



**MSc Political Science  
University of Amsterdam**

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## Summary

### Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The MSc Political Science (MPol) at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) investigates how social, economic and political transformations affect local, national, European and global governance. It aims to critically investigate the democratic accountability, representative quality and legitimacy of contemporary governance, and focuses on transnational politics. The programme is organized in six different, but interrelated tracks that cover the main themes of contemporary political science. The panel is positive about the MPol's broad profile and the six specialization options representing the various subdisciplines of political science. It considers these to match the research expertise of UvA political science staff quite well. The programme emphasizes theory, research, and methodological pluralism, in line with its academic profile. The panel appreciates the extensive and detailed intended learning outcomes, which reflect this profile and match the Dublin descriptors for master's programmes and the national domain-specific framework of reference.

### Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The panel considers the MPol to be well-designed. The MPol is taught in English, which the panel considers to be in line with its international orientation and the academic and professional fields linked to the programme. The panel appreciates the varied teaching methods and finds that research methods as well as academic and professional skills receive much attention throughout the various courses. Students praise the high quality of the courses and the expertise of the teaching staff. The panel is positive on the careful coordination between the various tracks and the manner in which they partly overlap where this is relevant. It recommends investigating the consequences of the current setup for the trajectories of individual students, particularly those in smaller tracks, whose restricted-choice electives and Research Project options are limited and can be accessed by students from other tracks with more choices. The Transnational Politics course at the start of the programme offers students a shared initial overview of the field, but communication to students on its aim and common thread deserves attention.

The panel finds that the programme is feasible through adequate supervision and guidance. The Research Project is particularly conducive to avoiding study delays, since it provides students with a clear structure. The panel appreciates the programme's desire to allow staff members teaching a Research Project to have autonomy in structuring the course, but recommends communicating clearly to students what they can expect in terms of supervision and deadlines when signing up for an RP group to avoid that differences in style may be experienced as inequalities.

The panel finds that staff quality and quantity are clearly sufficient for the MPol. The staff members have good or excellent track records in research paired with didactic skills. Students consider their teachers to be expert at what they teach. The panel noted during the site visit that there is a clear team spirit among the MPol's staff, which is conducive to cooperation in the tracks and electives.

### Standard 3. Student assessment

The panel appreciates the assessment policies and practice in the MPol. Assessment is varied and fitting. The panel is pleased with the way thesis assessment is done. The method of having the first assessor choose the second reader works out well due to a check on the list of second readers by the programme director and Examination Board. The panel looked at thesis forms and found that they provided sufficient information to underpin the final grade. However, some contained clearly more detailed feedback than others. The panel recommends clarifying expectations surrounding the thesis form to staff members so that these differences are reduced.

The panel learnt that the programme director in coordination with the EB introduced thesis calibration sessions for staff members in master's programmes, and considers this a good practice. It is impressed with the work done by the EB to check and improve quality of assessment in the programme. It considers the EB to be proactive and valuable to the programme and appreciates the changes made in thesis assessment and harmonization.

#### Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

Based on the good quality of the final theses and the success of alumni, who end up working in the private and public sectors and for NGOs, the panel concludes that graduates from the MPol have achieved the programme's intended learning outcomes.

### Score table

The panel assesses the programme 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 Date: 30 June 2023	Dr. Fiona Schouten

# Introduction

## Procedure

### Assessment

On 4 and 5 April 2023, the BSc and MSc Political Science and the MSc Conflict Resolution and Governance of the University of 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 25 November 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 period 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). For personal reasons, one of the panel members, Sofie Marien, was unable to be present at the site visit. She provided her findings and input to the other panel members prior to the visit. The panel offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour. One student requested a consultation. 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 University of 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, Assistant 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 (student member);
- Mark Dzoljic BSc, MSc student in Political Science at the University of Amsterdam (student member).

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

- Prof. dr. Petra Meier, Professor in Politics at the University of Antwerp, Belgium (chair);
- Dr. Chris van der Borgh, Assistant Professor at the Centre for Conflict Studies Utrecht University;
- 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;
- Fee A'mema MSc, Political Science graduate at Leiden University (student member).

## Information on the programmes

Name of the institution:	University of Amsterdam
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Programme name:	Political Science
CROHO number:	66606

Level:	Master
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Specialisations or tracks:	Comparative Politics European Politics and External Relations International Relations Political Economy Political Theory Public Policy and Governance
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 MSc Political Science (MPol) offered at the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of the University of Amsterdam (UvA) investigates how social, economic and political transformations affect local, national, European and global governance. It aims to critically investigate the democratic accountability, representative quality and legitimacy of contemporary governance. The programme studies politics broadly, addressing interactions between the political system, the economy and civil society. A distinguishing feature of the MPol is its focus on transnational politics. Through different sub-disciplinary lenses, and without denying the ongoing importance of states and state structures in domestic and foreign affairs, it takes a special interest in (today's relevance of) politics that transcend the confines of the formal political institutions that crystallized in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The programme is organised in six different, but interrelated tracks: Comparative Politics (CP), European Politics and External Relations (EPER), International Relations (IR), Political Economy (PE), Political Theory (PT), and Public Policy and Governance (PPG). Together, these tracks cover the main themes of contemporary political science.

