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Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam – Faculty of Social Sciences

## Self-evaluation report

Master's programme Public Administration (66627)

July 6, 2023



# Contents

<b>PART I. GENERAL INFORMATION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. ADMINISTRATIVE DATA RELATING TO THE INSTITUTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. ADMINISTRATIVE DATA RELATING TO THE PROGRAMME</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. OUTLINE OF THE STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4. ACTIONS TAKEN IN RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS ACCREDITATION AND MID-TERM REVIEW</b>	<b>6</b>
4.1 STANDARD 1 – INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES	6
4.2 STANDARD 2 – TEACHING-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	6
4.3 STANDARD 3 – ASSESSMENT	7
4.4 STANDARD 4 – ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES	7
4.5 STANDARD 5 – EXTERNAL INPUT	7
<b>PART II. THE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>STANDARD 1. INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1 EDUCATIONAL VISION OF THE PROGRAMME	8
1.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES, PROGRAMME LEVEL AND ORIENTATION	11
1.3 POINTS FOR DEVELOPMENT	13
<b>STANDARD 2. TEACHING-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1 PROGRAMME	14
2.2 ENTRY REQUIREMENTS AND PROGRESS	19
2.3 COURSE AND PROGRAMME EVALUATIONS AND THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE	20
2.4 TEACHING TEAM AND STUDENT-STAFF RATIO	21
2.5 POINTS FOR DEVELOPMENT	22
<b>STANDARD 3. ASSESSMENT</b>	<b>24</b>
3.1 ASSESSMENT METHODS	24
3.2 QUALITY CONTROL OF ASSESSMENT	25
3.3 THESIS ASSESSMENT	26
3.4 POINTS FOR DEVELOPMENT	27
<b>STANDARD 4. ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES</b>	<b>28</b>
4.1 MASTER’S THESIS	28
4.2 PERFORMANCE OF GRADUATES IN ACTUAL PRACTICE	30
4.3 FIELD ADVISORY BOARD	31
4.4 POINTS FOR DEVELOPMENT	31
<b>STANDARD 5. DIVERSITY</b>	<b>33</b>
5.1 DIVERSITY OF STAFF AND STUDENTS	33
5.2 POINTS FOR DEVELOPMENT	34
<b>6. ANALYSIS OF STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES (SWOT)</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>7. STUDENT SECTION</b>	<b>36</b>
7.1 INTRODUCTION	36
7.2 MASTER-WIDE COURSES	36
7.3 PROGRAMME STRUCTURE	38
7.4 THESIS	38
7.5 ACADEMIC LEVEL	38
7.6 CONCLUSION	38

## Part I. General information

The Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam Master's programme on Public Administration was established 1 September 2003, one year after the establishment of the Bachelor's programme on Public Administration and Organisation Science on 1 September 2002. Enrolment in the master's programme from the start in 2003 varied from 77 in 2014 to 191 in the peak year 2021-2022 to currently 111 (academic year 2022-2023). The master's programme originally had three specialization tracks, Quality of Governance, Governance of Third Sector Organisations and Governance of Security. In 2016, a fourth specialization track was added, Governance of Health Care Innovation. The Governance of Security-track has always been the largest one, with about 40% of the enrolments; about 60% of the enrolments is shared by the other three tracks. An organogram of the Faculty of Social Sciences and the programme management is added as Appendix 2.

Part I contains the general information about the institution (1) and the programme (2). It also contains a brief outline of the faculty organisation (3) and a brief summary of the actions taken since the previous external assessment (4).

Previous versions of this report were discussed with and/or commented by: the department's management team (19 December 2022, 13 February 2023); the Faculty Director of Education and a colleague Programme Director (version 14 February 2023); programme teachers (23 January 2023, 13 March 2023); the Vice Dean of Education and the Faculty Dean (version 13 March 2023); the faculty accreditation support team (12 December 2022, 26 January 2023, and regularly in between); the External Advisory Board (6 April 2023).

## 1. University details

Name of institution	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU)
Status of institution	Publicly funded
Result of institutional audit	Positive, 14 June 2016
Contact person	Jikke Bekker, j.w.bekker@vu.nl, +31 (0)20 598 3231

## 2. Administrative data relating to the programme

Name of programme	Public Administration
CROHO ISAT code	66627
Last accreditation	15 December 2017
Last midterm review	12 October 2021
Orientation; level	University; Master
Number of EC's	60
Variants	Fulltime and parttime
Specialization tracks	Quality of Governance Governance of Security Governance of Third Sector Organisations Governance of Health Care Innovation
Programme language	Dutch
Location	Amsterdam
Programme director	Duco Bannink, d.b.d.bannink@vu.nl
Accreditation co-ordinator	Duco Bannink, d.b.d.bannink@vu.nl
Faculty support	Suzanne Willems, s.willems@vu.nl, +31 (0)20 598 6838

## 3. Outline of the structure and organization of the Faculty of Social Sciences

The Faculty of Social Sciences consists of five scientific departments that represent six scientific disciplines: Social and Cultural Anthropology, Communication Science, Organisation Science, Sociology, Political Science and Public Administration. The last two disciplines are combined within one department. Each department is led by a joint Management Team consisting of a head of department, the programme director(s) and the research manager. An organizational chart is provided in Appendix 2.

The Master's programme in Public Administration is taught by the staff of the Department of Political Science and Public Administration. The department is responsible for the proper deployment of staff in teaching and research. The current Head of Department is Prof. dr. Gjalte de Graaf.

The Faculty is led by a four-person Faculty Board (FB), consisting of the Dean, the Portfolio Holder for Education, the Portfolio Holder for Research, the Director of Operations. A Student Assessor participates in the meetings of the FB. The FB is held accountable to the Joint Assembly, consisting of a faculty committee of the Works Council and the Faculty Student Council.

The Faculty Board is supported by different teams of support staff: the Education Office, the Research Office, the faculty secretariat, a team Education development & quality assurance as well as support staff of the university's central services such as Marketing and Communications, Finance and Project Control, and Human Resource Management.

The faculty currently offers five bachelor programmes, seven one-year master programmes and one two-year research master. At the faculty level, the Dean delegates the responsibility for the teaching programmes to the Portfolio Holder for Education, who is supported by the director of education. At the programme level, each programme is led by a Programme Director, who is primarily responsible for developing the mission and vision of their programme, translating those into the programme's content and organization. The Programme Directors meet on a bi-monthly basis, presided by the portfolio holder for education, and report to the Faculty Board annually. The Programme Director is supported by a Programme Coordinator, recruited from the scientific staff, who works closely with the director. The Programme Coordinator is responsible for the operational tasks of the programme management. The Programme Coordinators meet monthly, presided by the Director of Education.

#### *Programme Committee*

The Programme Committee (PC) of the Master programme Public Administration consists of two staff members and two student members. Staff members are nominated by the department, student members can apply on their own initiative. After nomination and application, all PC members are formally appointed by the Faculty Board.

In addition to monitoring the quality of education and advising on the Teaching and Examination Regulations (TER) in accordance with their statutory duties, the PC also gives the Programme Director and Faculty Board both solicited and unsolicited advice on the design and content of revisions in the education programmes.

The PC usually schedules its meetings after each of the teaching periods and discusses topics that follow from the results of students' course evaluations. Recommendations are made to the Programme Director, who responds to every recommendation and takes necessary actions. The PC submits an annual report to the Faculty Board and the Programme Director.

#### *Examination Board*

The Examination Board (EB) is an independent body that guarantees the quality of the examinations and oversees the organization and coordination of examinations and the qualifications of examiners. For this purpose, the Programme Director is requested to submit an assessment plan for the programme and submit the assessment plan again when changes have been made and to provide a list of examiners annually.

Furthermore, the EB pursues an active policy to combat fraud in conducting examinations, especially plagiarism, and it handles complaints about examinations from students, supervisors and teachers. The EB reports annually on its findings regarding all course files: whether the courses were completed as planned and what the Board has concluded regarding assessments, reviews and success rates. The EB meets twice a year with the Programme Director to report the findings and to discuss improvements.

The faculty has one Central Examination Board and subcommittees for each programme. The Central Examination Board is responsible for policy issues at the faculty level. The EB advises and instructs programme directors on policy matters. Complaints and requests by students are handled by the EB, and

if needed, with assistance of the appropriate subcommittee. Subcommittees also bi-annually sample theses, internships and examinations, assess their quality, and report their findings to the programme director. The EB is appointed by the Faculty Board and provides an annual report of its actions to the FB.

Ultimately, the quality of the exams must be guaranteed by the Examination Board. To be able to do so, most members of the Examination Board have received professional training at the VU Education Centre. They can also apply towards an external assessment expert. The chair of the EB obtained the senior qualification for examination (SKE). The Examination Board oversees the assessments of all faculty programmes as well as whether these meet the standards of reliability and validity. The Examination Board engages in five monitoring activities: it 1) evaluates the assessment plan of each programme, 2) checks the course files, 3) checks the quality of the way the thesis assessment forms are filled in, 4) takes a random sample of exams and theses and review its quality, and 5) evaluates and acts upon complaints by students or notifications by lecturers of suspected fraud or plagiarism.

#### *Field Advisory Board*

The Field Advisory Board's (FAB, 'Veldadviesraad') role is to provide a critical external perspective on the programme and future developments and to advise the Programme Director on current and future activities. The FAB consists of stakeholders from outside the university who are in a position to judge what the job market requires from graduates of Public Administration. Board members are selected for their experience, contacts, knowledge and influence. Some of the board's members are alumni of the programme.

## 4. Actions taken in response to previous accreditation and mid-term review

In Appendix 1 we elaborately cite the recommendations of the previous accreditation panel for each standard (Qanu, 6 April 2018) and the recommendations made by the panel of the midterm review (midterm review panel, 19 November 2021) and the actions taken by the programme since then. The outline below provides a brief overview.

### 4.1 Standard 1 – Intended learning outcomes

"The panel considers that the master's programme PA has a clear vision within the domain of public governance and an articulated educational philosophy. [...] Nonetheless, there is room for formulating the learning outcomes in a more specific and ambitious way, by reflecting more strongly the VU-flavour as well as the distinctive tracks and variants of the programme." (Qanu, 6 April 2018, p. 12)

We have adjusted the definition of the intended learning outcomes of the programme and the tracks and a large number of courses accordingly (TER, Opleidingsspecifiek deel, chapter 9). The current intended learning outcomes are stated in standard 1.

