



EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT **Vesalius College**

An evaluation of the quality of the Bachelor in Communication Studies, the Bachelor in Business Studies & the Bachelor in International Affairs, Vesalius College

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vluhr



**EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT
VESALIUS COLLEGE**

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PREFACE BY THE CHAIR OF THE VLUHR QA BOARD

In this report, the assessment panel Vesalius College announces its findings with regard to the Bachelor in Communication Studies, the Bachelor in Business Studies, and the Bachelor in International Affairs at Vesalius College. This study programme was assessed in the autumn of 2014 on behalf of the Flemish Higher Education Council (VLUHR). The assessment procedure is part of the VLUHR activities in the area of external quality assurance in Flemish higher education.

The assessment report is first of all intended for the study programmes involved and primarily aimed at quality maintenance and improvement. In addition, the report intends to provide objective information to the outside world about the quality of the evaluated study programmes. For this reason, the report is posted on the VLUHR website.

This assessment report provides a snapshot of the study programmes and is only one phase in the process of ongoing concern for educational quality. After a short period of time the study programmes may already have changed and improved significantly, partly in response to the results of internal educational evaluations by the institution itself, or in response to recommendations by the assessment panel.

I would like to sincerely thank the chairman and the members of the assessment panel for the time they have invested and for the high level of expertise and dedication with which they have performed their task. This assessment has only been made possible thanks to the efforts of all those involved within the institution in the preparation and implementation of the assessment site visit.

I hope the positive comments formulated by the assessment panel and the recommendations for further improvement provide justification for their efforts and encouragement for the further development of the study programmes.

Nik Heerens

Chair VLUHR QA Board

PREFACE BY THE CHAIR OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

In October 2014, the assessment panel reviewed three bachelor programmes of Vesalius College, Brussels:

- the Bachelor in Communication Studies
- the Bachelor in Business Studies
- the Bachelor in International Affairs.

Vesalius College is a unique institution in the Flemish context: it is a non-subsidized educational institution offering three-year American-style undergraduate programmes in English, with many of the characteristics of liberal arts programmes.

At the time of our visit, Vesalius College Brussels was undergoing a process of change. Some new strategic actions had begun, designed to strengthen the position of the College. The timing of the visit has thus to be taken into account when reading this report.

The panel would like to thank the faculty staff of the College for their cooperation and openness during the visit and for all the documents they made available. The interviews and documentation led to a valuable exchange of ideas and contributed to a better impression of the characteristics and quality of the programmes. The discussions with the students, alumni, and business community also helped the assessment committee to gain further insights into the educational processes of the College.

Our assessment gives a snapshot of the current programmes and is therefore to be viewed as only one stage in the quality management process. The recommendations of the panel aim to contribute to the improvement of the educational quality of the programmes, a process already begun by the College.

As chairman I would like to take the opportunity to thank the members of the assessment committee:

- Prof. dr. Geoffrey Edwards, Cambridge University
- Prof. dr. Steven Eggermont, KU Leuven
- Prof. dr. em. Hans van Hout, University of Amsterdam
- Miss Anneloes Hoff, alumna of University College Roosevelt (Middelburg).

Their critical, constructive and professional attitude and contribution helped to achieve a good team spirit and a high added-value experience. The support of Els Van Zele, staff member of the Quality Assurance Unit of VLUHR, was also extremely valuable. Her experience and knowledge helped the assessment panel go through all the different phases of the assessment process efficiently. After Els Van Zele left VLUHR in February 2015 for another challenging job, Aljosja Van der Straeten took over to support us in the final stage of this report. We would like to thank Aljosja Van der Straeten for his help in finalizing this report.

We hope that Vesalius College Brussels will make use of this report to continue their commitment to high-quality educational processes and sustain or even improve their competitive position in the educational landscape.

Prof. dr. Rudy Martens

Chairman of the assessment panel for Vesalius College, Brussels

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¹ See www.vluhr.be/kwaliteitszorg

SECTION 1

General Section

PART I

The educational assessment of Vesalius College

1 INTRODUCTION

In this report, the assessment panel for Vesalius College announces its findings with regard to the Bachelor in Communication Studies, the Bachelor in Business Studies, and the Bachelor in International Affairs at Vesalius College. These study programmes were assessed in the fall of 2014 on behalf of the Flemish Higher Education Council (VLUHR).

This assessment procedure is part of the VLUHR activities in the domain of external quality assurance in Flemish higher education, which is designed to ensure that Flemish universities, university colleges and other statutory registered higher education institutions are in compliance with the relevant regulatory framework.

2 THE ASSESSED STUDY PROGRAMMES

In accordance with its mission, the assessment panel visited:

- from October 15 to 17, 2014: Vesalius College
 - Bachelor in Communication Studies
 - Bachelor in Business Studies
 - Bachelor in International Affairs.

3 THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

3.1 Composition of the assessment panel

The composition of the assessment panel Vesalius College was ratified on June 21, 2013, January 17, July 4 and September 5, 2014 by the VLUHR Quality Assurance Board. The NVAO sanctioned the panel composition on July 29, 2014. The assessment panel was subsequently installed by the Quality Assurance Board by its decision of September 17, 2014.

The assessment panel was composed in the following way:

- Chairman of the assessment panel:
 - **Prof. dr. Rudy Martens**, Professor of Strategy at and Dean of the Faculty of Applied Economic Sciences, Universiteit Antwerpen, BE

- Other panel members:
 - **Prof. dr. Geoffrey Edwards**, Professor and Senior Fellow at the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Cambridge, UK (domain expert)
 - **Prof. dr. Steven Eggermont**, Associate Professor and Programme Director at the School for Mass Communication Research, Department of Social Sciences, KU Leuven (domain expert)
 - **Prof. dr. em. Hans van Hout**, Professor Emeritus of Education Sciences, University of Amsterdam, NL (educational expert)
 - **Miss Anneloes Hof**, Alumna of University College Roosevelt (Middelburg), NL (student member)

Dr. ir. Els Van Zele, staff member of the Quality Assurance Unit of the Flemish Higher Education Council, was project manager of this educational assessment and acted as secretary to the assessment panel. As of March 2015, Mr. Aljosja Van der Straeten took over this assignment.

The brief curricula vitae of the members of the assessment panel are listed in Appendix 1.

3.2 Task description

The assessment panel is expected:

- to express substantiated and well-founded opinions on the study programmes, using the assessment framework;
- to make recommendations allowing quality improvements to be made where possible;
- to inform society at large of its findings.

3.3 Assessment Process

3.3.1 Preparation

The study programmes were asked to compile an extensive self-evaluation report in preparation for the educational assessment. An assessment protocol, with a detailed description of the expectations regarding the content of the self-evaluation report, was presented by the Quality Assurance Unit of VLUHR for this purpose. The self-evaluation report reflects the accreditation framework.

The assessment panel received the self-evaluation reports some months before the on-site assessment visit, which allowed for adequate time to carefully study the document and to thoroughly prepare for the assessment visit.

The assessment panel held its preparatory meeting on September 18, 2014. At this stage, the panel members were already in possession of the assessment protocol and the self-evaluation reports. During the preparatory meeting, the panel members were given further information about the assessment process and they made specific preparations for the forthcoming on-site assessment visit. Special attention was given to the uniformity of the implementation of the accreditation framework and the assessment protocol. Also, the time schedule for the assessment visit was agreed upon (*see Key figures*) and the self-evaluation report was collectively discussed for the first time.

3.3.2 On-site visit

During the on-site visit the panel interviewed all parties directly involved with the study programmes. The panel spoke with those responsible for the study programmes, students, teaching staff, educational support staff, alumni, and representatives from the professional field. The conversations and interviews with all these stakeholders took place in an

open atmosphere and provided the panel with helpful additions to and clarifications of the self-evaluation reports.

The panel visited the programme-specific infrastructure facilities, including the library, classrooms, and computer facilities. There was also a consultation hour during which the assessment panel could invite people or during which people could come and be heard in confidence.

Furthermore, the institution was asked to prepare a wide variety of documents to be available during the on-site visit for the assessment panel to consult as a tertiary source of information. These documents included minutes of discussions in relevant governing bodies, a selection of study materials (courses, handbooks and syllabuses), indications of staff competences, testing and assessment assignments, etc. Sufficient time was scheduled throughout the assessment visit for the panel to study these documents thoroughly. Additional information could be requested during the on-site visit if the assessment panel deemed that information necessary to support its findings.

Following internal panel discussions, provisional findings were presented by the chairman of the assessment panel in conclusion of the on-site assessment visit.

3.3.3 Reporting

The last stage of the assessment process was the compilation of the panel's findings, conclusions, and recommendations into the present report. The panel's recommendations are separately summarised at the end of the report.

The study programme directors were given the opportunity to reply to the draft version of this report. The assessment panel considered this response and included elements of it into the final version when deemed appropriate.

PART II

Table with scores

The following table represents the assessment scores of the assessment panel on the four generic quality standards set out in the assessment framework.

For each generic quality standard (GQS) the panel expresses a considered and substantiated opinion, according to a four-point scale: satisfactory, good, excellent or unsatisfactory. The panel also expresses a final opinion on the quality of the programme as a whole, also according to a four-point scale: satisfactory, good, excellent or unsatisfactory.

In the report of the study programmes the assessment panel clarifies how it has reached its opinion. The table and the assigned scores ought to be read and interpreted in connection to the text in the report. Any interpretation based solely on the scores in the table, is unjust towards the study programmes and passes over the assignment of this external assessment exercise.

Explanation of the scores of the **generic quality standard**:

- Satisfactory (S)** The study programme meets the generic quality standards.
- Good (G)** The study programme systematically exceeds the generic quality standards.
- Excellent (E)** The study programme achieves well above the generic quality standards and serves as an (inter) national example.
- Unsatisfactory (U)** The generic quality standard is unsatisfactory.

Rules applicable to the **final opinion**:

- Satisfactory (S)** The final opinion on a programme is 'satisfactory' if the programme meets all generic quality standards.
- Good (G)** The final opinion on a programme is 'good' if at least two generic quality standards are additionally assessed as 'good', including in every case the third one: final outcomes achieved.
- Excellent (E)** The final opinion on a programme is 'excellent' if at least two generic quality standards are additionally assessed as 'excellent', including in every case the third one: final outcomes achieved.
- Unsatisfactory (U)** The final opinion on a programme – or a mode of study – is 'unsatisfactory' if all generic quality standards are assessed as 'unsatisfactory'.
- Satisfactory for a limited period (S*)** The final opinion on a programme – or a mode of study – is 'satisfactory for a limited period' , i.e. shorter than the accreditation period, if, on a first assessment, one or two generic quality standards are assessed as 'unsatisfactory'.

