

## Experts' Report on the Accreditation of Study Programmes

at the  
**National Research University  
Higher School of Economics**

- St. Petersburg, Russia -

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### 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ZEV A Commission, March 17, 2020

Study Programme	Degree	Credit Points	Duration	Type of Programme
Political Science and World Politics	Bachelor	240 ECTS	4 years	Full-time
Comparative Politics of Eurasia	Master	120 ECTS	2 years	Full-time

**Date of site visit: 21-22 November, 2019**

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

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

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

*The Commission decides to accredit the following degree programmes as offered by the Higher School of Economics (HSE) St. Petersburg School of Social Sciences and Area Studies:*

- *Political Science and World Politics (Bachelor)*
- *Comparative Politics of Eurasia (Master)*

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

*This decision is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), the Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area and the recommendations of the ECTS Users' Guide as referred to in the ZEvA Manual for the External Assessment of Study Programmes.*

## **2. Central Findings and Final Vote of the Expert Panel**

### **2.1 Central Findings of the Expert Panel**

The experts have come to the overall conclusion that the School of Social Sciences and Area Studies at HSE University St. Petersburg has created two innovative study programmes which provide a large variety of career prospects for graduates. Both programmes strike a new path in terms of their strong international profile, their focus on state-of-the-art methods training and their combination of political science and IR perspectives. The School's student-centred approach to teaching and learning is especially convincing, as is the general strong commitment of the high-profile faculty to their role as teachers and instructors.

The experts have identified some room for optimization regarding the university's tools and procedures for quality assurance (as, for example, course evaluation). In addition, the transparency of the course syllabi and the precision of the general programme descriptions could be further enhanced.

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

The expert panel recommends the accreditation of the following study programmes as offered by the *Higher School of Economics (HSE) St. Petersburg School of Social Sciences and Area Studies*:

- Political Science and World Politics (Bachelor)
- Comparative Politics of Eurasia (Master)

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

To support the university and the programmes in their further development and enhancement, the experts give the following general recommendations:

- The experts recommend further intensifying staff development activities, especially in the realm of didactic training.
- The questionnaire for course evaluation should include more specific and more relevant questions, as, for example, questions concerning teaching methods or the achievement of intended learning outcomes. Also, the university should make sure that the students are always informed about evaluation results and the measures taken in response (feedback loop).
- The experts recommend using the alumni network more systematically for the purpose of quality assurance. General efforts to consolidate and extend the alumni network should be intensified.

I Final Vote of the Expert Panel and Decision of the ZEvA Commission

2 Central Findings and Final Vote of the Expert Panel

- Some of the information provided in the course syllabi could be more precise and transparent. This applies particularly to the reading lists (for example, a clear distinction between mandatory texts and additional recommended reading would be helpful).
- The experts recommend further improving the presentation of the study programmes online and in other published sources. In particular, more detailed and more precise information on the content and structure of the programmes should be provided.

In addition, the experts give the following recommendation for the Bachelor's Programme in Political Science and World Politics:

- With a view to the programme title, the regional focus of the programme should be extended beyond Europe and the BRICS states.

## II. Evaluation Report of the Expert Panel

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

It is the purpose of this accreditation procedure to assess the quality of one Bachelor's programme and one Master's programme in the field of Political Science as offered by the School of Social Sciences and Area Studies at the **Higher School of Economics (HSE) St. Petersburg**.

The assessment is based on the "Assessment Framework for the Evaluation of Study Programmes" as laid out in the "ZEvA Manual for the Evaluation and Certification of Study Programmes". This framework integrates the requirements of the "European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG)" (ENQA 2015), the "Framework for Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area" (2005) and the "ECTS User's Guide" (European Communities, 2015).

As stipulated in the ESG, the assessment was organized as a multiple-step peer review procedure. ZEvA assembled an expert panel composed of three university professors in the discipline, one professional from outside academia and one student.

For the purpose of assessing the study programmes, the School of Social Sciences and Area Studies generated a self-evaluation report including an appendix of supplementary documents (course syllabi, CVs of teaching faculty, relevant statistical data, rules and regulations). The self-report and all documents were submitted in English.

Upon reception of the self-report the expert panel travelled to St. Petersburg for a 2-day site visit in November 2019. In the course of this visit the experts conducted separate interviews with members of the university leadership board, the Dean of the School of Social Sciences and Area Studies, academic supervisors and programme coordinators, teaching faculty, students, graduates and employers.

This report is based on the experts' assessment of the self-report and the results of the on-site talks. It will serve as a basis for the ZEvA Accreditation Commission to decide on the accreditation of the study programmes with the ZEvA quality seal.

The experts would like to thank all involved members of the HSE faculty and staff for the professional organisation of the site visit, the open atmosphere during the talks and the friendly reception at the HSE campus in St. Petersburg.

