

## Experts' Report on the Accreditation of Study Programmes

at

**St. Petersburg State University**

- School of International Relations -

File Nr. 1627-xx-1



**1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the ZEV A Commission, February 27, 2018**

**4.01**

Study Programme	Degree	Credit Points	Programme Duration	Type of Programme	maximum annual intake
International Relations	Bachelor	240 ECTS	4 years	Full-time	205
American Studies	Master	120 ECTS	2 years	Full-time	16
Diplomacy of the Russian Federation and Foreign States	Master	120 ECTS	2 years	Full-time	16
European Studies	Master	120 ECTS	2 years	Full-time	16
Baltic and Nordic Studies	Master	120 ECTS	2 years	Full-time, Joint Programme	15
Pacific Studies	Master	120 ECTS	2 years	Full-time	12
History of International Relations: 20th and 21st Centuries	Master	120 ECTS	2 years	Full-time	9
International Cooperation in Environmental Policy and Sustainable Development	Master	120 ECTS	2 years	Full-time	10
International Humanitarian Cooperation	Master	120 ECTS	2 years	Full-time	10
International Relations (in English)	Master	120 ECTS	2 years	Full-time	11
International Relations in the Post-Soviet Space	Master	120 ECTS	2 years	Full-time	10
World Politics	Master	120 ECTS	2 years	Full-time	21
Public Relations as Part of International Relations	Master	120 ECTS	2 years	Full-time	18
Strategic and Arms Control Studies	Master	120 ECTS	2 years	Full-time	12
Theory of International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis	Master	120 ECTS	2 years	Full-time	10

**Hanover, December 17, 2017**

**Date of Site Visit: 26-28 September 2017**

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## **I. Final Vote of the Expert Panel and Decision of the ZEvA Commission**

### **1. Decision of the ZEvA Commission**

*The ZEvA Commission follows the experts' report and recommendations and takes note of the university's response.*

*The Commission decides to accredit the following Bachelor's and Master's programmes as offered by the School of International Relations at St. Petersburg State University:*

- *International Relations (Bachelor)*
- *American Studies (Master)*
- *Baltic and Nordic Studies (Master)*
- *Diplomacy of the Russian Federation and Foreign States (Master)*
- *European Studies (Master)*
- *History of International Relations: 20th and 21st Centuries (Master)*
- *International Cooperation in Environmental Policy and Sustainable Development (Master)*
- *International Humanitarian Cooperation (Master)*
- *International Relations (Master, in English)*
- *International Relations in the Post-Soviet Space (Master)*
- *Pacific Studies (Master)*
- *Public Relations as Part of International Relations (Master)*
- *Strategic and Arms Control Studies (Master)*
- *Theory of International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis (Master)*
- *World Politics (Master)*

*The accreditation of the study programmes is valid for a period of five years.*

## **2. Summary of the Experts' Findings**

The experts have gained the overall impression that the School of International Relations at St. Petersburg State University is a dynamic and vibrant place delivering high quality teaching and research. Graduates are provided with both a solid academic education and the skills they need to succeed in a complex, internationalized job market. The experts were impressed by the dynamic and progressive team of teachers and researchers at the School, their strong dedication to their work and their openness for new, innovative teaching methods. The students also benefit from a modern learning environment and the School's extensive network of external partners, which includes a large number of potential employers in business companies, administration and political institutions.

The experts would like to give the following recommendations for further improvement:

### **2.1 General Recommendations**

- The School of International Relations should be given more influence on the process of student selection and admission.
- The faculty members should be relieved of administrative burdens wherever possible to give them more time for their core tasks in teaching and research.
- The experts recommend taking increased efforts to promote greater internationalization of the School of IR. For instance, the following measures could be taken:
  - The School should be encouraged to take more initiative in establishing cooperation agreements with suitable partners abroad.
  - An International Advisory Board should be established providing advice on curricular and research matters.
  - The website should be more strongly geared to the needs of international students and applicants.
  - The procedures for the recognition of ECTS credits earned abroad should be optimized.
  - The members of the faculty should have more options to attend sessions or summer schools abroad for further professional qualification and training.
  - Additional double degree options should be provided.
- Faculty members and teaching staff should automatically be granted full access to course evaluation results. Students should also be informed about the basic outcomes of the surveys and ideally get a chance to discuss them with the teachers in class.
- The university should take increased efforts to raise the degree of acceptance for evaluation and quality assurance in teaching and learning across the institution by increasing transparency, closing feedback loops and reducing the complexity of quality assurance processes wherever possible. In particular, teachers should always be in-

formed about the results of course evaluation surveys.

