



**European Association for
Public Administration
Accreditation**

EAPAA Accreditation Committee Evaluation Report

Evaluation Report with respect to the request for accreditation of the Bachelor's programme Public Administration and Organization Science of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU), Faculty of Social Sciences, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

At its meetings of September 3 and 4, 2018 in Lausanne (Switzerland), the EAPAA Accreditation Committee evaluated the programmes against the EAPAA Accreditation Criteria.

1. Accreditation Criteria

2. Applicability/Eligibility	
2.1 Domain	The bachelor programme is a standard academic degree programmes in public administration. The programme fulfils this criterion.
2.2 Geography	The programme is organized by the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The Netherlands is a member of the Council of Europe; therefore the programme falls within the jurisdiction of EAPAA.
2.3 Programme longevity	The programme has been accredited by EAPAA before (lastly 2011). The programmes fulfil this criterion.
2.4 Programme variants and locations	There are no variants or other locations.
4 Category of accreditation	The bachelor programme opts for the first cycle bachelor level public administration programmes accreditation.
5. Standards	
5.1 Domain of public administration	The panel observed that the PAOS programme stands out from other public administration programmes in the Netherlands in a number of ways. The bachelor's programme at VU Amsterdam pays particular attention to the intertwining of governance and organising; to the argument that private organisations operate in an institutional context and therefore have to deal with key public administration requirements; to studying in an interrelated way the interactions of public and private organisations; and to the consequences of the functioning of organisations for society at large. The exit qualifications cover the topics stipulated by the domain-specific reference framework PAGO.

5.2 Mission of the programme	<p>The mission of the bachelor's programme is to offer a comprehensive, challenging and engaging curriculum to students. The panel observed that the programme has a clear vision within the domain of public governance: governance and organising are permanently interacting processes that occur in the public and private sector; policy making and the opportunities of public organisations to have a real impact on society are pre-eminently dependent on the (quality of the) internal organisation; combining insights from public administration and organisation sciences is therefore valuable to better understand the working of public and private organisations, and to contribute to the development of both policy itself and to the organisation processes that are likely to determine how successful that policy will be.</p> <p>Bachelor's students are trained towards achieving fifteen learning outcomes, which are organised in three categories of levels of learning: knowledge and understanding, application, and attitude. The panel observed that the competencies reflect the programme's profile and mission. The learning outcomes are related to the five Dublin Descriptors for bachelor's programmes.</p>
5.3 Level	<p>The panel considers that the intended learning outcomes reflect properly the content (public administration / organization science), orientation (academic) and level (bachelor's) of the programme.</p>
5.4 Practice and internships	<p>Throughout the curriculum students are developing skills that will serve them in their professional career, such as presentation, reflection or (academic) writing skills. They learn about these skills in tutorials and apply these in practica and assignments. In the 'PAOS: practical problems' course, students develop a research question based on a real-life issue in cooperation with the local Academy of the City. Although internships are not a compulsory part of the programme, students may decide to do a research-based internship as part of the minor subject space in the fifth semester. There is, however, room for more exposure to the professional field, both in the framework of the curriculum and as part of the extracurricular activities which the programme and the faculty can organise with the students' organisation.</p>
5.5.1 Curriculum Content	
5.5.1.1 Core components	<p>The curriculum of the bachelor's programme consists of four groups of courses: substantive and skills courses (90 EC) in the domain of PAOS; academic core courses (30 EC) attended by all students of the faculty of social sciences; electives (30 EC) in year 2, focusing on either Public Administration or Organisation Science; and a profiling space (30 EC) in the fifth semester which allows for a study period abroad, an internship or a VU-wide minor. The profile of the programme is reflected in the curriculum. There is ample attention to research methods and skills, and because governance and organising are studied from multiple perspectives, students acquire knowledge and skills on both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The panel acknowledges, based on the written materials and its on-site discussions, that the intended learning outcomes of the programme are translated adequately in the different components and individual</p>