### 4.2 Standard 2 – Teaching-learning environment

"The panel considers that the teaching and learning environment of the PA programme is very adequate, and this applies to all tracks and all variants. The panel thinks highly of the way in which the programme mixes full-time and part-time students [...] [The panel sees] issues of practice, growth and success rate and invites the management to look for feasible approaches to solve / mitigate these challenges." (Qanu, 6 April 2018, p. 17)

Actions taken:

In order to increase the room for professional practice and improve the success rate of finishing the programme in time, we have extended the duration of the master's thesis-trajectory from two to three (fulltime) or four to five (parttime) teaching periods. To mitigate the growth in student numbers, we have added a number of external staff members to our teaching staff.

#### 4.3 Standard 3 – Assessment

“The assessment plans and assessment matrix are set up in such a way that each learning outcome is tested in various courses and through different forms of assessment. Individual tests are valid, reliable and transparent.” (Qanu, 6 April 2018, p. 18-19)

Actions taken:

We have continued emphasising the importance of insightful feedback to our teachers, including the externally hired staff, e.g. in the thesis supervision and assessment calibration sessions we organised.

#### 4.4 Standard 4 – Achieved learning outcomes

“Having established that each master's thesis studied by the panel fulfils at least the minimum criteria required, the panel concludes that the intended learning outcomes of the master's programme are achieved by the end of the curriculum. [...] The programme prepares students adequately for relevant positions on the labour market or, in the case of the part-time students, for a continuation on their career path.” (Qanu, 6 April 2018, p. 20)

Actions taken:

This consideration did not lead us to take measures.

#### 4.5 Standard 5 – External input

“The panel has observed that the role of student representatives on the Committee raises some issues of effectiveness. [...] The panel is impressed by the way the recommendations from the previous accreditation committee have been addressed and very much welcomes the mid-term review [...] In addition to maintaining the current strengths of its quality assurance system, the programme could enhance the role of the Field Advisory Board.” (Qanu, 6 April 2018, p. 21-22)

Actions taken:

The support the Faculty offers to the student representatives in all of the faculty's Programme Committees is intensified. We were happy that we were able to have another midterm review (MTR) of the programme in 2021. We intensified our relation to the Field Advisory Board ('Veldadviesraad').

#### 4.6 Summary of recommendations of previous midterm review and programme response

In October 2021, a development-oriented midterm review of our programme took place and provided the programme with a few valuable recommendations.



The MTR-panel advised to further strengthen our vision on teaching and assessment and to make our educational vision of the programme more explicit and the panel suggested to strengthen the integration of primarily the external thesis teachers in our staff.

We have rephrased the intended learning outcomes and the assessment plan. We have embedded our external teachers more strongly in our organisation by organising calibration sessions.

## Part II. The assessment framework

Below, we discuss the programme's aims (standard 1 – intended learning outcomes), the way we achieve our aims (standard 2 – teaching-learning environment), the way we ascertain whether students reach these aims (standard 3 – student assessment), the results of our programme (standard 4 – achieved learning outcomes) and an additional standard for the EAPAA-accreditation on the diversity of our staff and students and the measures we take to support diversity (standard 5 – diversity).

### Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

Standard 1: The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements. Making a connection between the educational philosophy of the programme and the programme's mission and aims is mandatory to meet the EAPAA requirements.

#### 1.1 Educational vision of the programme

We define our programme as an instance of critical, normative and societal public administration. This implies that we explicitly relate insights, ideas and concepts from public administration to societal challenges and support our students to build their own normative orientation vis-à-vis these challenges and the way governance, policy and organization respond to them.

Our programme takes its own position in the Netherlands' field of Public Administration programmes as defined in the domain-specific frame of reference (PAGO, Appendix 3). It notsomuch starts from issues of public administration and its impact upon society, but the other way around. Our main question does not mainly concern the functioning and operation of institutions of public administration, but instead the changing nature of social structures and social problems and their impact upon public administration. Doing so, we connect the societal level of social problems, the institutional level of policy formulation, the organizational level of street-level policy implementation and again the social sphere, where social problems materialize as problems at individual and neighbourhood level.

We consider it crucial to acknowledge their social embedding when analyzing issues of public administration. This social embedding has for long been a core of the Public Administration programme at the Vrije Universiteit. This is also exemplified by our parttime variant, which allows us to strongly include the experience from real-life PA-practice in our teaching (see below).

Our programme's educational vision is based on that of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The university's core values are: 'open', 'personally engaged' and 'responsible.'

#### *Open*

The programme strives to be open to society and social developments and to import society into the classroom. Current and local governance issues and cases are explicitly part of the programme. We strengthen the relation between the PA-field and societal developments in our four specialization tracks, on security, health care, the third sector and the quality-track. Our understanding of public administration is that it is and should always be related to societal developments and that it is important for PA-scholars and practitioners alike to understand the developments in the sectors they work in. The four tracks each

follow a similar approach. Of the two courses of a track, one is oriented to societal developments in the field allowing a deeper understanding of societal challenges and the other to the developments and opportunities in the governance of these challenges. We teach theoretical approaches and methods in different disciplines, like sociology (related to different societal fields, e.g. sociology of health and care), law, criminology, organization science, political philosophy and public administration.

The position our Master's programme takes in the Dutch field is further supported by our parttime programme variant. This variant is fully integrated with the fulltime programme, apart from a number of organizational differences. This opens up our teaching programme to society and social developments. Most parttime students are professionals in public and semi-public organisations. As such, they bring their everyday work experience and questions with regard to governance and organization into the classroom; and their access to the sector. This is highly beneficial for the fulltime students, who – in turn – bring their insights from recent education to the same classroom. Our teaching in the specialization tracks explicitly builds upon the interaction between these groups of students.

Furthermore, an important segment of our students (55% in 2022) entered via our premasters' programme, indicating an educational background from a university of applied science or other educational background. This especially goes for our parttime students. Apart from that we know that an important part of our students are first generation students. We very much welcome these students, since we have an emancipatory ambition attached to our programme. Our relatively broad entrance requirements, a relatively large entrance via the premaster programme and our parttime variant create a broad openness of our programme to a wide variety of students.

#### *Personally engaged*

Being personally engaged means, first of all, paying attention to academic citizenship which revolves around the personal engagement of both students and teaching staff with respect to the issues discussed in the programme. Teachers stimulate students to adopt an open and active attitude to societal developments and governance approaches. As already mentioned, especially the parttime students bring questions about governance and organisation from their own work experiences. Teaching is highly interactive and takes place in a setting that demands and enables an ongoing academic dialogue among students and between students and teachers. This especially goes in the specialisation tracks, where student numbers are smaller than in the general courses and all track-specific classes have a seminar format.<sup>1</sup> Although students numbers are large, of course also in the larger general courses, our lecturing is strongly interactive in nature.

Our objective is to show to our students and help them understand that their (and our) cognitive understanding of societal challenges and governance approaches is tightly linked to their (and our) personal engagement with these same issues. In this context, in the classroom we co-create and validate knowledge of and normative orientations towards current societal challenges for governance. Doing so, we aim to help students make their own analysis, while taking care not to put forward a normative position of our own, but instead to continually show the heterogeneity of normative positions with regard to the societal issues discussed in the four specialization tracks. We explicitly do not support specific ideas on how to improve public administration, like citizen-centred or more integrative public administration, but instead, we aim to show that in the practice of governance, various understandings of public values

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<sup>1</sup> The general courses are taken by all enrolled students, normally about 125 students. Within the specialisation tracks, student numbers normally range from about 60 in Governance of Security to 20-35 in the other specialization tracks Governance of Health Care Innovation, Quality of Governance and Governance of Third Sector Organisations.

and of adequate modes of governance to realise these public values interact. In other words, we show that normative positions are related to the personal position of both students and staff, while public administration concerns the interaction of actors with their own normative orientations and factual understandings. Public administration is always also personal engagement.

Among our staff, we continually discuss what normative and societal public administration means. We believe that being ‘personally engaged’ is also achieved through a strong relationship between teaching, research and valorisation. The specialization track teachers are also researchers in that field and they engage in valorisation activities.<sup>2</sup> They thus constantly connect their own research and societal activities and their own engagement with questions of governance and organisation in these social sectors to the interaction in the classroom.

### *Responsible*

One of the most important reasons that we teach is that we want to contribute to society and to improve public governance, through shaping students’ knowledge, skills, and their moral and social responsibility. We teach our students to take a critical and interdisciplinary approach to social problems and governance, policy and organizational responses. In the Quality of Governance track, we study and discuss the role of scientists in policy (climate policy) and the (future) role of the students in society and public governance. In the Governance of Security track, ethnic profiling is an important issue next to many others. In the Governance of Health Care Innovation track we discuss the interaction between health insurers, health providers and patients and changing conceptions of health and care. In the Governance of Third Sector Organisations-track, we debate how and to what extent third sector organisations support social cohesion and integration. With respect to all these issues, in which a variety of positions are taken, it is difficult to do justice to the normative questions at hand. Without taking an explicit normative position, an attempt is made to answer those questions by taking a closer look at the intrinsic normativity built into social and professional practices. Therefore, we show our students that they cannot take a position vis-à-vis the governance of societal challenges without understanding and phrasing their own personal engagement: what is it that health care, security policies, third sector organisations or a public sector of high quality should provide?

As future scholars or practitioners of public administration, our students will be affecting how we live together, arrange care, provide security, organize ourselves and order our society. Our students need analytical competencies to understand that different actors have their own understandings of problems. In their future or current professional roles, they have the social responsibility to cope with these differences. We want our students to fully understand this responsibility, but we do not want to prescribe them how to take it. Instead we think public governance might be defined as attempts, in a broad variety of governance modes, to address different public *problems* while maintaining a thorough understanding and appreciation of the *differences in views towards* these problems that exist in society.

During lectures and workgroup meetings, therefore, real societal problems are central, as well as several critical questions: who determines the problems that need to be solved, for whom are these problems an issue, what alternative views exist, and what role might the student and future professional play in them? Discussion in class between our students, bringing in real-life work experiences and different perspectives, revolve around these issues, and research assignments as well. To this end, we invite guest speakers in class also in order to bring in real-life experiences.

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<sup>2</sup> See also under standard 2 and the teaching qualifications and educational background of our core staff in Appendix 7B.

The programme teaches the idea that acting in public governance means taking personal responsibility. We, therefore, teach students to systematically determine and reflect upon one's own position vis-à-vis the surroundings in which one acts. We train students in academic skills in order to solve scholarly problems, but primarily we educate students in order to develop their competences to become reflective, engaged students who can find their way through a diversity of views (related to a complex, globalising, and increasingly rapidly changing world). The programme strives to provide students with the knowledge and skills to get to grips with this world, by teaching them how to understand, describe and explain the phenomena that they are confronted with, while embracing the diversity of our complex late-modern world.