The Comparative Politics track (CP) provides students with insight into political processes and political institutions and actors across different geographic contexts. It studies state-building and democratization, and analyses the role of parliaments and governments, political parties and politicians, social movements and lobby groups, the media, and individual citizens in contemporary developments across the globe. Students learn to understand (and conduct independent research on) the consequences of global change processes, globalization and transnationalization for national and subnational political developments.

The European Politics and External Relations track (EPER) provides students with a thorough understanding of the politics and power of Europe. It offers in-depth study of the internal and external dimensions of European politics and their interrelations. Students learn to understand (and conduct independent research on) the way in which two traditionally separate fields of study – 'domestic' EU politics and EU external relations – are part of a single whole characterized by the dynamic interplay of state and non-state actors at the sub-national, national and transnational levels.

The International Relations track (IR) provides a comprehensive coverage of international policy themes and world regions. The track is distinguished by its emphasis on transnational processes and institutions. It draws on interdisciplinary insights and is committed to a broad range of theoretical and methodological approaches within the sub-discipline of International Relations. Students learn to understand (and conduct independent research on) the consequences of global change processes, globalisation and transnationalization for the relationship between state and non-state actors.

The Political Economy track (PE) focuses on the interaction between ‘the economy’ and ‘politics’, both broadly conceived. It also explores policy challenges with an ethical dimension, such as social policies or corporate power and social inequalities, so as to better understand how they play out in different political environments. Students learn to understand (and conduct independent research on) the mutual interaction of economic dynamics and patterns of governance, including those pertaining to the relationship between various types of political behaviour and economic change.

The Political Theory track (PT) provides students with the conceptual toolkit to analyse the complex normative and methodological issues of contemporary political life. Students are encouraged to take an active role in critical reflection on political practices, institutional arrangements and social science methods by building on a solid foundation in social and political thought. Students learn to understand how to apply (and conduct independent research on) normative and realist theory in at least one of the following sub-areas: democracy, justice, political economy, gender, migration, and the politics of expertise and experts.

The Public Policy and Governance track (PPG) prepares students to meet the demands of effective and legitimate public action in complex and often controversial political settings. The programme helps students develop as critical analysts and innovative designers by linking research and practice, theory and action on the ‘shop floor’ at local, national, European and international levels. Students learn to understand (and conduct independent research on) old and new administrative arrangements and problems typical of 21st century society, the management of policy processes and organisations, and they learn to apply methods for designing policy, organizations and arrangements in response to global, (trans)national and local challenges.

The programme is research-oriented in all its tracks, and characterised by its theoretical and methodological pluralism and an international orientation. It expects its graduates to be able to critically and independently analyse the power structures underlying political processes in contemporary (transnational) societies, and aims to stimulate students’ political awareness and social engagement to the extent that they will continue to play an active role in resolving the political and social problems of our time after graduation.

This profile has been translated into a set of exit qualifications (see appendix 1) that reflect the Dublin descriptors for master’s programmes and the domain-specific reference framework formulated by the Dutch political science programmes. The general intended learning outcomes are shared by all tracks and are supplemented by track-specific learning outcomes.

The panel is positive about the MPol’s broad profile and the six specialization options representing the various subdisciplines of political science. It considers these to match the research expertise of the UvA political science staff quite well. The programme emphasizes theory, research, and methodological pluralism, in line with its academic profile. The panel also appreciates the extensive and detailed intended learning outcomes, which match Dublin descriptors for master’s programmes and the national domain-specific framework of reference.

### Considerations

The MSc Political Science (MPol) at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) investigates how social, economic and political transformations affect local, national, European and global governance. It aims to critically investigate the democratic accountability, representative quality and legitimacy of contemporary governance, and focuses on transnational politics. The programme is organized in six different, but interrelated tracks that cover the main themes of contemporary political science. The panel is positive about

the MPol's broad profile and the six specialization options representing the various subdisciplines of political science. It considers these to match the research expertise of UvA political science staff quite well. The programme emphasizes theory, research, and methodological pluralism, in line with its academic profile. The panel appreciates the extensive and detailed intended learning outcomes, which reflect this profile and match the Dublin descriptors for master's programmes and the national domain-specific framework of reference.

### 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 one-year curriculum (60 EC) of the MPol is divided into two semesters, which consist of two blocks of 8 weeks and one block of 4 weeks, resulting in six blocks. In the programme, the second and third blocks of the first semester and the three blocks of the second have been joined together to create greater course units. See appendix 2 for an overview.

In the first block of the first semester, students take two 6 EC courses. One of these is the common course Transnational Politics, which is intended to bring to the fore what is common to, and distinctive about, the MPol, in all its diversity. The course investigates how ongoing transnational transformations – social, economic, political – affect governance at local, national, European and global levels. It responds to the need for a common perspective on political science. Alongside this course, students follow a so-called Specialisation Course, which is the core course of their selected track. This course also amounts to 6 EC. The Specialisation Course introduces students to their chosen specialization at an advanced level. In the second and third blocks, students choose two electives from an offering of over 20. The electives allow students to broaden the foundation provided in the core courses and to customize their own programme, while deepening research interests within their chosen track.

