

Additional assessment

**Master's programme
European Public Affairs**

**Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Maastricht University**

Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU)
Catharijnesingel 56
PO Box 8035
3503 RA Utrecht
The Netherlands

Phone: +31 (0) 30 230 3100
E-mail: info@qanu.nl
Internet: www.qanu.nl

Project number: Q547

© 2015 QANU

Text and numerical material from this publication may be reproduced in print, by photocopying or by any other means with the permission of QANU if the source is mentioned.

CONTENTS

Report on the additional assessment of the master's programme European Public Affairs of Maastricht University	5
Administrative data regarding the programme	5
Administrative data regarding the institution.....	5
Quantitative data regarding the programme	5
Composition of the assessment panel.....	5
Brief description of the procedures.....	6
Summary judgement	9
Description of the standards from the Assessment framework for limited programme assessments	11
Appendices	15
Appendix 1: Curricula vitae of the members of the assessment panel	17
Appendix 2: Documents studied by the assessment panel.....	19
Appendix 3: Overview of the revised integrated skills track, 2014-2015.....	21

This report was finalised on 9 December 2015.

Report on the additional assessment of the master's programme European Public Affairs of Maastricht University

This report takes the NVAO's Assessment Framework for Limited Programme Assessments as a starting point (22 November 2011).

Administrative data regarding the programme

Master's programme European Public Affairs

Name of the programme:	European Public Affairs
CROHO number:	60003
Level of the programme:	master's
Orientation of the programme:	academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Specialisations or tracks:	none
Location(s):	Maastricht
Mode(s) of study:	full time
Expiration of accreditation:	29-06-2016

Administrative data regarding the institution

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

Quantitative data regarding the programme

The required quantitative data regarding the programme are included in the assessment report 'History, International Relations and European Public Affairs. Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Maastricht University' (QANU, 15 January 2014).

Composition of the assessment panel

The panel that assessed the master's programme European Public Affairs of Maastricht University consisted of:

- Luc François (chair), professor emeritus of Contemporary History at Ghent University, Belgium;
- Jan Orbie, senior lecturer on EU External Relations at the Department of Political Science and co-director of the Centre for EU Studies at Ghent University, Belgium;
- Sebastian Oberthür, professor for Environment and Sustainable Development at the Institute for European Studies (IES) at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Belgium.

The panel was supported by Adrienne Wieldraaijer-Huijzer, MA, who acted as project manager and secretary.

The board of Maastricht University and the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) approved the composition of the panel. Appendix 1 contains the

curricula vitae of its members. All panel members and the project manager signed a declaration of independence as required by the NVAO protocol to ensure that they judge without bias, personal preference or personal interest, and the judgement is made without undue influence from the institute, the programme or other stakeholders.

Brief description of the procedures

Previous assessment

On 5 and 6 March 2013 an assessment panel evaluated the master's programme European Public Affairs. On 15 January 2014, the assessment report based on the NVAO Assessment Framework for Limited Programme Assessments was finalised. The panel assessed Standard 1 (Intended learning outcomes) and Standard 2 (Teaching-learning environment) of the programme as 'satisfactory'. Standard 3 (Assessment and achieved learning outcomes), however, was assessed as 'unsatisfactory'. The assessment panel formulated recommendations for improvement for the programme.

Based on these recommendations, the management of the programme prepared an improvement plan, which was sent to the NVAO on 31 January 2014 together with the request to grant the programme an improvement period. In a letter dated 10 April 2014, the NVAO indicated that the improvement plan insufficiently addressed some items put forward by the panel. It requested a follow-up of the panel's suggestions in an addendum to the improvement plan and submission of the improvement plan plus addendum to the panel for approval. The 2013 panel subsequently approved the submitted improvement plan and addendum. Based on the advice of the assessment panel, the NVAO decided to extend the accreditation of the programme and to grant the programme an improvement period to implement adjustments in order to fulfil the criteria for accreditation.

