

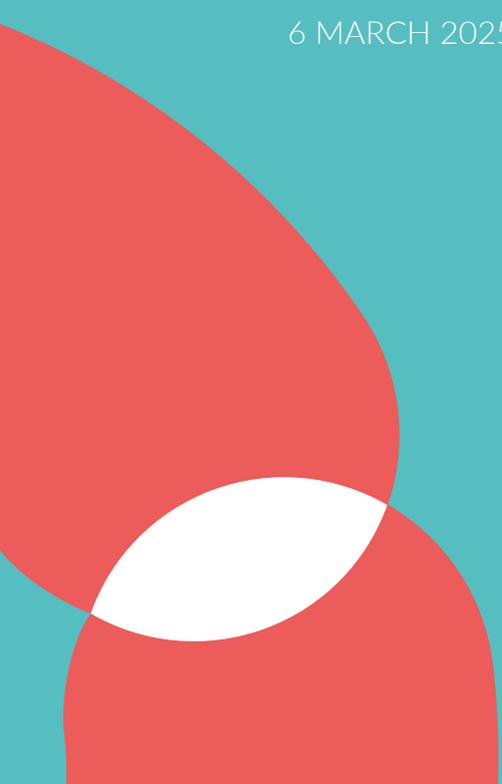
NVAO  THE NETHERLANDS

ACCREDITATION

JOINT MASTER'S PROGRAMME
EUROPEAN POLITICS AND SOCIETY,
VÁCLAV HAVEL JOINT MASTER
Leiden University (the Netherlands), Charles
University Prague (Czech Republic),
Jagiellonian University Kraków (Poland),
Pompeu Fabra University Barcelona (Spain),

PANEL REPORT CONDITIONS

6 MARCH 2025



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1 Introduction

On 16 December 2022, the panel assessed the quality of the joint master's programme European Politics and Society, Václav Havel (hereafter EPS) during a site visit. In its advisory report (21 February 2024, AV-1516), the panel issued a conditionally positive advice. Subsequently, the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (hereafter NVAO) came to a conditionally positive decision on 25 April 2023 regarding the application for accreditation. Two conditions were imposed, which had to be met by 25 April 2025. The consortium submitted a response to the conditionally positive NVAO accreditation decision to the NVAO on 4 December 2024, explaining how the consortium intends to meet the imposed conditions.

At the request of the NVAO, two panel members from the former panel (AV-1516) assessed whether the consortium met the condition.

- Prof. dr. Robert Wagenaar, chair, Director International Tuning Academy, Professor of History and Politics of Higher Education, University of Groningen, the Netherlands;
- Dr. Laura Horn, Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences and Business, University of Roskilde, Denmark;

The panel was assisted by Tinka Thede MSc, policy advisor at NVAO, also secretary. All panel members completed and signed a statement of independence and confidentiality.

The panel assessed the conditions for the joint master's programme EPS according to the Standards of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), issued in October 2014 and approved by the EHEA ministers in May 2015. This European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes should be applied for quality assurance of international joint programmes if some of the cooperating higher education institutions require external quality assurance at programme level. The standards to be assessed are based on the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG). This procedure allows the possibility that only one procedure can lead to accreditation in several countries.

Only the criteria for the standards where conditions have been imposed are mentioned in this report. Per standard the panel presents a brief outline of its findings, as well as the considerations that led the panel to a concluding judgement on a three-point scale: the programme either meets, partially meets or does not meet the standard. At the end of this chapter and based on its judgements on the individual standards, the panel presents an overall conclusion on whether the conditions have been met. This conclusion can be either positive, conditionally positive or negative.

The panel members read the documentation presented by the institution (Annex 1: documents reviewed) and reported their findings to the secretary. Based on the findings, considerations and conclusions, the secretary wrote a draft advisory report that was first presented to the panel. After the panel commented on the draft report, the chair endorsed the report. On 25 February 2025, the advisory report was sent to the consortium, which was given the opportunity to respond to any factual inaccuracies in the report. The consortium replied on 3 March 2025. This led to some corrections. Subsequently, the final report was endorsed by the panel chair. The panel drafted its advice fully independently and offered it to NVAO on 6 March 2025.

