

## Besluit

### Besluit strekkende tot het verlenen van accreditatie aan de opleiding wo-master Political Science van de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

	<b>datum</b>	<b>Gegevens</b>	
	29 september 2017	Naam instelling	: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
	<b>onderwerp</b>	Naam opleiding	: wo-master Political Science (60 EC)
	Besluit	Datum aanvraag	: 5 juli 2017
accreditatie wo-master		Variant opleiding	: voltijd
Political Science van de		Afstudeerrichtingen	: Comparative European Politics; International Relations and
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam			Transnational Governance; Global Environmental
(005894)			Governance; Policy and Politics
<b>uw kenmerk</b>		Locatie opleiding	: Amsterdam
CVB/JWB/2017/666		Datum goedkeuren	
<b>ons kenmerk</b>		panel	: 9 januari 2017
NVAO/20172549/AH		Datum locatiebezoeken	: 20 en 21 april 2017
<b>bijlagen</b>		Datum visitatierapport	: 15 juni 2017
2		Instellingstoets kwaliteitszorg	: ja, positief besluit van 14 juni 2016

#### Beoordelingskader

Beoordelingskader voor de beperkte opleidingsbeoordeling van de NVAO (Stcrt. 2014, nr 36791).

#### Bevindingen

De NVAO stelt vast dat in het visitatierapport deugdelijk en kenbaar is gemotiveerd op welke gronden het panel de kwaliteit van de opleiding voldoende heeft bevonden.

#### Advies van het visitatiepanel

Samenvatting bevindingen en overwegingen van het panel.

#### *Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes*

The one-year master's programme in Political Science aims to educate students to critically examine political issues at a high level of conceptual abstraction and to carry out in-depth academic theoretical and empirical research on a political topic in a globalising context. The intended learning outcomes have been described in terms of a set of exit qualifications,

Pagina 2 van 7 which are in line with the domain-specific frame of reference and the Dublin descriptors at master's level. The panel agrees that they properly reflect the intended learning outcomes of an academic master's programme in political science. The panel recommends to link the VU core values (open, personally engaged and responsible) explicitly to the exit qualifications, to clarify not only the knowledge and skills, but also the attitude aimed for in the programme. Based on the students' feedback during the site visit, the panel concludes that the programme is able to position itself adequately. It offers a distinctive profile based on the international and selective character, the integration of comparative politics and international relations, the comprehensive approach of politics, polity and policy, and the strong academic orientation of the programme. The panel assesses Standard 1 as 'satisfactory'.

*Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment*

The programme consists of four specialisation tracks: 'Comparative European politics', 'International relations and transnational governance', 'Global environmental governance' and 'Policy and politics'. The track 'Policy and politics' will be discontinued per September 2017, because it does not attract a sufficient number of students.

The panel recognises the cumulative structure of the programme, guiding students to an advanced level of knowledge and research skills in a logical sequence of courses. The dual role of the foundational courses in the first period may have to be reconsidered, since the role of a refresher course interferes with the nature of a strong theoretical course at master's level. Alternative methods to harmonise the diverse academic backgrounds of incoming students should be looked into. Halfway through the programme, in January, students work on the formulation of their research topic. The procedure to link students with suitable supervisors is through speed dates at a 'thesis market'. Most topics can be accommodated this way. The panel appreciates that the programme wishes to cater to all students' interests, but on the basis of the theses (see Standard 4) the panel is not entirely convinced that all supervisors can be aware of the most recent literature in a topic that is far removed from their own area of expertise. It might be better to limit the scope of possible thesis topics for students, to guarantee a better match with the staff's expertise. The many written assignments and the extensive feedback provided by lecturers prepare students for their thesis writing. Admission to the master's programme is selective, based on disciplinary and methodological background and strong English proficiency. Currently, the number of international students is more than fifty per cent, leading to a natural diversity in the classroom. Most students (sixty per cent) are able to complete the programme within one year, although quite a few of these do not submit their master's thesis in June, but use the summer months and turn in their thesis for the re-sit in August. The students describe the workload, level of the programme and most of the courses (for the foundation courses, see above) as intensive and demanding. There are no major impediments to study progress.