- A career center should be established at the School of IR to provide special guidance to the IR students concerning their employment prospects and options for internships.

## **2.2 Programme-Related Recommendations**

- For each Master's programme, the pool of elective modules should be reduced in size or should be more clearly structured.
- The experts recommend providing detailed information on the special features, contents and intended learning outcomes of all degree programmes on the School's website, both in Russian and in English.
- The faculty members should be encouraged to further develop their professional qualifications in applying a wider scope of current qualitative and quantitative research methods of their discipline, and to integrate these methods into their own teaching.
- Where feasible, language training should be integrated into the curricula at Master's level. Ideally, students should have a choice of languages other than English, too. This goes especially for the students of Regional Studies programmes.

## **2.3 Final Vote of the Expert Panel**

The expert panel recommends the accreditation of the following Bachelor's and Master's programmes as offered by the *School of International Relations at St. Petersburg State University*:

- International Relations (Bachelor)
- American Studies (Master)
- Baltic and Nordic Studies (Master)
- Diplomacy of the Russian Federation and Foreign States (Master)
- European Studies (Master)
- History of International Relations: 20th and 21st Centuries (Master)
- International Cooperation in Environmental Policy and Sustainable Development (Master)
- International Humanitarian Cooperation (Master)
- International Relations (Master, in English)
- International Relations in the Post-Soviet Space (Master)
- Pacific Studies (Master)

*1 Final Vote of the Expert Panel and Decision of the ZEvA Commission*

*2 Summary of the Experts' Findings*

- Public Relations as Part of International Relations (Master)
- Strategic and Arms Control Studies (Master)
- Theory of International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis (Master)
- World Politics (Master)

The accreditation of the study programmes is recommended for a period of **five** years.

## II. Evaluation Report of the Expert Panel

### Introduction: Purpose, Design and Context of the Accreditation Procedure

It is the purpose of this accreditation procedure to assess the quality of the study programmes offered by the **School of International Relations at St. Petersburg State University** against international, particularly European standards. At present, the School offers a Bachelor programme and a relatively large variety of Master's programmes which focus on different aspects of International Relations and Area Studies.

The assessment is based on ZEvA's "Assessment Framework for the Evaluation of Study Programmes" as laid out in the agency's "Manual for Evaluation and Certification of Study Programmes". This framework is fundamentally based on the "European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG)" (ENQA 2009), the "Framework for Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area" (2005) and the "ECTS User's Guide" (European Communities, 2009).

During the entire review process, ZEvA was supported by the colleagues of the Russian accreditation agency AKKORK, who provided assistance in all organizational and administrative matters and functioned as the main communication link between all parties involved.

For the purpose of assessing the study programmes, the School of International Relations was asked to submit a self-report in English. Apart from detailed descriptions of the university as a whole and each study programme of the cluster, the self-report included a number of additional documents, as e.g. selected course syllabi, CVs of teaching faculty, central statistical data on students, exam regulations and sample questionnaires for course evaluation. All documents were translated into English before submission.

ZEvA and AKKORK jointly assembled an international panel of experts for the review. In September 2017, the experts and the responsible staff of both agencies travelled to St. Petersburg for a three-day site visit. The site visit involved talks with members of the university leadership board, the faculty members of the School of International Relations, teachers, students, alumni and employers. Also, the experts were given a tour of the university campus.

This report is based on the experts' assessment of the self-report, some additional documents submitted during or shortly after the site visit, and the results of the on-site talks. It will serve as a basis for ZEvA's accreditation commission to decide on the accreditation of the university's study programmes. In the case of a positive decision by the commission, ZEvA will award its quality seal for a limited time period, after which the university can apply for re-accreditation.