## 1. General Aspects

### 1.1 Mission and Profile of HSE University

Since its foundation in the early 1990s, the Higher School of Economics (hereinafter: HSE) has established itself as one of the most renowned universities in Russia. The university's focus in research and teaching is on economics and social sciences, although the spectrum of disciplines has been constantly extended over the years, now including programmes in the humanities, engineering, physics and computer science. As one of 29 higher education institutions HSE was granted the status of a National Research University, which entitles it to apply its own educational standards. Of all NRUs, HSE is the only one with a focus on social sciences (instead of technology and engineering).

HSE currently offers 72 Bachelor's programmes and 151 Master's programmes. More than 30 Master's programmes and 10 Bachelor's programmes are taught in English only. At present, about 35.000 students are enrolled at the university, 25.000 of whom study at the main HSE campus in Moscow. Three branch campuses were opened in St. Petersburg, Perm and Nizhny Novgorod in the mid-1990s. In organizational and strategic terms, all HSE campuses possess a relatively high degree of decision-making autonomy.

In the self-report, the mission and strategic goals of HSE are summarized as follows (cf. self-report, p. 13):

*[The] Mission of HSE is to ensure global competitiveness of Russia via development and promotion of cutting-edge economic, information and social models and technologies. The university sees its role as a centre of integration of Russia into international social and economic networks and a place for education of the most talented domestic and international high-school graduates, which is compatible with international universities.*

*The Strategic Goals of HSE University include:*

- *To educate professionals possessing in-demand skills in their subject areas: economics, management, social sciences and humanities, computer science and engineering;*
- *To apply fundamental and applied research to public benefits and harmonization of Russian national policies;*
- *To act as a platform of sharing best practices and implementing innovative internationally acclaimed forms of learning and research and disseminate this experience across Russia.*

#### 1.1.1 HSE St. Petersburg

HSE St. Petersburg enrolled its first students in 1998. During the last four years the number of students has doubled, reaching a total of more than 5.000 in 2018/19. In the academic year 2019/20, the branch campus counts more than 6.500 students.

The vision and mission of the St. Petersburg campus are described as follows in the self-report (cf. p. 19):

*The comprehensive internationalisation of education and research is a strategic goal of HSE St Petersburg's campus and it is reflected in its activities. Similarly, the campus has a strong commitment to promoting inter- and multidisciplinary approaches in both education and research. Strategic priorities also include the integration of quantitative methods and analytics as a core feature across all of the degree programmes and research, the development of an entrepreneurial attitude among the students, and a team-first corporate culture for a fast decision-making. It ideally fits the vision of HSE to become Russia's leading world-class scientific and educational, analytical and consulting centre.*

HSE St. Petersburg offers 12 Bachelor's programmes and 16 Master's programmes, about 25% of them in English. It is organized in four "Schools" (Social Sciences and Area Studies, Economics and Management, Arts and Humanities, Mathematics and Information Science) and a Faculty of Law, with the majority of the students being enrolled in the HSE core disciplines (management, economics and law).

The two study programmes discussed here are offered by the **School of Social Sciences and Area Studies**. The School came into existence in September 2018 as a result of the division of the former School of Social Sciences and Humanities into two separate organizational entities. It unites four departments (Asian and African Studies, Public Administration, Political Science, Sociology) and six research centers under its roof and offers four Bachelor's and five Master's programmes to almost 1.700 students. The programmes are not exclusively attached to one department, but involve a large variety of faculty from the entire School and beyond.

According to the self-report, the School puts a particular emphasis on the following goals: *"establishment of educational programmes instructed in English, attraction of the most world renowned and ambitious universities as partners, development of conditions for active international mobility of the students, intensification of methodological training of students (especially development of the skills of digital data analysis), development of the skills to implement applied projects for students of all levels of education"* (self-report, p.37).

### *Experts' Appraisal*

The on-site talks with the members of the HSE leadership board and the Dean of the School of Social Sciences and Area Studies have confirmed that HSE St. Petersburg has developed its own distinctive institutional profile, which is closely in line with the general HSE strategy, but puts a particular emphasis on internationalization and interdisciplinarity as outlined above. These strategic cornerstones are also clearly reflected in the two programmes assessed here, as well as the high importance attached to solid methodological training which is pivotal for the HSE approach to the discipline of Political Science.

The experts appreciate that HSE St. Petersburg is granted a high degree of autonomy in designing its study programmes, even though the campus is, of course, tied to the central university administration and leadership in Moscow in various ways. The competition between the HSE campuses for the most attractive study programmes and the best students

clearly has a positive effect on the general development of the institution and results in a convincing portfolio of innovative study programmes at the campus. The experts highly appreciate HSE St. Petersburg's efforts to develop a unique profile within the national HSE network, and to realize it with its own strategic partners and for different target audiences. The experts also approve of the strategy to focus on cross-disciplinarity and internationality as distinctive features of the programmes.

The on-site talks with faculty, staff and students have also shown that the rapid growth in student numbers HSE St. Petersburg has seen over the past few years is beginning to push the building infrastructure and the staff capacities to their limits. Also, further growth at this rate may lead to a further extension of class size, which could affect the quality of teaching and learning and compromise HSE's profile as a research university. In this regard, HSE St. Petersburg is currently at the crossroads. Hence, the experts see the need for a continued, intense discussion process that involves all internal and external stakeholders and leads up to a well-grounded decision between further growth and consolidation.