## 1.2 Intended learning outcomes, programme level and orientation

The intended learning outcomes of our programme are aimed at realizing our vision on the programme, based on the VU core values 'open,' 'personally engaged' and 'responsible.' Currently, they have a rather general outlook. Although the intended learning outcomes were reformulated in response to the midterm review and the previous reaccreditation to be less general, we still see room for improvement in this regard. We have organized our intended learning outcomes in three segments, knowledge, capacities and attitudes.

In the knowledge segment, we aim at a broad understanding of public administration in its social context (K1), the variety of actors and organisations and the variety of task, responsibilities and understandings of these actors (K2) and a thorough understanding of the normative nature of public administration (K3). Together, this contributes to an understanding of the often complex, public-private, multi-actor networks that deal with collective and public interests. We aim at an 'open' understanding of public administration in its social context.

With respect to capacities, we emphasise 'personal engagement.' Theoretical insights are applied to increasingly complex objects of study, identified by our students, where our part-time students have a specific role bringing along the problems of their work practices, in which, e.g., street-level, organizational level and social developments are discussed in an interrelated manner (C1), leading to a more advanced, and personal understanding of the field of governance and organization (C1). Also the other capacities are related to the independent functioning of the graduate in a weakly structured environment, in which their own integration of insights (C2), their critical reflection (C3), presentation (C4) and work (C5) is based on personal engagement.

With respect to attitudes, we emphasise 'responsibility.' The professional field expects that public administration-students are able to recognize the multi-dimensionality of the societal challenges in themselves and the broad variety of understandings (factual) and evaluations (normative) of these challenges that exist in society and the impact different governance approaches might have on these challenges and the multiplicity of public values that is associated with it (A2). Practitioners in public administration need to be able to understand the potentially conflictual nature of societal challenges and they need to be able to find ways to overcome or mitigate differences in societal views in socially responsible ways (A1). Our intended learning outcomes aim at this understanding of public administration that allows the graduate to develop a consistent set of norms and values with respect to the public administration practice (A3).

Our intended learning outcomes are phrased in Dutch in the Teaching and Examination Regulation, art. 9.4 (TER, see Appendix 4). Below, we provide an English translation of the intended learning outcomes:

### Knowledge (K)

The graduate possesses knowledge of recent approaches, insights and theories with respect to:

K1. issues of the governance of society;

K2. the differentiation and partial socialization ('vermaatschappelijking') of public governance and the changing distribution of tasks and responsibilities between public and private sectors and modern techniques of policy making, policy implementation and management;

K3. issues of good governance, among which the management of public values like integrity.

### Capacities (C)

The graduate is able:

C1. to discern theoretical approaches and methods in different disciplines and is able to usefully select those in order to apply them to issues of policy, governance and organization in the public domain and is able to substantiate these choices;

C2. to integrate empirical, normative and action-oriented argumentations, in such way that he or she can independently analyse and evaluate social and governance problems, using well-defined research methods and techniques and reports on findings in that regard and make propositions that contribute to possible responses;

C3. to critically reflect on the results of his or her own research and relate this to theoretical debates in the discipline;

C4. to report on (the own) scientific research into an issue of policy, governance and organization in a clear manner, written and orally, and oriented to a diverse public;

C5. to independently work in both public and private organizations in the public domain.

### Attitude (A)

The graduate shows:

A1. to be able to critically reflect on the own analytical competencies and the own future or current professional role and the social responsibilities that accompany this role;

A2. to search for new, original, interdisciplinary and creative approaches to problems, by showing the ability to first critically analyse a problem and if necessary redefine it, before searching for new responses;

A3. to show academic citizenship, apparent from mastery of a consistent set of norms and values with respect to the practice of scientific and professional activities.

Table 1 below outlines how our intended learning outcomes cover the Dublin descriptors of a master's level qualification.

Dublin descriptor	Explanation	Intended learning outcomes
<b>Knowledge and insight</b>	Has demonstrable knowledge and insight, based on the knowledge and insight at the level of Bachelor and which exceed and/or deepen it, as well as providing a basis or an opportunity to make an original contribution to the development and/or application of ideas, often in the context of research.	K1, K2, K3
<b>Applying knowledge and insight</b>	Is able to apply knowledge, insight and problem-solving skills in new or unknown circumstances within a broader (or multidisciplinary) context related to the field of expertise; is able to integrate knowledge and deal with complex matter.	C1, C2
<b>Judgment</b>	Is able to formulate judgements on the basis of incomplete or limited information, taking into account the social and ethical responsibilities associated with the application of his own knowledge and judgements.	C3, A1, A3

<b>Communication</b>	Is able to communicate conclusions, as well as the knowledge, motives and considerations that underlie them, clearly and unambiguously to an audience of specialists or non-specialists.	C2, C4
<b>Learning skills</b>	Possesses the learning skills that enable him or her to enter into a follow-up study with a largely self-directed or autonomous character.	C5, A2

*Table 1. Relation between intended learning outcomes of our Ma programme in Public Administration and the Dublin descriptors of a master's level qualification.*

### 1.3 Points for development

Our intended learning outcomes are subject to continuous review, e.g. by our own teaching staff in regular staff meetings, by faculty educational professionals and by our Field Advisory Board (see also §4.3) and in response to the accreditations and mid term reviews. We will include social skills like presenting, listening or arguing more strongly in our intended learning outcomes and the capacity to critically discern normative arguments from factual statements and integrity of governance. We need to make more explicit that we address specific social domains in our specialization tracks.

Furthermore, we have submitted a proposal for a specialization track on AI to the university board in June 2023 (at the time of the site visit, it will be clear whether this proposal was granted). In addition to initiatives of the programme management, the faculty will review its portfolio of programmes in 2023. This review might have consequences for future developments of the programmes, including the Master Public Administration.

Apart from that, we wish to further develop stakeholder and transdisciplinary teaching, in order to further strengthen the connection between our teaching programme and societal concerns. Ways to do that might include the increase of direct stakeholder involvement in the drafting of assignments and commenting on students' work, the further increase of the already strongly developed involvement of stakeholders in students' master's theses and a stronger involvement of the Field Advisory Board in the drafting of assignments and course elements. The latter builds upon the already strong involvement of the FAB in the assessment of the feasibility of our curriculum in our regular (half-yearly) meetings (see also §4.3).

## Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

Standard 2: The intended learning outcomes have been adequately translated into learning objectives for the degree programme and its parts. The diversity of students admitted is taken into account. Teaching staff are sufficiently knowledgeable, both in terms of content and didactics, to provide education and guidance. The teaching-learning environment promotes students' active participation in designing their own learning process.

### 2.1 Programme

The Master programme Public Administration is a Dutch language programme and covers a fulltime variant and a parttime variant. An overview of the curriculum is presented below and the curriculum is presented in a more detailed and larger form in appendix 4.

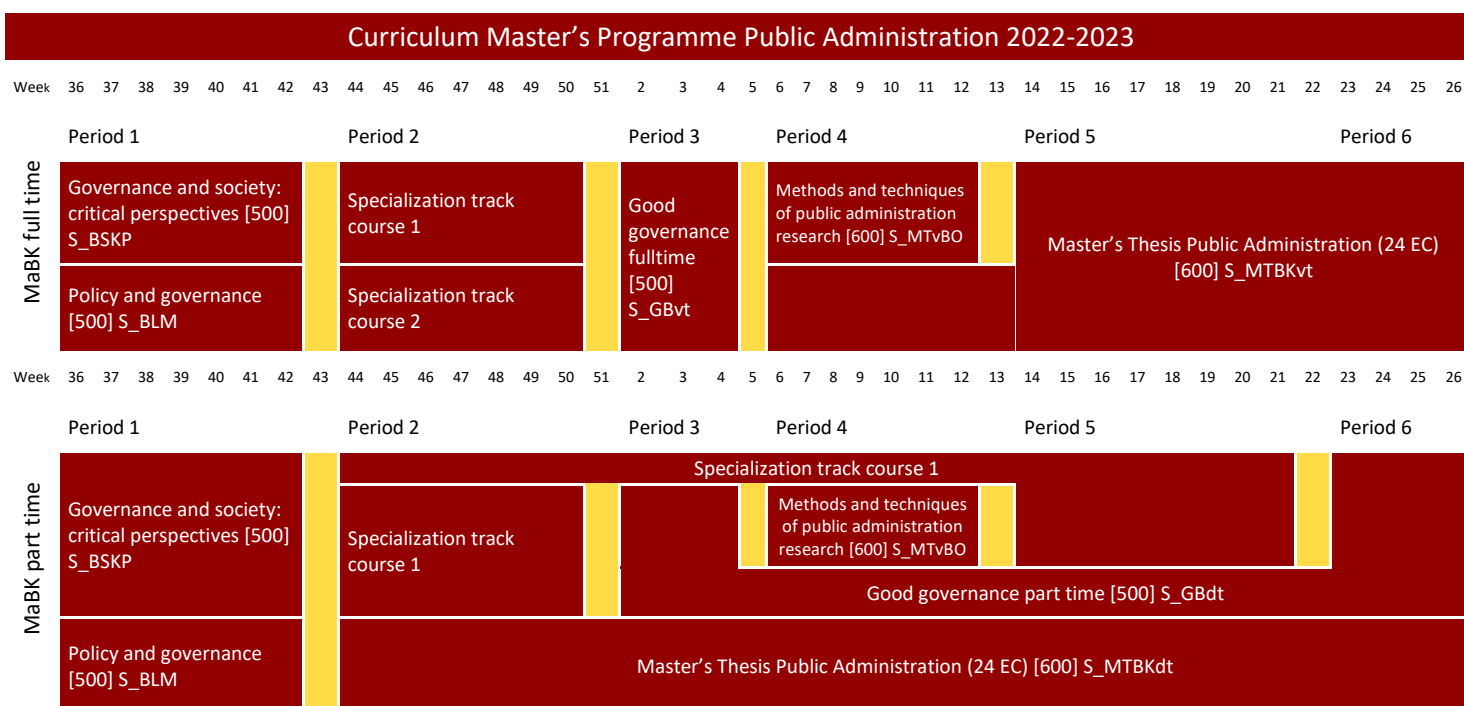


Figure 1. Curriculum Master's Programme Public Administration 2022-2023; the fulltime variants is presented in the upper and the parttime variant in the lower part of the graph.

