



**European Association for
Public Administration
Accreditation**

EAPAA Accreditation Committee Evaluation Report

Evaluation Report with respect to the request for accreditation of the Master's programme Public Administration 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 master 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	The master's programme at VU Amsterdam is unique in offering a part-time programme that is for a large part integrated with the full-time programme.
4 Category of accreditation	The master programmes opt for the second cycle graduate/master level public administration programmes accreditation.
5. Standards	
5.1 Domain of public administration	The master's programme builds upon the broad orientation of the bachelor's programme PAOS towards public and private governance and organisation. In addition to classical public administration, the programme addresses non-governmental actors and reflects on the public- private, multi-actor networks that deal with collective and public interests. The exit qualifications cover the topics stipulated by the domain-specific reference framework PAGO.
5.2 Mission of the programme	The aim of the master's programme Public Administration is to educate students to a level that enables them to function as specialised

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	professionals in the (semi) public sector or as scientific researchers. At the end of their studies, they can analyse complex situations and challenges relating to public administration and governance, and formulate recommendations as to what action should be taken. Moreover, graduates can assess the value of relevant social scientific research and design or conduct such research themselves. The theoretical insights in the master's programme are applied to increasingly complex objects of study and lead to a more advanced understanding of the field of public governance.
5.3 Level	The SVT observed that the competencies reflect the programme's profile. The learning outcomes are related to the five Dublin Descriptors for master's programmes. The SVT considers that the intended learning outcomes reflect properly the content (public administration), orientation (academic) and level (master's) of the programme.
5.4 Practice and internships	Most part-time students are professionals in (public) organisations and thus bring their everyday governance experience and questions into the classroom. The SVT gathered from the discussions with both part-time and full-time students that both sets of students appreciate this mixture, which is extended beyond the lecture halls and includes joint preparation of group assignments. However, while the programme provides sufficient tools to conduct research, there are only limited possibilities to put these tools into practice. In comparison to other one-year master's programmes, the exposure to practice is rather limited.
5.5.1 Curriculum Content	
5.5.1.1 Core components	<p>The curriculum of the master's programme consists of four core courses (24 EC) that are followed by all students: three substantive courses (theories of governance, policy and management, and good governance) and one course on methodology (methods of governance research). Furthermore, each track features three specialisation courses (18 EC) and a master's thesis (18 EC). The programme offers four different tracks emphasising the quality of governance and concentrating on three specific policy sectors – security, health care, and the third sector. The programme also distinguishes between the three P's of public governance: principles, problems and policies. Public governance is built on principles of good governance and confronted with interdependent social problems, while responses to such problems take the form of policy and policy implementation.</p> <p>The SVT observed that the intended learning outcomes of the programme are translated adequately in the different components and individual courses of the master's curriculum. The sample of course materials which the SVT reviewed indicated that the programme covers all the concepts, theories, methods and classics one would expect to find in a master's curriculum on Public Administration. The SVT observed that the entire curriculum consists of courses in which several core disciplines, and their inter-relationship, receive adequate attention.</p>
5.5.1.2 Other Components	The elective tracks offer either a focus on three different sectors or a more in-depth coverage of advanced disciplinary courses. The general and specialised track courses and the development of methodological and

	academic skills culminate in the master's thesis in the specialist domain. In the view of the SVT, the set-up of the curriculum is fine, with four specialisms integrated into one programme and with both programme variants catered for adequately.
5.5.1.3 Structure and didactics of the programme	<p>The SVT gathered from the written materials and the on-site discussions that the didactic approach of the programme is strongly connected to the educational philosophy of the university, which is summarized in its core values 'open, personally engaged, and responsible'. Most courses are organised either as lectures or as tutorials. The general core courses consist mainly of lectures while the specialist track-specific courses are often set up as tutorials.</p> <p>contents and the didactic approach were relevant and interesting. It observed that teachers use a variety of methods to give substance to the educational philosophy of the programme. On the basis of course materials and discussions, the SVT gathered that each course is feasible: there are no major individual stumbling blocks in the curriculum. Nonetheless, the number of students finishing the programme within the stipulated time is rather limited: 31% of the full-time students and about half of the part-time students manage to finish in the nominal time, while about 60% of full-time students finish in two years, and 60% of part-time students finish in three years.</p>
5.5.1.4 Intake	Although individual students bear responsibility for their own study progress, the SVT observed that the structure of the programme, the didactic approach and the commitment of the teaching staff contribute to students levelling up quite quickly, should they have to, and to complete the programme. Given that the programme caters for both full-time and part-time students, the drop-out rate of 10-15% is acceptable.
5.5.2 Length	The SVT confirms, based on the information materials supplied and the discussion on site, that the master's programme amounts to 60 EC. Full-time students complete the curriculum in one year, whereas part-time students spread the course load over two years.
5.5.3 Results	In order to establish whether students have effectively achieved the learning outcomes, the SVT reviewed a sample of 15 master's theses. The SVT thought that in each case, the thesis fulfilled at least the minimum requirements one would expect of a final product of an academic programme at master's level. Moreover, the SVT agreed with almost all scores given by the assessors. The SVT observed that one thesis was of sufficient quality but rather weak, and was satisfied to read that this appreciation was shared by the assessors and clearly spelled out in their evaluation form.
5.6 Quality Improvement and Innovation	
5.6.1 Programme accomplishment	Part-time students tended to choose a particular track that was in line with their occupation and provided them with more competencies to enhance their career in for instance civil society or the health sector. Full-time students mentioned that they are satisfied with the education they received during the master's programme as it prepared them adequately