## 1.2 Internationalization and Mobility

As already mentioned above, increasing internationalization at all levels is a core strategic goal of HSE as a whole and HSE St. Petersburg in particular. In the self-report, the university's commitment to this goal is particularly highlighted:

*"HSE St. Petersburg Internationalisation Strategy defines internationalisation as a key focus which is reflected in all the schools' activities. It is [...] not limited to international mobility or the number of international faculty [...] Comprehensive internationalization is a culture of thinking and acting by faculty members, professional services staff and students" (self-report, pp. 22-23).*

The university has included its regulations for international student mobility and the recognition of credits in the self-report (annex). At the request of the experts, the HSE internationalization strategy was also provided as a hand-out on site.

The School has taken a number of measures to foster the process of internationalization. These include a strong focus on English as a language of instruction (25% of the programmes are taught in English only), the development of double degree programmes with partner universities abroad and strong efforts to recruit faculty on the international job market. Also, HSE St. Petersburg is actively involved in international associations and consortia.

The percentage of international students at HSE St. Petersburg currently lies at around 12%. Within the last 3-4 years, both incoming and outgoing student mobility has greatly increased, as underlined by the statistical data provided in the self-report. For the academic year 2018/19, the report records more than 380 incoming and more than 360 outgoing students.

The university has set itself further ambitious goals in this realm: by the year 2025, 20% of the degree-seeking students are to be from outside Russia; by 2030 it should be 30%.

Also, it is the goal of HSE St. Petersburg that all Russian students should have gathered some experience abroad by the time they graduate, as e.g. by studying abroad for at least one semester or by participating in Summer Schools or similar events.

In order to achieve these goals, the university takes high efforts to provide more funding in support of outgoing mobility, as financial limitations are still the greatest obstacle preventing students from going abroad. As far as staff mobility is concerned, the university is currently developing a programme that enables HSE lecturers to teach as guest lecturers at partner universities. Also, visiting lecturers from abroad are invited on a regular basis. These measures are supplemented by third-party funds for student and staff mobility.

The two Political Science programmes assessed here show the same dynamic growth in student mobility, even though in terms of absolute student numbers, mobility rates are still comparatively low. Out of almost 400 Bachelor students, only about 20 are studying abroad in the academic year 2019/20; in the Master's programme it is five out of 60 students. The university identified this as an area of improvement in its self-evaluation report, although the self-report contains a long list of partner universities for the Political Science programmes, among them many renowned European research universities. For the Bachelor's programme there is also a double degree option in co-operation with a partner university in Rome (Tor Vergata); another co-operation with the University of Trento is planned for the Master's programme.

### *Experts' Appraisal*

The on-site talks have revealed that the internationalization process at HSE St. Petersburg is even more dynamic than becomes apparent in the self-report. The experts particularly appreciate the steps already taken to increase funds for student and staff mobility and recommend further pursuing this path. By and large, the recent rapid increase in mobility rates is very impressive and seems to prove that the university is successful in its efforts to internationalize.

The partners for the double degree options also appear to be wisely chosen, as they offer classes in English and possess particular expertise on fields that cannot be offered at HSE, as e.g. global governance.

The university's internal regulations ensure that credits earned abroad are recognized based on a learning agreement.

### **1.3 Teaching Faculty**

The School of Social Sciences and Area Studies counts a total of about 100 faculty members, among them 20 Full Professors and 43 Associate Professors.

Most of the faculty involved in the two Political Science programmes possess experience as researchers and lecturers abroad, mainly in European countries and in the USA. In both pro-

grammes, the core parts of the curriculum are taught by lecturers affiliated with the departments of Political Science and Sociology, with additional contributions from the departments of History and Asian and African Studies.

For each study programme HSE appoints an Academic Director or “Supervisor” from among the teaching faculty. The Academic Directors bear the main responsibility for the design and contents of the programme, and for the appointment and coordination of the teaching staff. CVs of the core teaching faculty were submitted to the experts as part of the self-report. Also, the experts had the opportunity for talks with the Academic Supervisors of the programmes and other members of faculty during the site visit.

### *Experts’ Appraisal*

The experts are impressed by the excellent qualifications, the international profile and the open, critical mindset of the teaching faculty they encountered during the site visit. There is no doubt that the lecturers as well as the faculty leadership attach high importance to the quality of teaching and to their own professional role as teachers. The university’s excellent staff resources are further supplemented by regular visiting lecturers from inside and outside academia, and the university ensures that students receive qualified training and supervision during internships and projects.

Furthermore, the experts commend HSE on its principle of appointing Academic Directors at programme level and on the strong team spirit among the members of faculty who share responsibilities for the same programme.

Based on the outcomes of the talks in St. Petersburg the experts recommend further intensifying staff development activities, especially in the realm of didactic training. Even though a number of measures are already being taken (open classes with peer observations, training events and seminars on and off campus) this could be done in a more structured and systematic way.