2 Description of the programme

2.1 General data

Institutions	: Leiden University (The Netherlands) Charles University Prague (Czech Republic) Jagiellonian University Kraków (Poland) Pompeu Fabra University Barcelona (Spain)
Programme	: European Politics and Society, Václav Havel joint master programme
Level	: Master
Orientation	: Academic
Degree	: Master of Arts
Locations	: Leiden (the Netherlands), Prague (Czech Republic), Kraków (Poland), Barcelona (Spain)
Study load	: 120 ECTS credits ¹
Mode of study	: Fulltime
Field of study	: ISCED ² : Interdisciplinary

2.2 Profile of the consortium

The application is filed by a consortium of four higher education institutions in four countries: (1) Leiden University in Leiden, the Netherlands, (2) Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic, (3) Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, and (4) Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, Spain. The partners signed the first consortium agreement in February 2017, and updated it in January 2022.

The degree is offered by these four academic and degree awarding partners. Charles University Prague has been the Coordinating Partner from the beginning. The European Politics and Society, Václav Havel Joint Master Programme (EPS) had its first student cohort in 2017. The intake of first year students has grown from 16 in 2017-2018 to an annual average of 42 in the period 2022-2024.

Leiden University was founded in 1575 and is a research university. The University has seven faculties and a campus in both Leiden and The Hague. Currently, over 34,000 students are registered, and over 5,800 staff are employed.

Charles University in Prague is a research university, founded in 1348. The University comprises seventeen faculties in a wide range of disciplines. Charles University has nearly 50,000 students enrolled in more than 300 accredited degree programmes. Over 7,000 students come from other countries. The University employs almost 4,500 academic and research staff.

Jagiellonian University Kraków was founded in 1364. It comprises sixteen faculties, the oldest of which is the Faculty of Law and Administration as the continuation of the Faculty of Law. Over 34,000 students are registered in bachelor and master programmes. The University employs more than 8,700 staff members, 4,700 of whom are academic teachers.

Pompeu Fabra University Barcelona was created in 1990 by the Generalitat de Catalunya to establish a public university aimed at academic excellence and to contribute to the development of the country. The University concentrates its research and teaching on the various dimensions of the human being, including biological, communicative and social, and is organised into eight faculties. Over 12,000 students are registered, and almost 600 academic and 670 administrative staff are employed.

¹ Credits indicating the study workload, based on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.

² International Standard Classification of Education

2.3 Profile of the programme

European Politics and Society, Václav Havel Joint Master Programme (EPS) combines the strengths of the four Partner Universities in the fields of European politics, contemporary history and culture, economics, international relations, public policies and policy making in a joint master's degree programme. In this programme, students acquire knowledge and skills that are essential to understanding and interpreting the challenges that Europe currently faces in the global arena. EPS prepares the students for a career in the international labour market, capable of building bridges both within Europe and with countries outside Europe.

The programme is a two-year full-time study programme of 120 ECTS credits. Throughout the programme, the language of instruction is English. The programme consists of four semesters of 30 ECTS credits each. The first semester, taught in Prague, familiarises the students with key challenges Europe faces, giving attention also to cultural and historical dimensions, and provides a first introduction to the methodology and the key academic disciplines. It lays the foundations for the rest of the programme. At the end of the first semester, students choose the topic of their master's thesis and write the first version of the master's thesis project proposal.

The second semester is spent in Leiden or Kraków and provides the opportunity for students to start their specialisation. It consists of compulsory courses on several aspects of European Union (EU) studies, in particular EU law and EU economics, a European language course and a methodology course. In addition, students have a choice of optional courses provided by the local university.