	GQS 1 Targeted Outcome Level	GQS 2 Learning Process	GQS 3 Outcome Level Achieved	GQS 4 Structure and Organisation of Internal Quality Assurance	Final Opinion
Bachelor in Communication Studies	S	U	U	U	S*
Bachelor in Business Studies	S	U	U	U	S*
Bachelor in International Affairs	S	S	U	U	S*

SECTION 2

Assessment report

VESALIUS COLLEGE

Bachelor in Communication Studies,
Bachelor in Business Studies &
Bachelor in International Affairs

SUMMARY OF THE ASSESSMENT REPORT

Bachelor in Communication Studies, Bachelor in Business Studies & Bachelor in International Affairs, Vesalius College

From 15 to 17 October 2014, the study programmes Bachelor in Communication Studies, Bachelor in Business Studies, and Bachelor in International Affairs organized by Vesalius College (Brussels) were assessed by a panel of independent, external experts. In this summary, the main findings of the panel are listed.

Profile of the programme

The Bachelor in Communication Studies (hereafter CMM), the Bachelor in Business Studies (hereafter BUS), and the Bachelor in International Affairs (hereafter IA) are three-year academic bachelor's programmes, comprising 180 ECTS. They are organized by Vesalius College, an American-style liberal arts college which was founded in 1987 by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and Boston University's Metropolitan College. Vesalius College became fully independent in 2000.

The average student number is about 35 students in CMM, 78 students in BUS and 54 students in IA. Students who have graduated secondary school are eligible, and their academic performance, English skills and personal character are taken into account with regard to admissions. Vesalius College explicitly aims to attract an international student body and English is the official language in the whole College. The Brussels location

is often cited as a main strength of the College, because of the proximity of international institutions and companies for internships.

The liberal arts philosophy is an important aspect of the three study programmes. This is reflected in the curriculum (a broad view on the humanities and social sciences) and in the teaching and evaluation methods (small groups, interactive teaching, focus on written assignments).

Programme

The three programmes consist of 180 ECTS each, comprising 120 ECTS worth of compulsory courses and 60 ECTS of electives. The core courses are logically structured and their level is built up gradually, from 'general skills' over 'pillars' and 'intermediate courses' to 'advanced courses'. Additionally, in all three programmes the electives can be clustered in minors. All programmes include an internship.

CMM is structured along four thematic 'pillars': a research pillar, a theory pillar, a business pillar and a politics pillar. The student is thus schooled in different communications theories and also in business and politics (with a focus on European Union politics). The BUS curriculum includes many aspects of business and economics, including marketing, HRM, business law, accounting, information systems, etc. The IA programme consists of four fields of study: history, international law, politics and economics. IA students who take up a specific multi-institutional minor can get an additional Undergraduate Certificate in European Peace & Security Studies.

A broad, multidisciplinary understanding of the relevant fields of study is the main aim of all three programmes, although the panel concluded that the IA curriculum is more academic and research-oriented than those of the CMM and BUS. This led the panel to recommend a stronger focus on research methodology for the CMM and BUS programmes to achieve a higher academic level.

Students appreciate the hands-on approach and small class sizes which are typical of Vesalius College. A wide variety of teaching methods is used, including student-activating methods and a focus on presentations and written assignments. There is a strong interaction with the teaching staff and feedback is normally ample. The panel is of the opinion that there might be too many assignments, which do not always add value to the programme. Students estimate the overall workload at about 45 hours a week, although an objective measurement system is not in place. IA

students report that their workload is noticeably higher than that of CMM and BUS students – which is in line with the more challenging academic character of the IA programme.

All three programmes include a capstone and/or honours essay which is meant to integrate previously acquired knowledge and prove the achieved outcome level of the student. The panel read several of these essays and found that their level of analysis, statistics and research could be significantly more advanced.

Evaluation and testing

A variety of formative and summative evaluation methods are used in all three programmes. For each course, the lecturer determines the evaluation methods and these are mentioned in the course information file. The final exams are mostly written, oral exams are rare. There are also mid-term evaluations to stimulate students to study and to improve their in-class performance. The small scale of the College supports this type of continuous evaluation, with many papers and presentations. As a result, writing and communication skills are frequently tested. The panel is of the opinion that when it comes to this continuous assessment, less might be more, and the level and depth of the assignments might benefit from limiting their number. The panel deemed the level of IA papers to be higher than that of BUS and CMM papers.

The panel thinks that, overall, the examination level should be higher, in all three programmes. Grades are, on average, relatively high, and there is a need for common marking standards. There is currently no coherent evaluation and testing policy, although there are several committees in place to monitor the progress of students. The panel has recommended giving more attention to the validity and reliability of testing and developing a coherent evaluation policy.

Services and student guidance

Vesalius College is located in the Karel-Van-Miert Building in Etterbeek, Brussels. The facilities are good though limited in size, so students have to attend classes on the nearby VUB campus as well. Also, students of Vesalius College use the VUB library, which has a good collection and is fairly accessible. There are computer facilities available with wireless internet access all over campus.

The bulk of student counselling is performed by the academic staff, in line with the American tradition. Students are positive about this system, which leads to very personal guidance and tutoring.

Study success and professional opportunities

In recent years, because of curriculum reforms, the student retention rate has been improved and the dropout rate has declined. The average study progress (i.e. the proportion of students who obtain their degree within six or less semesters) is about 75% over the last 8 years for the three programmes. This indicates an effective learning environment.

A fair number of alumni continue on to a Master's programme, without noticeable problems. This is true for all three study programmes.

The entire assessment report of the study programmes Bachelor in Communication Studies, Bachelor in Business Studies, and Bachelor in International Affairs organized by Vesalius College is accessible online on the website of the Flemish Higher Education Council (www.vluhr.be/kwaliteitszorg).

ASSESSMENT REPORT

Bachelor in Communication Studies, Bachelor in Business Studies & Bachelor in International Affairs, Vesalius College

Preface

This report concerns the Bachelor in Communication Studies, the Bachelor in Business Studies and the Bachelor in International Affairs organised by Vesalius College, Brussels (hereafter referred to as 'the College'). The assessment panel (hereafter referred to as 'the panel') visited the study programmes from 15 to 17 October 2014.

Vesalius College is a non-statutory registered institution for higher education in Flanders. The College therefore is not subject to an institutional review. The panel assesses the study programmes on the basis of the four generic quality standards (GQS's) of the VLUHR programme assessment framework. This framework is designed to fulfil the accreditation requirements, applied by the NVAO. For each generic quality standard the panel gives a weighted and motivated judgement on a four point scale: **unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good or excellent**. In assessing the generic quality assurance, the concept of generic quality indicates that the GQS is in place and that the programme – or a specific mode of the programme – meets the quality level that can reasonably be expected, from an international perspective, of a Bachelor's programme in higher education. The score '**satisfactory**' points out that the programme meets the generic quality because it demonstrates an acceptable level for the particular GQS. If the study programme scores '**good**', the programme systematically exceeds the generic quality for that standard. When the programme scores '**excellent**', it achieves well above the generic quality for the particular GQS and serves as an (inter)national example. The score '**unsatisfactory**' indicates that the programme does not attain the generic quality for that particular GQS.

The panel's opinions are supported by a careful analysis of the presented evidence. The panel makes clear how it has reached its opinion. The panel also expresses a final opinion on the quality of the programme as a whole, according to the same four-point scale. For the assessment, the panel uses the criteria outlined in the assessment protocol.¹

1 Manual for the External Quality Assurance in Flemish Higher Education, Brussels, August 2013.

The panel assesses the quality of the programme as it has been established at the time of the site visit. The panel has based its judgement on the self-evaluation reports and the information that arose from the interviews with the Dean, the programme management, lecturers, students, representatives of the professional field, alumni and personnel responsible for internal quality assurance, internationalization, study guidance and student tutoring. The panel has also examined the course materials, final papers (capstone and honours), assignments, examination questions and standard answering formats, as well as relevant reports available. For the student success rate, the panel relied on the data provided by the study programmes. The panel has also visited the programme-specific facilities on the premises used, such as classrooms and the library at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) during the site visit at the College. The interesting discussions and interviews during the site visit have proven to be vital for the panel to develop a good understanding of all elements contributing to the quality of the programmes.

In addition to its judgements, the panel has also formulated recommendations with respect to quality improvement. In this manner, the panel wants to contribute to improving the quality of the programmes. The recommendations are included in the relevant sections of the respective generic quality standards. An overview of improvement suggestions can be found at the end of the report.

Context of the study programmes

The Bachelor in Communication Studies (hereafter referred to as CMM), the Bachelor in Business Studies (hereafter referred to as BUS) and the Bachelor in International Affairs (hereafter referred to as IA) are **Bachelor of Arts** programmes, organised by Vesalius College.

Vesalius College is situated in Brussels and was **founded** in 1987 by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Boston University's Metropolitan College. The College follows an American-style model, indicating that staff is also involved in administering the College. The College became independent from VUB in 2000.

The **Board of Directors of the VUB** documented the relationship with the College and emphasised that the College contributes to the international strategy of the VUB. The College has a particular teaching model, characterized by its small scale and close relationship between students and teachers and is expected to 'adapt the Business Model to the new

reality'. Up to a certain level, VUB and the College will increasingly become competitors, in comparison to recent years, but the Board of Directors emphasised that there is a place for both on the international market. The College has a separate Board from the university, but the majority of members in the College Board are nominated by the VUB's Board of Directors. This safeguards the development of the College in line with the aspirations of the VUB. The professors teaching at Vesalius are on the payroll of the VUB, which is in line with the decision-making power of the VUB-nominated members of the College Board.

Vesalius College aspires to offer undergraduate study programmes, in small groups with interactive teaching approaches, to an international student body. The **'liberal arts' philosophy** is strongly anchored in the College. This is clear from the broad range of courses from the humanities and social sciences, along with Vesalius' aim for students demonstrating a tolerant and cosmopolitan approach to the world.