The assessment panel that was asked to reassess the programme consisted of two members from the previous assessment panel (Professor Luc François and Associate Professor Jan Orbie) and one new member, Professor Sebastian Oberthür.

Preparations and working method

The approved improvement plan plus addendum included the following measures:

- Introduction of a new "graduation package" (2013-2014);
- Revision of the final qualifications (to become effective in the 2014-2015 academic year, the revised set of final qualifications was included in the approved addendum);
- Enhancing and expanding the Integrated Skills Track (IST, 2013-2014);
- Starting the IST earlier in the programme (2014-2015);
- Expanding the IST (2014-2015);
- Strengthening the academic content of Module 1 (2014-2015 and 2015-2016);
- Changing the admission requirements of the programme (2014-2015).

The panel felt it should be possible to judge the implementation and the effectiveness of the above-mentioned measures with an assessment based on written material. Therefore, in accordance with the 'NVAO points of departure for the assessment of programme granted an improvement period', it opted for a proportional approach. In order to prepare for the additional assessment, the management of the master's programme European Public Affairs provided a report describing the current state of affairs. The panel studied this report and

additional information provided. It also studied 3 internship theses and 3 "final work packages", consisting of an internship thesis and internship report (plus assessment forms) and the assessment form of the internship (for an overview, see Appendix 2).

Since the panel's findings were positive, a site visit was deemed to be unnecessary. On 14 October 2015, the panel held a closed meeting to discuss its findings.

Report

On 14 October 2015, the assessment panel held a meeting to discuss its findings based on the materials provided by Maastricht University. In this additional assessment, the assessment panel concentrated only on measures that affect Standard 3 (Assessment and achieved learning outcomes). Based on the panel's findings, the secretary drafted a report that was commented upon by the panel members. Subsequently, the programme was given the opportunity to check for factual irregularities. Comments by the programme were discussed with the chair and – when necessary – with other panel members. A few days later, the report was finalised.

Decision rules

In accordance with the NVAO's Assessment Framework for Limited Programme Assessments (as of 22 November 2011), the assessment panel used the following definitions for the assessment of both the standards and the programme as a whole.

Generic quality

The quality that can reasonably be expected in an international perspective from a higher education bachelor's or master's programme.

Unsatisfactory

The programme does not meet the current generic quality standards and shows serious shortcomings in several areas.

Satisfactory

The programme meets the current generic quality standards and shows an acceptable level across its entire spectrum.

Good

The programme systematically surpasses the current generic quality standards across its entire spectrum.

Excellent

The programme systematically well surpasses the current generic quality standards across its entire spectrum and is regarded as an (inter)national example.

Summary judgement

On 5 and 6 March 2013, an assessment panel assessed the master's programme European Public Affairs. The panel assessed Standard 1 (Intended learning outcomes) and Standard 2 (Teaching-learning environment) as 'satisfactory'. Standard 3 (Assessment and achieved learning outcomes), however, was assessed as 'unsatisfactory'. Consequently, in line with the framework's decision rules, the programme as a whole was assessed as 'unsatisfactory'. The most important reason for this outcome was that the panel was not convinced that all graduates in the programme had achieved the intended learning outcomes, since none of the final papers sufficiently tested the achievement of academic research skills. In response to these findings, the programme developed an improvement plan, and later an addendum to this plan. On 30 June 2014, the NVAO approved of the improvement plan plus addendum and decided to extend the accreditation of the programme and to grant the programme an improvement period of two years (until 29 June 2016) to implement improvement measures.

On 14 October 2015, an assessment panel again assessed Standard 3 of the programme in order to establish whether the improvement measures had been implemented successfully and had been effective.

The panel found that the programme management took the advice of the previous assessment panel seriously and carried out the required improvement measures in a professional manner. It not only implemented measures from the improvement plan plus addendum, but also took measures based on evaluation and progressive insight and paid attention to the sustainability of the improvements.