The experts would like to thank the Vice-Rector of St. Petersburg State University, the faculty of the School of International Relations as well as all members of staff involved for the friendly reception and the open and constructive atmosphere during the on-site talks in St. Petersburg.

## **1. General Aspects**

### **1.1 Mission and Profile of the University and the School**

#### *St. Petersburg State University: Basic Facts and Figures*

St. Petersburg State University holds a special position in the Russian higher education system in more than one sense. It is the oldest and – with a total of about 30,000 students – also one of the biggest universities in the country. As one of only two higher education institutions, it was granted the status of an “Autonomous University”, which allows it to develop and apply its own educational standards and to award its own diplomas instead of the Russian State Diploma.

St. Petersburg State University shows the typical profile of a classical European university, covering a wide range of academic disciplines in teaching and research. These include Medicine and the Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities, Economics, Art and Earth Sciences. In its history, the university has produced nine Nobel laureates and is still one of the most important and prestigious research institutions of Russia. As one of the country’s 45 leading universities, it is also meant to be a flagship of internationalization and aims at winning a place among the top 100 universities of the world in international rankings by the year 2020.

#### *Profile of the School of International Relations*

The School of International Relations (IR), established in 1994, is one of the youngest academic units of St. Petersburg State University. At the time of its foundation, the School was meant to fulfil the strong demand of the Russian employment market for qualified experts, particularly in the realm of Area Studies. Many of the first alumni filled positions in the local administration and government, but also in national administrations and private companies.

As opposed to other Russian universities with similar academic programmes, the School of IR does not primarily aim at training future diplomats, but provides professional training that is useful for a wider area of career paths.

At present, about 1,400 students are enrolled at the School of IR. The School offers one Bachelor’s programme on International Relations which enrolls about 200 students per year. In addition, there are 15 Master’s programmes that focus on different areas and regions of the world or on special theoretical aspects of the discipline, as well as two Ph.D. programmes (cf. more detailed information in Chapter 2). In each Master’s programme, an average of between 10 and 20 students is enrolled each year. About two thirds of the Master’s students are graduates of the School of IR.

In more recent years, the School has started to put a strong strategic emphasis on the aspect of employability: potential employers are given an opportunity to influence the development of the degree programmes,, and the curricula are designed with a careful view to the needs and requirements of the labour market. For instance, there is now an advisory council including representatives of the labour market for each Master’s programme.

In organizational terms, the School consists of six departments. All programs are “interdepartmental” in the sense that teaching faculty from across the entire School and beyond are involved in them. In detail, the School hosts the following departments:

- American Studies
- European Studies
- International Cultural and Humanitarian Cooperation
- International Relations in the Post-Soviet Space
- Theory and History of IR
- World Politics

Each study programme is headed by a member of faculty who is primarily responsible for its development, management and quality.

The School of IR itself is led by the Dean who is elected from among the faculty by the Academic Council of the School. For many years, the School has been one of two Russian members of the Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs (APSIA), which unites the world's top graduate schools of international affairs and counts only 36 members around the world.

During the on-site talks, the experts gained a clear picture of the School's profile and central goals in teaching and research. First of all, the School aims at increasing the graduates' employability by tailoring the programmes as closely as possible to the needs of potential employers. The School also follows a rather broad and generalist approach to International Relations: regardless of their specialization, students usually take courses from a large spectrum of IR departments.

From the experts' point of view, it is advisable to reduce the relatively large number of Master's programmes in Area Studies in favor of one Area Studies programme with several elective tracks. At present, these programmes seem to be strongly dependent on individual key scholars, which puts their long-term sustainability at risk (cf. Chapter 1.3).

To the experts, the School's membership in the APSIA is a clear proof of its compatibility with the international standards of the discipline and the general quality of its work.

However, the experts have found that the School's autonomy in certain academic matters seems to be limited: for instance, the members of faculty are not directly involved in the process of student selection and admission, even though they take a certain impact on the selection criteria.