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

The infrastructure, resources and student services provided at HSE are described in detail in the self-report. In addition, the experts were given a short tour of the HSE premises in St. Petersburg.

### *IT Infrastructure and Library*

The library at HSE St. Petersburg contains about 16.000 print volumes in Russian and English and provides access to more than 45 electronic databases, including EBSCO and ScienceDirect. Also, the university increasingly integrates blended learning elements (as, for example, MOOCs) into the teaching and learning process. There is a video studio on site to record online courses and other online learning materials.

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1 General Aspects

All classrooms are equipped with computers and licensed software, including systems for video and audio records.

*Building Infrastructure*

Classes in Political Science are mainly held in one of the four HSE buildings in St. Petersburg, centrally situated on Griboedova Channel. The programme offices, the international office and the personal offices of the faculty members are also to be found here. Apart from 12 lecture rooms of various sizes, the building also hosts six language labs and six computer labs with a total of more than 160 computers. The building also offers additional areas for recreation and group work, as well as catering options for students.

HSE St Petersburg has three dormitories across the city which are open both for domestic and international students. On principle, all international students are offered a place in one of the dorms.

*Student Support Services*

HSE St. Petersburg has implemented a number of centralized support services that serve the needs of students, applicants and faculty. Among these are the Admissions Office, the International Office, a Career Development Center and the Social Welfare Office that provides advice on social, financial and medical issues.

Career services include individual counseling and a regular career day. Also, the Career Development Center is in charge of the university's alumni network.

In all matters concerning programme-related administrative issues, students can approach the support staff at the responsible programme office. In all academic matters, they may turn to their lecturers or to the Academic Director of their Programme, depending on the particular question.

Students can also contact the central Student Council or to the student councils at programme level for information and support. The members of this board are elected by the students in order to represent their interests.

The Association of International Students and the Erasmus Student network provide special assistance to incoming students from outside Russia, including an orientation week, a buddy programme, the annual "Cultures Day" and other extracurricular activities, as well as support in finding internship placements.

Special learning and examination conditions can be arranged for students and applicants with disabilities.

*Experts' Appraisal*

In the course of the site visit the experts have gained the overall impression that the students of HSE St. Petersburg are provided with excellent support structures and services that help them to pursue their studies successfully. Both lecturers and administrative service units display a high level of commitment in catering to the students' needs, and students always know

who to turn to for advice. The students and graduates interviewed on site confirmed that they were very satisfied with general service quality and service orientation on campus, and were never hesitant to approach a professor about any questions. Generally, the relationship between lecturers and students is marked by low hierarchies and mutual respect, as the students pointed out during the on-site interview.

As far as infrastructure and technical equipment at the HSE building are concerned, the experts find that these are state-of-the-art. The panel members are particularly impressed by the large variety of electronic resources (e-journals) that are available to the students via the university library.

However, as already mentioned above, student numbers are slowly beginning to exceed the capacities, as was also drawn out by the students during the site visit. In case the university decides to further extend enrolment figures, this may have to go along with a further extension of the building infrastructure.

## **1.5 Quality Assurance**

The main responsibility for the quality of the study programmes lies with the Academic Director and with the so-called Programme Boards (one for each degree programme). The Programme Board consists of about seven members of the teaching faculty and/or administrative staff involved in the programme, including the Academic Director. Each Programme Board meets annually to discuss the general development of the programme and to decide upon changes to be made to the curriculum based on survey results and other feedback provided by internal and external stakeholders.

A general quality assurance policy does not yet exist at HSE St. Petersburg but is currently in the process of development.

HSE St. Petersburg applies several instruments for the quality assurance and enhancement of teaching and learning. As a general rule, students evaluate each of their classes based on standardized online survey questionnaires. The questionnaires are relatively short and concise, comprising only about eight questions, but also include free comment options. Participation in course evaluation is compulsory for all students.

The results of the surveys are made available to the teachers and – in aggregated form – to other interested parties within the university (as e.g. deans, Academic Directors and programme offices) and serve as a basis for the continuous improvement of the programmes.

In case the general evaluation of a course turns out to be substantially below average, the Heads of Department are entitled to exclude lecturers from teaching a course.

On the other hand, HSE does not only apply sanctions for “substandard” evaluation results, but also a number of “moral” and financial incentives for particularly good teaching. These include an internal “Best Teacher Award” that also entails monthly supplements to the winning lecturer’s salary.

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*1 General Aspects*

In addition, there are awards for the best teaching in English both at university and campus level, and regular supplements for teachers who teach a particularly high number of classes in English.

In 2018 HSE St. Petersburg implemented an additional survey for the monitoring of Student Life in order to receive feedback on the students' satisfaction with their general living and learning conditions at the university.