In response to the critique of the previous assessment panel, the programme introduced a thesis as part of the final work. The new "graduation package" consists of the Internship (8 EC), the Internship report (2 EC), and the Thesis (8 EC). The programme management also enhanced and expanded the academic writing and research skills track: it implemented an Integrated Skills Track (IST, 4 EC) in 2013-2014, and introduced further improvement measures to this track in 2014-2015. Finally, the Faculty took measures to improve the faculty-wide final work procedure.

The panel studied the implementation and the effect of the above-mentioned improvement measures. It observed that the new "graduation package" and the adjusted academic skills training better match the profile of an academic master's programme with a strong professional focus. It studied 3 theses and 3 complete "graduation packages" and concluded that the new "graduation package" sufficiently assesses the acquisition of professional as well as academic research- and writing skills by the students. It was also positive about the adjustment of the faculty-wide final project procedure, especially the measures to strengthen the independence of the second reader and the introduction of thesis calibration workshops for thesis assessors. It applauds the development of a document outlining necessary and sufficient conditions for passing the MA thesis.

The panel read 3 internship theses and 3 complete "final work packages" that were produced since the previous assessment and concluded that they are of satisfactory academic quality. Although the effect of further measures to be implemented in the current academic year (2015-2016) is not yet noticeable, the 2015 panel concludes that the measures taken have already yielded positive results.

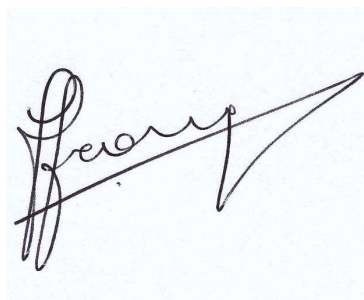
The panel assesses the standards from the Assessment framework for limited programme assessments in the following way:

Master's programme European Public Affairs

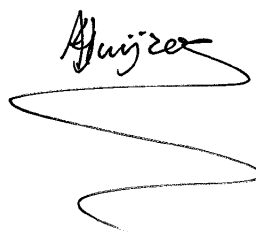
<i>Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes</i>	<i>satisfactory</i>
<i>Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment</i>	<i>satisfactory</i>
<i>Standard 3: Assessment and achieved learning outcomes</i>	satisfactory
General conclusion	satisfactory

The chair and the secretary of the assessment panel hereby declare that all members of the panel have studied this report and that they agree with the judgements laid down in it. They confirm that the assessment has been conducted in accordance with the demands relating to independence.

Date: 9 December 2015.



Prof. Luc François
Chair



Adrienne Wieldraaijer-Huijzer, MA
Secretary

Description of the standards from the Assessment framework for limited programme assessments

Standard 3: Assessment and achieved learning outcomes

The programme has an adequate assessment system in place and demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Explanation:

The level achieved is demonstrated by interim and final tests, final projects and the performance of graduates in actual practice or in post-graduate programme. The tests and assessments are valid, reliable and transparent to the students.

Relevant issues of the 2013 assessment

The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS) of Maastricht University has one Board of Examiners. In 2013, the panel concluded that this Board of Examiners played a pro-active role in the quality assurance of assessments in the master's programme. It monitored the achieved learning outcomes by checking the examination dossier of individual students, had concrete plans to start evaluating the content of the examinations and theses, and was working on an internship assessment policy. The panel also observed that the system of assessment in the master's programme was valid and transparent. The exams from the core modules thoroughly assessed academic knowledge and its application, and the assessment methods were varied and appropriate.

However, the panel encountered several problems in determining whether the intended learning outcomes had been achieved. First, it found it difficult to assess the achieved learning outcomes without a thesis as a final project. It stressed that the achieved learning outcomes, as far as academic research and writing skills are concerned, ideally culminate in a thesis. To determine the achievement of the learning outcomes, it examined internship reports and evaluation papers of module 4. It observed that neither the internship report nor the evaluation papers sufficiently testified to the achievement of academic research skills. In addition, students could pass module 4 with a grade lower than 6 for their evaluation paper.