The second semester (30 EC) is entirely devoted to research and thesis writing in the context of so-called Research Projects (RPs). Every RP consists of approximately 10 students who work together during the second semester in a seminar setting. During the intensive seminar phase in the first block of the second semester, students study key literature about their research topic area and its theoretical and conceptual development and tools. The product of this first seminar phase is a research proposal. Students must receive a pass for this proposal in order to move to the next phase of the RP, where they conduct their research and write their thesis. In order to further support students in their thesis research, a series of Method Seminars is offered as a part of the RP, training students in different methodological skills ranging from statistics to interviewing, ethnography or content analysis. Students are expected to participate in at least one Method Seminar.

The panel studied the curriculum setup of the MPol and discussed it with the students and staff of the programme. It learnt that the programme is designed to combine specialization and flexibility. Students from all tracks start in a joint course, which runs parallel to a track-specific course, then shape the

programme according to their own needs by choosing electives and entering a Research Project. For every track, a list of restricted-choice electives is available to ensure that a chosen elective is relevant for the track the student is in. The RPs, too, are open to students from multiple tracks. This allows the programme to have students from various, related tracks come together in the classroom, benefiting from each other's different approaches and backgrounds and stimulating in-class dialogue.

The panel considers the programme to be well-designed, allowing students the opportunity to follow their own interests while at the same time ensuring they achieve all general and track-specific learning outcomes. It appreciates the varied teaching methods in the courses, ranging from data collection and fieldwork to writing papers and written assignment, presenting, writing policy briefs, providing peer feedback etc. Research methods as well as academic and professional skills receive much attention throughout the various courses. Students praise the high quality of the courses and the expertise of the teaching staff. The panel is positive on the careful coordination between the various tracks and the manner in which they are 'dovetailed' to partly overlap in shared electives where this is relevant.

Students that the panel interviewed mentioned a downside to this model. Students in the larger tracks, Political Economy (50-70 students) or International Relations (80-100), can choose from a wide offering of electives (10 and 15, respectively). Students in smaller tracks, such as Political Theory or European Politics and External Relations (on average 25-30 students) have less choice: they can opt for five or slightly more electives. Students in these tracks told the panel that their restricted-choice courses are also open to students from other tracks, and often fill up immediately. Smaller track students therefore are not always able to take their preferred elective and may be disappointed. The same goes for the Research Projects: students sometimes feel they are not able to take a research project that matches their specialization since students from all tracks are allowed to enter into any RP. Since the tracks are fluid in nature and allow students to combine elements from multiple tracks while still achieving the final qualifications, this does not constitute a problem, but it does create frustration among smaller-track students when they are not able to take the courses that suit their initial choice for a particular master track.

In order to improve this situation, the panel recommends investigating the consequences of the current setup for the trajectories of individual students. The programme could consider implementing measures to avoid disappointment, for instance through allowing students from smaller tracks preference in subscribing to their restricted-choice electives and/or the thematically or methodically most relevant Research Projects.

The panel understood from students and staff that the MPol's first course, obligatory for all students, is receiving less positive student evaluations. Transnational Politics aims at presenting the Political Science department's research expertise through weekly sessions from its staff members presenting topical research themes. The course is intended to show students the size and diversity of the department and the discipline by giving an overview through the common concept of transnational politics. From its interview with students, the panel understood that students don't see this common thread throughout the course and experience it as fragmented and incoherent. They would rather start specializing immediately. The panel agrees with the MPol staff that a shared initial overview of the field is beneficial for students, who get a sense of the larger field in which they move. It advises MPol staff to communicate clearly and frequently to all students what the aim of the course is and to make sure they understand and grasp its concept and the common thread running throughout its elements.

#### *Guidance and feasibility*

Admission to the MPol is designed to allow all students to complete the programme in a timely fashion. All applicants are expected to have sufficient English proficiency and a solid basis in the field of political science,

or in a closely related social science, with a minimum of 30 EC in political science earned in their previous studies. They should have a solid basis (20 EC) in both qualitative and quantitative social science research methodology. For those who don't entirely qualify, a research methodology course or the 60 EC premaster's programme are available. Applicants are evaluated by the admissions committee. The number of available places is limited to 35 students per year for the four smaller tracks (CP, EPER, PT and PPG), and 60 for PE and 120 for IR. This allows the programme to offer sufficiently small-scale teaching.

Once they enter the programme, students are guided by the study advisor. The study advisor maintains close and regular contact with the students and provides them with information about the programme, such as the elective options and research projects on offer. They also help students compose the curriculum. Students can also discuss personal matters and request meetings on their initiative. The study advisor can also refer students to UvA-wide facilities like the Career Centre or student psychologists. The study advisor is a member of the programme team, which is further made up of the programme director and the programme coordinator. The programme team organizes events for students, such as an introduction programme and career reflection days. Student association Machiavelli set up a specific master's branch in 2021-2022 and actively participates in such events.