For fulltime students, the teaching programme of our Master of Public Administration consists of a semester of substantive courses and a semester dedicated to the master's thesis. All students start with two courses providing an advanced introduction to the field of public administration. After these introduction courses, students continue with their specialisations and do two specialisation courses in period 2. The students of the four tracks jointly finish the first semester with a course on good governance. All courses have a weight of 6 EC. In the second semester, all students take our methodology course (6 EC) and do their master's thesis research (24 EC).



The programme of the parttime variant is spread over two years. Students take the same courses, but the sequence is slightly different. They take the methodology course in their first year and the second introduction course BLM in their second year (we summarise important aspects of this course in the specialisation courses). The size of their thesis trajectory is equal to the trajectory of fulltime students (24 EC), but the duration is about twice as long.

#### *First semester – general courses*

In the first semester, students start with two advanced introductory courses. The first is called 'Bestuur en samenleving: kritische perspectieven' (BSKP, Governance and society: critical perspectives). In the course, classical themes of public administration are discussed at an advanced level, such as the relation between state and politics, governance and society and public and private domains. A number of 'foundations of governance' are discussed, including authority, management, competition, information and normality and these are discussed with reference to current social problems and developments. The other advanced introductory course is called 'Beleid en management' (BLM, Policy and Management). In this course, students are introduced to varying, explicitly contrasted modes of governance and their philosophical foundations and applications; current developments in governance and society that cause new challenges of governance; new, alternative and critical approaches to governance in late modernity; and they apply these understandings by critically evaluating an actually existing, real life, policy and designing an alternative approach.

The third general course, 'Goed bestuur' (GB, Good Governance), is taken at the end of the first half year. This course aims at students' understanding of the normative fundament of governance: each approach to governance, each model of public administration, each theory of government is built upon a normative or moral basis, an idea of what a good society looks like and a corresponding idea of good governance. Students are asked to search for such normative assumptions and the course offers frameworks that help student uncover these assumptions. What answers are given to the question about good governance and what consequences do these answers have for governance and society? Again, the approach in this course is to apply the focus topics to real world problems and policies.

#### *First semester – specialisation tracks*

In period 2 (halfway the first semester), our students take two courses in the specialisation track of their choice. There are four specializations: Quality of Governance, Governance of Security, Governance of Third Sector Organisations or Governance of Health Care Innovation. The four specialisation tracks each follow a similar approach. In one of the courses, societal developments are the main point of departure, while the other course focusses on developments in the governance of the sector.

In the Security-track, the course 'Veiligheid in de Samenleving' (VIS, Security in society) centres on social developments, while the course 'Samenwerking in veiligheid' (SIV, Collaborative governance in the security domain) centres on developments in the governance of security. In the Care-track, 'Zorg in de samenleving' (ZIS, Health and care in society) centres on social developments, while 'Besturen van zorgvernieuwing' (BVZ, Governance of health care innovation) focusses on changes in governance. And again, in the Third Sector-track, 'Maatschappelijke organisaties in transitie' (MOT, Third sector organisations in transition) revolves around developments in the third sector, while 'Besturen van maatschappelijk initiatief' (BMI, Governance of social initiatives) focusses more strongly on changes in governance. In the Quality of Governance-specialisation track, the course 'Openbaar bestuur en kennis' (OBK, Knowledge and public governance) discusses social developments that lead to a decrease of the scientific authorities as bearers of knowledge and the consequences of this for governance; the course 'Dynamiek in het binnenlands bestuur' (DIB, Dynamics of Dutch governance) discusses changes in Dutch

governance. At a more detailed level, and in the actual interactive discussions in class, the two viewpoints that characterise the two parallel courses of the track show deliberate overlap. We aim to clarify that governance and society are strongly interconnected and intersected. This is in line with our educational vision.

#### *Second semester – methodology course and thesis*

In the second semester, students turn to their master’s thesis research projects (MTBK) and take our methodology course.

In the course ‘Methoden en technieken van bestuurskundig onderzoek’ (MTBO, Methods and techniques of public administration research), our students study inductive and deductive, and qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to be able to apply these throughout their thesis project. We differentiate between deductive and inductive research approaches, because we think that it is necessary that our students thoroughly reflect on the conceptualisation of governance, structure, authority relations, etc. that is implied in different research questions. We emphasise that such phenomena can be considered from multiple points of departure, ranging from a realist perspective, possibly suggesting a research approach that starts from deduction, to a constructivist perspective, possibly suggesting a research approach that starts from induction. In most research, there will be iteration between these research strategies. Doing so, the critical reflection on governance and society in the substantive courses is transferred to a critical, reflective approach to researching public administration in our methodology course. This reflective approach to research methodology is combined with a presentation of techniques that students apply in the written assignment of the course by evaluating a number of prescribed existing studies and further develop themselves in their master’s thesis.

At the same time, at the start of the second semester, our fulltime students start with their theses; parttime students start their theses in their second year. Thesis subjects are tailored to the interests of our students and build upon the expertise and interests of our teachers. The thesis is an individual project; supervision is organized in groups. Students of the Health-track study e.g. the functioning of integrative care-projects; in the Security-track, students study issues like security and policing interaction in neighbourhoods, transport hubs and wider society; in the Third Sector-track, students study the way third sector-organisations draft linkages to other organisations; in the Quality of Governance-track, students e.g. study the functioning of a measure intended to improve the quality of decision-making. The thesis trajectory is further discussed under standard 4.

Table 2 below outlines the contribution the courses in our curriculum make to the intended learning outcomes.

	General courses					Quality of Governance		<u>Governance of Security</u>		Third sector organisations		<u>Governance of Care</u>	
	BSKP	BLM	GB	MTBO	MTBK*	OBK	DIB	VIS	SIV	MOT	BMI	ZIS	BVZ
K1	X	X	X		X		X	X			X		
K2		X	X		X	X		X		X		X	
K3	X		X		X	X	X		X		X		X
C1	X	X		X	X		X	X	X		X		X
C2	X		X	X	X	X		X		X		X	
C3				X	X			X		X		X	
C4				X	X		X		X		X		X
C5			X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
A1	X	X	X		X	X		X		X		X	

A2		X	X		X		X	X	X		X		X
A3			X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

*Table 2 Contribution of courses to final attainment levels of programme.*

The numbering K1-K3 (Knowledge), C1-C5 (Capacities) and A1-A3 (Attitude) of the final attainment levels in the left column of the table refers to the numbered list of final attainment levels mentioned under standard 1. The complete set of intended learning outcomes of all courses is included in Appendix 9B.

\* All students participate in the thesis trajectory MTBK; supervision and formal registration are differentiated to our four tracks.

### *2.1.1 Didactic approach*

Our didactic concept is based on three elements. The first element of our didactic approach is a shift over the course of the programme (general courses; specialisation courses; thesis) towards an increasing personal responsibility of our students. This supports our students to develop their own understanding and normative evaluation of developments in society and public administration. The second element is the interaction between fulltime and parttime students, who each bring their own perspective. The third element is the application to and study of real world phenomena in the courses and especially the thesis.

#### *Increasing complexity and student responsibility*

Over the course of the year, the interaction between students themselves and between students and teachers becomes more intensive and students' personal responsibility grows, while the teachers' responsibility shifts from instructing to coaching students in this increasingly open interaction. Students are increasingly requested to combine theoretical understandings with their own empirical observations. Whereas in period 1 we mainly provide students with empirical illustrations to apply their knowledge on, in the specialization tracks and in the thesis trajectory we challenge students to search for empirical data themselves and to determine which relevant theoretical insights help to analyse these empirical data. An example from the Governance of Health Care Innovation-track is that students write a paper based on qualitative research on the various perspectives of actors in care on a self-chosen governance intervention, like an integrated care initiative, and reflect upon the question whether actor perspectives support or stand in the way of such an intervention. The increasing complexity of societal conditions and the application of public administration insights in that regard go along with increasing student responsibility and a shift in teaching modes from instruction and discussion to coaching.

#### *Interaction between parttime and fulltime students*

The interaction between parttime and fulltime students is important for us. Parttime and fulltime students take all courses together. Key in the workgroups and lectures of the specialization tracks are discussions and presentations by our students. Parttime and fulltime students jointly prepare these presentations in teams. We arranged that all teaching and assessment occurs on Fridays in order to accommodate that parttime students can participate in the programme.

Parttime students are mostly older and work in sectors of the public domain related to our specialisation tracks. Often, they see problems in governance and organisation and it is their ambition to be able to improve the functioning of governance and organisation in the domain of their specialisation. For many parttime students, this is the driver for their enrolment in the program. Parttime students bring hands-on experience with social problems and modes of governance in these societal domains, in short knowledge and understandings from the professional field. Our fulltime students, on the other hand, mostly come from a previous academic bachelor or applied university programme and bring theoretical knowledge and recent experience of academic training to the table. They on their turn contribute to the learning environment by bringing in their experience from recent training. The interaction between parttime and

fulltime students leads to a mutual improvement of theoretical understanding and empirical application and transferrable academic skills development through class-based discussion and debate.

### *Real world problems*

The assignments students work on are always related to real world problems and the governance approaches towards these problems. For example, students analyse social problems in the domain and actor perspectives with regard to these problems and study policy documents in order to assess to what extent the theory of change of a policy is built on an adequate understanding of these perspectives.

In order to support that, we also invite guest lecturers who take an involved point of view and enthusiastically relate the substantive insights from our courses to societal developments in their fields. Examples are Pharos and EHdK in the health-track, Amsterdam Police and AIVD in the security-track, Lansco and UvH in the third sector-track and Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality in the Quality of Governance-track.<sup>3</sup> In some courses, alumni are invited to reflect on the relation between the insights students develop in our programme and the professional field. We also build upon these and other contacts in order to help students find interesting thesis projects. In the thesis trajectory, most students study a real world problem in real world organisations in the public domain. Parttime students often study a problem related to their own work, sometimes partly within the context of their own work organisation.

Sometimes, discussing real world problems in class leads to tensions, especially when issues are discussed like, in the Governance of Security track, ethnic profiling by the Police. Another example might be selection of specific patients for treatment, while selecting against others, in the Governance of Care Innovation track, or the role of health insurers or the Inspection. Such subjects are sensitive for some of the students, who themselves work in the domain, e.g. in the police organization. At times, student evaluations reflect that indeed students consider these topics highly sensitive. This is also exemplified in the student section of this report (see §6). We discuss this among ourselves in our teaching team meetings.

The programme is taught in Dutch because most students already work in, or will later work in, the Dutch public domain. Hence, real world problems of the Dutch public domain are pivotal in our programme.