As academic research is essential to an academic master's degree, the panel concluded that the expected learning outcomes were not achieved. It recommended that the programme develop the evaluation paper of module 4 into a significant research project that can serve as a master's thesis. In Standard 2 of the report, the panel also advised the programme to train students more thoroughly in academic research- and writing skills.

The approved improvement plan (plus addendum) of the programme promised the introduction of a new final work arrangement (2013-2014); revision of the final qualifications (to become effective in the 2014-2015 academic year, the revised set of final qualifications was included in the approved addendum); enhancement and expansion of the Integrated Skills Track (IST, 2013-2014 and 2014-2015); an earlier start of the IST in the programme (2014-2015); strengthening of the academic content of module 1 (2014-2015); and adjustment of the admission requirements of the programme (2014-2015).

Findings in 2015

The 2015 panel was commissioned to reassess Standard 3 and to review the manner in which the programme had ameliorated the shortcomings identified by the NVAO, i.e. the implementation of the improvement measures including their effect. On 29 September 2015,

the panel received a report describing the current state of affairs with regard to the implementation of the approved improvement measures in the programme. It studied this report and concluded that it offers a detailed overview of the current state of affairs of the improvement measures. It learned that the management of the programme took the advice of the previous assessment panel seriously and carried out the required improvement measures in a professional manner. It not only implemented measures from the improvement plan plus addendum, but also took measures based on evaluation and progressive insight and paid attention to the sustainability of the improvements. For example, the management implemented structural measures to further strengthen the monitoring of quality (e.g. extending the compensation for specific members of the Board of Examiners) and facilitate quality improvements (e.g. in March 2015, the Faculty hired an educational specialist to focus on issues such as curriculum adjustments and the design of tests and exams).

The measures in the improvement plan and the addendum concerned immediate adjustments as well as measures that had not yet been implemented, or only partly, at the time. The immediate adjustments had been endorsed by the previous panel by means of its approval of the improvement plan plus addendum in its letter of 19 May 2014, e.g. the adjustment of final qualifications (in Annex 5 of the addendum to the improvement plan). The other measures had not yet been (fully) implemented or were subject to further observations and advice from the panel. Below, the 2015 panel describes its findings of the improvement measures that had not yet been (fully) implemented in 2014 and the effect of the measures taken. The overall effect of all of the measures is not yet noticeable. The programme also identified improvement measures to be introduced in the 2015-2016 academic year. The results of these changes will only be noticeable once the students from this cohort finish their thesis.

The state of affairs report categorised all observations, recommendations and required improvement measures in two main areas of improvement: 'Changing the final work package' and 'Enhancing and expanding the Integrated Skills Track.' It also addressed improvements with regard to the faculty-wide final project procedure.

Changing the final work package

The programme management followed the advice of the previous assessment panel to introduce a thesis as part of the final project. As of the 2013-2014 academic year, the "graduation package" (18 EC) of the programme consists of three components:

1. Internship (8 EC): the actual work delivered at the host organisation;
2. Internship report (2 EC): a paper which reflects on the internship project and the experience gained and, moreover, analyses the social function of the host organisation and the learning curve accomplished during the internship;
3. Thesis (8 EC): an academic research paper on a topic linked to the curriculum.

Students can only graduate when all three components of the "graduation package" have been concluded with a passing grade.

The new "graduation package" was implemented for the first time in the 2013-2014 academic year, together with measures to strengthen the academic skills training in the programme (see below). In the summer and fall of 2014, the programme management reflected on the introduction of the thesis. As a result, the management introduced further improvements in the 2014-2015 academic year. Examples include: providing better information to students and staff about what is expected of the thesis (revision of the 'EPA Internship and Thesis Manual'), introducing the new requirement that the thesis topic needs

to be closely related to the curriculum and approved by the Director of Studies, moving the start of the thesis trajectory from January back to September, and adding to the admission procedure that all candidates must be screened with regard to their level of academic writing.