Prior to the Bologna reform, the College offered four-year undergraduate programmes and found accreditation with the Open University Validation Services (OUVS) of the UK (with evaluations in 1998 and in 2001). Since the Act on Higher Education in 2003–2004, adopted in Flanders, the College has reoriented its focus towards humanities and social sciences, gradually phased out its four-year programmes and replaced these with **three-year bachelor's programmes**. In 2007, the former Open University Validation Services (OUVS) evaluations were replaced by NVAO accreditation, based on programme evaluations. In 2007, the Business, International Affairs and Communications majors underwent an external evaluation, coordinated by the Flemish Interuniversity Council VLIR, resulting in an assessment report and positive accreditation decision in 2007.

The three bachelor programmes have a common track, next to a distinct set of discipline-specific knowledge and skills. The **Bachelor in Communication Studies** (CMM) aims at forming competent and ethical communicators who are able to act against their broad background of communications theories. The **Bachelor in Business Studies** (BUS) aims at studying and understanding businesses, how these are organised and managed, how these create value and their operations in an economic, social, legal and political context. The **Bachelor in International Affairs** (IA) aims at developing core theoretical and conceptual knowledge and policy-oriented skills for understanding and assessing major processes, dynamics and institutions in international affairs.

The programmes are located in Brussels, the **'capital of Europe'**. This offers students ample opportunities to explore and become acquainted with international organisations, for instance for assignments or internships.

All three bachelor programmes were **redesigned** in 2012, indicating that the second year was offered in the new manner, and that the third year of the bachelor's programme was still in the process of being developed and finalised and will be offered for the first time in 2015–2016.

In 2014–2015 there are 84 students in the Fall semester and 72 students in the Spring semester for BUS, 39 students in the Fall semester and 33 students in the Spring semester for CMM, and 57 students in the Fall semester and 54 in the Spring semester for IA.

As a result of the Flemish Act on the Qualifications of 30 April 2009, **discipline-specific learning outcomes** (DLO) have been made for university study programmes by the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR), the umbrella organisation of the Flemish Universities. The Bachelor in Communication Studies (CMM) refers to the DLO of the 'Bachelor in Communicatiewetenschappen' (an academic bachelor's degree), validated by the NVAO on February 12, 2012. For the Bachelor of Business Studies (BUS) and the Bachelor in International Affairs (IA) no such DLO was available at a bachelor's level. The study programmes therefore outlined the intended learning outcomes in the self-evaluation reports, as stipulated in the assessment protocol. The assessment panel drafted a frame of reference for BUS and IA. These frames of references were communicated to the programmes prior to the site visit and subsequently discussed during the interview with the Dean and the programme directors, who agreed with the frames of reference composed by the assessment panel.

Generic quality standard 1 - Targeted Outcome Level

The assessment panel evaluates the targeted outcome level for the Bachelor in Communication Studies as satisfactory, for the Bachelor in Business Studies as satisfactory, and for the Bachelor in International Affairs as satisfactory.

CMM, BUS and IA are **academic Bachelor of Arts programmes** in the area of the humanities and social sciences, offering students a broadening knowledge and insight into various sub-disciplines, related to the subject of their study. This approach is in line with the liberal arts philosophy of the College. **CMM** is oriented towards conceptual understanding of human, mass and organisational communications and their social, economic and political dimensions. It **aims at** developing the applicability of communication theories to the understanding of events and contexts, allowing the graduates to investigate the function and organisation of political institutions and business industries as well as the social responsibilities of professional communicators. Furthermore, CMM also aims at the application of practical presentation skills to address a variety of audiences. **BUS** is oriented towards the study of organisations from a multitude of contexts, including the economic, social, legal and political context. **IA** is oriented towards the development of core content knowledge and skills with respect to the approaches to and the operation of the international system, its actors and institutions. **IA** uses a multidisciplinary approach, addressing elements of politics, history, law and economics to this end.

The liberal arts tradition in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and in some similar programmes in the Netherlands were used to **benchmark** the general profile of the College's bachelor's programmes. Apparent from the comparison is the attention given to a type of liberal arts philosophy, touching upon various aspects and disciplines in humanities and social sciences and aiming at a broad, widening education in a particular topic (CMM, BUS or IA). This is in line with the 'Bachelor of Arts' denomination, given to the three distinct programmes by the College.

With respect to the targeted learning outcomes, **CMM** makes reference to the 11 **discipline-specific learning outcomes** (DLO) of the 'Bachelor in Communicatiewetenschappen' composed by VLIR and developed these into 12 programme-specific learning outcomes (PLO). The DLO for the 'Bachelor in Communicatiewetenschappen' are in line with the aspirations of an academic bachelor, with a strong academic research component.

CMM is more oriented towards **knowledge acquisition and ‘practical applicability’** of communication in a broad sense. The panel is of the opinion that the DLO adopted by CMM are to some extent in conflict with the liberal arts philosophy of CMM, as the DLO are very much oriented towards deepening instead of broadening the academic research issues. Moreover the orientation towards ‘practical applicability’ of knowledge indicates a ‘vocational orientation’ of the programme, rather than an ‘academic orientation’. The panel is convinced that both ambiguities need to be clarified. The panel therefore invites the programme management to reflect on this and to better position the programme and reformulate the intended learning outcomes for the CMM programme, clarifying its true orientation and aspirations. **BUS** has outlined its own set of learning outcomes, starting from the frame of reference discussed with the previous assessment panel (in 2007). The frame of reference is in line with the Dublin Descriptors and is inspired by the proficiencies identified by the American Economic Association. The PLO of BUS represent the core competences required in a broadening bachelor in business studies fairly well. IA has also outlined its own set of learning outcomes in conformity with the Dublin Descriptors and has based these on an international benchmarking with similar liberal arts programmes in international affairs. The PLO of IA cover the core competences required in a broadening bachelor in International Affairs.

The programme-specific learning outcomes for the three programmes are applicable to the particular contexts studied. The competences aimed at are in line with level 6 (i.e. bachelor’s level) of the **Flemish Qualification Framework**. A competence matrix, composed for each programme, shows the relation between the PLO and the particular courses addressing the various competences aimed at by the bachelor’s programme. The panel suggests aligning the PLO of BUS with the DLO of the study programme ‘Handelwetenschappen’, whilst keeping the liberal arts approach.

The College and its staff have invested in articulating the intended learning outcomes more explicitly in the last few years. Consequently, the aims and objectives now better outline the aspirations of the various courses for each programme, compared to the former assessment in 2007. Gradually, all relevant information is gathered in the course information files of the individual courses (ECTS-files, called ‘syllabi’ by the College), providing valuable information with respect to the learning outcomes, the learning process as well as evaluation and testing. Compared to 2007, the students are better informed about the intended learning outcomes by means of

various media and information carriers and they seem to have a fairly good view on the intended learning outcomes of their study programme.

The **international atmosphere and aspiration** is inherent to the programmes. The international student population (comprising over 50 nationalities) and the particular position of the College in the “capital of Europe” contribute to this end. In addition, the truly international staff adds to the international atmosphere and brings in various research traditions and different views, enriching the learning environment.

In summary, the panel is of the opinion that the intended learning outcomes are adequate. The programmes aim at offering undergraduate students a broad education in communication studies, business studies or international affairs respectively. The intended learning outcomes are situated at the threshold level for bachelor’s programmes and are sufficiently in line with the requirements set by the international community. The learning outcomes for CMM need to better reflect the particular position (‘the bachelor of arts’ and ‘vocational orientation’) of the programme.

Generic quality standard 2: Learning Process

The assessment panel evaluates the learning process for the Bachelor in Communication Studies as unsatisfactory, for the Bachelor in Business Studies as unsatisfactory, and for the Bachelor in International Affairs as satisfactory.

CMM, BUS and IA are three year bachelor’s programmes. Each of the **curricula** (180 ECTS, evenly spread over three years) comprises compulsory core courses (120 ECTS) and electives (60 ECTS). The electives are divided into two groups: 30 ECTS are to be taken from the electives in the majors (related to the field of study), 30 ECTS can be chosen freely from the list of courses in the College or in associated institutions. Since the recent curriculum reform, students can combine a group of interrelated courses into one minor, adding a particular focus to the individual’s study programme. The courses build up from introductory courses in the first year towards intermediate and more advanced courses in the second and third year. Electives can be taken from the second year onwards. Students can combine a cluster of electives into a minor in the bachelor’s programme. All programmes comprise an internship. Students can enter the programme in the Spring or Fall semester.

The Bachelor in Communication Studies (CMM)

The general structure of CMM is based on four pillars : a research pillar, a theoretical pillar, a business pillar and a politics pillar. The courses are listed per pillar in the figure.

Figure 1: the Bachelor in Communication Studies courses overview

Research Pillar	Theory Pillar	Business Pillar	Politics Pillar
Composition for Academic Communication	Introduction to Communication Studies	Introduction to Business	Introduction to Politics
Writing and Critical Inquiry	Communication Theories	Introduction to Economics	European Union Politics
Research and Presentation Skills	Intercultural Communication	Organisational Communication	Rhetoric
Quantitative Methods	Cultural Studies and Cross Cultural Capability	Marketing Communication and Advertising	Political Communication
Intermediate Research Methods	European Identities in Cross-Cultural Perspectives	Corporate Communications and Public Relations	International Communication
Capstone (paper)	Journalism Studies and Practice	Business and Media Ethics	European Communication Policies
Honours Essay	Film: History, Theories and Scriptwriting	Capstone: International Marketing (theory)	Lobbying in the EU
	Convergence Culture and Transmedia Writing	Internship	Capstone: Public Diplomacy (theory)
			Internship
Electives from the Social Sciences disciplines			

The Bachelor of Business Studies (BUS)

The general structure of the BUS curriculum is outlined in figure 2.