	<p>courses of the bachelor's curriculum. the panel learned that in the most recent revision of the curriculum, the set-up of the thesis project has changed. In the view of the panel, the combination of group research and literature study now constitutes a relevant bachelor's thesis trajectory and addresses all intended learning outcomes.</p> <p>Moreover, students are exposed to several disciplines which are supportive of the curriculum, such as macro and micro sociology, law (including the elective 'law for government and companies'), political science, and economics and public finance (including the electives 'economy between markets and government', and 'strategy and decision making'). The panel observed with satisfaction that all core disciplines are covered in the curriculum.</p>
5.5.1.2 Other Components	<p>The programme features 30 EC of electives in either public administration or organisation science, as well as a 'profiling space' (minor subject space) of another 30 EC. The panel appreciates that honours students have the opportunity to extend their bachelor's thesis research with 12 EC and follow 18 EC electives from a wide range of disciplines at VU, University of Amsterdam or Amsterdam University College.</p>
5.5.1.3 Structure and didactics of the programme	<p>The panel observed that the curriculum is set up in a logical and coherent way. The programme has three types of learning activities: lectures, tutorials and practica. Students mentioned that they like the mixture of learning types and appreciate the open atmosphere of the university and the programme. The panel thinks highly of the mentorship programme and welcomes the idea to extend the scheme to the second and third year of the PAOS programme.</p> <p>During the visit the panel consulted a sample of course materials and concluded that both the contents and the didactic approach were relevant and interesting to students. It observed that teachers use a variety of methods to give substance to the educational philosophy of the programme.</p> <p>The panel gathered, based on the written materials and its discussions, that the courses are feasible. There are no major individual stumbling blocks in the curriculum. The bachelor's thesis project is organised meticulously and monitored carefully in order to ensure that most students finish the thesis in time. On average about 20% of students drop out of the programme.</p>
5.5.1.4 Intake	<p>The panel gathered from the written materials and its discussions that the programme is set up in such a way that difficulties in the transfer from secondary school to university is mitigated as much as possible. In the first year, students combine knowledge-based lectures with skills-based tutorials and challenging yet feasible assignments. Students indicated that the availability of mentors is a particular strength of the programme.</p>
5.5.2 Length	<p>The panel confirms, based on the information materials and the discussion on site, that the bachelor's programme is a three-year full-time programme of 180 EC, and thus meets the length criteria for academic bachelor's programmes in Europe.</p>
5.5.3 Results	<p>Upon reviewing the thesis sample, however, the panel wondered to what extent this thesis project effectively allows each student to achieve the</p>

	<p>learning outcomes 11 (conducting a literature survey and reporting on it orally and in writing) and 12 (conducting a simple research project under supervision). The panel learned that in the meantime and based in part on feedback from students, the programme has revised the bachelor's thesis, which consists as of 2017-2018 of a group research project (12 EC) and an individual thesis based on a literature study (12 EC).</p> <p>The panel concludes that the final products of the programme show that the graduates have achieved the programme's intended learning outcomes. However, some of the theses which the panel reviewed were quite weak in either the group or the individual part. The panel considers that this a point of attention for the programme.</p>
5.6 Quality Improvement and Innovation	
5.6.1 Programme accomplishment	<p>Graduates of the bachelor's programme have the opportunity to enter the labour market directly, but the vast majority enter a master's programme either at VU or at another university. The panel gathered from the discussion with alumni that they are satisfied with the education they received during the bachelor's programme as it prepared them adequately for their follow-up study and afterwards for a relevant position on the labour market.</p>
5.6.2 Curriculum Development	<p>After each course students are asked to complete a course evaluation which also enquires about the perceived quality of the assessment. The development of the PAOS programme is a continuous process and is based on the feedback by internal and external parties. The programme management initiates changes in the programme always in consultation with the relevant stakeholders: depending on the proposed change, the faculty portfolio holder for teaching, the Programme Committee, teaching staff, the group of programme directors, the heads of department, and the Examination Board are involved.</p> <p>The panel gathered from the written materials and its discussions that alumni are slowly but steadily getting involved in the quality of education through the Field Advisory Board. Last year a new field advisory board was established featuring both alumni and non-alumni.</p>
5.6.3 External Reviews	<p>The panel observed that the report of the previous accreditation committee (2011) and the findings from the voluntary midterm review by an external VU-committee (2015) were very important sources of feedback for the PAOS programme as they triggered the management to start innovations. Major changes that have been implemented as a follow-up to these reviews include the introduction of two distinct specialisations of five elective courses each, the minor subject space in semester five, the elaboration and use of an assessment plan, and the introduction of digital course dossiers.</p>
5.7 Student Assessment	<p>The panel observed that the bachelor's programme has an assessment policy that is in line with the established faculty assessment policy. Assessment has received considerable attention over the past few years from university, faculty and bachelor's programme, and this has led among others to an assessment plan. During the visit, the panel consulted the assessment plan, as well as the assessment matrix, which contains a description of the programme and the main learning trajectories. In the</p>

