- Annual report BSc Political Science 2021-2022 (in Dutch)
- Assessment plan BSc Political Science, 2022-2023 (in Dutch)
- Annual report Examination Board FSS, 2021-2022
- Annual report Programme Committee Bachelor Political Science, 2021-2022
- Factsheet BSc Political Science, 2021-2022
- Student and Alumni Events Booklet, 2020-2022
- Course manual Mentoring Programme, 2021-2022
- Course manual Bachelor's Thesis, 2021-2022
- Previous report and NVAO decision (BSc)

- Self-evaluation report MSc
- Dublin Descriptors
- Domain Specific Reference Frame
- Enrolment and nominal student success rates
- Programme Management and coordination (2022-2023)
    - Programme management
    - Programme Committee
    - Examination Board
    - Various coordinating tasks
- Teaching Staff
- Composition of the External Advisory Board
- Teaching in times of COVID-19
- Selection of courses for the Committee
- Study guide and course descriptions Bachelor Political Science

- Teaching and Examination Regulations
- Rules and Regulations of the FSS Examination Board
- Assessment Policy FSS
- Master's Thesis Regulations FSS
- Annual report MSc Political Science 2021-2022 (in Dutch)
- Assessment plan MSc Political Science, 2022-2023 (in Dutch)
- Annual report Examination Board FSS, 2021-2022
- Annual report Programme Committee Master Political Science, 2021-2022
- Factsheet MSc Political Science, 2021-2022
- Student and Alumni Events Booklet, 2020-2022
- Course manual Master's Thesis, 2021-2022
- Previous report and NVAO decision (MSc)