Figure 2: the Bachelor in Business Studies courses overview

Academic core (30 ECTS): general liberal arts skills	Major requirements - Principles (30 ECTS): pillars of Business	Major requirements - Intermediate courses (30 ECTS)
Composition for Academic Communication	Accounting	Human Resources Management
Writing and Critical Inquiry	Business	Corporate Finance
Quantitative Methods	Business Law	Marketing
Research and Presentation Skills	Economics	Macroeconomics
		Methods: Mathematics
Major requirements - Advanced courses (30 ECTS)	Major electives (30 ECTS)	Free electives (30 ECTS)
Operations Management	Major Elective 1	Free Elective 1
Financial Markets	Major Elective 2	Free Elective 2
Business Information Systems	Major Elective 3	Free Elective 3
Microeconomics	Major Elective 4	Free Elective 4
Methods: Statistics	Capstone Course	Free Elective 5

The academic core courses develop skills and attitudes, in line with the liberal arts components, and form the baseline for the programme. Students have to choose one of two capstone courses ('Entrepreneurship' or 'International Marketing') as a major elective, in which much of the knowledge and the skills developed in the core programme section are to be integrated. The capstone course focuses on various current topics in business. The major electives are deepening courses (including the capstone course). The free electives are set up to broaden the student's knowledge. BUS offers some clusters of related courses as minors: e.g. 'Economics', 'Marketing and advertising', 'Psychology', 'Strategic management', 'Banking and finance', 'Sustainable development and technological innovation'.

The Bachelor in International Affairs (IA)

Figure 3: the Bachelor in International Affairs courses overview

Academic Core (30 ECTS): general liberal arts skills	Academic Principles (30 ECTS): pillars of International Affairs	Intermediate Courses (30 ECTS)
Composition for Academic Communication	History	International Relations
Writing and Critical Inquiry	International Law	Macroeconomic Policy
Quantitative Methods	Politics	History: Methods and Problems
Research and Presentation Skills	Economics	European Union Politics
		Intermediate Research Methods
Advanced Courses (30 ECTS)	Major Electives (30 ECTS)	Free Electives (30 ECTS)
Contemporary Political Debates	Major Elective 1	Free Elective 1
International Political Economy	Major Elective 2	Free Elective 2
Evolution of the International System	Major Elective 3	Free Elective 3
Current Problems in International Law	Major Elective 4	Free Elective 4
International Affairs Research Methods	International Affairs Capstone Course	Free Elective 5

The IA programme gradually builds up the general liberal arts skills and the academic principles of IA in the first year, to move onto intermediate courses in international affairs and some electives in the second year. Prerequisites (where needed) guarantee the students' level of understanding upon entering intermediate and advanced courses. IA also offers some clusters of related courses as minors: 'European Peace and Security Studies', 'European Union Studies', 'Global Governance' and 'History of Ideas'. In addition, IA organises a multi-institutional Minor:

'Undergraduate Certificate in European Peace & Security Studies' (EPSS) in the Fall semester. Students get an additional certificate after succeeding for the minor. The IA students appreciate the curriculum, but would like to add some more elements about religions, other than the European view (now addressed in the Summer programme), and some more regional studies. Furthermore, the students asked for a reconsideration of the content dealt with in the 'European History' course, as it overlaps with several other courses.

The panel studied the curricula, the course materials and reference books on display and traced some of the **learning tracks** throughout the distinct curricula. The panel also looked at the 2007 assessment report and found that a lot of the problems detected by the current panel in the current curricula of CMM and BUS had already been pinpointed by the previous assessment panel.

The panel is of the opinion that the **CMM curriculum** covers the various disciplines expected in a Bachelor in Communication Studies reasonably well, although currently the range of disciplines covered is too broad. The panel therefore suggests conducting a thorough international benchmarking process (that should include distinct programmes) with respect to the content of the curriculum. The next step should then be to realign the PLO and implement these in the revised CMM programme more consistently. The CMM focus on **research and practical competences** is currently seriously unbalanced in favour of too much emphasis on practical applicability and not enough on the **academic dimension**, which needs to be improved. This is especially reflected in the way subjects are studied, the level of academic rigour and the way in which problems are addressed in the assignments. A stronger emphasis on **research methodology** needs to be brought into the CMM curriculum. The academic level of the courses is too low overall and the students' application of academic reasoning is too weak. Students only seldom use advanced academic research methods in the numerous student reports and assignments, indicating that this knowledge is not adequately entrenched in the students' thinking and problem solving. Moreover the **structure** of the programme needs to be improved, to better align the compulsory courses, the major requirements (principles, intermediate and advanced courses) and the electives. In addition predefined sets of electives (for instance in terms of minors) would better structure the currently unlimited choice of subjects to be chosen by the students. 'Less might be more' in this respect as students currently have a too wide

variety of interesting courses to choose from. Downsizing the number of courses to a smaller number of relevant courses for communication studies would then improve the coherence of the programme. In summary, after completing the CMM programme, the level attained by the student is currently not situated at level 6 of a genuine Bachelor's programme, as neither the curriculum, nor the learning environment are challenging or rich enough to bring students to the appropriate bachelor's level. The panel is convinced that the CMM curriculum needs to be brought back to the drawing board and needs to be redesigned in order to take into account not only the current recommendations, but also the ones made by the previous assessment panel in 2007.

The panel is of the opinion that the **BUS curriculum** fairly well covers the relevant disciplines expected of a Bachelor in Business Studies, but (compared to the 2007 evaluation) BUS is still missing depth in various disciplines, particularly in the application of methodological knowledge and the functional areas of business management. The focus on **research and practical competences** of BUS is strongly unbalanced in favour of too great an emphasis on practical applicability and not enough on the **academic dimension** compared to what is expected from a Bachelor's programme. This is apparent in the way subjects are studied in the courses and visible in the low level of academic thinking and how problems are addressed in the assignments. A stronger emphasis on **research methodology** needs to be brought into the curriculum. The academic level of the programme is currently too low in the courses and the students' application of academic reasoning is too weak in their work. Students only seldom use advanced academic research methods in the numerous student reports and assignments, indicating that this knowledge is not adequately absorbed by students in their thinking and problem solving. This means that after completion of the BUS programme, the level attained by the student is not situated at level 6 of a genuine Bachelor's programme, as the curriculum, nor the learning environment are challenging or rich enough to bring students to the appropriate bachelor's level. In order to remedy this shortcoming, the level of the courses in the functional business domain, the application of methodological knowledge in assignments/papers and the overall mastery of the academic dimension of the programme need to be improved substantially. The BUS students at the interview asked for more focus in the minors: the subjects are generally good but too broad. The panel supports this request. Some additional pre-structuring would help them to select a consistent cluster of related subjects.

The panel is of the opinion that the **IA curriculum** comprises most relevant courses, allowing students to get a good view of the discipline of international affairs. The overlap of courses, helpful in some cases in allowing the same subjects to be addressed from different angles, hinders students in some respects and so could be reconsidered. The curriculum builds up from introductory to more advanced courses and brings students to the appropriate bachelor's level. The panel is of the opinion that the IA curriculum comprises the core elements expected from a bachelor in International Affairs and challenges the students to apply the theories learned in an academic manner, in line with the level expected from an academic bachelor. Next year, a third year advanced course in research methodology will be added to the IA curriculum, and as such will consolidate the academic research learning curve better in the curriculum. The electives (majors and free electives) allow students to fine-tune their curriculum. The overall IA curriculum prepares students to start working in an international IA environment or to proceed to a masters degree in a related field. The panel is of the opinion that IA is much more research led than CMM and BUS. The research methods are gradually built up throughout the IA programme. Moreover, the minors function as starting points for a more in-depth exploration of coherent sub-disciplines, allowing an element of specialisation in the curriculum. The panel observed that the IA programme functions – in more than one respect – as the initiator of improvement initiatives and observed the first signs thereof in the IA Department. The panel suggests CMM and BUS to learn from this to improve the quality of their programmes.

Some of the **2007 recommendations** related to the CMM and BUS curricula have only recently been addressed. The assessment panel finds that not only at the level of the College but also at the programme level, too few remedial actions are apparent over the last eight years that might have lifted the CMM and BUS curricula to an appropriate bachelor's level. On the other hand, the IA curriculum is found to be situated at an appropriate bachelor's level and the IA management team demonstrates a clear view on international affairs as an academic field of study and has developed the curriculum to attain the intended learning outcomes. During the interviews the International Affairs students documented how they are challenged to attain the learning outcomes.

The **students particularly appreciate** the small classes, the strong interaction with the group and the lecturers, the continuous evaluation tradition, which keeps them up to speed with the courses, and the practical

orientation of the programme, which is felt to be much more useful compared to university undergraduate training in similar disciplines.

The **alumni** feel well prepared to enter the professional field (particularly through the internship programme) and they most often start a career in an international environment. Students become confident in presenting and defending their case in front of a large or mixed audience.

The programmes use a variety of **teaching methods**, including numerous student activating teaching methods, writing and presentation skills. Most lectures are supplemented with examples, demonstrations, in-class discussions and presentations, multimedia and students' self-study activities, cases, field trips and internships. The lectures introduce the crucial knowledge, examples demonstrate the theory and cases elaborate on the application of knowledge. The panel is of the opinion that the teaching methods for CMM and BUS are appropriate but need to add a component that would deepen the academic rigour of the programmes. The teaching methods, applied in IA, are in line with the curriculum, offering students a rich learning experience. The close attention to student-activated activities and the strong emphasis on **writing and presentation skills** are positive elements, but the quality of the students' application and use of various **research methodologies** needs to be improved for CMM and BUS. The students and alumni strongly supported the liberal arts philosophy behind the programmes during the site visit.

With respect to the numerous **assignments** and **feedback**, the panel is of the opinion that the students are overburdened with small assignments. The panel suggests that the staff get together and decide which assignments are most useful and in line with the students' learning path throughout the programmes. The panel, moreover, is of the opinion that the lecturers invest too much of their time in student counselling and providing feedback for every single assignment. The panel therefore suggests reconsidering this in favour of fewer but more thorough assignments and having the lecturers provide proper feedback at crucial moments of the student learning path.

The panel has examined the **course materials** via the learning environment and the numerous materials on display during the site visit. The panel is of the opinion that the course materials for CMM and BUS need to be upgraded with the integration of academic standards, suitable for a bachelor's programme. The IA course materials and reference materials

are situated at bachelor's level, have an overall good quality and are up-to-date.