The experts strongly recommend for the university to locate the main responsibility for student selection in the School and not at central level. At least for the Master's programmes, the members of faculty should have more influence and decision-making power regarding this central academic criterion. This could also help to sharpen the profile of the entire School

in the long run, as the faculty could select students whose interests and academic profiles match the focus areas of the School in teaching and research. Currently, the relatively diverse backgrounds of Master's students seem to impede the teaching process at least in some programmes and courses.

The same applies to the design of the curricula. The School should be given as much freedom as possible regarding the teaching contents and the modular structure of its programmes. It should be supported in its regular review by an International Advisory Board providing advice on curricular and research matters.

At present, there seem to be some impediments caused by over-bureaucratic internal processes and structures. For example, some of the teachers interviewed on site pointed out that the course syllabi often did not fully match the reality, as the annual process of updating the official documents was too lengthy and complicated. In order to save time, not all modifications of contents and methods are integrated into the syllabi on a regular basis (cf. Section 1.5), which causes a widening gap between paper and reality at the School.

For this and other reasons, the experts recommend relieving the teaching faculty of administrative burdens wherever possible.

As regards student participation, the experts got a very positive impression during the on-site talks: both at university level and at the level of the School, students have a lot of opportunity to actively take part in institutional governance and quality assurance, as e.g. by joining the student council. In case of conflicts between teachers and students, there is an official appeals procedure in accordance with Russian educational law.

## **1.2 Internationalization and Student Mobility**

Internationalization is an integral part of the university's overall strategy. It goes without saying that this element is of particular importance for the School of International Relations and the quality of its teaching and research.

In the realm of research, the School primarily aims at further increasing its output of international publications and the number of co-operative projects with partners abroad.

As for mobility, the on-site talks have shown that mobility rates both among students and faculty are still relatively low by international standards. Less than 10% of the School's students go abroad for a longer period of time, and the number of incomings from abroad is also much lower than may be expected, given the profile and content of the study programmes.

During the on-site talks, several faculty members mentioned that they would highly appreciate having more opportunities to go abroad, as e.g. for research projects, conferences, summer schools or other forms of further qualification and training.

The experts fully support the efforts taken to further enhance the international profile of the university as a whole and of the School of IR in particular. In accordance with the members

of faculty, they regard internationalization as critical to the quality of teaching and research at the School and a main key to its future success. In order to facilitate the internationalization process, the experts recommend considering the following measures:

The School should be encouraged to take more initiative in establishing co-operation agreements with suitable partners abroad. At present, such agreements can only be established at central level, i.e. by the university as a whole. Giving more responsibility to the School may lead to an increase in the number of partners, and, as a result, in higher student mobility rates. The International Advisory Board suggested above could play an important role in identifying suitable partners.

In addition, the website should be more strongly geared to the needs of international students and applicants: for instance, there should be more information in English regarding the individual study programmes (especially those programmes taught in English, as e.g. the Master's programme in Strategic and Arms Control Research) and also on Russian language classes offered for international students. The overall transparency of the programmes should be increased, and increased marketing efforts should be taken to attract more students from abroad.

In this context, it would also be important to optimize procedures for the recognition of credits earned at universities abroad based on the ECTS. According to the students interviewed on-site, recognition of credits is possible, but not always without additional assessment upon return.

Enhancing the possibilities for teaching staff to attend programmes or summer schools abroad will most likely have a positive effect on teaching quality and will further contribute to sharpening the School's international profile. The School administration should consider ways of collecting information about such programmes and provide it to the members of faculty in an organized, systematic manner.

In accordance with the students they talked to in St. Petersburg, the experts would be strongly in favor of providing additional double degree options, modeled on the positive example of the Master's programme in Nordic and Baltic Studies. The School's membership in APSIA may be a good basis to start from during the search for suitable partners.

### **1.3 Teaching Faculty**

The School of International Relations has provided the experts with detailed and transparent written information on its teaching faculty. During the on-site talks, the panel had the opportunity to talk to the Heads of all Study Programmes and conducted another interview with further members of the teaching faculty.