At the end of November, the programme team organizes a Research Project market to help students choose a Research Project and supervisor. On this market, all supervisors present their project and answer students' questions on the thematic focus, setup and methodology. Once students choose an RP and start on the thesis, they have weekly group meetings of typically three hours a week in block 4, accompanied by individual meetings with the RP teacher, who is also the thesis supervisor. Thesis supervisors guide students in their choice of Methods Seminars, based on their topic and research question. After completing the proposal at the end of block 4, students enter the research and writing phase in blocks 5 and 6. Throughout these blocks, there are less frequent group meetings while one-on-one supervision and consultation meetings with the supervisor continue.

The panel concludes that the programme takes adequate measures to ensure that the programme is feasible. This is underlined by the MPol's success rates, with students graduating in 14-15 months on average. Students consider the programme challenging due to its one-year span, but otherwise doable. Due to the flexible setup, some students feel more at home and connected to 'their' track in the programme than others, and students coming in from abroad need time to adjust. Therefore, the extracurricular and introductory events that are organized are of importance to students.

The Research Project traditionally causes most study delays. The panel considers the way this is shaped, starting with a group phase and accompanied by 'refresher' Methods Seminars, to be beneficial to the programme's feasibility. It learnt from staff and students that the thesis supervisors leading these projects are held to some common deadlines, but have the freedom to choose their own approach in shaping the course. This leads to differences between RPs that students may experience as inequalities. Some supervisors set clear reading lists, assignments, and intermediate deadlines, while others are less structured. The panel appreciates the programme's desire to allow its staff members such autonomy in structuring the course, but recommends communicating to students clearly and in advance what they can expect in terms of supervision and deadlines when signing up for a specific RP group.

#### *Language*

The MPol is taught in English, which the panel considers to be in line with the international orientation of the programme and to match the academic and professional fields (which include international bodies and organizations such as the EU) linked to it. In 2022-2023, 46% of students in the programme have an

international background, allowing the MPol to create a balanced international classroom with a multitude of different perspectives. In addition, the choice of English allows the programme to have diverse academic teaching staff with relevant expertise and backgrounds.

#### *Teaching staff*

The academic staff teaching in the MPol currently consists of 70 staff members, who are predominantly employed by the Department of Political Science. Based on the 320 students enrolled on 1 October 2021, the staff-student ratio is 1:31. Of the staff members involved in teaching, 97% hold a PhD and 89% a university teaching qualification (UTQ), with 7% in the process of acquiring one. About 40 staff members are directly involved in teaching courses and supervising theses. The others have other roles, acting as second readers or committee members.

All tenured teaching staff with a research appointment (assistant, associate, and full professors) are members of one of the research programme groups of the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR). The scores on quality and quantity of the research groups that feed into the programme were assessed as excellent in the latest research reaccreditation report in 2020. Staff members have been successful in acquiring international (EU) and national (NWO) funds over the past few years and are internationally influential academics in their fields. Full, associate and assistant professors spend 60% of their contract time teaching. In case of large research grants or substantial research management involvement, this can be reduced, but in line with the general Social Sciences policy at the UvA, all permanent staff members teach at least 30% of their contract time in order to realise the UvA's ambition to provide research-based teaching. In recruiting new tenured staff and in staff promotion, teaching performance is therefore given weight.

The programme's policy is that teaching in the master's programme should be conducted exclusively by academic staff with a PhD degree. Occasionally, postdocs or PhD students who are almost finished teach in the master's programme. These cases normally involve co-teaching with senior colleagues. In various courses, guest lecturers are invited to provide their insights.

The panel concludes that staff quality and quantity are clearly sufficient for the MPol. The staff members have good or excellent track records in research paired with didactic skills. Students consider their teachers to be expert at what they teach. They appreciate participation of guest lecturers from the professional field. The panel noted during the site visit that there is a clear team spirit among the MPol's staff, which is conducive to cooperation in the tracks and electives.

The panel is positive about the programme's aim to maintain and increase staff diversity. It was pleased to see that the staff was composed of teachers with varied backgrounds. Like elsewhere, the higher positions are still occupied by a less diverse group, demonstrating the need to keep investing in staff diversity.

#### *Considerations*

The panel considers the MPol to be well-designed. The MPol is taught in English, which the panel considers to be in line with its international orientation and the academic and professional fields linked to the programme. The panel appreciates the varied teaching methods and finds that research methods as well as academic and professional skills receive much attention throughout the various courses. Students praise the high quality of the courses and the expertise of the teaching staff. The panel is positive on the careful coordination between the various tracks and the manner in which they partly overlap where this is relevant. It recommends investigating the consequences of the current setup for the trajectories of individual students, particularly those in smaller tracks, whose restricted-choice electives and Research Project options

are limited and can be accessed by students from other tracks with more choices. The Transnational Politics course at the start of the programme offers students a shared initial overview of the field, but communication to students on its aim and common thread deserves attention.

The panel finds that the programme is feasible through adequate supervision and guidance. The Research Project is particularly conducive to avoiding study delays, since it provides students with a clear structure. The panel appreciates the programme's desire to allow staff members teaching a Research Project to have autonomy in structuring the course, but recommends communicating clearly to students what they can expect in terms of supervision and deadlines when signing up for an RP group to avoid that differences in style may be experienced as inequalities.