In the College, students' **workload** is not measured systematically nor monitored throughout the academic year. **IA and CMM** estimated the intended workload by asking their lecturers to estimate the time required to study their course. In doing so, IA made reference to the Bologna reform (where a 150-180 hours span workload is attributed to 6 ECTS for a one semester course). All programmes (CMM, BUS and IA) – in preparation for the review process – included a workload related question in the alumni survey. Based on the feedback from the survey, the College rearranged the number of credits per course, in favour of less but larger, more in-depth courses. This reduction of different courses covered in one semester seems to have had a positive effect on students' retention rate and improved students' learning. The students commented during the interviews that the workload is feasible and allows them to develop a social life outside of their study at the College as well. The workload rises during the mid-term examinations and the final exams. Throughout the semester, it is evenly spread and typical for continuous learning approaches. In terms of numbers, students estimate the overall workload at about 45 hours a week (courses and assignments included). The students nonetheless reflected on the numerous (for some programmes too many) assignments and tasks to be undertaken, which keep them busy throughout the year. The IA students perceived a difference in workload between the programmes, which is in line with the panel's findings, with respect to the level of the assignments to be made for IA. The panel on average estimates the workload as doable, it being more intensive for IA, compared to CMM and BUS. As information about the alignment of the intended and the actual workload is a vital parameter to assess the overall workload of a study programme, the panel urges the introduction of a systematic study time measurement system (as part of an overall internal quality assurance mechanism, see QGS 4) and a continuous monitoring of the link between the intended and real workload for the various courses in the next few years and to make appropriate changes if necessary.

Throughout the CMM, BUS and IA programmes, students make numerous assignments and write papers and reports for various courses. In the third year, every student also writes a **capstone or honours essay**. This paper is considered an element of integration, in which the knowledge and skills collected by the student are to come together in one consistent piece of work. The honours essays are seen as bachelor papers, the capstone papers

are looked at as client-oriented projects in which the student applies the tools learned in the particular context of the case at hand. Either way, the capstone papers and honours papers are seen as a milestone in the programme. In the paper, the student has to demonstrate mastery of the skills gained throughout the programme, applied to a particular subject.

The panel read and examined a large selection of capstone and honours papers for the three programmes and is of the opinion that the level of **analytical discussion** and critical thinking is fairly poor and that the use of **statistics and research methodologies** is rather basic. In addition, the time spent on the capstone paper is spread too much over the entire semester and could be concentrated more in a shorter period. This suggestion is in line with the student comments during the site visit.

The panel is in favour of an end of programme **integrative** piece of work (such as a capstone paper), in which the student is to demonstrate the attainment of his academic ability. The panel learned during the interviews that some of the staff members are in favour of such a change, as it would permit the student to analyse a certain subject in greater depth. The panel is of the opinion that the quality of the current capstone paper therefore needs to be improved.

Vesalius College **promotes** the programmes on its website, via the international network and the contacts of the staff. Students often learn about the programmes by exploring the internet or hear about them from other students and alumni.

The programmes are **accessible** to students who have graduated from secondary school. Admission decisions take into account the candidate's secondary school performance, examination results and English language competence, as well as demonstrated personal qualities and character. The College seeks students, able to meet the challenges of the College's programmes and willing to participate fully in the intellectual and social life of the College in a spirit of openness and tolerance. The panel pinpoints the problem that it is quite unclear which specific criteria are applicable for entering the programme and suggests that these need to be formulated more clearly. The assessment panel is of the opinion that, while the **admission requirements** are formally adequate, there is a need to safeguard them against giving undue weight to the personal qualities and character of any particular student.

The alumni suggest deploying a much more assertive recruitment policy for the College and its programmes. The **average student number** is about 35 students in CMM, 78 students in BUS and 54 students in IA. The panel is of the opinion that these numbers are rather modest and suggests developing a genuine marketing strategy and clearer recruitment policy for the College and its programmes, as planned by the Dean. In addition the College also has a significant number of international students who study at the College for a single semester. These numbers are not included in the averages.

The core faculty of the College comprises **21 professors** teaching in CMM, BUS and IA (12,68 FTE in terms of full professors, professors, associate and assistant professors). In addition there are **5 lecturers and 22 adjunct faculty** teaching in the programmes. The College hired some excellent teaching staff in recent years in answer to the needs of the College and in line with the recommendations made by the 2007 review panel. The contracts of Vesalius College staff and faculty are administered by the VUB Personnel Department. The College administers the contracts of its adjunct professors. Research as well as education are considered upon contracting new lecturers. The lecturers/adjunct faculty are linked to one of the disciplinary groups and bring in particular domain-related expertise. The College follows the VUB rules for staff development and promotion. Almost all lecturers hold a PhD and either conduct research and/or work in industry in branches related to their teaching assignment. Some staff members also teach as guest lecturers in other institutions or universities. The self-evaluation report signals that there is little money to be invested in **staff development**. Lecturers may follow professionalization courses at the VUB, but only few seem to be applicable to the College's teaching strategy. The panel is of the opinion that, in view of the formation of a true core faculty for the College and the programmes, and in order to gather around the challenges ahead (*see GQS 3 and GQS 4*), it seems wise to invest in a common training for all staff members for various elements (e.g. evaluation of academic standards and assessment policy, internal quality elements, grading of assignments).

The staff is committed to deliver high quality teaching. The panel is of the opinion that the programmes are strongly supported by its **staff**, some of whom (particularly at the IA department) have a sound track record in research and education. The panel observed various dynamics among the teaching staff and suggests investing in the formation of a strong **core faculty** for the College, creating a coherent group in which

the group dynamic subsumes the commitment of the individual. If CMM is to hire new people in the next few years, the emphasis certainly ought to be on more research-oriented profiles. The panel is convinced that in general the College's problem is not the number of staff, but the kind of tasks (managerial and student counselling) assigned to the staff and the substantial workload these tasks entail. As a consequence there is not enough time left for doing research. The panel is firmly of the opinion that the research output currently produced at Vesalius College is rather low, which is a problem that needs to be addressed properly. The panel firmly believes that all staff members teaching in academic programmes must be researchers themselves, no matter how high or low the percentage of teaching.

During the site visit the panel heard and observed conflicting views among the staff and management on how the College should be **managed**. The panel was informed that, shortly before the site visit, the Board of Vesalius College decided to contract a new Dean, who is to secure the position of the College in an increasingly competitive environment, as currently more bachelor and master programmes in humanities and social sciences will attract an international student body. To safeguard the future of the College, a stronger research tradition needs to be developed at the College. The Board of Directors and the new Dean established the positions of two Associate Deans (one for research and one for teaching affairs) to help move the College forward. The panel is convinced that the academic rigour of the College's study programmes will be the answer to the challenges the College is facing in this respect.

In line with the **American style**, a lot of administrative tasks are devolved to the lecturers, which – according to the panel – keeps them away from their main duties of teaching and research for a considerable portion of their time. An **administrative body** could assist the Dean of the College and might take over the majority of the administrative burden of the teaching staff. The staff reported its investment of a considerable amount of time in student counselling, and while it may be correct that this is in line with the American tradition, most staff members consider it to be a burden and are convinced that the counselling (with respect to changing programmes and the best options for individual students) should better be assigned to a **study adviser**. This could considerably lighten the burden on the shoulders of the staff members, without any loss of quality. The lecturers have weekly counselling hours and are very open towards students. The administrative support and personal contact with the students are

appreciated by the international student body. The panel is of the opinion that **student guidance and tutoring** is properly taken care of but could be rearranged in view of the suggestions above. The ombudsperson functions properly and students are helped in an appropriate manner.

The College is located at the Karel-Van-Miert Building in Etterbeek. The **facilities** at the College are pleasant, but the size and number of the classrooms are too small or too few to house all the students. Consequently, lecture rooms at VUB (across the road) are hired. The three lecture rooms (capacity of 30 to 36 seats) are equipped with projection facilities and facilitate modern teaching methods. The College houses a small computer room, allowing students to use current software programmes for tasks and assignments. The students highlighted that the computer facilities could be improved. The panel **visited** the premises during the site visit. The computer facilities are fine at the VUB and wireless access to the Internet is provided on the VUB campus and at the College. The College does not have its own library and uses the VUB library facilities. These facilities are adequate and fairly accessible. The paper and online collection are up-to-date and the opening hours are fine. The learning environment POINTCARRE is utilised by the lecturers and helps students focus on their studying.

The College enhances the **international** character of the programmes by sending its students to international partner institutions and by hosting international study abroad students at the College. Furthermore, the international staff who lecture in various international institutions, add to the international character of the College. In general the students and alumni from all programmes asked to capitalise more on what Brussels, as the “capital of Europe”, can offer to the learning environment of the international student body. They felt that by the end of their programme, students should know more about what is going on in Brussels, in the governmental bodies and international organisations. The few encounters during study visits could in this respect be enlarged and enriched.

The dropout of students from the first year has been reasonably high in recent years for CMM and BUS. The recent curriculum reform has raised the student retention rate and reduced the student dropout rate considerably. The average study progress (i.e. the proportion of students who obtain their degree after six or less semesters) is about 75% over the last 8 years for the three programmes. This parameter is seen as an indicator of an **effective learning environment**. However, as noted above, the panel found shortcomings in the CMM and BUS programmes in the

quality of the learning environment. That quality is too low in terms of the application of academic research methods that could allow students to achieve the intended learning outcomes for CMM and BUS. In contrast, IA offers students a richer learning environment and has been able to foster students' development of academic skills, in conformity with the academic bachelor's level.

The panel describes the **self-evaluation report** as offering general information. Some sections are merely descriptive and some SWOT analyses made for a particular generic quality standard refer to elements contributing to different generic quality standards. The panel considered the interviews they carried out to be a crucial supplement to the pieces that were laid down in preparation for the visit and contributed significantly to a much better understanding of the strong elements and the problems of the programmes. The panel wishes to thank the programmes and their personnel for the thorough preparation of the assessment, which finally enabled the panel to establish a clear picture about the quality elements of the programme and allowed it to formulate meaningful recommendations, with a view to the continuous improvement of the programmes.

In summary, the panel is of the opinion that for CMM the content as well as the academic rigour of the programme need to be thoroughly strengthened before the level expected from an academic bachelor's programme can be attained, while for BUS the academic rigour of the programme needs improving. Students do not use the academic skills they are meant to achieve in the Bachelor's programme, notwithstanding the 'bachelor of Arts' signature of the programmes. Consequently, the panel evaluates the learning process as below threshold level. For IA, the panel is of the opinion that the research base is much more academically oriented, and the quality of the learning process is in line with the level of an academic bachelor's programme. This is clear from the course materials, the workload and IA student's work and assignments. Consequently, the panel evaluates the learning process for the IA programme as at threshold level. The College has an adequate number of lecturers committed to teaching. In recent years good people have been contracted and some very recent new initiatives have been undertaken to move the College in the right direction. Despite the lack of progress on the majority of the 2007 recommendations, the panel is firmly of the opinion that substantial changes have to be made, not only in the programmes, but also in the managerial structures of the College (see GQS 4) in order for the College and its programmes to remedy for the shortcomings in CMM and BUS.