In the course of the site visit, the experts have gained a very positive impression of the teaching faculty at the School of IR. The general picture is that of a relatively young, active

and dynamic team with a high motivation and dedication both to teaching and research. The experts were especially impressed by the faculty's openness for innovative teaching methods (cf. Chapter 2.4), and their strong interest in further developing their teaching skills.

The School disposes of a core of excellent scholars, as can be expected from a university of this profile and reputation, and has a solid output of international publications. All in all, the faculty members seem to find a good balance between their teaching and research duties. Some doubt remains whether there is a sufficient number of qualified supporting staff at hand to prevent the study programmes from becoming too dependent on individual professors, especially in the Area Studies (cf. Chapter 1.1). In the future, special attention should be paid to this aspect in quality assurance and in the strategic development of the School. Again, the advice of the International Advisory Board might be quite helpful in steering these processes.

#### **1.4 Learning Environment and Student Support System**

During the site visit, the experts were taken on a tour around the premises of the School of International Relations, including the International Relations section of the library. The self-report of the School of IR also contained detailed information on the support and advisory services that the university provides for its students.

The experts have gained the impression that the students of the School of International Relations are provided with a very good learning environment that fulfils all their academic and non-academic needs. This includes a historical, but well-modernized building infrastructure and state-of-the-art technical equipment. The experts were especially impressed by the well-stocked library which holds numerous foreign publications, including the leading international journals of the field.

The university provides special support for non-Russian students and for students who wish to go abroad through the International Admissions Office. A psychological support service is available at the university, and all students can receive medical care and assistance. The special needs of disabled students are met as prescribed by Russian Federal Law, as e.g. through individualized schedules, special teaching aids and a barrier-free environment.

The departments of the School assist the students in finding suitable internship placements, for example by publishing vacancies on their websites. Some lecturers also organize excursions to companies on their own initiative. Job and career fairs are held at the university on a regular basis, and there is also a career center that helps students to establish contacts with potential employers. The experts recommend launching a similar project at School level to better meet the special requirements of the IR students. For example, special guidance could be provided regarding employment prospects and internships, or special IR-related career fairs could be organized on site.

The students interviewed on site confirmed that in general their lecturers were easily accessible to them and provided as much flexibility as possible, especially for those Master's stu-

dents who hold part-time jobs.

## **1.5 Quality Assurance**

St. Petersburg State University has launched a general policy on the quality assurance of its educational programmes, which is included in the self-report submitted to the expert panel. The policy touches upon different aspects relevant to the quality of teaching and learning, as e.g. regular updates of the educational standards, the selection of qualified students and teaching staff, or the participation of students and staff in the continuous improvement of study programmes and the educational process.

In the policy, little is said about the instruments and procedures applied, but it was confirmed during the on-site talks that written course evaluation is actually taking place via the online platform Blackboard. The self-report also includes two sample questionnaires, one of which is directed at senior students or graduates and serves to evaluate the quality of a study programme in its entirety. This includes an evaluation of the programme contents, the general learning environment and student involvement in quality assurance. The second questionnaire serves to determine the teachers' satisfaction with the general conditions of teaching at the university, as well as some details regarding their professional profile, their participation in further training etc.

In the course of the on-site talks, the experts have come to the conclusion that the university has implemented standard instruments of quality assurance, but does not yet use them to their full potential.

The course evaluation system still suffers from a general lack of transparency and feedback: Evaluation results are not necessarily made known to the students and the instructors. As a general rule, the Dean of the faculty receives the data and passes them on to the School's Learning and Methodical Commission as well as the Heads of Department who take actions in response if necessary. The teachers themselves are only informed in case of problematic or particularly good evaluations. The students reported that "official" evaluation had very little effect from their point of view, but that if there were serious problems, there were other ways to make their voice heard.

The experts strongly recommend changing this policy in order to raise the general degree of acceptance for course evaluation among staff and students. Teachers should always be granted full access to course evaluation results. Students should be informed about the basic outcomes of the surveys, too, and ideally get a chance to discuss them with the teachers in class.