### *2.1.2 Digital infrastructure*

We make use of the infrastructure for hybrid and blended learning that has seen a strong development in the last few years, also because of the Corona period. We offer blended learning provisions, like recorded lectures and short knowledge clips. In one of the courses, students also make short clips in the context of peer feedback processes. Especially for our parttime students, we are working towards a more effective application of blended learning provisions (see §2.5).

For individual thesis supervision, online meetings are very suitable both for students who don't live in Amsterdam and for parttime students who have a job next to their studies. Meetings among students are also often planned in an online environment. Furthermore, we strongly stimulate the student groups in

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<sup>3</sup> Pharos is the national expertise centre on inclusive health care; EHdK is a consultancy in the health field; AIVD is the General Intelligence and Security Service; Lansco is the national network for social and co-operative entrepreneurship; UvH is the Humanist University.

our specialization tracks and in the thesis supervision groups to engage in mutual support and to discuss difficult issues and suggest ideas among themselves.

Since the start of Corona, one of our teachers functions as a blended learning-consultant. We have direct access to teaching development support by the Centre for Teaching & Learning (CTL), with a CTL staff member assigned to our department to support our department's teachers, and direct access to support staff for our digital teaching infrastructure, including Canvas, Feedback Fruits, Testvision, and the like. Support staff helped designing courses in which students e.g. make knowledge clips. This supports student learning and improves the transfer of knowledge to others. In addition, the university regularly organizes meetings for teachers on various digital applications.

During the Corona period, we almost immediately shifted to online teaching and later, when restrictions became less stringent, to hybrid teaching. This worked rather well for lectures and for small-group and individual interactions, e.g. during thesis supervision. It worked less well in seminars, group discussion is much more difficult online. Currently, we only make use of online provisions when suitable. We do not offer hybrid options for our specialization courses. We consider it vital for our didactic approach that we have real-life interaction with our students and we stimulate real-life interaction among our students. The new NU-building offers well-equipped meeting rooms of various sizes and ample possibilities for students to meet among each other, but also to individually work on their studies.

The Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam's online infrastructure is well-organised and well-used. A large number of lecture halls offer online options via Zoom (for hybrid lectures and recording of lectures; for some of our parttime students, hybrid lectures are important) that can easily be arranged. Zoom and Teams are available for meetings.

## 2.2 Entry requirements and progress

There are three admission criteria in order to assess whether applicants to our programme should do a deficiency programme.

1. Applicants who have a background in a list of related academic bachelor's or master's programmes are admitted straight away.
2. Applicants who have a background in an applied university-programme need to take a premaster assessment. If they pass, they are admitted to our premaster's programme of 30 EC. They are admitted to our Master's programme if they pass the premaster's programme.
3. Applicants who have a background in a non-related academic bachelor's or master's programme are exempted from the premaster-assessment. Depending on their exact background, they need to take (a) the full premaster's programme or (b) a part of it or (c) take a number of academic bachelor's courses in the field of Public Administration and/or methods of social-scientific research.

The premaster's programme consists of a substantive course on Public Management, which is taken from the Bachelor's programme of Public Administration and Organisation Science, a methodology course that is taken by all premaster students in the Faculty of Social Sciences, a second methodology course tailored to Public Administration premaster students and two courses on academic writing also tailored to our own premasters' needs. Doing so, we aim to lift students from diverse educational backgrounds to a

similar level of understanding, although unfortunately in the student chapter it is mentioned that students do not always feel adequately trained to enter the first course in our programme.<sup>4</sup>

The entry requirements allow us to admit students who should be able to finish the programme in time. Student performance for the entire programme is presented in table 3 below.

Year	FT entrance	FT withdrawal 1 year	FT grad., 1 year	FT grad., 2 years	PT entrance	PT withdrawal 1 year	PT grad., 2 years	Total grad.
2015	54	9%	31%	65%	32	n.a.	53%	75
2016	80	16%	24%	56%	43	9%	33%	77
2017	106	17%	29%	60%	33	6%	39%	85
2018	92	7%	28%	64%	35	9%	34%	93
2019	84	12%	30%	65%	40	5%	45%	92
2020	110	12%	36%	57%	46	13%	46%	129
2021	130	9%	48%		57	11%		96 FT + 28 PT
2022	76				35			

Table 3 Student performance, completion of programme.

PT = parttime students; FT = fulltime students.

Our students show more or less nominal progress through the general and specialisation courses, but, unfortunately, they lose time during the work on their theses. Starting from the academic year 2021-2022, we changed the master's thesis-trajectory in order to address this problem (part I, §4.2).

### 2.3 Course and programme evaluations and the Programme Committee

The organisation and quality of teaching are regularly evaluated for all courses each academic year by means of a student evaluation system organised at university level. The evaluation plan of the programme is included in the TER (Appendix 4). The programme management happily uses the evaluations to obtain information on students' views on the quality of our courses and teaching and all evaluations are discussed by the Programme Committee (PC). The Annual Report of the Programme Committee is included in Appendix 6B. The student-chair of the PC coordinated the drafting of the student section of this report, which is included in section 6 below.

The quality assessment procedures established at university level also apply to our programme. These quality assessment procedures were themselves assessed during the ITK-process in 2021.

With respect to the course evaluations, the PC of our programme adjusts its schedule of meetings to the timing of the evaluation procedure. This year our PC gives special attention to thesis supervision and the functioning of the – still relatively new – curriculum with two specialization track courses and a 24 EC-thesis. A related issue the PC mentioned is the curriculum schedule for parttime students, which is not yet functioning fully adequately, since students are overburdened in period 2 of their first year and have room for more activities in period 5 (see also §2.5). The evaluation results of the courses in our programme are mostly positive. If the evaluation results give occasion to do so, the Programme Director and Programme Co-ordinator are invited to join the PC-meeting to discuss the evaluation results.

<sup>4</sup> The course Public Management is part of the regular Bachelor's programme B&O and shows some overlap with a part of our own Master's course Policy and Management.

Further evaluations are conducted through the National Student Survey (NSE, Nationale Studenten-Enquête). The results are presented in table 4 below.

	2023	2022	2021
General satisfaction	3,83	3,77	4,04
Content and organisation of teaching	3,89	3,93	3,76
Connection to professional practice/career	3,43	3,17	3,03
Teachers	4,00	3,87	3,95
Guidance/counselling	3,66	3,33	3,59
Examination and assessment	3,63	3,57	3,67
Engagement and contact	3,90	3,84	3,86
General skills	3,92	3,79	3,65
Scientific skills	4,09	4,07	3,95
Practical research skills			3,95
International aspects	3,06	2,98	2,91
Reflection	3,78	3,80	3,66
Remote learning	3,69	3,44	3,48
Equal treatment			3,82
Challenging nature	3,94	4,03	
Average		3,61	3,67

Table 4 Results National Student Survey, 2021, 2022 and 2023.

Two categories score relatively low: connection to professional career and international aspects. The evaluation of the first is clearly increasing, reflecting our increased attention to this in our teaching. International aspects are only relevant to a limited extent, since our programme is oriented to Dutch speaking students who mostly work in a Dutch context, although we do at times offer guest lectures from international speakers, e.g. via Teams in Security in Society (VIS). The scientific literature we use is in either Dutch or English language.

## 2.4 Teaching team and student-staff ratio

The teaching qualification level and education background of our core teaching staff is presented in the table in Appendix 7B. We also outlined which courses the staff members teach.

All of our core teachers have obtained a master's and PhD or equivalent qualification in the PA-field or a closely related field, apart from two who are about to finish their PhD. The teachers of the specialisation tracks are all involved in research in the field of the track. All but two of our teachers have a Basic Teaching Qualification (BTQ) or equivalent; one of them is currently taking the BTQ-trajectory, while the other is exempted on the basis of ample teaching experience. Seven of our teachers have an STQ. Two of them also have a qualification of the Programme on Educational Leadership (LOL, Leergang Onderwijskundig Leiderschap). These teachers are or have been more strongly involved in programme management. See Appendix 7B for a list of qualifications and educational backgrounds and additional information on our teaching team.

The aggregated number of hours dedicated to teaching our programme is 7544 (4.5 FTE) per year. The student-staff ratio in hours is  $7455/125 = \pm 60$  hours (0.036 FTE) per student per year, or 27.8 students per FTE dedicated to teaching our programme.

Even though student numbers have remained at a high level, the ratio of students and core staff is adequate to teach the courses of our curriculum. We apply the estimates defined by the FSW teaching norm model, a model that is established by the Faculty Board to estimate the teaching hour capacity required for a specific course element (lectures, seminars, additional assignments, etc.), while also weighing for the number of students in a course. The accompanying workload of high student numbers has been mitigated by extra staff members responsible for assessments of courses. Additional teaching staff is hired for thesis supervision because thesis supervision is a relatively work intensive process and this comes with a peak in workload. These external staff members get longer term contracts for a period of initially one and additionally two years. Usually they supervise eight students and get a position for 0.15 FTE on a yearly basis. These teachers have a PhD in Public Administration or a related field or work towards finishing one and are checked on teaching qualifications and their expertise in the various societal domains relevant to our programme. A complete list of our thesis supervision teachers is included in Appendix 7B. Applicants for a thesis supervision position are assessed by the Programme Director and the Head of Department. Assessment concerns their scientific and teaching qualifications and their expertise in the various societal domains relevant to our programme. The Examination Board has formulated strict rules regarding examiner qualifications for theses.

Based on the FSW teaching norm model, the Programme Director together with the teachers and the Programme Coordinator determine the capacity (in terms of teaching hours) that can be used for a course. The Head of Department is responsible for the availability of the required teaching capacity. The lines of coordination are short; the Programme Director is a member of the department management team and director, coordinator and department head are all highly accessible for our teachers.

There are regular teaching staff meetings on the operation of the programme, appr. five meetings per year. A list of meetings and discussed subjects is provided in Appendix 8. In last years meetings, various issues were discussed, like opportunities for blended learning, the organization of the thesis trajectory, the design of the specialization tracks, our views on the normative aspects of our programme, the interaction with students, etc. Apart from the regular teaching staff meetings, we organized calibration sessions especially related to thesis supervision and assessment.

## 2.5 Points for development

Two potential complications arose from the curriculum change we implemented in 2021-2022. At that time, we extended the thesis from 18 to 24 EC and limited the specialization tracks from three to two courses.