	<p>for a relevant position on the labour market. Moreover, they feel they were indeed broadly trained, capable of pursuing a career at an appropriate level in different directions, and with enough skills to build a successful career.</p>
5.6.2 Curriculum Development	<p>The development of the master's programme PA 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. The SVT learned from its meeting with the PA Programme Committee that teachers and student members are equally represented and that in addition to monitoring the quality of education and advising on the Teaching and Examination Regulations, it also gives solicited and unsolicited advice to the programme director and faculty board.</p> <p>The SVT gathered from the materials and the on-site discussions that most adjustments to the curriculum of the master's programme concern changes within existing courses. All in all, the programme has been left relatively unchanged over the last four years. The most important innovation was the establishment of a fourth track, Governance of Health Care Innovation. Furthermore, the SVT observed that changes at the level of the faculty also had an impact on the master's programme. This is the case for instance with the assessment policy and with harmonising the internal quality assurance provisions. The SVT gathered from the written materials and its on-site discussions that alumni are slowly but steadily getting involved in the quality of education through the Field Advisory Board.</p>
5.6.3 External Reviews	<p>The SVT observed that the report of the previous accreditation committee and the findings from the voluntary midterm review by an external VU-committee were important sources of feedback for the PA programme. Major changes that have been implemented as a follow-up to these reviews include the introduction of the assessment plan, the production of digital course dossiers and the establishment of a Field Advisory Board.</p>
5.7 Student Assessment	<p>The SVT observed that the master'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 master's programme, and this has led among other changes to development of an assessment plan. The SVT was pleased to learn that in the run-up to the academic year 2017-2018, all examiners of all courses related the learning goals of their course to the exit qualifications of the programme, and indicated which kind of assessment was used to assess both the learning goals and the exit qualifications. Moreover, the SVT welcomes the importance given to this assessment plan, as it has been assessed by the Examination Board and is now used as a management instrument at programme level. The assessments are valid and reliable; moreover, students indicated that they are properly informed about the assessment requirements. Students also appreciate the mixture of exams and papers.</p> <p>The Faculty of Social Sciences has one Examination Board for all programmes. The existence of subcommittees ensures that enough attention is paid to the specificities of each individual programme. The SVT appreciates the role the Examination Board has played and continues to</p>

	<p>play in safeguarding the quality of assessment through monitoring and validating the assessment plan.</p> <p>The master's thesis is evaluated and marked by two assessors, the supervisor and a second reader who is appointed from a thesis committee pool. To ensure that each thesis is assessed correctly, objectively, consistently and independently, the programme has created a committee of second readers. The committee's chair distributes the theses among the committee members and ensures that the quality is assessed consistently by discussing the criteria with the members and by taking actual theses as examples. Where both graders disagree on the quality of the thesis, a third reader is appointed by the Examination Board. The SVT is impressed by the way the programme organises thesis evaluation.</p>
5.8 Programme Jurisdiction	Covered in the Institutional Accreditation
5.9.1 Faculty nucleus Score:	<p>Covered in the Institutional Accreditation.</p> <p>Based on the written materials and on site discussions, the SVT thinks that the staff allocated to the programme are sufficiently numerous – the staff-student ratio is reportedly 1:13.</p>
5.9.2 Faculty qualifications	<p>The SVT gathered from the written materials and its on-site discussions that most staff members are involved in both research and teaching. Teaching in the master's programme and research in the department of Political Science and Public Administration are closely connected. The expertise of the teaching staff on the programme covers all core domains identified in the domain-specific reference framework, as well as the specific areas of the four tracks. A large part of the curriculum is taught by senior teachers and researchers. The SVT appreciates the efforts of the faculty to invest in the professionalization of its teaching staff. Students indicated that they are satisfied with the quality of the staff, both content-wise and in terms of didactics. This appreciation also extends to thesis supervision. Moreover, staff are available and perceived as motivated.</p>
5.9.3 Diversity: gender and minorities	<p>According to the self-evaluation report, about 14% of the master's students have an immigrant background. Gender diversity among students is not an issue with half of the students being female. Because of its part-time variants, the master's programme stands out in terms of diversity in age. Staff, however, are not very ethnically diverse. One of the reasons for this is that, while recruitment policy takes into account diversity, there have not been many opportunities for recruitment lately. According to the self-evaluation report, only 25% of the staff teaching on the master's programme are female.</p>
5.10 Admission of Students	<p>The SVT observed that the admission criteria are clearly described in the Teaching and Examination Regulations. Students with an academic bachelor's degree in public administration or political science and those who successfully complete the pre-master in Public Administration are granted direct access to the programme. Other students with a scientific bachelor's degree in disciplines such as communication science, sociology, history or law can apply to the admissions committee. Their acceptance will</p>

	depend on the courses they have taken during their bachelor's degree. Students with a bachelor's degree in a relevant field obtained at a University of Applied Science follow the Public Administration pre-master programme (30 EC) featuring courses on policy and governance, statistics, qualitative methods and a pre-master thesis.
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 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 independence of the 2nd reader can be commended to other programmes.

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.