During the site visit, the experts got the general impression that many faculty members and students seem to perceive quality assurance as a purely administrative, cumbersome and bureaucratic exercise which is only loosely connected to the quality of academic teaching and makes only a minimal contribution to improve it.

On the other hand, it became obvious that an effective quality assurance and further devel-

opment of study programmes is happening outside the “official”, centralized procedures, i.e. at the level of the School. For instance, all members of faculty meet once a year to discuss the programmes and other issues concerning the School in an informal atmosphere. The School also keeps close track of its alumni, as e.g. through an alumni club. According to what was communicated during the on-site talks, the overwhelming majority of the School’s graduates succeed in finding adequate working positions in their field of study.

The central management of the university should therefore take increased efforts to fill the quality assurance system with more life. From the experts’ point of view, this can only be achieved by increasing transparency at all levels, closing feedback loops and reducing the complexity of quality assurance processes wherever possible, as, for example, the regular updating of course syllabi (cf. Chapter 1.1).

It should also be communicated to all parties involved which measures for improvement are taken in response to evaluation results and statistical data, and in what ways each degree programme is continuously updated and further improved. Short annual quality reports at School level could be one way of realizing this.

## **1.6 Transparency and Public Information**

The students of St. Petersburg State University have access to all important regulations and documents concerning their study programmes, including exam regulations.

For each course, a very detailed syllabus is provided that describes the intended learning outcomes and teaching contents, the methods of teaching and assessment, as well as the estimated student workload involved. All in all, very few questions remain open to the reader. However, as mentioned above, the university should allow more flexibility in updating the syllabi (cf. Chapters 1.1, 1.5).

Also, the School should provide more information on itself and its programmes in English to attract more foreign students (cf. Chapter 1.2).

## **2. Assessment of the Study Programmes**

### **2.1 Basic Structure and Design of the Study Programmes**

The School of International Relations has fully implemented the two-tier Bologna structure and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). As stipulated by Russian Federal Law, the School applies a 4+2 model, with a four-year Bachelor's programme (240 ECTS credits) and 2-year Master's programmes (120 ECTS credits). Each credit equals an average workload of 36 academic hours (or 27 astronomical hours), which is in line with the recommendations of the ECTS Users' Guide.

All programmes are designed based on the educational standards of the Russian Federation. In addition, the university has the right to apply its own standards.

#### *Bachelor Level*

As is the norm in Russian higher education, a large part of the Bachelor's programme is dedicated to general educational classes, as e.g. Philosophy, Economics or Sports. This goes especially for the first two semesters. Furthermore, the curriculum includes introductory classes on the discipline of International Relations, and on the history and development of the most important political areas and regions of the world.

In the course of the programme, students continuously deepen their knowledge in their core discipline and related fields. To develop their skills in scientific research and writing, they have to write term papers on a regular basis. From the beginning of the second year they may also choose from a large variety of elective classes on different aspects and topics of International Relations and Political Sciences. Through additional "professional modules" students are introduced to some typical employment sectors for IR graduates (diplomacy, journalism, NGOs etc.).

Throughout the programme, students receive intense foreign language training in English and a second foreign language of their choice. As a prerequisite for graduation, students must generate and defend a research paper at the end of the fourth year.

#### *Master Level*

Currently, the School of IR offers 14 Master's programmes, most of which share the same basic structure. For each programme, there is a large pool of elective modules from the fields of IR, Political Sciences or related disciplines. The programme portfolio can be roughly divided into the following categories:

- a) Area Studies:** American Studies, European Studies, Nordic and Baltic Studies, Pacific Studies
- b) General IR Programs:** International Relations, International Relations (in English) History of International Relations: 20th and 21st Centuries, Theory of International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis, World Politics, International Humanitarian Cooperation
- c) Programs on Special Aspects of IR:** PR in International Relations, International

Cooperation in the Sphere of Environment and Development, Strategic and Arms Control Research, Diplomacy of the Russian Federation and Foreign States, International Relations in the Post-Soviet Space

All programmes are taught in Russian, except for the Master's in Nordic and Baltic Studies, which is a joint programme in co-operation with the University of Tampere/Finland, Strategic and Arms Control Research (since 2017) and the English version of the Master's in International Relations.