For the third and fourth semesters students may choose to study at a partner university, not being the one in which the student was enrolled in the 2nd. Semester, and specialise in one of the four areas of expertise associated with the consortium partner. The third semester includes also an internship (Prague, Leiden, Kraków) or the acquisition of advanced research skills (Barcelona) as well as the preparation for the thesis through seminars and optional courses. Students finish their thesis in the fourth semester.

In addition, extracurricular joint events are organised in each semester: the Prague Welcome Event, the Barcelona Research Seminar, the Brussels Study Trip and the Oxford Spring School. These are aimed at community building and training the students in research and presentation skills, career and network development and debating skills

3 Assessment realisation conditions

3.1 Condition 1 Standard 1 Eligibility

3.1.1 Substandard 1.2. Joint design and delivery

The joint programme should be offered jointly, involving all cooperating institutions in the design and delivery of the programme.

Condition

Adopt a joint set of Teaching and Examination Regulations, make informal guidelines, rules and regulations more formal and monitor their implementation.

Outline of findings and considerations

The consortium compiled a short report in which they provided information on the measures implemented to meet the conditions. The information comprises of a description of the process, the measures taken and assessment of the impact of the measures so far. The report is accompanied by three appendixes (see documents reviewed).

The report, as well as the Plan of Action offer detail and insights regarding the actions from May 2023, with first initiatives taken in January 2023. The panel commends the programme for the substantial progress it has made in addressing the conditions.

A result of the actions is the document *Course and Examination Regulations* (hereafter CER) which has been implemented in October 2023.

The CER includes the learning outcomes, making a distinction between four types of competencies: basic, general, specific and transversal and substituted with five abilities.

The panel is of the opinion that the CER is rather general and does not detail the type of learning, teaching and assessment applied for each course unit but instead refers to the manuals. A general overview in the form of a table covering variation and consistency in the modes of learning, teaching and assessment would have been useful. However, a distinction is made between obligatory courses and facultative or elective course units.

The panel noticed that regarding the 'compulsory order of examinations' there is a difference between Kraków and the three partner universities in the requirements for commencing their studies in the third semester (2nd. year).

Nevertheless, the CER, which are based on already existing documents as well as not documented arrangements, offers a formal framework to implement and deliver the programme and in result responds to the shortcomings in terms of insufficient jointness expressed by the panel.

The document also shows that the reconstituted Board of Examiners (further: BoE) hold regular meetings and is well positioned for monitoring the CER.

The panel likes to make one more observation. Although the panel strongly advised to exclude language courses from the programme, because these are not meeting the academic requirements for the master level, a student still can opt for a language course of 5 ECTS.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that there is still no full alignment between all partners and not all recommendations of the panel are fully followed, it is clear to the panel that previously informal procedures are now formulated in clear written policies, and there are clear coordination mechanisms through regular meetings. This also means that the programme partners can deliver the programme in a more integrated way, while still retaining a level of local flexibility.

The panel notes that the CER certainly constitutes a great step towards safeguarding the joint design and delivery. Therefore, the joint master's programme meets the condition related to standard 1.2, joint design and delivery.

3.2 Condition 2 Standard 5 Learning, Teaching and Assessment

3.2.1 Substandard 5.2. Assessment of students

The examination regulations and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes should correspond with the intended learning outcomes. They should be applied consistently among partner institution.

Condition

Strengthen the role of the Exam Board: in supervising (1) not only the procedure but also the content and level of the assessments, (2) the quality assurance of the assessment, and (3) the level of the optional courses selected by students.

Outline of findings and considerations

Next to the document *Course and Examination Regulations* (CER) a second document was compiled: *Rules and Regulations of the Board of Examiners* (hereafter RRBoE). The panel is of the opinion that this document responds in particular to the concerns of the panel regarding this standard.

The consortium chooses to split information in two documents, namely CER and RRBoE. The panel, however, believes that one single document would have probably been more transparent. The RRBoE are in practice an elaboration of article 3.12 of the CER.

The panel recommends sharing both documents with teachers, supporting staff and most of all students, because its content is relevant to all.