The panel finds that staff quality and quantity are clearly sufficient for the MPol. The staff members have good or excellent track records in research paired with didactic skills. Students consider their teachers to be expert at what they teach. The panel noted during the site visit that there is a clear team spirit among the MPol's staff, which is conducive to cooperation in the tracks and electives.

### 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 policies and practice*

All programmes in the social sciences at the UvA work with a joint assessment policy, which operates within the central UvA Assessment Policy Framework. Aimed at unity, coherence and transparency, this policy outlines the conditions for the assessment process (notably the relationship between Dublin descriptors, learning outcomes, and assessment design, formats, and procedures); the scheduling and distribution of assessments; the assessment of internships and final projects; the regulatory framework; and the quality assurance of assessment and testing, including the division of responsibilities. A range of practices has been developed to ensure the quality, variation, transparency and effectiveness of assessment within the programme, through the use of assessment keys, rubrics, etc. Assessment criteria are specified either in the course manuals or in separate assignment descriptions distributed to students at the start of the course. The four-eyes principle is applied in test composition.

The assessment of courses in the MPol is closely linked to the training of students towards writing their master's thesis. The programme chiefly uses oral presentations, group discussions and written assignments, mainly in the form of scientific papers. All courses require active student participation. Most courses use a mix of individual assignments, such as academic papers or essays, and group assignments, such as case studies or presentations. In some courses, particularly in Transnational Politics and the electives, assignments may deliberately resemble products common in the real labour market: e.g., a lobbying strategy, a proposal for a policy analysis, organization advice, or a professional reflection journal. Papers, essays, reports, etc. are usually provided with feedback and/or assessed with the use of standardized rubrics or feedback software. The panel appreciates assessment policies and practices in the MPol, which it considers fitting, varied and well-chosen.

### *Assessment of the final level*

The Research Projects lead to the individual master's thesis as the final assessment. Students can write their thesis either in the format of a research article of 8,000 to 10,000 words (which can be accompanied by lengthy appendices) or, more commonly, in the format of a brief monograph of up to 24,000 words. Regardless of the format, the same criteria apply regarding the quality of the thesis and the learning outcomes. The thesis is assessed by the supervisor and a second reader. Second readers are contacted by the supervisor in advance. The list of second readers is checked by the Examination Board and programme director in order to ensure both the quality and diversification of second readers (each research project should have a least three different second readers). Second readers do not read or comment on any written drafts of the thesis; their task is to assess the final product. In the case of clearly insufficient or unstructured work the supervisor may decide not to pass the thesis on to a second reader and simply sign the grade slip as incomplete/not meeting the requirements.

Before the supervisor and second reader determine the final grade, they each fill out the assessment form and propose a grade. The supervisor also provides a separate grade for the thesis-writing process. Based on these two assessments, the supervisor and second reader deliberate on a joint final assessment of the thesis that is signed by both and shared with the student. The thesis supervisor communicates the grade and feedback to the student. If supervisor and second reader cannot agree on a grade, the programme director will appoint a third reader in consultation with the Examination Board. The grade and feedback of the third reader should be taken into account by the original two examiners, which normally results in them being able to agree upon the grade. In case this still results in a stalemate, the Examination Board could decide to appoint two different examiners, but this has never happened.

The panel appreciates the way thesis assessment is done in the programme. It is pleased with the clear working method. The method of having the first assessor choose the second reader works out well due to a check on the list of second readers by the programme director and Examination Board. An advantage of this working method is that it ensures that the second reader is an expert on the thesis subject.

The panel looked at thesis forms and found that they provided sufficient information to underpin the final grade. However, some contained more detailed feedback than others. The panel learnt that some assessors prefer to give extensive oral feedback and then summarize this briefly on the form. Others see the form as a significant feedback document and provide more input. The panel recommends clarifying expectations surrounding the thesis form and the oral feedback moment to staff members, so that these differences are reduced.

### *Examination Board*

The MPol shares an Examination Board (EB) with the bachelor's programme Political Science and the master's programme Conflict Resolution and Governance (CRG). The EB consists of five members, including two chairs (one for the bachelor's and one for the master's programmes), supported by a secretary. In addition, an external member is part of the EB to look critically at the procedural and substantive aspects of testing/assessment and the functioning of the EB in general.

The Board performs regular checks to safeguard quality of assessment in the programme. A rotating committee consisting of one or two EB members, two lecturers, and the department's assessment specialist perform an assessment periodically to monitor alignment between learning objectives, forms of assessment and exit qualifications, as well as the variety of assessment forms and knowledge levels tested. In addition, specific courses may be reviewed in-depth, with a focus on clarity of learning objectives, assessment

procedures and quality of feedback. This practice was performed in a less structured manner during the Covid-19 pandemic, but has been taken up in full again per 2022-2023.