	<p>view of the panel, both plan and matrix demonstrate that assessment has been aligned to the learning goals of the courses and the exit qualifications of the programme.</p> <p>The panel believes that the assessment system is appropriate. The assessments are valid and reliable. The panel was informed that further to student comments, the programme will enhance the variety of testing forms and pay more attention to writing skills, mainly in assessments of second year courses.</p> <p>The Faculty of Social Sciences has one Examination Board for all regular programmes. It consists of five bodies: the secretariat, the central examination board, the core committee, twelve subcommittees for the degree programmes and the chair. The central board is responsible for policy issues at faculty level, while the core committee advises and instructs programme directors.</p> <p>The bachelor's thesis is evaluated and marked by two assessors, the supervisor and the co-reader. Both are using an identical evaluation form to evaluate independently the thesis, which consists of a partly collective and partly individual project. In the view of the panel, the evaluation of these theses was organised adequately with two assessors using a good quality evaluation form and scoring systematically both the group achievement and the individual accomplishment of the student. The panel did notice, however, that it was not always possible to establish how the graders arrived at the final mark when they did not substantiate their scores. The panel considers that the university, the faculty and the bachelor's programme pay good attention to assessment, which is reflected in an adequate assessment system.</p>
5.8 Programme Jurisdiction	Covered in the Institutional Accreditation
5.9.1 Faculty nucleus Score:	Covered in the Institutional Accreditation
5.9.2 Faculty qualifications	<p>The panel gathered from the written materials and its discussions that most staff members are involved in both research and teaching. Moreover, the expertise of the PAOS staff covers all core areas identified in the domain-specific reference framework. A large part of the curriculum is taught by senior teachers and researchers from the department of Organisation Sciences and the Public Administration section of the department of Political Science and Public Administration. These lecturers are often experienced researchers and are affiliated to research programmes that were assessed positively in the last international research review.</p> <p>Based on the written materials and its discussions, the panel thinks that the staff allocated to the programme is sufficiently numerous – the student-staff ratio is reportedly 1:23 - and has adequate didactic skills and good domain-specific knowledge to deliver the bachelor's programme.</p>
5.9.3 Diversity: gender and minorities	According to the self-evaluation report, roughly 30% of the first-year PAOS students have an immigrant background. Gender diversity among students is reportedly not an issue, with at least 40% of the students being female.

	<p>The diversity among staff is promoted in policies and activities at university, faculty and programme level. According to the self- evaluation report, gender diversity in the Organisation Science department is fine, with 42% of the staff being female, including staff at senior level. At the Political Science and Public Administration department, however, only 13% of the teaching staff are female.</p> <p>The panel recommends the programme to continue its efforts to attract both more ethnically diverse and more female teaching staff.</p>
5.10 Admission of Students	<p>The SVT observed that admission of students to the bachelor's programme is regulated by Dutch law. Admission is possible for everyone with a pre-university qualification and there is no cap on student intake. Students are strongly encouraged to attend the 'matching' programme in which they follow a representative introductory lecture and do a short test that is discussed afterwards. This matching enables students to make a better informed choice about their studies. Although the programme may advise students negatively, such advice is not binding and students are still at liberty to enrol.</p>
5.11 Supportive Services and Facilities	Covered in the Institutional Accreditation
5.12 Student Services	Covered in the Institutional Accreditation
5.13 Public Relations	Covered in the Institutional Accreditation
6 Additional Criteria	N.a.

2. Conclusion

Based on all material and especially the report of the NVAO-EAPAA site visit team, the Accreditation Committee has evaluated the programmes.

In conclusion: a mainstream public administration programme that also is critical and well organised. The mentoring of the bachelor students can be commended to other programmes. The individual element of the bachelor thesis should be improved (as planned).

Based on the above evaluation of the specific criteria, the EAPAA Accreditation Committee concludes that this programme meets the criteria for accreditation sufficiently and can be accredited without restrictions.