Generic quality standard 3 - Outcome Level Achieved

The assessment panel evaluates the outcome level achieved by the Bachelor in Communication Studies as unsatisfactory, by the Bachelor in Business Studies as unsatisfactory, and by the Bachelor in International Affairs as unsatisfactory.

The self-evaluation report describes **two bodies** in control of the academic quality at College level. The **Academic Standards Committee** (composed of faculty members appointed by the College Council) ensures that students have met the requirements for graduation and that the regulations pertaining to individual student assessment and overall academic evaluation have been applied. The **Student Conduct Committee** (composed of representatives of faculty and students) examines cases of, for instance, plagiarism and other student misconduct. The assessment requirements are said to be monitored by the Dean and Associate Dean (at College level) and by the Heads of Departments (at programme level).

After studying the materials and the interviews during the site visit, the panel concludes that the College currently has no explicit **evaluation and testing policy** in place with respect to testing student learning. The requirements for the evaluation and testing practice at the College are outlined in the 'General Academic Regulations', applicable to all programmes at the College. These regulations do not reflect the core criteria, necessary to guarantee the quality of testing. Currently, there is little attention given to the **reliability and validity** of testing, either in the self-evaluation reports and regulations, or, convincingly, during the interviews. The panel urges the College to better substantiate a **coherent evaluation policy**. A second phase is then to have the lecturers adopt this policy in everyday practice. **The Academic Standards Committee** deliberates on the examination results, but is not involved in safeguarding the quality of the examinations. Every two years an external examiner looks at various examples of examination questions and makes recommendations for the improvement of the evaluation practice. Many of the recommendations of the external examiners are not implemented.

The College uses regular and varied student continuous **assessment** (formative assessment) as well as mid-term and final exams (summative assessment). The mid-term evaluations are meant to direct students towards improving their in-class performance or to reconsider their approach towards studying, if needed. This approach is in line with the

liberal arts education tradition. The small scale of the College facilitates such a continuous evaluation approach. However, the panel is of the opinion that the number of presentations and evaluations is too high.

At the level of the **individual course**, the lecturer determines the evaluation formats and documents these in the course information file. A matrix, drawn for every study programme, shows the evaluation methods used per individual course. The most often used format for summative evaluation in all programmes is the written examination, comprising various types of questions. At the College, students only rarely have oral examinations. In CMM, the student's oral communication skills are tested throughout the semester by means of continuous evaluation at various instances. Students also write (in their estimation) lots of papers for most of the courses, contributing to their development of writing and communication skills. The BUS curriculum uses a variety of tests to evaluate the students. In IA, the various evaluation methods used to evaluate student learning are based on the new IA Department strategy, demonstrating that the student's research papers need to show the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The research papers are appropriate for evaluating students' theoretical and factual knowledge and critical analysis capacity.

The panel analysed a large sample of **assignments, papers, examination questions and some standard answering formats** for every programme. Summative assessment is most often used to evaluate (theoretical and factual) knowledge. The panel describes the mix of examination formats as fairly well balanced in terms of variation, but emphasises that the overall level of the evaluation does not meet the standard required of an academic bachelor degree. The overall level of the written exams especially needs to be improved for all programmes and especially the level of the papers for CMM and BUS. The sample of capstone and honours papers for the three programmes, read by the panel, demonstrates a number of issues. The use of research methods, critical thinking and academic referencing is very poor or even missing in the CMM and BUS papers. Nonetheless, the CMM and BUS capstone and honours papers' grades are rather high. All grades are rather high throughout the College and consistently higher, compared to the grades scored by the review panel. In addition the diversity of grades given in the different programmes is too large. All these elements contribute to the panel's finding that there has been **grade inflation**. The programmes themselves outlined in the self-evaluation reports a need for **common marking standards**. This finding has been corroborated by the external examiners reports. The panel is convinced that a rubric for

grading the capstone and honours papers is necessary to address this issue. The panel is sad to signal that the same worries expressed in the previous assessment report in 2007 are still valid: the high grades, the possible lack of objectivity, and the possibility for students to drop a course after the midterm evaluation if the results are less than expected. Notwithstanding the clear findings in the 2007 evaluation, no improvement has been made by the College. Consequently, the same serious problems still remain.

The panel finds that the honours essays in IA are of a higher level, compared to the CMM and BUS papers and have an overall better quality and academic level. The IA Department and its **recently** hired staff have taken a number of necessary initiatives with respect to evaluation (e.g. mapping and debating the evaluation practices, streamlining the assessment practices and the scoring across the BUS and IA department, developing a rubric for evaluation). At the time of the site visit, the first signs of a stronger awareness of the necessity of improving the evaluation practice were visible in the IA department, although the impact of these recent initiatives had not yet been fully developed or realised. The panel expects this transition to take place in the next year, resulting in an improved evaluation policy and a higher level of the evaluations in the IA curriculum.

This policy should then be adopted throughout the College. In applying this strategy, the BUS and CMM evaluation practice will improve, shaped against the background of an improved institution-wide evaluation practice and will result in an increased level of the evaluations for every programme. The panel expects the College to take these suggestions to heart and to make considerable progress in the next few years in this respect. The new approach towards an appropriate evaluation policy touches on crucial elements such as the **reliability and validity** of the testing, in addition to the transparency of evaluation. The panel is very supportive of a fully-fledged deployment of this new approach, which will eventually result in a new policy with respect to evaluation and testing. The panel is firmly convinced that if these initiatives are treasured, supported and embraced by every single staff member at the College, the evaluation and testing policy will be improved and brought up to the level required from an institution organising academic study programmes.

The panel is of the opinion that the **Academic Standards Committee (or a new Quality Management Committee)** should function as an internal quality instrument with respect to evaluations and testing. Currently, reli-

ability and validity are attributed to the external check of the examination questions, done by the external examiners. The panel believes that the system of external examiners is an important element of an internal quality assurance system. However, the Academic Standards Council should identify good practices, follow these up and use them for learning throughout the College. If the Academic Standards Committee looks into the quality of the examinations as well and the staff follow the initiatives of the Associate Dean for teaching affairs in this respect, there is a fair chance that the College will be able to set up an internal quality assurance mechanism for the study programmes and for the College as a whole.

The panel notes that a fair number of **alumni who continue** a Master's programme after completion of their CMM, BUS or IA programme are doing well. The panel signals that this does not diminish the fact that the evaluation standards at the College need to be improved significantly.

Especially given the teaching model (with their variety of formative assessment elements), **feedback** is an essential part of the student's learning. Students nonetheless reported during the interviews that they do not receive feedback on all their assignments and papers. The panel suggests providing feedback at key moments in the programme, in order to provide stepping stones for the students throughout the numerous assignments, and communicating this accordingly to the student population.

In summary, the panel is of the opinion that there is currently no coherent evaluation policy at the College. The panel sees a significant task to be taken up by the Academic Standards Committee (or a new Quality Management Committee) in the support and development of a genuine assessment policy for the College and all its programmes. At the time of the site visit, the outcome level achieved by the three programmes is situated below the threshold level expected from an academic bachelor degree as the current testing system is inadequate to safeguard the quality of evaluation. The quality of testing is too diverse and overall too low. The grading is often too high and the 'evidence' for critical thinking and application of research methods is in general too poor in the capstone and honours papers. Although the alumni are pleased with their education and are able to start a professional career or continue a master's programme, the panel is not convinced that all the intended learning outcomes are acquired at the bachelor's level. The College needs to develop a genuine evaluation and assessment policy, particularly addressing the validity and reliability of the testing and evaluation methods. The staff should then

adopt this strategy in its everyday teaching and evaluation practice. The panel saw some good examples and the beginning of a true assessment policy at the IA Department. The panel encourages the College to learn from this and develop an evaluation and assessment policy in the next few years, strengthening the College's position on the international market for academic study programmes.

The panel remarks that as most elements contributing to an evaluation policy are to be deployed at College level, the panel does not differentiate the scores for the three individual programmes, notwithstanding the slightly better condition of the testing in the IA Department.

The panel particularly states that it recognises that the Vice-Deans showed a view on how to improve the quality of teaching and research and believes that this is a good starting point to remedy for the current shortcoming at the College.

Generic quality standard 4 - Structure and Organisation of Internal Quality Assurance

The assessment panel evaluates the structure and organisation of the internal quality assurance of the Bachelor in Communication Studies as unsatisfactory, of the Bachelor in Business Studies as unsatisfactory, and of the Bachelor in International Affairs as unsatisfactory.

The organization of the College combines college-wide and departmental bodies of governance. The **College Council** is currently the main college-wide governance body. It includes the teaching staff and student representatives, representatives from the professional world, alumni and a delegation of persons nominated by the VUB's Board of Directors. The College Council is currently chaired by the Vice-Dean while the Dean prepares proposals. The College Council ratifies all major departmental decisions that impact other departments. The panel does not believe that this is the appropriate governmental structure. The current hierarchy needs to be inverted if the Council is to be a genuine governmental body. The Dean of the College should chair the College Council, while the Vice-Deans ought to prepare proposals for various issues to be dealt with. **The Steering Committee** (consisting of the dean, the associate dean, the heads of department and the directors of recruitment, external affairs and study abroad) is the college-wide governance body for day-to-day operations.

Decisions regarding personnel and the curriculum first need to be approved by the **Vesalius Board of Trustees** before being executed. At departmental level, the central decision-making body is the programme Department Council, which decides on curriculum changes. Each Department Council gathers its teaching staff and student representatives. The Department chair has significant autonomy and is responsible for the study programme and the functioning of the Department. The **Department Council** discusses the results from student surveys about the courses and checks the information per course before it is made public on the website. During the site visit, the recently appointed Vice-Deans outlined their views on research and teaching affairs and showed evidence of a strong awareness among some of the staff members of the necessity to improve crucial elements in the programmes.