In addition to the written surveys, students may also provide face-to-face feedback to their teachers or, in case of general complaints, use the so-called "Red Button" system. The "Red Button" is an online feedback form by means of which both faculty and students may lodge any form of complaint, report or appraisal, which is received by the responsible staff in St. Petersburg and by the Directorate of the Programmes at HSE Moscow. The Red Button tool should especially be used in severe conflict situations, as e.g. breaches of ethical behavior.

Relevant input may also come from the employers' side, as e.g. in the form of feedback reports on internships or via the members of the Board of Trustees.

*Experts' Appraisal*

Based on all written and oral information provided, the experts have no doubt that quality in teaching and learning is a central strategic goal of HSE St. Petersburg. The university has assigned clear internal responsibilities for quality assurance and has developed effective and reliable procedures for the management and development of the study programmes.

As regards the procedures and instruments applied, the experts recommend further development and refinement. This refers especially to course evaluation: from the experts' point of view, the questionnaire should be significantly extended by including more specific and more relevant questions, as, for example, questions concerning teaching methods or the achievement of intended learning outcomes. At present, the design of the questionnaire does not provide sufficient information for an in-depth, substantiated analysis of teaching quality or individual teaching performance. This view was also shared by some members of the teaching faculty participating in the on-site talks. The experts suggest involving students in the re-design of the course evaluation questionnaire in the context of a project.

Furthermore, the university should make sure that the central results of course evaluation and the consequences drawn from them are always communicated to the students (feedback loop).

In addition, the experts recommend using the alumni network more systematically for the purpose of quality assurance, as, for example, by conducting long-term alumni surveys to gather information on the graduates' career paths. General efforts to consolidate and extend the alumni network should be intensified: during the on-site talks, some of the graduates pointed out that they feared losing touch with the HSE community and particularly the St. Petersburg campus.

## **1.6 Transparency and Public Information**

All key information on the School and its study programmes (intended learning outcomes, profile, contents, course syllabi, etc.) can be found on the HSE website, both in English and Russian language. Also, there is extensive additional information available for international students, concerning, for example, admission regulations and exchange programs, possible sources of funding etc.

University-wide regulations on student assessment, term papers and theses, projects and internships are officially documented and accessible to students at all times.

The experts commend HSE on the high degree of transparency and easy accessibility of its website especially for foreign applicants and the interested public outside Russia. For all enrolled students, maximum transparency regarding course requirements and assessment procedures is also warranted.

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

### **2.1 Structure and Profile of the Study Programmes: General Outline**

#### General Structural Features

In terms of structure, the study programmes follow the Russian “4 + 2” model, which comprises four-year undergraduate programmes (240 credit points) and 2-year Master’s programmes (120 credit points). HSE was the first university in Russia to adopt this two-tier model and has now fully disestablished the pre-Bologna “specialist” programmes.

The study programmes are based both on Federal Educational Standards that are binding for all higher education institutions in the country, and on HSE’s own standards, which it is entitled to apply due to its status as a National Research University. The self-report names the following innovative features that distinguish HSE educational programmes from those offered by other universities (cf. p. 38):

- *General cycle of courses in all Bachelor’s programmes: introduction into social sciences;*
- *Bachelor’s students get not only a specialized education in a selected area (Major), but can also choose a secondary specialization in a different area (Minor) to complement the Major;*
- *Master’s and Bachelor’s programmes offer a lot more research, project and internship activities than required by federal educational standards.*

The close link between research and teaching is of central importance for the university’s didactic approach. In the Bachelor’s programme, mandatory research seminars are a recurrent element of the curriculum each year, and students are involved in research activities from an early stage. At Master’s level, research and projects take up more than 40% of the ECTS credits awarded.

The “Minor” subjects in the Bachelor’s programmes comprise 8% of the curriculum. Each Minor consists of a pre-defined set of four classes (one per semester) from outside the student’s core discipline which relate to the same umbrella topic.

For each educational component, a detailed course syllabus is provided which describes the intended learning outcomes and contents of the course, the applied methods of teaching and assessment, the credits awarded and the estimated student workload. Also, a detailed reading list is included in each syllabus. All course syllabi were made available to the experts as part of the self-report and are also published on the university website.

#### Methods of Teaching and Assessment

HSE attributes special significance to providing a solid methodic and theoretical training, analytical skills and general professional skills to ensure the employability of its graduates in

a wide variety of fields. This applies equally to the students of Political Science, as was confirmed in the course of the site visit. The students interviewed on site stressed that they were “not so much taught the facts, but rather learned how to study facts”. Above all else, students are to learn how to approach and solve problems from an academic point of view and by means of scientific tools and methods.

In order to achieve this aim, a mixture of teaching methods is applied in both programmes, including lectures and seminars, projects, case studies, business games and, of course, independent self-learning. In its self-report, the university describes its didactic guiding principles as follows (cf. p. 40):

1. *Student-focused approach which emphasizes the student’s crucial role in the discussion of newly-derived information and prior experience and focuses on skills and practices that enable lifelong learning and independent problem-solving;*
2. *Active Learning which encourages the engagement of students on the learning process. Active learning requires an appropriate learning environment which promotes research-led and interdisciplinary learning; encourages leadership skills of the students through self-development activities; stimulates collaborative learning for building knowledgeable learning communities; cultivates task-based performance by giving students a realistic practical sense of the subject matter learned in the classroom.*

Some courses are fully or partly taught online by means of so-called MOOCS. These may be embedded in a standard face-to-face course (blended learning concept) or fully substitute such a course.