The available staff is well-qualified substantively, didactically and in research. Staff members are very committed to help students along by providing feedback, even to the extent that the expectation levels may be raised too high. Naturally, eagerness to support students is to be applauded, but the panel advises discussing this question in a staff meeting, aiming for a fair balance between teaching and other staff obligations.

The panel concludes that the curriculum and staff constitute a coherent teaching-learning environment for the students and enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The panel assesses Standard 2 as 'satisfactory'.

The panel observes that over the past few years serious steps have been undertaken to guarantee the assessment quality, as illustrated by the introduction of an assessment plan and peer review. The assessment methods are in line with the learning objectives and the assignments are of an appropriate level. Students are provided with timely and detailed feedback. The examination committee checks the implementation of the mechanisms to ensure validity and reliability, by an annual survey of course files and the evaluation of a random sample of courses and theses. The survey outcomes indicate that the implementation of the assessment quality mechanisms is not yet complete and that there are inconsistencies in the thesis assessment procedure. In theory, this is a solid quality system. Initially, it was, however, unclear to the panel whether the examination committee can sufficiently monitor if such critical points are addressed. The composition of the examination committee - at Faculty level rather than at programme level - could lead to a procedural and formal approach. The panel wondered if the examination committee is sufficiently able to check the implementation of improvement measures. After the site visit, the panel received additional information, which shows that the programme staff indeed discusses the examination committee's advice in regular staff meetings and implements the recommendations. The panel is reassured that the examinations committee actively monitors the assessment quality and that the programme staff acts upon the committee's criticism. The panel advises the programme director to formally report on these improvement activities to the examination committee. This will ensure that the examination committee is fully informed and consequently more 'in control' of the assessment quality. The panel assesses Standard 3 as 'satisfactory'.

#### *Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes*

The panel read a sample of fifteen theses and their assessment forms and had an interview with a number of alumni during the site visit, to determine if the intended learning outcomes are achieved. The learning outcomes of the master thesis reflect all the exit qualifications of the programme. In general, the theses were of the appropriate master level. In two cases, the panel found the level a marginal pass at most. The panel's doubts were clearly shared by the two examiners who had written thorough comments on the various criteria. In contrast with these two marginal cases, the quality of some other theses was outstanding. The grades are generally in line with the panel's judgements. In a few cases the panel would have given a lower grade, but in other cases the panel's grade would have been higher.

The literature reviews in a few theses are not complete and do not reflect the most recent academic discussions. The panel wonders if this is caused by the very high degree of freedom for students to select their research topic and the fact that supervisors cannot be expected to be experts in every field. The panel advises reconsidering the matching procedure of student, topic and supervisor. In most cases the feedback was detailed and based on the assessment criteria. The assessment forms for the master theses are clear, but the intersubjectivity could be further improved by adding a weighting for the various criteria and by specifying minimum criteria for the different ranges of grades (pass/fail, 6-7, 7-8 et cetera). A discussion between the thesis examiners about their proposed grades, instead of an automatic calculation of the average of their proposed grades, would also be useful. The alumni are satisfied with the programme as a preparation for their further career. The panel assesses Standard 4 as 'satisfactory'.

Pagina 4 van 7 Based on its international experience (Belgium, USA, UK), the panel notes with appreciation that the programmes in Political Science in the Netherlands are comparatively better structured and wellconsidered than elsewhere. For further improvement of the programme, the panel recommends to link the VU core values (open, personally engaged and responsible) explicitly to the exit qualifications, to clarify not only the knowledge and skills, but also the attitude aimed for in the programme. The dual role of the foundational courses in period 1 should be reconsidered, since the role of a refresher course interferes with the nature of a strong theoretical course at master's level. Alternative methods to harmonise the diverse academic backgrounds of incoming students should be looked into. The panel advises investigating how a more balanced intake across tracks can be achieved. In order to guarantee a better match with the staff's expertise the panel thinks it may be better to limit the scope of possible thesis topics for students. A stronger connection to real life and work could be achieved by taking advantage of the vicinity of relevant political organisations and organising field trips or excursions to Brussels and The Hague. The panel advises discussing in a staff meeting what students can reasonably expect from staff members in terms of (speed of) feedback, aiming for a fair balance between teaching and other staff obligations. The panel advises the programme director to formally report on the activities to improve the assessment quality to the examination committee. The assessment forms for the master theses are clear, but the intersubjectivity could be further improved by adding a weighting for the various criteria, by specifying minimum criteria for the different ranges of grades, and by including a discussion between the two thesis examiners about their proposed grades.