All courses are **evaluated by the students**, halfway through (in group) and at the end of the semester (individually). The remarks feed into the revision process of the courses. The lecturers are required to write a reflection report that outlines remedies to address the remarks made. Currently, there is no programme evaluation, as there is no quality management system operational at the College.

An **external examiner** normally evaluates the courses every semester and suggests areas for improvement. The self-evaluation reports show that not all the remarks of the external examiners are followed, seemingly on the grounds that the examiners are unfamiliar with the nature of the College and its culture. If the College wants to continue to invest in the services of external examiners, this point needs to be clarified. The panel is of the opinion that the external examiner is to assess the academic standards per course in an independent manner. If the examiner has to take into account 'the nature and culture of the College', objectivity will be lost. The panel saw many sound recommendations of examiners which were disregarded or not followed. The panel repeats its advice (cf. GQS 3) that if the College is to invest in the services of the external examiners, it also has at least to consider following up the recommendations made.

Based on the information on display during the site visit and its interviews and discussions, the panel considers that students, lecturers and alumni have adequate opportunities **to get involved** in the programmes. Particularly the students in the IA programme reported that they have regular focus group discussions with the Head of Department and the student representatives. During the interview with the IA staff members,

the panel was informed that since the summer of 2014 the lecturers have been meeting regularly to discuss the assessment and quality of the examinations. The alumni survey questions their appreciation of the courses and their responses are discussed at Department meetings.

The aftercare for the alumni as well as opportunities to link them to the programme as ambassadors for their programme could prove worthwhile and could be improved. The alumni of all programmes asked for more support and, for instance, suggested the creation of a career counselling service.

The panel has taken note of the **many different recent actions** (e.g. effective follow-up of evaluation of courses and examiner's reports), along with new positions established for key staff to push necessary changes forward (e.g. the associate deanship for research and the associate deanship for teaching practice), which begin to move the College towards achieving improved standards (especially at course level) and to help students acquire appropriate skills. The panel has seen some rudimentary pieces of a PDCA-cycle but there is currently no real quality culture at the College. The panel observed that the College has elements at its disposal (of which some are in a very early phase) that may contribute to an integrated approach towards internal quality assurance, but it is absolutely convinced that these still need to be put into a system which helps to proactively manage the quality of the programmes and lift the College to the next level of performance.

The assessment panel finds that too few of the recommendations from 2007 have been taken up in time to remedy and improve the curricula of CMM and BUS. It therefore concludes from these observations that there was no real mechanism for internal quality assurance operational at the institutional level at the time of the site visit.

In setting up an internal quality assurance policy and system, the Board of Directors at the VUB were open to the suggestion of **exchanging ideas** with the VUB central level and helping the College to discuss these issues.

In summary, the panel is of the opinion that the College has some pieces of the puzzle and some rudimentary mechanisms in place to start building an internal quality assurance mechanism, but it is convinced that these still need to be fitted into one coherent approach. Currently there is no coherent system in place to safeguard the internal quality assurance and its core processes, at the College level nor at the programme level.

Moreover there is an urgent need to establish a quality culture at the College, gathering all staff members and supporting them in the deployment of the everyday quality functioning of the College. Particularly the different stages of the PDCA-cycle need to be defined, appropriate mechanisms need to be designed, and action to be taken based on the measurements and knowledge gained from the internal quality assurance instruments, all of which need to be fed into the system to improve the quality of the programmes. Note that, as most elements contributing to an internal quality assurance are to be deployed at College level, the panel does not differentiate the scores for the three individual programmes, notwithstanding the slightly better approach towards quality awareness in the IA Department. The panel therefore repeats that it acknowledges that the Vice-Deans pointed to ways in which the quality of teaching and research might be improved and believes that this is a good starting point from which to remedy for the current shortcoming at the College.

Final judgement of the assessment panel

Bachelor in Communication Studies (CMM)

As Generic quality standard 1 is evaluated as satisfactory, Generic quality standard 2 is evaluated as unsatisfactory, and Generic quality standard 3 is evaluated as unsatisfactory, according to the decision rules, the final judgement of the assessment panel on the Bachelor in Communication Studies is satisfactory for a limited period. In addition, Generic quality standard 4 is evaluated as unsatisfactory.

Bachelor in Business Studies (BUS)

As Generic quality standard 1 is evaluated as satisfactory, Generic quality standard 2 is evaluated as unsatisfactory, and Generic quality standard 3 is evaluated as unsatisfactory, according to the decision rules, the final judgement of the assessment panel on the Bachelor in Business Studies is satisfactory for a limited period. In addition, Generic quality standard 4 is evaluated as unsatisfactory.

Bachelor in International Affairs (IA)

As Generic quality standard 1 is evaluated as satisfactory, Generic quality standard 2 is evaluated as satisfactory, and Generic quality standard 3 is evaluated as unsatisfactory, according to the decision rules, the final judgement of the assessment panel on the Bachelor in International Affairs is satisfactory for a limited period. In addition, Generic quality standard 4 is evaluated as unsatisfactory.

Summary of the recommendations for further improvement of the study programmes

Generic quality standard 1 – Targeted Outcome Level

- Consider aligning the PLO of BUS with the DLO of the study programme ‘Handelswetenschappen’, whilst keeping the liberal arts approach.
- Conduct a thorough international benchmark to better position CMM with respect to its vocational versus academic orientation and its liberal arts versus the bachelor of arts philosophy.
- Provide all relevant course-related information in the course information files for the individual courses.

Generic quality standard 2 – Learning Process

- Reduce the number of and narrow down the range of disciplines touched upon by CMM in order to make the programme more coherent.
- Better integrate the DLO in the CMM curriculum after reducing the number of disciplines covered in the programme.
- Thoroughly redesign the structure and content of the CMM curriculum.
- Improve the depth in various disciplines in the CMM curriculum.
- Improve the balance of the research and practical competences of CMM.
- Strengthen the academic dimension in the CMM curriculum.
- Strengthen the emphasis on research methodology in the CMM curriculum.
- Improve the structure of the CMM curriculum to better align the compulsory courses and electives.
- Improve the structure of the electives in CMM and offer students a set of predefined choices, related to communication studies.
- Strengthen the academic dimension in the BUS curriculum.
- Strengthen the emphasis on research methodology in the BUS curriculum.
- Improve the depth in various disciplines in the BUS curriculum.
- Improve the balance of the research and practical competences of BUS.
- Increase the academic level in various courses of the BUS curriculum.
- Have students develop a stronger ability to apply methodological knowledge in assignments and papers in CMM and BUS.
- Increase the focus in the minors in BUS.
- Consider the introduction of some more elements about religions and some more regional studies in IA.
- Reconsider the content dealt with in the ‘European History’ course for IA.

- Reconsider and reduce the overlap in IA.
- Introduce the third year advanced course in research methodology in IA, as planned.
- Use the opportunities to learn from one another in the aspiration to improve the quality of the CMM and BUS curricula. Add a methodology component, deepening the academic rigour of the CMM and BUS curriculum.
- Discuss among the staff the number of assignments; rearrange these with respect to the learning path of the students throughout the programme.
- Offer proper feedback at crucial instances of the student's learning path in order to provide stepping stones for the students to grow and develop their competences.
- Introduce a systematic study time measurement system, as part of an overall quality assurance mechanism, and act upon it.
- Improve the level of analytical discussion, the use of statistics and research methods in the capstone and honours papers.
- Introduce an end of programme integrative element, at an appropriate academic level.
- Clarify the specific admission regulations for all programmes.
- Safeguard the quality of the incoming students whilst applying the clear admission regulations.
- Enhance the assertiveness of the recruitment policy.
- Set up a genuine marketing strategy for the College, as planned.
- Invest in staff development initiatives for all Vesalius staff members.
- Form a strong group of core faculty members for the College and its programmes.
- If new staff are to be hired for CMM, aim at research-oriented profiles.
- Reduce the number of administrative and general counselling tasks of the staff.
- Develop a stronger research tradition at the College to support the academic level of the programmes and have all of Vesalius' staff perform research.
- Introduce a student counsellor in order to reduce the general student counselling duties of the staff; introduce the position of a student counsellor in this respect.
- Look for an enlargement of the premises, with the eye on larger student groups at the College.
- Improve the facilities at the College.
- Look into how the contacts of the students with governmental bodies and international organisations can be improved.

Generic quality standard 3 – Outcome Level Achieved

- Develop a coherent evaluation policy for the College.
- Improve the level of the examinations and testing, to bring it up to the level of an academic bachelor.
- Develop common marking standards, as part of the evaluation policy.
- Have the Academic Standards Committee (or a new Quality Management Committee) function as an internal quality assurance instrument with respect to evaluation and testing.
- Enlarge the academic orientation of the CMM and BUS programmes.
- Act upon the recommendations of the external examiner reports.
- Reduce the number of assessments and evaluations in all programmes.
- Improve the quality of the capstone and honours papers.
- Address the grade inflation problem properly in all programmes.
- Develop common marking standards for all courses.
- Use the opportunities to learn from one another.
- Have the Academic Standards Committee (or a new Quality Management Committee) identify good practices.
- Develop a genuine internal quality assurance system for the College and its programmes.

Generic quality standard 4 – Structure and Organisation of Internal Quality Assurance

- Develop an appropriate governmental structure with the Dean as head of the College Council and the Vice-Deans preparing proposals.
- Develop a quality management system.
- Initiate a quality culture in the College and its programmes.
- Clarify the position of external examiners.
- Improve the aftercare for the alumni.
- Use the recommendations of review panels and external examiners to improve the quality of the programmes.

Follow-up of the recommendations

The assessment panel wishes to express its appreciation of the improvements implemented by Vesalius College since the site visit, based on the description of these improvements during the first feedback round. These include drafting a manual concerning teaching and quality control, benchmarking research expectations, and undertaking a full governance review. The panel notes the positive attitude displayed by Vesalius College with regard to the recommendations suggested in this report and encourages the College to continue these efforts.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

Curricula vitae of the members of the assessment panel

Prof. dr. Rudy Martens

Rudy Martens is full professor in strategic management and, since 2011, dean of the Faculty of Applied Economics at the University of Antwerp. Before 2011 he was vice dean of the Faculty of Applied Economics and chairman of the department of Management. He was also director for post-experience education at the Antwerp Management School from 2000 till 2005.