The applied methods of student assessment are very diverse, too, ranging from regular written assignments, research essays and text analyses to projects and presentations. Active participation in class also has an impact on the overall course grade. On principle, it is the responsible lecturers’ task to ensure a constructive alignment between intended learning outcomes, contents, didactic methods and the forms of assessment within their courses. As well, the selection of course literature is at the lecturers’ discretion.

As a general rule, examinations are not clustered within one time period at the end of the academic year, but evenly distributed across the year. Classes are scheduled at varying times of the day, leaving at least some room for side jobs or other extracurricular activities.

### *Experts’ Appraisal*

By and large, the on-site talks with the students and faculty have confirmed the positive overall impression of the two degree programmes that the experts had gained from the written material. The experts commend the School of Social Sciences and Area studies on the general design and structure of the programmes. The strong efforts taken to impart solid methodic foundations, research competences and professional skills clearly distinguish the Political Science programmes of HSE St. Petersburg from other educational programmes in this subject discipline that are currently offered in Russia.

The experts particularly appreciate the School's comprehensive understanding of political science, including global politics and international relations (IR). In absence of a separate IR School – as it exists in most Russian universities – the programmes under scrutiny deliberately include IR topics, which adds substantially to the distinctive profile of the School of Social Sciences and Area Studies.

The conception of political science as being “not about facts, but about how to study facts” is obviously shared by students, faculty and graduates alike, as became apparent throughout the site visit.

The experts also find the student-centered approach to teaching and learning pursued at HSE very convincing. The on-site talks have proved the success of these methods: students and graduates displayed a high level of commitment to their university and obviously possess excellent communication skills. It also became clear that due to their special skill set, the graduates enjoy a high degree of employability in a variety of professional areas.

The assessment system, although demanding in its requirements, is relatively student-friendly. Courses and examinations are generally organized in such a way that they remain feasible for the students. The final theses presented to the experts during the site visit also prove that the School applies high academic standards that are in line with those of the international scientific community.

The on-site talks have shown that there are mixed opinions among the teaching faculty about the university's strategy to integrate more blended learning elements like MOOCs into the study programmes. A further process of intense discussion and reflection on this topic appears necessary which takes the concerns of the lecturers into account.

The syllabi contain very comprehensive, in-depth information on the courses in compliance with Russian academic standards and traditions. For further enhancement, the experts recommend describing certain aspects more precisely, especially as far as the reading lists are concerned. For example, students should know from the syllabi whether the sources listed there are basic and mandatory reading or just recommended material for further reference, or sources which should be read in excerpts only.

In this context the experts also recommend further enhancing the presentation of the study programmes online and in other published sources. For instance, it does not become clear at present that the English language training in the first year of the Bachelor's programme is only optional and extracurricular. In order to avoid misunderstandings, this aspect should be more transparently described.

## **2.2 Bachelor's Programme “Political Science and World Politics”**

### Key Data

A Bachelor's programme in Political Science has existed at HSE St. Petersburg since the year 2006. Since then, the programme has undergone a number of substantial changes and

transformations in terms of its profile and content. In 2016/17, it was re-named into “Political Science and World Politics” as a result of a fundamental curricular reform. Since the academic year 2017/18, the programme has been taught in English only, apart from a number of compulsory courses in the first and second year which are offered both in English and in Russian.

Most recently, a double degree option in cooperation with the University of Rome Tor Vergata was introduced into the programme.

HSE currently offers 40 state-funded places and 60 places for fee-paying students on the Bachelor’s programme. There is an additional small quota of places for students from outside Russia.

In the academic year 2019/20, a total of about 400 students are enrolled, about 50% of them female.

Interest in the programme has been continuously high over the last few years, with an average acceptance rate of about 15%. Applicants are ranked based on the overall scores they achieved in the Russian Unified State Exam (school leaving certificate). For the Bachelor’s programme in Political Science, relatively high “threshold scores” are defined. Candidates with USE results below that threshold are not eligible to apply for the programme.

According to the self-report submitted to the experts, the average annual student dropout rate lies around 9%.

So far, the majority of the graduates have continued their studies by enrolling in graduate programmes in Political Science, International Relations or related fields, either at HSE or at other universities in Russia or abroad. A smaller percentage of the graduates enter the job market directly, starting careers in international business, public service, journalism or in NGOs.