The panel is positive about the new “graduation package”. It studied 3 theses and 3 complete “graduation packages” and observed that the new “graduation package” sufficiently assesses the acquisition of professional as well as academic research and writing skills by the students (see below).

Final project procedure

As announced during the site visit and endorsed by the 2013 panel, the 2013-2014 academic year saw the introduction of a formal faculty-wide assessment procedure. This procedure includes the introduction of an independent second reader who initiates the assessment process and the introduction of a third reader when the independent reader and supervisor fail to come to an agreement about the final grade. The master’s programme European Public Affairs follows the faculty-wide assessment procedure. During the improvement period, the Faculty took measures to improve it further. The adjusted final project procedure has been laid down in the ‘FASoS Final Work Procedure’, which is updated every year and communicated to all assessors. The panel approves the steps taken. It is particularly enthusiastic about measures to strengthen the independence of the second reader and the introduction of thesis calibration workshops for thesis assessors. It believes that regular discussions about assessment criteria and grading will improve the validity of the thesis assessments. As the ‘FASoS Final Work Procedure’ is updated every year, it encourages the faculty to sustain the new assessment procedures in the future. It applauds the development of a document outlining necessary and sufficient conditions for passing the thesis. However, it believes that it is also important to clarify to students and staff the necessary and sufficient conditions for graduating with distinction. It recommends that the programme also add the criteria that have to be met for passing a thesis with an 8.0 or higher to this document.

Enhancing and expanding the Integrated Skills Track

As announced in the improvement plan plus addendum, the programme has improved the academic research and writing skills training in the curriculum in two stages. In the 2013-2014 academic year (Stage 1), it introduced the Integrated Skills Track (IST, 4 EC). In this track, the training of academic skills is strengthened and nine two-hour sessions on research, writing and research design are incorporated. At the end of the academic year, the programme management evaluated the changes and developed measures for further improvement. These measures were introduced in the next academic year (2014-2015) (Stage 2). They included enhancing the IST course to provide students with even more guidance on academic skills, and moving the start of the IST course to the first period. An overview of the 2014-2015 IST is included in Appendix 3.

The programme committee evaluated a selection of thesis proposals. It noted that the improved skills training in 2014-2015 had been effective: the research designs and operationalisation strategies discussed in the proposals from 2014-2015 were more extensive and stronger than those from the previous year. The programme management and the programme committee also identified some improvements to be introduced in the 2015-2016 academic year. The panel would like to express its appreciation for the careful way in which the programme management and the programme committee have implemented, evaluated, refocused (where necessary) and complemented the measures to improve the academic skills training of the students. It is confident that future improvement measures will also be monitored closely. The panel observed that the new “graduation package” and the adjusted

academic skills training match the profile of the programme as an academic master's programme with a strong professional focus.

The effect of the improvement measures on the quality of the "final work packages"

The panel read 3 internship theses and 3 complete "final work packages" (each including an internship thesis and internship report – plus assessment forms – and the assessment forms of the internship) that were finalised in the summer of 2015. It concluded that the students in the programme had achieved the intended learning outcomes, including those related to academic research and writing skills. The assessment of the theses and the other final products was balanced, transparent and just. In some cases, the panel would even have graded the internship theses a little bit higher. In conclusion, the introduction of the final work package, the improvement of the academic skills training in the curriculum and the further improvements in the faculty-wide 'Final Work Procedure' have been effective.

Conclusion

Master's programme European Public Affairs: the panel assesses Standard 3 as 'satisfactory'.