The first complication concerns the scope of the specialization tracks. While we acknowledge the value of providing students with ample opportunity to intensively study a real-world problem for their thesis, we also recognize the need to balance it with the provision of comprehensive teaching on public administration in societal domains. However, the Programme Committee considers the current balance as a potential problem. Primarily in the Governance of Security specialization track, teachers also consider that time to discuss a variety of issues is insufficient. At the time of implementation, the scope of the specialization tracks was discussed in the Programme Committee and in the Field Advisory Board and although the risk of a lack of depth was recognized, both the PC and the Field Advisory Board expected students to be able to deepen their understanding of a sector in the extended thesis trajectory. Although we do not experience a strong lack of knowledge and understanding of societal domains when our



students start their thesis work, we continuously evaluate the feasibility of our programme and particularly this revision. We are currently engaged in discussions about how to move forward on this issue.

The second complication is that parttime students participate in class for both specialization courses at the same time, while their regular schedule allows for a single course at the time. They finalise the second course in period 5 of the first year and we provide a limited number of additional meetings in period 5 especially for the parttime students to accommodate that. Spreading a course over different periods is not an ideal situation. We continuously evaluate the functioning of this system and it is a special point of attention for the Programme Committee in the current (2022-2023) academic year. In a student evaluation organized by the student members of the Programme Committee, parttime students expressed that they considered the year roster unclear. Parttime students participate in two courses in period 2, while finishing only one of them. The other course is finalized in period 5. We offer additional support during this period through hybrid teaching and we have recently started a process together with the blended learning support team to develop blended learning provisions especially for this group. One of the ideas we aim to develop is to have students make knowledge clips among themselves: this at once supports students' own learning process and improves the transfer of knowledge to others.

A challenge is the large number of students. In the peak year 2021-2022, student numbers reached 60 in class in the Governance of Security-track and about 50 in the Quality of Governance-track. It was difficult to uphold our didactic model of intensive teacher-student and student-student interaction without splitting the class. Splitting the class, however, is difficult because of the limited capacity of our teaching staff. Fortunately, additional funding (like the 'studievoorschotmiddelen') allows us to hire additional staff, so that we can further strengthen the interactive nature of our teaching.

A smaller point for development is to enhance the explicit connection to professional practice that exists through the interaction between fulltime and parttime students, the specialization tracks and the extended thesis.

## Standard 3. Assessment

Standard 3: The programme has an adequate assessment system. Assessment is valid, reliable and sufficiently independent. The requirements are clear to students. The quality of the examination procedures is adequately assured and complies with the statutory requirements. Assessment supports the students' own learning process.

### 3.1 Assessment methods

Assessment is an integral part of our didactic approach. This implies that the assessment formats are aligned with the learning objectives and content of the courses and the increasing responsibility of the students is reflected in the assessment. The summative assessments in our master's programme are primarily taken in the form of written assignments or papers, allowing students to construct and present their own understanding and reflection of theoretical insights and empirical phenomena in the fields we study and to evaluate policy documents. The general courses are mostly assessed through a written exam. See table 5 below for an overview.

The normative-critical and societal approach to Public Administration requires and supports at the same time that our students work towards higher levels of autonomy. Over the course of the curriculum, students need to write increasingly complex assignments. The courses of our specialization tracks are mainly assessed through a paper. In all courses, preparation for the assessment is done during the strongly interactive classes in which parttime and fulltime students participate together. Apart from the class interactions, about half of our courses also include a more formalized formative assessment and a peer feedback procedure. For the papers, assessment forms are used in order to evaluate the students' performance.

In our courses, students regularly present parts of the teaching material and reflect on theoretical insights and empirical findings or policy documents in their domains, both in small student presentations and during discussions in class. These presentations are an integrated part of teaching and not registered as formative or summative feedback.

Thesis summative assessment is always done by the thesis supervisor and a second examiner (see §3.3).

In our general courses BSKP and GB, and also in most specialization track courses, and naturally also during the thesis trajectory, we also provide formative assessments. In BSKP and GB, formative assessment concerns teacher feedback on concept papers. In the thesis trajectory, formative feedback is given in a variety of ways, e.g. during class in response to student presentations, but also by e.g. individual peer feedback using student-made knowledge clips, followed by teacher feedback in the course ZIS. During the thesis trajectory, students are required to hand in their work in progress and formative feedback is provided by the teacher, while teachers strongly encourage students to provide peer feedback within their thesis supervision groups.

	General courses					Quality of Governance		Governance of Security		Third sector organisations		Governance of Care	
	<b>BSKP</b>	<b>BLM</b>	<b>GB</b>	<b>MTBO</b>	<b><u>MTBK*</u></b>	OBK	DIB	<u>VIS</u>	<u>SIV</u>	<i>MOT</i>	<i>BMI</i>	<u>ZIS</u>	<u>BVZ</u>
WE	S, F	S						S					
Wal	F		S	S	F	S	S		S	S, F	S, F	S	S
WaG							S		S				
Prl					F								
PrG												F	
Th					Th								
PF	F		F		F	F				F		F	
Other													F

Table 5. Assessment methods of courses.

Core courses: bold; specialisation track Quality of Governance: normal characters; specialisation track Governance of Security: underlined; specialisation track Governance of Third Sector Organisations: italic; specialisation track Governance of Health Care Innovation: underlined and italic. WE = written exam; Wal = written individual assignment WaG = written group assignment; Prl = individual presentation; PrG = group presentation; Th = master's thesis; PF = Peer Feedback; Other = other methods of assessment. S = summative assessment; F = formative assessment.

\* All students participate in thesis trajectory MTBK; supervision and formal registration are differentiated to our four tracks.

### 3.2 Quality control of assessment

The choice of assessment methods is based on our Assessment Plan (Appendix 9B), which is established by the Programme Director, while the Programme Committee and the Examination Board (EB), each on the basis of their own mandate, oversee the quality of the assessment process. Our programme's Assessment Plan in turn is based upon the Faculty Policy on Assessment (Appendix 10), as well as our Teaching and Exam Regulation (TER, appendix 4) and the Rules and Guidelines (R&R) of the Examination Board (Appendix 12). The most recent Annual Report of the EB is provided in Appendix 11.

#### *Quality assurance procedures*

An overview of the intended learning outcomes per course is included in Appendix 9B. For all courses, a course file (cursusdossier) is developed, in which the teachers and course coordinator outline what the learning objectives of the course are and what teaching activities are conducted to attain these objectives (roster, literature). Furthermore, the course file needs to contain an assessment plan in which an assessment matrix is presented, which is available for most courses.

#### *Examination Board*

The Examination Board regularly checks all course files on completeness and as such assesses compliance to assessment policies. See article 3 and 4 of the Rules and Guidelines of the EB (Appendix 12) for an overview of the tasks and composition of the EB. The EB advises on the assessment plan, monitors course reports (see below), and evaluates the quality and validity of course assessments and theses assessments based. Suggestions and recommendations from the EB are discussed with the programme management and a plan of action is agreed on e.g. adjustments to the assessment plan and improvements in the courses and corresponding course files. The collaboration with the EB is supportive and constructive. Apart from this role in direct supervision of assessment, the Examination Board also provides information to our teachers.

#### *Validity*

The validity of the assessment system is ensured through the following steps.

- The learning objectives of the courses and assessment are proposed by the course coordinators and determined by the Programme Director after advice and approval of the Programme Committee;
- The learning objectives and assessment methods for each course are described in the Study Guide by the course coordinators;
- Course coordinators are required to include this same set of learning objectives and assessment methods into the syllabus of the course. Deviations from what is mentioned in the study guide of the course need to be approved by the Programme Director and the EB;
- To ensure and monitor the alignment of the assessment with the intended learning outcomes of the programme, course coordinators are asked to provide an assessment plan at course level detailing how learning objectives are assessed (making use of the Faculty format). For exams, course coordinators are asked to design a assessment matrix;
- All summative assignments are peer reviewed. Teachers request a colleague to review their concept assignment and provide feedback;
- Aggregated, the course assessment plans provide insight into the diversity of assessment formats across the programme and the alignments with the final exit qualifications. The programme's examination plan is evaluated by the (central) Examination Board and re-evaluated in the case of changes.

### *Reliability*

The reliability of the assessment is further supported through the use of rubrics and evaluation forms. Written assignments are accompanied by rubrics or a list of criteria against which they are assessed, which also enhances the transparency of the assessment. Rubrics are included in the study guides of courses and/or on the Canvas intranet page of a course.

### 3.3 Thesis assessment

Thesis assessment is of particular importance. It is a large trajectory (24 EC) in which the students show to have achieved the final attainment levels of the programme. Students get a thesis supervisor who is an expert in the topic. This is mainly a supervisor of the academic staff. The pool of thesis supervisors is supplemented by external staff with smaller contracts. The latter are either supervised by a staff member who has a PhD-qualification and at least a BTQ-qualification or are permitted to be examiner if they have completed a course 'Supervising and examining theses' of LEARN! Academy.<sup>5</sup> Examiners are formally appointed by the Examination Board. In the case that a supervisor is not appointed as an examiner, an examiner is added make the final thesis assessment.

The final grade is the average of the grades of the supervisor and the second examiner (following VU-rules for rounding). If the difference between the grades of the first and second examiner exceeds 1.5 point or if one of the grades is a pass while the other is a fail, a third examiner is requested to assess the thesis (see Appendix 17C for the Faculty Regulations Masterthesis). During the last academic year, this has occurred in three cases, out of 96 finished theses. The Examination Board monitors whether all forms are submitted and filled out in the correct manner. Every other year, the Examination Board assesses a random sample of theses and thesis assessments.

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<sup>5</sup> Appendix 2 of the Rules and Regulation: Regulation on the assignation of examiners (Regeling aanwijzing examinatoren).

### 3.4 Points for development

Currently, not all course files are complete. In order to address this problem, the Programme Director deliberates on methods to support our teachers primarily with respect to constructing the assessment plans and assessment matrices. Additionally, the chair of the Examination Board is working on the improvement of the course files and included assessment files process.<sup>6</sup> We also regularly evaluate the intended learning outcomes of our courses and the assessment instruments (e.g. rubrics) we use during the yearly process of submitting the course information and gave additional attention to their fit to the programme-level intended learning outcomes and assessment plan in the 2023 process.

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<sup>6</sup> This is part of the SEQ (Senior Examination Qualification) trajectory the EB-chair is currently taking.

## Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

Standard 4: The degree programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved. The achievement of the intended learning outcomes is demonstrated by interim and final tests, final projects and the performance of graduates in actual practice or in postgraduate programmes.

We first discuss the thesis as the main reflection of the intended learning outcomes, and subsequently, we describe the performance of our graduates.

### 4.1 Master's thesis

The master's thesis is the final project students undertake in order to achieve the intended learning outcomes. In the thesis trajectory, students develop their own research questions. They mostly study a real world problem in real world organisations in the public domain. Parttime students often study a problem related to their own work, sometimes partly within the context of their own work organisation.