He obtained his PhD in strategic management in 1988 at the University of Antwerp. He was a visiting research fellow at INSEAD with an ICM doctoral fellowship from 1985 till 1987.

His teaching is situated in the field of strategic and general management at the graduate and postgraduate level. His research focuses mainly on strategy processes, knowledge management and management of SME's. He is actively involved in the AACSB network and also participating in the EFMD network to help increase the effectiveness of educational processes in business schools.

Prof. dr. Steven Eggermont

Steven Eggermont, PhD, is research director of the Leuven School for Mass Communication Research and programme director of the Bachelor and Master in Communication Sciences at the University of Leuven. His

work draws from literatures in communication science, developmental psychology, and social and health behavior sciences. It focuses on media use during the life course and effects of exposure to the media on perceptions and behaviors. Eggermont has published widely on children's and adolescents' media use, sexual media contents, media use and health behaviors, and media effects. He is principal investigator of several fundamental and applied research projects within the field of communication sciences and has a large international network. As a visiting scholar he has spent periods at renowned institutes such as the Annenberg School for Communication (University of Pennsylvania, U.S.A.), the Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media (University of London, U.K.) and the University of Amsterdam.

Prof. dr. em. Hans van Hout

Hans van Hout has been emeritus professor in Higher Education, University of Amsterdam, department of Educational Sciences since 2007. He is an expert in quality assurance, assessment of learning results and study careers in higher education. He was a member of different assessment panels of NVAO, Qanu and Certiked. He had appointments at the University of Twente (1968–1976), University of Nijmegen as a director of a Center for Educational Research and Development (1976–1993) and the University of Amsterdam as a professor in Higher Education and Vice-chancellor for academic affairs (1993–2007). He is an external member of the Examination Committee of the Medical School of the Free University in Amsterdam and member of the Supervisory Board of the Vocational College Midden Nederland in Utrecht (Secondary Vocational Education). He also is program manager of courses in Educational Leadership for educational directors of the Center for Excellence in University Teaching of University Utrecht.

Prof. dr. Geoffrey Edwards

Geoffrey Edwards is a Senior Fellow in the Department of Politics and International Studies in the University of Cambridge and Reader Emeritus in European Studies in the University and an Emeritus Fellow of Pembroke College. He was made a Jean Monnet chair in Political Science in 1996. He has a PhD from the London School of Economics and worked at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office as well as various think tanks, including Chatham House, before taking up his post in Cambridge. His particular research interests are the EU's foreign, security and defence policies and its institutional development.

Miss Anneloes Hoff

Anneloes Hoff currently spends her sabbatical year working on several projects relating to business and human rights in Colombia as an intern at PAX, the Dutch section of Pax Christi International. She graduated summa cum laude from University College Roosevelt (Middelburg, the Netherlands), where she completed a BA (Hons) in Political Science, International Law and Anthropology with a minor in Research Methods and Statistics. She also spent a semester at Lund University (Sweden), where she focused on International Development and International Political Economy. Her bachelor thesis was selected as the overall winner of the International Relations and Politics category of the Undergraduate Awards, a prestigious global awards program for undergraduate research. Furthermore, she received the 2014 UCR Student Leadership Award for her involvement in various student boards and her academic achievements. Anneloes' academic interests include, among other things, corporate accountability and human rights, rights-based monitoring and grassroots activism.

APPENDIX II

Vesalius College Reply and Follow-up to the Assessment Report

12 MAY 2015

The faculty and management of Vesalius College hereby express their appreciation for the analysis and recommendations provided by the assessment panel. The report has been carefully and intensively studied by the College's faculty body and senior management and a far-reaching process of fundamental reform and comprehensive improvement measures have already been initiated.

Most importantly, the Board of Trustees of Vesalius College has appointed a new senior management team, including a new Dean as well as two new senior management posts - an Associate Dean for Teaching Excellence and an Associate Dean for Research. The new management team has, in close cooperation with the Heads of Department, faculty members as well as student representatives, initiated a rigorous reform process that includes far-reaching governance reform (including a new Academic Quality Committee), comprehensive teaching guidelines and training as well as a College-wide research frame-work.

The College is of the firm opinion that these measures and their full implementation over the next year will significantly strengthen Vesalius College's educational offerings as well as the academic quality of its staff and programmes. In this light, the senior management and Heads of Department of the three programmes appreciate the panel's encouraging remarks in the final report, related to the College's reform efforts that have been already undertaken:

“The assessment panel wishes to express its appreciation of the improvements implemented by Vesalius College since the site visit, based on the description of these improvements during the first feedback round. These include drafting a manual concerning teaching and quality control, benchmarking research expectations, and undertaking a full governance review. The panel notes the positive attitude displayed by Vesalius College with regard to the recommendations suggested in this report and encourages the College to continue these efforts.”

The following sections briefly outline the College's main pillars of the reform and improvement actions that have already been initiated. The full implementation of these actions will be outlined in the College's official remedial action and improvement plan and roadmap and will take effect in the next academic year.

1 Change of Senior Management and Full Governance Reform (including Quality Control)

In June 2014, the Board of Trustees has appointed a new Dean with significant international education and research expertise in order to lead the College's reform and re-orientation for the next six years. A key emphasis is placed on leading the implementation of far-reaching academic reforms, innovations and remedial actions with a view to strengthen Vesalius College and its existing academic programs. In September 2014 the Board of Trustees approved the Dean's recommendation of creating two new senior management positions, dedicated to strengthen the College's international research, teaching & assessment as well as internal quality control dimensions. A new **Associate Dean for Research** and an **Associate Dean for Teaching Excellence** have been appointed in order to devise and implement core processes for strengthening the College's research and teaching dimension. Both post-holders have significant expertise in international education and leading peer-review research.

Between October 2014 and April 2015, the senior management and faculty initiated a **comprehensive governance reform of the College** with a view to create core institutions and processes for internal and external quality control of all three programmes and the College's evaluation and teaching policies as a whole. This governance reform was adopted by the College Council and approved by the Board of Trustees in April 2015. At the core of the reform is the creation of the new **Academic Quality Committee (AQC)** composed of the Dean, Associate Deans, Head of Departments, three external examiners and three VUB professors belonging to the Faculty of

Economic and Social Sciences (ES). A Service-level Agreement (SLA) is currently in preparation between the College and the VUB's ES Faculty to strengthen cooperation in research and quality control. The Academic Quality Committee is in charge of overseeing the general process of quality control (including academic rigour and demands of individual courses, reliability, transparency, validity and objectivity of testing as well as follow-up on student evaluations). The international benchmarking of academic standards and results is guaranteed through the involvement of independent, international external examiners, who provide rigorous evaluation of the content and results of the three programmes' courses and testing. The AQC and Heads of Department follow a strict procedure of implementing the external examiners' recommendations. In addition, External Examiners will have significant moderation powers, including the right to recommend the lowering (or increase) of grades in line with leading international standards.

The College's senior management and Head of Departments are confident that the appointment of the Associate Dean for Teaching Excellence, the creation of the AQC, the clarification of the External Examiners' roles as well as the governance reform and new responsibilities of the Departments in terms of quality control will form an important step in the College's improvement of its internal quality control.

2 Vesalius College Teaching Manual and Assessment Policy

Under the leadership of the Associate Dean for Teaching Excellence and the Teaching Excellence Committee, a comprehensive teaching manual, outlining key requirements of course content, progression levels, skills and testing has been devised and adopted by the College Council and approved by the Board of Trustees in April 2015. The manual forms the basis for common academic requirements and standards across the three academic programmes and outlines in detail binding and mandatory processes and requirements related to all major aspects of teaching and testing. A separate **College-wide Assignment and Examination Policy** is currently in preparation. The procedures outlined in the manual will already take effects as of the coming Fall Semester 2015. Heads of Department and the Associate Dean for Teaching Excellence will closely monitor the implementation of these procedures. A full screening and review of all exam questions and assignments has already been carried out by the AQC in the Spring 2015 semester. The College will continue on its path of implementing and further improving these procedures and standards.

In addition, and in close cooperation with the VUB and external partners, the College will provide regular training of all faculty in the field of pedagogics and teaching methods in order to guarantee homogenous standards of teaching across all programmes.

3 Adoption of an internationally benchmarked Research Framework

Under the leadership of the Associate Dean for Research, the College has developed and adopted a new **“College Policy on Research Outputs and Expectations”** (see Appendix). The policy is the result of an international benchmarking process that combines the research expectations of major research universities in Flanders as well as international standards and expectations. The research policy is firmly embedded in the College’s new faculty evaluation frame-work and now forms an integral part of regular faculty assessments. Research support, in terms of resources and regular colloquia complements the research policy. As a first step, the Associate Dean for Research conducted, in close cooperation with the VUB’s ES faculty, an assessment and “audit” of every faculty member’s research track-record. Individual classification and research output expectations have been formulated and will be followed up on on an annual basis. The College is confident that the new research policy, which directly feeds into future faculty evaluations, will provide the basis for a fundamental shift in the faculty’s research activities as well as quality and quantity of output. A mentoring scheme between those faculty members that are highly research prolific and those still having to develop their research profile will be established in the summer of 2015.

4 Comprehensive reform of the Curricula of the three Programmes

A process of a full and comprehensive review and reform of the three programme curricula has been initiated and will be carried out within the next year. The aim is to have a fully reformed curriculum available for each programme by 2016. The first College away days are scheduled for the end of May 2015 during which faculty, students and senior management will carry out a full review of course offerings, curriculum coherence, academic rigour, progression and course innovation. The process will include a thorough international benchmarking exercise, input from the professional field, in-depth consultation with the student body and careful consideration of external examiner remarks. The Heads of Department are confident that at the end of this exercise a thoroughly strengthened and academically challenging (as well as internationally competitive) programme will be adopted by Fall 2016.

Overall Implementation

The new senior management of the College would like to stress once again that the panel's recommendations and follow-up requirements have been taken very seriously by all stakeholders and a wide range of fundamental remedial actions and improvement measures have already been undertaken in close consultation with the Board of Trustees, the Heads of Department, student representatives as well the VUB's Vice-Rector for Education and the Dean of the VUB's ES faculty. We are grateful for the panel's recommendations and look forward to the continuation of strong reform actions with a view to fully comply with the panel's recommendations and the future strengthening of Vesalius College as a unique educational institution.