Compared to the undergraduate level, scientific research gains a lot of significance in the Master's programmes. Each semester the students participate in Research Seminars (which, however, may be designed and organized in different ways, depending on the profile of the programme). For example, the seminars may serve to prepare students for their final Master's theses, teach them how to approach a scientific problem by applying different methods or theories, or how to write research papers and discuss their findings with colleagues. Concurrently, they deepen their knowledge in their chosen core disciplines.

In order to develop their professional skills, the Master's students also do an internship outside the university in the fourth semester.

The experts find that the School of IR has created a range of interesting and innovative study programmes, covering a very wide spectrum of specialties. There is a good mixture of more research-oriented programmes (e.g. History of International Relations; Theory of International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis), programmes with a more practical-professional approach (e.g. Public Relations as part of International Relations; International Cooperation in the Field of Environmental Development and Protection) and Area Studies programmes. The three foreign-language programmes (International Relations; Strategic and Arms Control Research; Nordic and Baltic Studies) also fit in very well with the general profile of the School. The experts were particularly impressed by the internationally well connected and professional faculty of the Nordic and Baltic Studies programme.

From the experts' point of view, the composition of the elective part of the Master's programmes should be reconsidered. In all programmes, the electives cover such a wide thematic scope that the selection seems somewhat arbitrary. Narrowing down the choices would give the programmes a clearer structure and profile. Alternatively, recommendations could be made to the students regarding the most suitable electives for each programme.

## **2.2 Objectives and Intended Learning Outcomes**

The School of International Relations has submitted a detailed description of each study programme as part of the self-report, including an outline of the intended learning outcomes (ILOs).

The ILOs are fundamentally based on the Federal State Educational Standards for Bachelor

and Master programmes, which in turn are very closely in line with the European Framework of Qualifications and the Dublin Descriptors. In addition, the university can define learning outcomes for the programmes based on its own standards.

The experts assert that the School of IR has defined the intended learning outcomes of its programmes in great detail. The competence descriptors applied – although sometimes of a rather general and unspecific nature – are considered adequate for the Bachelor and Master level.

The number of competencies to be acquired in each programme (and each module) seems a bit too extensive at times to be plausible. Provided the School is entitled to do so, it should aim at reducing the wide range of IOLs per programme and teaching unit in favor of more concise descriptions.

Beyond the “official” competence descriptors, the School has described the qualification goals of all programmes in a more palpable way in the self-report. The special history, background and profile of each programme is clearly drawn out, and the typical employment options for graduates are laid out in detail, which is congruent with the School’s (and the university’s) general strategic aim of promoting employability and market-orientation.

The experts recommend providing detailed information on the special features, contents and intended learning outcomes of all study programmes on the School’s website, both in Russian and in English. So far, this has only been realized for some of the programmes, at least as far as the English website is concerned. More tangible profile descriptions could also help to attract stronger interest into the School’s programmes from abroad. Another option could be to create an official students’ handbook containing all central information on the study programmes.

## **2.3 Contents and Curricula**

Due to the size of the cluster and the strong overlap between most of the study programmes, no detailed analysis of the individual curricula shall be conducted here. Nevertheless, the experts would like to draw on a number of central aspects that were also intensely discussed with the members of faculty and the students on site:

First of all, it became clear during the on-site talks that the School’s approach to the subject discipline of International Relations is strongly theory-based and focused on historical developments. The Master’s students generally do a lot of reading and literature analysis in class, but are not thoroughly introduced to qualitative and quantitative methods in International Relations that are normally applied by IR scholars in other countries. For instance, tools and methods of data collection and statistical data analysis are not a standard part of the curricula, although they are widely established and commonly applied in IR research. With a view to the goal of bringing the School in closer touch with the global scientific community, the members of faculty should be encouraged to further develop their competencies in this realm and

incorporate them in the teaching process.