Prior to starting the thesis (period 1 of the second year for parttime; period 2-3 for fulltime), the thesis coordinator requests the thesis supervisors to draft a thesis group description that outlines the main subjects, societal field and approach the students in the thesis group will be addressing. The thesis is an individual work, while student supervision is organized in groups of five to ten students. Students can register their preferences. The thesis coordinator allocated the students to thesis groups. An overview of thesis group descriptions is provided in Appendix 13E.

The thesis trajectory is not organised as an internship, but in the vast majority of cases, students establish contact with an external organisation (in the case of parttime student, often the organisation they work, or an organisation they interact with) and develop their research questions on the basis of this contact. Thesis supervisors offer advice and sometimes also help establishing contact. In some cases, the thesis supervisor has already contacted with an external organisation and developed an initial question for an individual student or small group of students.

Over the course of the trajectory, there are regular meetings with the supervisor. Groups mostly start with group meetings and turn to individual meetings later in the process. Students work on their theory and methodology sections and design a research approach (qualitative, quantitative or mixed; following a deductive, inductive or combined approach) and select cases for empirical research at the start of their thesis trajectory and conduct their empirical research and analysis in VU-teaching period 5 (fulltime students) and period 3 and 4 (parttime students) and draw conclusions and implications at the end of the trajectory (in period 6 and 5 and 6 for the fulltime and parttime students respectively).

During the work on their theses, students conduct an empirical analysis of the (problem) situation they face, apply public administration-concepts in order to structure this analysis, make an inventory of the options for intervention the public administration-literature suggests and assess whether the empirical analysis of the case would indeed support such an intervention. Often students discuss or present these findings to officials in the organisation or organisations they have studied.

Thesis groups are interactive venues for students throughout their thesis trajectory, e.g. in online meetings or online chat groups, providing mutual feedback and support. Students can also participate in

the ‘thesis studio’ (scriptieatelier), where they can participate in group writing sessions and where coaching is available. We do not have a mentorate programme for thesis students, since we consider this would merely duplicate the thesis supervision trajectory, except for problems that might arise from personal or work-related issues of our students, in which case we refer to the faculty’s academic advisers.

In the previous academic year, the thesis manual and the structure of the thesis trajectory were revised. The master’s thesis syllabus has been strongly extended to help students and supervisors alike to timely organise the process. The team of teachers, the thesis coordinator and the Programme Director have jointly expanded the set of intended learning outcomes of the Master’s Thesis and explicitly related these to the final attainment levels of the programme. In addition, the assessment form was improved and the criteria in the assessment form were explicitly related to the intended learning outcomes of the thesis (see Appendix 13D for the master’s thesis study guide, in which the assessment form is included).

In table 6 below, we present the performance of our students in the thesis trajectory. The pass percentage of nearly 100% is not informative. Our students tend to not hand in their theses if they are not finished and expect accordingly not to pass the assessment. Out of 223 enlisted students, 126 successfully finished their thesis, which amounts to a graduation rate of 56%. The indicated 18 EC-theses indicate the transitional arrangement for students from the previous academic year, so non-nominally working students. When only counting the current-year (2021-2022) 24 EC-students, 172 students subscribed for the thesis, 104 participated and 102 passed, which amounts to a nominal graduation rate of 59%.

Track	ECs	Subscribed (223)	Participants (129)	No show (% subsc)	Passed (126)	Passed (% part.)	Grade (av.)
BMO	24	19	14	26%	14	100%	7,7
BMO	18	2	1	50%	0	0%	5,0
BVV	24	78	51	35%	49	96%	7,4
BVV	18	29	12	59%	12	100%	7,2
BVZ	24	29	17	41%	17	100%	7,2
BVZ	18	8	4	50%	4	100%	6,8
KVB	24	46	22	52%	22	100%	7,2
KVB	18	12	8	33%	8	100%	7,1

Table 6. Students performance in PA master’s thesis 2021-2022.

*Track; 18- or 24-EC-variant (18-EC indicates transitional arrangement 2020-2021); number of students subscribed for thesis; number actually participating (submitting thesis); no show as percentage of subscribed students; number of students passed; passed students as percentage of participating students; average grade.*

In 2021-2022, we extended the thesis from 18 to 24 EC in order to both extend the scope in EC’s, and accommodate an earlier start of the trajectory extending the duration in months. Before this revision, fulltime students started in period 5 (early April) of the Vrije Universiteit educational calendar and had to finish their theses at the end of period 6 (late June). Parttime students started in period 3 of their second year (early January) and also finished at the end of period 6. The extension to 24 EC allowed us to extend the duration for fulltime students from three to five months, now starting in early February. In the added period 4, students combine their work in the start-up phase of their thesis projects (6 EC) with the course Methods & Techniques of Public Administration Research (MTBO, 6 EC). For the parttime students, the duration of the thesis process was extended from six to eight months, now starting in early November. For them, this period is exclusively available for thesis work, because they already take MTBO in their first year. An important reason for the extension of the thesis trajectory was that the thesis supervisors felt

that students needed more time to develop their own questions and research approach. The complex realities in the public administration field, in which conflicting and incongruent factual estimations and normative evaluations of conditions exist, require some time to identify researchable questions and consider a response. This was in line with the view of the previous accreditation panel (2018), the mid-term review panel (2021) and the views of the Field Advisory Board.

Unfortunately, students' performance since the adjustment to our curriculum has not strongly increased. This may be related to the Corona period and we expect some improvement in the current academic year 2022-2023.<sup>7</sup> We feel it is important to also note that an unknown segment of our students may not be strongly interested in nominally finishing their studies. This might especially concern our parttime students, who have jobs and encounter life events that at times push aside their work on their theses. From the viewpoint of the programme, we design our yearly and weekly roster in such a way to be maximally inclusive to parttime students; on the other hand, we naturally cannot fully control external events in the lives of our students. Another reason for some doubt regarding the current 24 EC thesis is related to the curriculum at large: the Programme Committee wondered whether a specialisation track of two courses provides enough theoretical and substantive preparation for the thesis.

Fortunately, our students continue to produce results that are highly valued externally. Theses written by our students have won prizes, and theses sometimes lead to co-authored publications in international journals.<sup>8</sup>

## 4.2 Performance of graduates in actual practice

We have some, albeit limited, information on the performance of our graduates in actual practice. We regularly discuss the fit of our programme to demands in actual practice with our Field Advisory Board (see §4.3) and we discuss their impressions of the performance of our graduates in practice. These impressions are good. Apart from that, we incidentally take part in the National Alumni Survey. Lastly in 2019, results specifically for our master's programme were registered. A total of 24 of our alumni participated, important results are briefly presented below.

- All participating alumni currently work in paid jobs;
- 15 students found a job immediately after finishing the programme; 6 within half a year and the remaining 3 students needed a longer period to find a job; 2 students have participated in a work experience trajectory beforehand;
- 17 alumni report good or very good career opportunities; 7 report moderate career opportunities;
- 20 alumni are satisfied or very satisfied with their job; 4 are neutral or moderately dissatisfied;
- 12 alumni work for the government, 6 in the third sector and the remainder in the private sector; 18 work in large (200-999 employees) to very large (1000 and more) organisations;
- 23 of the alumni are satisfied or very satisfied with their education.

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<sup>7</sup> The results for the academic year 2022-2023 were not yet available during the writing of this report, but they will be available during the accreditation panel visit.

<sup>8</sup> Marie de Vries won two prizes, the FSW Master's Thesis Prize and the Johannes van der Zouwen Master's Thesis Prize. A recent publication based on a student thesis was Eski, Y., & Fiddlers, V. (2022). Ignorance-led port policing? The limits of information sharing-based policing in the North Sea Canal Area and Port of Amsterdam and in the Port of Moerdijk. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*.



### 4.3 Field Advisory Board

The fit of our programme to the requirements of the public administration domain (taken broadly) is a regular point of debate in our approximately half-yearly meetings of our Field Advisory Board (FAB, 'Veldadviesraad). The Field Advisory Board consists of persons working in the public domain, partly in governmental organisations, but also in the wider public domain (see Appendix 15B). We have members in our board working at e.g. a Ministry, a municipality, a University of Applied Science and a consultancy in the public domain. The members of our board have a good understanding of the capacities that employees in the public domain need to have.

The board members often emphasise that the alumni of our programme need to be able to handle large, unstructured pools of views and information, coming from a broad range of sources, and related to a broad range of interested parties. Our alumni need to understand the substantive content of all these chunks of information, but also evaluate their normative orientation and their importance for policy development and implementation. The board members value that our programme strongly emphasises that students need to position themselves while we offer them the tools they need to do so and they positively value the intended learning outcomes the programme attains.

In our meeting of 6 April 2023, we discussed a concept of this self-evaluation report.<sup>9</sup>

### 4.4 Points for development

Insights in the performance of our graduates in their professional environments are merely based on impressions that come to us through the Field Advisory Board and through contacts between teachers and professionals in the field and with students after graduation. Some of our alumni participated in the National Alumni Survey in 2019, but this is already some time ago and the response rate was limited. We feel it is important to get a more systematic view. Therefore, we recently have appointed an alumni coordinator for our programme.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, we want to maintain and enhance strong relations to the field through our Field Advisory Board and the contacts that we have. In the Field Advisory Board, we continue to discuss the feasibility of our final attainment levels and the intended learning outcomes we achieve. We are working on a new specialisation track on AI in government, which strongly fits one of the remarks the Field Advisory Board made. We aim to more systematically build a network of alumni from our programme. We also intend to use these contacts to improve the labour market orientation of our programme.

During the work on their theses, students often have intensive contacts with organisations in the field. They study these organisations, but also work towards an approach to address problems that occur in the organisation or network. Although we coach and support the students' self-responsibility and professional skills they need to accomplish such complex tasks, we aim to work towards a more systematic understanding of such skills, which might allow stronger coaching of our students in this regard.

As stated before, with regard to the number of courses and the duration of the thesis, we see a dilemma, also posed by the Programme Committee. Extending the thesis necessitated limiting the number of

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<sup>9</sup> Notes of this meeting are included in Appendix 15B.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Leidorf-Tidå.

specialisation track courses to two. We will reconsider the length of the thesis, taking into account student performance and the requirements of the labour market.

## Standard 5. Diversity

Staff and student populations should adequately reflect society, in various ways. The programme has an adequate strategy for dealing with the diverse backgrounds of students.

### 5.1 Diversity of staff and students

In general, diversity is an important theme for us and we embrace the diversity in the complex late modern world.