The EB also conducts a periodic thesis peer review to monitor the assessment of the final products. This resulted in a more explicit go/no-go moment regarding the research proposal, and a more explicit agreement on the feedback and guidance that students can expect to receive from their supervisors. The previous accreditation panel recommended improving harmonization of thesis assessment. After conducting a detailed review of course manuals for thesis projects as well as the regrading of randomly selected master's theses, the EB made several recommendations to improve the course manual, harmonize the working method and rules and regulations, and adapt the assessment form to clearly distinguish the process grade from the thesis grade. Finally, the programme director and EB initiated calibration sessions between lecturers on thesis assessment.

The panel is impressed with the work done by the EB to check and improve quality of assessment in the programme. It considers the EB to be proactive and valuable to the programme. It particularly appreciates the changes made in thesis assessment and harmonization. The introduction of thesis calibration sessions among staff members is a good practice.

#### Considerations

The panel appreciates the assessment policies and practice in the MPol. Assessment is varied and fitting. The panel is pleased with the way thesis assessment is done. The method of having the first assessor choose the second reader works out well due to a check on the list of second readers by the programme director and Examination Board. The panel looked at thesis forms and found that they provided sufficient information to underpin the final grade. However, some contained clearly more detailed feedback than others. The panel recommends clarifying expectations surrounding the thesis form to staff members so that these differences are reduced.

The panel learnt that the programme director in coordination with the EB introduced thesis calibration sessions for staff members in master's programmes, and considers this a good practice. It is impressed with the work done by the EB to check and improve quality of assessment in the programme. It considers the EB to be proactive and valuable to the programme and appreciates the changes made in thesis assessment and harmonization.

#### 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

Based on the 15 theses from the MPol that the panel read, it concludes that its students clearly achieve the expected academic master's level in political science. The choice in topics is both varied and original, and the research is set up and executed according to the standards that may be expected. This is the case for both quantitative and qualitative methodology. The panel is pleased with the level achieved in the programme's final theses.

Graduates from the MSc across the tracks find careers spanning the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Alumni are currently employed as consultants, journalists, policy-makers and analysts, press secretaries and PR-managers, researchers, and teachers. Most graduates find employment in the private sector (45%), followed by the public sector (21%) and NGOs (14%), taking up jobs as consultants, information specialists, researchers, or (project or campaign) managers. The number of alumni working in the public sector is highest for EPER and PPG graduates; this includes employees of governmental institutions from municipal administrations to national ministries and intergovernmental organisations like the EU or the UN. Self-employment is highest among Political Theory alumni, featuring freelance journalists, organisers, speakers and private consultants. About 3% of alumni continue in academia as PhD students. The panel learnt from alumni that they appreciate the way their master's programme prepared them for their careers. It concludes that the programme prepared them well for entering the labour market.

### Considerations

Based on the good quality of the final theses and the success of alumni, who end up working in the private and public sectors and for NGOs, the panel concludes that graduates from the MPol have achieved the programme's intended learning outcomes.

### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 4.

### General conclusion

The panel's assessment of the programme is positive.

### Development points

1. Investigate the consequences of the current curriculum design for the trajectories of individual students, particularly those in smaller tracks, whose restricted-choice electives and Research Project options are more limited and can be accessed by students from other tracks with more choices.
2. Communicate the aim and common thread underlying the Transnational Politics course clearly to students.
3. Communicate clearly to students what they can expect in terms of supervision and deadlines when signing up for a Research Project group, also when it comes to differences in supervision style and structure.
4. Clarify expectations surrounding the thesis form to staff members, so that the forms end up containing equal amounts of feedback.

# Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

## *MSc Political Science*

### Article B.2.1 Programme objective

The programme aims to:

- a) provide knowledge, skills and understanding in the field of Political Science and achieve the exit qualifications mentioned in article B.2.2;
- b) provide an academic education, including acquiring academic skills (such as reasoning, writing, speaking and research skills, and correctly citing and recording sources), learning to solve complex problems independently and creatively and learning to reflect critically.

### Article B.2.2 Exit qualifications (Dublin Descriptors)

#### 1. Knowledge and understanding (DD1)

The graduate has acquired knowledge and understanding:

- a) of the key theories and research results on politics in contemporary transnational society from the various subfields of political science;
- b) of the relevant literature, including theories and research results, of the chosen track.

#### 2. Applying knowledge and understanding (DD2)

The acquired knowledge and/or understanding enable the graduate to apply:

- a) analyse the questions raised by this literature in a critical and action-oriented manner, rapidly familiarise him/herself with new subjects and conduct synthetic analyses (bridging the gaps between multiple disciplines and analytical concepts);
- b) work in a team to develop political and policy-oriented solutions to these questions in the context of the relevant political and societal developments.

#### 3. Formulating judgements (DD3)

Concerning the ability of formulating judgements, the graduate should be able to:

- a) analyse and interpret current societal and political developments on the basis of theoretical knowledge, and report on the resulting findings in a clearly understandable and coherent manner in both written and oral form;
- b) take stock of the various literatures and empirical materials relevant to the Master's programme and relevant track - given constraints in time, information and other resources - and subject these to critical analysis.

#### 4. Communicative skills (DD4)

The graduate should be able to use the following communicative skills:

- a) to use theoretical knowledge and understanding to analyse and interpret current societal and political phenomena and to make a clear report of the findings, both verbally and in writing;
- b) to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;
- c) to demonstrate English language skills at an academic level in the case of a thesis written in English or to demonstrate Dutch language skills at an academic level in the case of a thesis written in Dutch.