Furthermore, it came as a surprise to the experts that whereas foreign language training plays a crucial role throughout the Bachelor's programme, it is non-existent in the Master's programmes. The students interviewed on site took a critical view at this, seeing the need for a further continuation of language training in order to meet the study requirements at Master's level and to prepare for the challenges of their future working positions or for Ph.D. entrance exams. The experts agree with this and recommend making language classes a standard part of the curricula in all Master's programmes. These may also be classes on languages other than English, especially for the students of the Area Studies programmes.

Apart from these aspects, the experts gained a positive overall impression of the curricula and the faculty's way of teaching International Relations. Students work with a wide variety of foreign reference literature and are taught to approach and analyze complex research questions from different critical angles. They are encouraged to freely exchange their ideas with teachers and fellow students and continuously widen their perspective beyond "Russia-centric" views. According to the students, this works especially well in mixed learning groups that include students from different national backgrounds.

The aspects of employability and professionalization are clearly integrated into the curricula. The experts' general impression is that students get well-prepared for employment positions outside academia, both in Russia and abroad. This goes especially for the joint Master's programme in Baltic Studies and those programmes with a particularly practice-oriented focus, as e.g. "PR in International Relations" or "International Humanitarian Cooperation". Alternatively, graduates may pursue a career in science and research. At Master's level, in-depth research skills are mainly imparted in the context of the Research Seminars.

During the on-site talks the students reported that it was difficult to find attractive working positions with a Bachelor's degree only. Many employers were reluctant to recruit applicants without a Master's degree due to their lack of practical experience. Hence, for the large majority of students the Bachelor's degree seems to be not so much an asset in itself, but rather an in-between step on the way to a "full" degree. This fits in with the fact that as opposed to the Master's programmes, the description of the Bachelor's programme remains very vague when it comes to concrete employment prospects for graduates.

Regardless of that, the experts are convinced that the undergraduate programme provides a broad and solid basis of knowledge in the field of IR and a set of competencies (especially in the realm of foreign languages) that should give graduates a high advantage over many competitors on the job market.

## **2.4 Methods of Teaching and Student Assessment**

The on-site talks have shown that a very wide spectrum of didactic methods is applied at the School of IR.

The majority of the modules both at Bachelor's and Master's level are based on a combination of theoretical input in the form of lectures and more interactive elements like seminars

and/or colloquia. The students on site gave reports of vivid interaction with teachers in seminars and of innovative teaching formats as e.g. roleplays to simulate negotiation situations. A lot seems to be done to promote key competencies like teamwork, creativity and communication skills, but also the students' capacity for critical, independent thought.

The experts highly appreciate the faculty's openness for competency-based and student-centered teaching methods. As learning groups (at least at Master's level) are relatively small, there is enough room for intense discussion and experimental approaches.

The same goes for the chosen forms of student assessment. Here, too, a balanced mixture of different types of assessment is chosen, including written tests, essays, reports and assignments, presentations, oral exams and term papers.

Across the programmes, the methods of teaching and assessment are generally well aligned with the intended learning outcomes and the desired graduate profiles.

III Appendix

1 University's Response to the Expert Report

### **III. Appendix**

#### **1. University's Response to the Expert Report**

Based on the results of the analysis of the documents on self-evaluation of the Bachelor's and Master's programs in the field of International Relations of the St. Petersburg State University, by the experts of the accreditation agency ZEvA and the site visit of experts to St. Petersburg State University in September 2017 was presented the draft report on international accreditation.

The university administration, administrative staff responsible for international accreditation, dean of the Faculty of International Relations, heads of the programs familiarized themselves with the draft report. According to the general opinion, the report represents an objective, professional view of the development of these educational programs and contains valuable recommendations, the taking into account which will allow the preparation of bachelors and masters in the "International Relations" field in St. Petersburg State University to a qualitatively new level.

We also send a number of comments to the draft report.

p. II-3 – The proposal to combine regional studies in the Master's program contains a rational grain. But, of course, it is impossible and inexpedient to turn all of them into one program with a lot of variable profiles-the specifics of the regions studied, the volume and variety of special disciplines are too great. In addition, the development of master's programs is one of the main priorities of the Faculty of International Relations. Therefore, we plan to focus on strengthening the specificity of each of the programs, with the possible study of rare regional languages.