### Intended Learning Outcomes

In the official programme handbook, the aims and objectives of the Bachelor’s programme in Political Science and World Politics are summarized as follows:

*The international undergraduate programme in Political Science and World Politics is an English-language programme that combines theoretical knowledge of political science with analysis of regional particularities of political and social processes to prepare graduates for careers in government and policy making, international business and non-governmental organisations, or for further study.*

*The programme:*

- 1. Allows students to acquire expertise in the functioning of contemporary governments, and their interactions with civil society and business organisations;*
- 2. Enhances their understanding of contemporary modes of international cooperation and global political processes.*

3. *Provides students with hands- on experience of real-life approaches to political and social issues.*

Based on these overall goals as well as the Federal State and HSE Educational Standards, the university has defined a set of Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) for the Bachelor's programme. These include *Universal Learning Outcomes* (as e.g. the ability to work in a team, to think critically or to conduct professional activities internationally) as well as *Professional Learning Outcomes*, most of which touch upon the aspect of research competence (as e.g. capability of defining relevant research problems and putting together a research design, capability of choosing research methods appropriate for resolving professional tasks, capability of presenting research results). The ILOs are also published in the programme handbook and are laid out in detail in the self-report.

### *Experts' Appraisal*

The experts commend HSE St. Petersburg on the innovative profile of the Bachelor's programme. From their point of view, the idea to combine (comparative) political science with a strong international relations component is excellent and makes the programme stand out among its competitors, along with the choice of English as the sole language of instruction. However, the experts would be in favour of further diversifying the contents, especially in the IR part, in order to bring the programme more closely in line with its title (cf. chapter below).

The intended learning outcomes clearly reflect the taxonomies of the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area. By and large, the experts regard the ILOs as adequate for an undergraduate programme in political science. The element of research competence clearly dominates, especially in the Professional Learning Outcomes, which, however, corresponds to the actual programme profile.

### Contents and Curriculum

As already mentioned, the programme combines political science with elements of International Relations and World Politics, supplemented by foreign language training and a strong research component which run as continuous threads through the entire programme. All in all, 40% of the curriculum consists of elective components, including the "minor" subject already described above.

In the first two years, the main focus lies on providing students with a thorough introduction to the scientific methods of political science and a solid theoretical basis in their chosen field. Core units include courses on the history of political ideas, categories of political science and political theory, as well as mathematics and statistics and other social sciences and humanities subjects (economic theory, sociology, philosophy etc.) In addition, students are introduced into quantitative and qualitative research methods by means of special courses and in the context of projects and research seminars. From the second year onwards, students may choose a second foreign language they wish to study (French, German, Portuguese or Chi-

nese) as well as one out of two regional tracks to specialize on (either Europe or the BRICS and Asian countries). Extracurricular training in English is also offered to those students in need.

The third and fourth year of the undergraduate programme aim at extending the students' skills by covering comparative politics and comparative policy studies, as well as a larger amount of IR and World Politics contents. In addition, students are involved in several projects and internships and work on their final thesis. The programme finishes with the defense of the thesis and the final examination.

### *Experts' Appraisal*

The experts are impressed by the innovative design of the Bachelor's programme, which combines Political Science and IR, professional and scientific training in an unconventional, though very ambitious way. The curriculum is well aligned with the intended learning outcomes of the programme, especially as far as the central element of research is concerned, although the methods training appears almost too demanding for an undergraduate programme, judging by the course syllabi.

The overall structure of the programme seems reasonable in its progression from the theoretical foundations to more application-oriented elements and its gradual shift from PS methods to concrete regions. The projects and internships are another strong point of the programme, especially the concept of conducting project seminars to provide the necessary theoretical basis for the students' projects.

As the programme is named "Political Science and World Politics", the experts recommend further extending the regional focus beyond Europe and the BRICS states, for example by paying more attention to the position of the USA or other central players in global politics.

## **2.3 Master's Programme "Comparative Politics of Eurasia"**

### Key Data

The Master's programme "Comparative Politics of Eurasia" was launched in the year 2017. The programme is taught in English only and targets both international and Russian students. It was developed based on its predecessor, the Russian-taught programme "Politics and Governance", in direct response to current external demands and requirements.

In the academic year 2019/20, the programme counts a total of 52 students, about 50% of whom are international students. The average number of newly enrolled students per year lies at around 25. In 2019, 15 state-funded places on the programme were offered, with five additional fee-paying places and 12 places for (fee-paying) foreign students.

As for the Bachelor's programme, there has been a continuously high interest in the Master's programme and its predecessor: in recent years, acceptance rates lay at around about 20-30%, the average dropout rate at about 15%.

In order to be admitted to the programme, candidates need to hold a Bachelor's degree or equivalent and need to possess the necessary proficiency in English. Students are selected by a committee based on a portfolio of documents (including CVs, transcripts of records, letters of recommendation) and personal interviews.

A substantial percentage of the graduates enrol in doctoral programmes in the fields of political science, international relations and communication studies, both in Russia and abroad. Others join university research centres or independent think tanks as junior researchers, or pursue careers outside academia, as e.g. in journalism, diplomacy or in governmental organizations.