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Ingevolge het bepaalde in artikel 5a.10, derde lid, van de WHW heeft de NVAO het college van bestuur van de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam te Amsterdam in de gelegenheid gesteld zijn zienswijze op het voornemen tot besluit van 4 september 2017 naar voren te brengen. Bij e-mail van 2 oktober 2017 heeft de instelling van de gelegenheid gebruik gemaakt om te reageren. Dit heeft geleid tot een tekstuele aanpassing.

De NVAO besluit accreditatie te verlenen aan de wo-master Political Science (60 EC; variant: voltijd; locatie: Amsterdam) van de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam te Amsterdam. De opleiding kent de volgende afstudeerrichtingen: Comparative European Politics; International Relations and Transnational Governance; Global Environmental Governance en Policy and Politics. De NVAO beoordeelt de kwaliteit van de opleiding als voldoende.

Dit besluit treedt in werking op 29 september 2017 en is van kracht tot en met 28 september 2023.

Den Haag, 29 september 2017

Namens het bestuur van de NVAO  
Voor deze,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'i.a. René Hageman', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Mr. L.B. Kroes  
Directeur Nederland

René Hageman  
Afdelingshoofd Nederland

Tegen dit besluit kan op grond van het bepaalde in de Algemene wet bestuursrecht door een belanghebbende bezwaar worden gemaakt bij de NVAO. De termijn voor het indienen van bezwaar bedraagt zes weken.

Onderwerp	Standaard	Beoordeling door het panel
<b>1. Beoogde eindkwalificaties</b>	De beoogde eindkwalificaties van de opleiding zijn wat betreft inhoud, niveau en oriëntatie geconcretiseerd en voldoen aan internationale eisen.	<b>Voldoende</b>
<b>2. Onderwijsleeromgeving</b>	Het programma, het personeel en de opleidingsspecifieke voorzieningen maken het voor de instromende studenten mogelijk de beoogde eindkwalificaties te realiseren.	<b>Voldoende</b>
<b>3. Toetsing</b>	De opleiding beschikt over een adequaat systeem van toetsing.	<b>Voldoende</b>
<b>4. Gerealiseerde eindkwalificaties</b>	De opleiding toont aan dat de beoogde eindkwalificaties worden gerealiseerd.	<b>Voldoende</b>
<b>Eindoordeel</b>		<b>Voldoende</b>

De standaarden krijgen het oordeel onvoldoende, voldoende, goed of excellent.

Het eindoordeel over de opleiding als geheel wordt op dezelfde schaal gegeven.

- Prof. dr. Marijke Breuning (voorzitter), Professor of Political Sciences, Department of Political Science, University of North Texas in Denton, Texas, USA;
- Dr. Renske Doorenspleet, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Warwick, UK;
- Dr. Christien Van den Anker, Associate Professor of Politics and International Relations, Faculty of Health & Applied Sciences, University of the West of England in Bristol, UK;
- Prof. dr. Ferdi De Ville, co-directeur van het Centre for EU Studies, Universiteit Gent, België;
- Prof. dr. Peter Vermeersch, hoogleraar Politicologie, Faculteit Sociale Wetenschappen, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, België;
- Prof. dr. Dirk De Bièvre, hoogleraar Internationale Politiek, Departement Politieke Wetenschappen, Universiteit Antwerpen, België;
- Kaisa de Bel (student-lid), derdejaars bachelorstudent Politicologie en tweedejaars bachelorstudent Rechtsgeleerdheid, Universiteit Leiden.

Het panel werd ondersteund door dr. Marianne van der Weiden, secretaris (gecertificeerd).