#### 5. Learning skills (DD5)

The graduate has acquired the following learning skills:

- a) the capacity to apply at least one empirical research method within a specific area of the relevant Master's programme, and the capacity to interpret the results of such research in a scientifically sound manner;
- b) the ability to conduct independent scientific research;
- c) the ability to analyse complex political problems in a largely self-directed and autonomous manner.

#### 6.1 European Politics and External Relations

Without prejudice to the provisions of paragraph B 2.2.1 to B 2.2.5 the graduate with a track in European Politics and External Relations has acquired:

- a) knowledge of and insight into the (history of) development of European political and economic integration theory, including as regards the rise and development of the external relations of the European Union (EU);
- b) knowledge of and insight into the relationship between political, socio-economic and legal processes concerning European integration, including as regards the consequences for the external relations of the EU;
- c) knowledge of and insight into the evolution of modes of governance within the EU, and changing relations between European and national institutions, including as regards the consequences for external relations of the EU;
- d) knowledge of and insight into the dynamic relationship between state and non-state actors within the EU - at sub-national, national and transnational level - including as regards the external relations of the EU;
- e) the ability to formulate original theoretical ideas and the skill to design and perform empirical research independently (theory development and assessment) in the field of the track;
- f) the ability to present conceptual and empirical insights into European politics and external relations in academic English.

#### 6.2 International Relations

Without prejudice to the provisions in paragraph B 2.2.1 to B 2.2 .5 the graduate with a track in International Relations has acquired:

- a) knowledge of and insight into the history of the sub-discipline, the development of international relations theory, including realist and neo-realist, liberal and neo-liberal, Marxist and neo-Marxist, constructivist and critical approaches and has the ability to analyse and critique the contributions and limitations of these different perspectives;
- b) knowledge of and insight into the substantive debates within international relations, including examining conflict and security, international political economy and the role of non-state actors in international politics, in particular;
- c) knowledge of and insight into the consequences of global change processes, globalisation and transnationalisation on the relationship between state and non-state actors;
- d) the capacity to formulate original theoretical ideas, and the ability to design and carry out independent empirical studies to make both conceptual and empirical contributions to the field of International Relations;
- e) the ability to present conceptual and empirical insights into International Relations in academic English.

#### 6.3 Political Economy

Without prejudice to the provisions in paragraph B 2.2.1 to B 2.2 .5 the graduate with a track in Political Economy has acquired:

- a) knowledge of and insight into political economy as a way of thinking and the substantive debates concerning the mutual interaction of economic dynamics and patterns of governance, including those pertaining to the relationship between various types of political behaviour (e.g. voting, lobbying, protesting, media campaign, party politics) and economic change (e.g. globalization, (financial) market integration, labour market integration through migration, economic development);

- b) knowledge of and insight into the political and economic concepts relevant to the governance of the economy (e.g. macroeconomic imbalances and adjustment ; trade and investment flows, technological change and competitiveness , inequality, welfare state reform);
- c) knowledge of and insight into how global and local economic forces generate political conflicts and how in turn political contestation across different forms of governance (e.g. democracy, authoritarianism) shapes the economic 'rules of the game' across sectors, across levels of development, and across regions in the global economy;
- d) the capacity to independently formulate relevant research questions related to empirical and theoretical enquiry, and to carry out independent empirical analysis resulting in conceptual and empirical contributions to the development and testing of theories in the field of the track;
- e) the ability to present conceptual and empirical insights into Political Economy in academic English.

#### 6.4 Political Theory

Without prejudice to the provisions in paragraph B 2.2.1 to B 2.2 .5 the graduate with a track in Political Theory has acquired:

- a) knowledge and understanding of the development of political theory and its main contemporary approaches;
- b) knowledge and understanding of the development of normative and realist theory in at least one of the following sub-areas: democracy, justice, political economy, gender, migration, the politics of expertise and experts;
- c) capacity to apply the ideas about - and of - classical and contemporary political thinkers to current political issues and ideological movements;
- d) the ability to formulate original theoretical ideas and the skill to design and perform empirical research independently (theory development and assessment) in the field of the track;
- e) the ability to present conceptual and empirical insights into Political Theory in academic English.

#### 6.5 Public Policy and Governance

Without prejudice to the provisions in paragraph B 2.2.1 to B 2.2 .5 the graduate with a track in Public Policy and Governance has acquired:

- a) knowledge and understanding of diverse theories (especially rational choice, neo-institutionalist and interpretivist theories) and research results regarding the changing role of the national state, under influence of globalisation and Europeanisation as well as local changes in society and in policy;
- b) knowledge and understanding of diverse theories and research results regarding old and new administrative arrangements and problems typical of 21st-century society, such as those pertaining to migration and social integration, technological innovation and (food) safety, and climate change;
- c) knowledge and understanding of diverse theories and research results regarding the management of policy processes and organisations, and methods for the scientific analysis of politics, policy and management;
- d) knowledge and understanding of how to learn methods for designing policy, organisations and arrangements in response to such challenges;
- e) the ability to formulate original theoretical ideas and the skill to design and perform empirical research independently (theory development and assessment) in the field of the track;
- f) the ability to present conceptual and empirical insights into Public Policy and Governance in academic English.