### Intended Learning Outcomes

#### The Master's programme

According to the self-report of HSE University (cf. p. 59), the objectives of the programme are as follows:

*The programme responds to the growing strategic importance of the wider Eurasian region, including the former Soviet Union and the countries of East Asia, as well as the associated need for both national and international expertise in the comparative politics of this vital region. It combines theoretical knowledge of political science and international relations with advanced training in social sciences research methods and other analytical skills [...]*

#### *The programme objectives:*

- 1. To provide students with knowledge about the political and socio-economic processes in the countries of the post-Soviet space and East Asia, necessary for building a successful career in academia, diplomacy, international governmental and non-governmental organizations, journalism, government and non-governmental sector, and international business.*
- 2. To develop professional skills needed to frame efficient political, social and economic solutions for future social and political development.*
- 3. To assist students in developing analytic competence and skills needed to perform independent academic and practice-oriented research.*

These objectives are also named in the official programme handbook.

As for the Bachelor's programme, the university has defined intended learning outcomes (ILOs) for the Master's programme which are rooted both in the Federal Educational Standards and in the HSE standards. The ILOs include *Universal, General Professional and Professional Learning Outcomes*. All three categories cover academic research skills as well as soft skills and professional/management skills, with a clear focus on research aspects. For example, graduates of the programme should be able to "evaluate, model and forecast social and political processes at the global, international, regional and local levels using methodology of empirical and theoretical research", "conduct academic research including interdisci-

*plinary one, formulate hypotheses and innovative ideas, and test them”, “to develop a design for academic and applied research [...] with the use of modern political science methodology” or to “develop proposals and recommendations for applied research and consulting”.*

Professional and soft skills include the ability to communicate and interact in a multicultural environment, to take management decisions and to plan and organize political campaigns.

### *Experts’ Appraisal*

The experts fully support the general approach of uniting comparative politics and international relations perspectives within one Master’s programme. They share the university’s belief that this combination prepares students more effectively for the demands of the global academic and non-academic labour market, and is more strongly in accordance with the realities of politics in times of globalization than a traditional Area Studies programme.

From the experts’ point of view, the ILOs are adequate for a Master’s programme in this subject discipline, although some of them appear almost too ambitious for this qualification level. This applies particularly to the Professional Learning Outcomes, as e.g. PLO 4-6.

The special profile of the programme is clearly reflected in the general programme descriptions and in the ILOs. These leave no doubt that the focus of the programme lies on imparting advanced research skills and research-related soft skills, rather than historical or socio-cultural knowledge.

### Contents and Curriculum

In the core courses of the first year, students are introduced to the general framework of comparative politics and post-communist studies and receive a thorough instruction on quantitative and qualitative research methods. Alongside this core, the programme offers a range of elective courses from two different groups. The first group augments the core training in comparative political science, covering politics and society in contemporary Russia, social and political transformations of Central Asia, China and other East Asian societies, post-communist electoral politics and post-communist political economy. The second, more multidisciplinary group of electives covers the international relations of Russia, Central Asia and China, dimensions of global inequality, human rights etc.

In addition to that, students may choose one course from a general, university-wide pool (MagoLego), as well as one out of two elective courses with a methods focus (either Computational Text Analysis or Social Network Analysis).

The third and probably most central element of the curriculum is the research component, which includes two research seminars on Eurasian Political Studies and Qualitative Methods in Political Research. In the context of the research seminars students are introduced to the entire research cycle (formulation of hypotheses and research questions, research project design, choice of methods, data collection and analysis etc.) The research seminars and the

project seminar in the second year are to assist students in developing the skills they need to conduct their own research independently.

In addition, students work on projects and absolve two short internships in the second year (professional internship and research internship).

24 ECTS credits are awarded for the Master's thesis (including the final defence). However, there are several curricular components which are closely linked to the thesis or serve directly to prepare students for it, as e.g. the term paper in the first year, the project seminar in the second year or the weekly research seminars throughout the first three semesters.

### *Experts' Appraisal*

As already mentioned above, the experts fully embrace the overall profile and concept of the Master's programme in Comparative Politics of Eurasia. With a view to the formulated objectives and intended learning outcomes, the curriculum is designed in a convincing and plausible way, offering a good balance of mandatory and elective courses, a cutting-edge approach to comparative politics and an appealing mixture of topics. The curricular structure is generally clearer than in the Bachelor's programme, especially as regards the integration of the research components. As far as the experts can see, the credits awarded for the individual curricular components are in line with the course requirements.

The experts have no doubt that the programme fulfils its central goal of preparing students for future careers as academic researchers or for leading positions outside academia. The programme also provides excellent career prospects for graduates on the international market.

III Appendix

1 University's Response to the Expert Report

### **III. Appendix**

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

*The expert report is well-written and concise. It presents a comprehensive review of both degree programmes and the institutional context of the university. The ZEvA accreditation process has greatly contributed to our continuous improvement process both from the institutional and programme perspective. We would like to express our gratitude to the expert panel and the colleagues from ZEvA for their valuable recommendations and appraisals of the Degree Programmes in Political Science. We are going to continue develop the degree programmes in accordance with the expert advice.*

*HSE St Petersburg Team*

*St Petersburg, 07 February, 2020*