The RRBoE shows that the role and responsibilities of the BoE indeed have been strengthened. The BoE has been reconstituted with a clearer mandate and increased scope of authority. Its formal responsibilities – which are overarching for the implementation of the programme at the four partner institutions (with the exception of the elective course units) have been defined in eight points.

The reconstitution of the board safeguards independence, and the increased meeting frequency facilitates faster decision-taking, and signals to the students that there is indeed an efficient platform for quality assurance. The successful handling of concrete cases (i.e. plagiarism) shows that the implementation has worked.

Although it was not a real concern of the panel, the panel appreciates that the decision has been made to prevent overlap between the Management Board or Programme Committee and the membership of the Board of Examiners.

Furthermore, the panel strongly supports the decision of the consortium to take out the possibility for compensation of a thesis not meeting the minimum academic requirements via the defence (exam). Documents show that that a thesis always have to have a pass grade and there are clear procedures for assessment disputes, including a protocol for a third reader if necessary.

The implementation of standardised thesis assessment procedures, as well as a uniform weighting between the grades for the written thesis and the defence, also constitute important steps in strengthening the quality assurance of assessment across the programme.

However, the difference in thesis requirements between research and professional tracks is retained. The panel recommends this to be clearly communicated to both students and assessors in advance.

The selection of the elective or facultative course units is formalised and implemented in terms of the procedure. The judgement, that is fitting the programme learning outcomes and at the appropriate level, is left to the local coordinator. The BoE only checks retrospectively.

To ensure the quality the panel thinks that it might be helpful for the local coordinator to monitor these judgements and report to the BoE in case there are issues.

Moreover, the panel believes it would be more appropriate that the BoE pre-approves a list of possible electives and make a decision on student proposals rather than deciding everything on an individual basis.

Conclusion

It is clear now that the Board of Examiners is operating on a formal basis, with a clearer mandate and far more authority and power.

Harmonisation of quality assurance and (level of) assessment has been implemented by making the BoE responsible and strengthening their role.

The selection of the elective or facultative course units is formalised and implemented in terms of the procedure. The panel is of the opinion that the procedure would benefit by involving the BoE in the selection procedure.

The panel assesses that the joint master's programme meets the condition related to standard 5.2, assessment of students.

3.3 Conclusion

Overall, the panel finds that the documents presented by the consortium adequately address the realisation of the conditions. The panel was able to properly determine what measures the consortium has taken to meet the conditions.

It is clear to the panel that previously informal procedures are now formulated in clear written policies, and there are clear coordination mechanisms through regular meetings. The panel notes that the *Course and Examination Regulations* certainly constitutes a great step towards safeguarding the joint design and delivery.

The Board of Examiners is operating on a formal basis, with a clearer mandate and far more authority and power. Harmonisation of quality assurance and (level of) assessment has been implemented by making the Board of Examiners responsible and strengthening their role.

The selection of the elective or facultative course units is formalised and implemented in terms of the procedure. The panel is of the opinion that the procedure would benefit by involving the BoE in the selection procedure.

The panel concludes that the programme meets the imposed conditions. Therefore, the panel issues a positive advice.

4 Overview of the assessments

Standard	Judgement
1 Eligibility	
1.2. Joint design and delivery	Meets the standard
5 Learning, Teaching and Assessment	
5.2 Assessment of students	Meets the standard
Conclusion	Positive

Annex 1: Documents reviewed

Documents presented by the consortium

1. Progress report conditions joint MA EPS;
2. Appendix 1 Course and Examination Regulations joint MA EPS;
3. Appendix 2 Rules and Regulations Board of Examiners joint MA EPS;
4. Appendix 3 Plan of Action additional conditions joint MA EPS.

Annex 2: List of abbreviations

BoE	Board of Examiners
CER	Course and Examination Regulations
EAQA	European Approach Quality Assurance of joint programmes
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EPS	European Politics and Society, Václav Havel.
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders ('Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie')
RRBoE	Rules and Regulations of the Board of Examiners