General conclusion

The assessment panel in 2013 had doubts about the students' achievement of academic research skills. For the 2015 panel, this is no longer the case. The programme has carefully implemented improvement measures. It has introduced a thesis as part of the final project, enhanced and expanded the Integrated Skills Track, and improved the assessment procedure of the MA thesis. These measures have been effective. The panel read 3 internship theses and 3 complete "final work packages" that had been produced since the previous assessment and concluded that they are of satisfactory academic quality. It is convinced that the programme management and the Examination Board have established a system of coherent rules and procedures that guarantee adequate quality assurance of the achieved intended learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The panel assesses the master's programme European Public Affairs as 'satisfactory'.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Curricula vitae of the members of the assessment panel

Luc François is Professor Emeritus of Contemporary History at Ghent University, Belgium. He also served as Director at the Department of Education (2001-2006) and Rectoral Advisor on Internationalisation (2011-2014). He was chairman of the "HBO5" Committee (2011-2014). This committee advises the Minister of Education on applications for the set-up of new associate degrees. As of April 1, 2014, he is chair of the Higher Education Committee. François joined several NVAO audit panels assessing the quality of either institutes or educational programmes in the field of history.

Jan Orbie is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Political Science and co-director of the Centre for EU Studies at Ghent University, Belgium. He lectures in different courses in the Master for EU Studies at Ghent University, such as Theories of European Integration, European External Policies, Current Issues in EU Politics, and EU Trade Politics. His research focuses on the international policies of the EU. He is the author of numerous chapters, articles and edited books on EU trade politics and development, the EU's global social policy, and EU democracy promotion. He is also Erasmus coordinator of the Department of Political Science. He has been a member of several visitation committees on European Public Affairs in Flanders (2010-2011) and History, European Public Affairs and International Relations (2012-2013).

Sebastian Oberthür is Professor for Environment and Sustainable Development at the Institute for European Studies (IES) at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). Trained as a political scientist with a strong background in international law, he focuses on issues of international and European environmental and climate governance, with an emphasis on institutional issues and perspectives. Before joining the IES in 2005, Sebastian Oberthür was assistant professor at Bamberg University (2001-05) and senior research fellow at the Ecologic Institute in Berlin. He received his PhD in political science/International Relations from the Free University Berlin in 1995.

Appendix 2: Documents studied by the assessment panel

Final project products

The assessment panel studied the “final work packages” (internship report and the internship thesis - including assessment forms - plus the assessment form of the internship) of students with the following student numbers:

6079665
6093263
6099204

The assessment panel studied the new internship thesis plus the corresponding assessment form of students with the following student numbers:

6076048
6096807
6099921

In addition, the assessment panel studied the following documents:

- The assessment report ‘History, International Relations and European Public Affairs. Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Maastricht University’ (QANU 15 January 2014);
- Improvement Plan bachelor’s programme European Public Affairs, master’s programme European Public Affairs, master’s programme European Public Affairs (January 2014);
- ‘NVAO Besluit strekkende tot het verlengen van de geldigheidsduur van het accreditatiebesluit van 27 november 2007 zoals bedoeld in artikel 5a12a van de Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek (WHW) van de opleiding wo-master European Public Affairs van Maastricht University’ (30 June 2014);
- State of Affairs Report improvement plan Master European Public Affairs (September 2015).
- Master’s programme European Public Affairs:
 - Minimum requirements for the thesis;
 - Take home exam implementation and evaluation of EU policy.

Appendix 3: Overview of the revised integrated skills track, 2014-2015

First semester			Second semester		June
Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4	Period 5	Thesis
Skills training on academic writing Research design <i>training 1</i> (research questions and scientific standards) Introduction to the thesis trajectory	Research design <i>training 2</i> (conceptualization and theoretical framework) Research design <i>training 3</i> (operationalization and research methods) Peer-review Workshops Deliverable 1: First draft of the research proposal	First meeting with the supervisor Independent research	Methods Training Workshops Deliverable 2: Full research proposal	Independent research Deliverable 3: MA Thesis	
Lectures and tutorials by the IST coordinator Individual meetings with the Director of Studies		Meetings with the supervisors Workshops on different methodologies			