#### 6.6 Comparative Politics

Without prejudice to the provisions in paragraph B 2.2.1 to B 2.2 .5 the graduate with a track in Comparative Politics has acquired:

- a) knowledge of and insight into the history of the field of Comparative Politics, the development of different theoretical perspectives used in this field, and the ability to analyse and critically evaluate the contributions and limitations of these perspectives;
- b) knowledge of and insight into the substantive contemporary debates within the field of Comparative Politics; such as those on democratization, state-building, electoral processes, and protest movements;
- c) knowledge of and insight into the consequences of global change processes, globalisation and transnationalisation for national and subnational political developments;
- d) the capacity to formulate original theoretically informed ideas, and the ability to design and carry out independent empirical studies to make both conceptual and empirical contributions to the field of Comparative Politics;
- e) the ability to present conceptual and empirical insights into Comparative Politics in academic English.

## Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

Semester 1			
<i>Political Science Perspectives</i>	Block 1	Transnational Politics (6 EC)	Track Specialisation Course (6 EC)
<i>Further specialisation</i>	Block 2	Elective (9 EC)	Elective (9 EC)
	Block 3		
Semester 2			
<i>Research methods and design</i>	Block 4	Research Project Part I (includes Method Seminars)	
<i>Data collection/fieldwork, analysis &amp; presentation</i>	Block 5	Interim Review of required proposal	
	Block 6	Research Project Part II (both parts together 30 EC)	
Required course all	Elective relevant to track	Course/Research Project relevant to track (gradient: individual & group sessions)	

### List of elective courses (9 EC) in 2021-2022:

Course title
The politics of labour and inequality in the Middle East
Draining the swamp: fighting corruption in the EU
Democracy and Digitalization: How Social Media Transform the Public Sphere
Postcolonial borders, territorial rights, and historical injustice
Political violence
The Changing Politics of Gender and Sexuality in Times of De-Democratisation
Robots, Artificial Intelligence, and the Future Political Economy of Work
The political economy of development and the role of the IMF and the World Bank
Authoritarianism in a Global Age
Financialization: capital and power from the global to the everyday
The Dangerous 'Other': Political Violence, Exclusion and Emotions
Collective Action and interest group politics
Dealing with policy conflicts
Energy and geopolitical economy in Eurasia
Global Migration: Humanitarian Issues and Policy Responses
Advocacy and lobbying in Europe and beyond
Governing transitions for global sustainable development
The EU, State-building and Conflict Resolution
Humanitarianism in Crisis and Conflict
Civil Wars and State-building
Radical Political Theory and 21st Century Capitalism: Anarchism, Socialism, New Democracy
Transnational governance and corporate social responsibility

## Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

4 April 2023

10.30	10.45	Welcome to Panel
10.45	12.15	Internal session panel/possible walk-in session for students and staff
12.15	12.45	Session with the staff/management responsible: Bachelor (BPol)
12.45	13.15	Session with the staff/management responsible: Masters (MPol & CRG)
13.15	14.00	Lunch
14.00	14.45	Student session BPol
14.45	15.30	Lecturer session BPol
15.30	16.00	Break
16.00	16.45	Student & alumni session MPol
16.45	17.30	Lecturer session MPol

5 April 2023

09.00	09.45	Student & alumni session CRG
09.45	10.30	Lecturer session CRG
10.30	11.15	Internal session panel
11.15	12.00	Examinations Board session
12.00	12.30	Internal session panel (preparation final session)
12.30	13.15	Lunch
13.15	14.00	Final session with formal management all programmes
14.00	16.00	Internal session panel (preparation preliminary oral feedback)
16.00	17.00	Development dialogue
17.00	17.30	Preliminary oral feedback

## Appendix 4. Materials

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

- List of Reaction to Previous Accreditation
- Domain-specific Framework of Reference
- Dublin Descriptors, Domain-specific Framework of Reference and Exit Qualifications
- Relations Exit Qualifications to Curriculum (Learning Outcomes Courses)
- Relations Assessments Formats & Learning Outcome (Assessment Plan)
- Curriculum Overview
- List of Electives, methods seminars and research projects
- Course Information
- Teaching and Examination Regulations 2022-2023 (TER)
- Teaching Staff Overview 2022/23
- Student data
- Lecturer-Student Ratio & Staff Composition
- Comparison with other programmes
- Thesis Assessment Form Master Political Science
- Alumni
- Essential adjustments due to Covid-19
- Annual reports and minutes of the last two years of the Examinations Board
- Assessment Policy
- Annual report and minutes of the last two years of the Programme Committee
- Detailed course information/assessment information for selected courses, per programme
- General access to all current courses in the digital learning environment
- Thesis Manuals
- Internship manual bachelor
- Faculty Handbook
- Quality Assurance memo Social Sciences (in Dutch)
- Policy on Free Speech
- Relevant URLs to UvA document (vision on Teaching) and programme sites