Our goal is to have a diverse staff, with diversity manifesting itself in several aspects. Naturally, and in accordance with Dutch government policies that forbid it, we do not register these aspects of our teachers' backgrounds. Gender however is registered. The gender balance among teachers is biased. Of our teaching staff in the master's programme of 21 persons in total, 18 teachers (86%) are male, while only three teachers (14%) are female. Fortunately, in 2022 we hired three new female staff members, who will be involved in teaching in the master very soon. This increased the female male-ratio to 25%. With respect to diversity of scientific interest and approach, we do cover the various fields of our specialization tracks (see Appendix 7B, Teaching qualifications and educational background core staff of VU Master's programme of Public Administration). While the programme is currently a fully Dutch language programme, we have attracted a number of international scholars in our department to increase diversity. One of these persons is our new full professor, Madalina Busuioc, who works on algorithmic governance. Another new staff member is our professor on Diversity, Serena Does, who is also female and her field of study brings the diversity subject more to the centre of our attention, but she does not participate in the teaching of the programme. One of our staff members working in our programme for a longer time, Sinan Çankaya, is specialised in issues of diversity in the security domain.

We give an overview of the gender and education backgrounds of our students in Appendix 14B. The gender balance among our students is 60 (54 %) female students and 51 (46 %) male students out of a total of 111 students (cohort 2022). We see this as a balanced composition of our student group. Of the 111 students that entered our programme in 2022, 61 (55%) entered via our premasters' programme, primarily indicating an educational background from a university of applied science or other educational background. We very much welcome these students, since we have an emancipatory ambition attached to our programme.

Our programme does not register the diversity of students in terms of ethnic or cultural backgrounds, again in accordance with Dutch government policies that forbid the registration of such backgrounds. Research suggests that the student population at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and also the student population at our master's programme is relatively highly diverse.<sup>11</sup> The Vrije Universiteit is known as the most diverse university of the Netherlands in terms of the ethnicity of its student population. We also see that reflected in the student population in our classrooms. An important number of our students are from non-Western decent (mostly from Turkish and Moroccan decent), helping the cultural diversity in the classroom. A heterogeneous student population brings different viewpoints to the classroom.

The programme is definitely diverse with respect to parttime and fulltime students. In the 2022 cohort, 35 students (32%) registered for the parttime variant of the programme and 76 students (68%) took the

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<sup>11</sup> <https://vu.nl/nl/over-de-vu/meer-over/over-diversiteit>

fulltime variant. This is in line with our didactic vision and related to the employment experience of our students. We do not explicitly use the term 'Mixed Classroom' to develop our teaching, but we do explicitly build upon the differences among our students in our didactic approach, which is for an important part based on the interaction between fulltime and parttime students who each bring their own understandings of and experiences in the societal environment in which our four specialization tracks are situated.

The parttime variant of our programme is explicitly designed to attract older students who have a number of years of work experience. There is much diversity in the professional status of the part-time students. Comparatively speaking, the programme also has a large diversity in the age of the students, largely due to the part-time programme. The scheduling of our programme is designed to allow our parttime students to attend the programme next to their work. Also, the overall design of the programme, with four specialization tracks on public domains, attracts parttime students working in these domains. We consider this a strong aspect of our programme, because of the fruitful interaction between our fulltime and parttime students.

## 5.2 Points for development

Our department's hiring strategy is strongly oriented towards improving the department's gender balance. With regard to substantive issues, we naturally aim to cover the domains of our specialization tracks and we aim to cover a variety of scientific and methodological approaches. Furthermore, in our teaching, we explicitly address issues of diversity of cultural background, political position, educational background and their implications for public administration and we want our staff composition to reflect that. Our recently engaged professor on Diversity, Serena Does, will not be involved in the teaching in our programme, but her engagement in our group will strengthen our understanding of diversity in various aspects.

## 6. Analysis of strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities (SWOT)

A SWOT analysis is mandatory for the EAPAA accreditation. This should be a SWOT analysis on the level of a programme, detailing the distinctive strengths and weaknesses of the programme, as well as future opportunities and threats.

In the table below, we present a SWOT-analysis of our programme.

		Positive	Negative
<b>Internal</b>	Strengths	Societal, normative public administration, clear vision PT/FT-students combined; programme inclusive to PT-students Strong student-staff interaction Strong relation to outside world Good functioning of PC and FAB Strong integration external thesis supervision staff Adapted structure thesis trajectory International track AI, Data and Governance	Weaknesses
			Room to increase use of blended learning methods Room to improve personnel diversity Non-timely thesis completion Incomplete assessment files; awareness of staff with regard to this
<b>External</b>	Opportunities	Additional funding for personnel and teaching innovation Very explicit emphasis on diversity in application procedures	Threats
			Unexpected high increase or decrease of student numbers Lack of diversity among applicants for new positions

*Table 7. SWOT-analysis of the VU Master's programme of Public Administration.*

The weaknesses mentioned above relate to personnel diversity, the use of blended learning methods, student performance with respect to the thesis (timely completion) and assessment files being incomplete. Our strengths partly mitigate the weaknesses and we developed a number of programme and department policies to address them. These points for development were presented at the end of the standards on assessment, the final attainment level and the teaching and learning environment.

We also identified an important external threat. High increase, but also high decrease of student numbers are related to personnel capacity and changing student interest for our programme. With respect to personnel capacity, we make optimal use of additional funding opportunities mentioned in the table and we continuously monitor whether we can feasibly provide our programme. Changing student interest is indirectly monitored through course and curriculum evaluations and in discussion with our Field Advisory Board and we take active part in the student marketing activities organised by the university, like the Master's Days.

## 7. Student section

Author: Rebecca Jongkind, Chair of the Programme Committee and student

Date: 13 April, 2023

### 7.1 Introduction

This student section is based on a focus group held by the chair, Rebecca Jongkind (student member), of the programme committee, in which students gave their feedback about the Master's programme during a guided discussion. The input of the students was combined with some of the experiences that the student members of the programme committee have had, to write this student section.

The sample of the focus group consists of 10 students who participated in the meeting on March 17, 2022. Of these 10 students, 4 were full-time students and 6 were part-time students. There were 6 students who specialize in 'Besturen van Veiligheid', 2 students who specialize in 'Besturen van Maatschappelijke Organisaties' and 2 students who specialize in 'Kwaliteit van Besturen'.

The student section on the Master's programme in Public Administration at the VU describes all Master's-wide courses that the students have taken. This report contains both positive and critical feedback from the students on each course. In addition, the programme structure, the thesis and the academic level of the master are discussed.

The student section contains a number of points that students generally noticed about the Master's programme. For example, students are very positive about including ethics as part of the Master's programme and overall the content of the courses is perceived as useful and relevant. The students find interaction during lectures very important and had some feedback about the structure of the courses. This report therefore contains some suggestions from the students about a logical order of subjects to improve the structure.

### 7.2 Master-wide courses

*Governance and Society: Critical Perspectives (Bestuur en samenleving: kritische perspectieven, BKSP)*

The course 'Bestuur en samenleving: kritische perspectieven' is generally very positively appreciated by the students. The academic level of the course is high and is considered better than other courses. This is mainly due to the choice of literature and teaching methods. Students experience the interaction with the teacher as very stimulating and feel free to ask questions and express their opinion.

The content of the course is considered relevant and interesting. However, students that took part in the pre-master programme indicate that the pre-master does not offer sufficient preparation for this course. The treatment of the theories can be too difficult for them without prior knowledge. Students believe that part of the content that was important during this course should be included in the pre-master, in order not to widen the gap between pre-master students and university students. In addition, students think that the treatment of the theories could also be spread over other courses. The course is experienced as intensive, but as indispensable and very relevant for the Master's programme.

### *Policy and Management (Beleid en management, BLM)*

The course 'Beleid en management' is generally considered useful by the students. However, students indicate that there is too much overlap with the pre-master course 'Public Management'. Some slides were copied verbatim. The students see room here to add part of the content of the course 'Bestuur en samenleving: kritische perspectieven' to the pre-master course and to shorten everything that was literally repeated in 'Beleid en management'. The lecturers should have a good discussion with each other about the content of the course, the overlap with the pre-master course 'Public Management' and the requirements they set for students. The exam should be composed in collaboration, so that despite the differences in content between the teachers, it is clear to students what is expected during the exam. Despite the criticism, the students see it as a valuable addition that the course is taught by several teachers, because the teachers stimulate the students with their own knowledge and research about the content.

### *Good Governance (Goed bestuur, GB)*

The students were very positive about the content of the course 'Goed bestuur' and regarded it as an important part of the Master's. The course was seen as unique because ethics in the VU Public Administration Master is an important part of what sets it apart from Public Administration masters on other Dutch universities.

However, there were different expectations per teacher of the paper, which led to a lot of criticism from the students. It is therefore important that there is better consultation between the teachers in order to use one standard for the assessment. The focus group discussion demonstrated that students from different workgroups had received different instructions about how the papers should be written, which indicates that it is crucial that the teachers have clearly discussed content and assessment.

Students also expressed criticism about the timing and length of the course. The part-time students criticized the timing and structure of the course because the intensity of the lectures and tutorials and the literature was too high, and they were then not examined at the same time as the full-time students. Part-time students do not have the option to hand in their papers at the same deadline as the fulltime students, even when they followed the course and finished their papers straight away. It was indicated that the course was much too short and that such a short period of time is not suitable for a course with so much relevant literature. The part-time students were dissatisfied with the timing of examinations and felt that the subject with the most potential was insufficiently covered.

### *Methods and techniques of public administration research (Methoden en technieken van bestuurskundig onderzoek, MTBO)*

The content of the 'Methoden en technieken van bestuurskundig onderzoek' (MTBO) course, was seen as relevant knowledge that can be put to use when doing academic research. The information that was provided in this course helped students by writing their methods chapter of the Master's thesis. However, there was much disappointment about the low attendance at the lectures. The low turnout did not stimulate interaction during the lectures. Although the option to follow the course in a hybrid way was appreciated, because recordings of lectures are considered useful, the low turnout had a demotivating effect on the students present. Here too, there was criticism about the timing of the course, which is further explained in Chapter 2.

### 7.3 Programme Structure

The evaluation of the Master's programme structure provides a critical view of the experiences of part-time and full-time students. The part-time students are highly critical of the master's programme structure. They think that there is a lack of clarity about the courses that will or will not be tested, while they are obliged to follow the courses. The part-time students also find the study load unrealistically high and the refresher lectures inconvenient.

The order of courses is criticized by both part-time and full-time students. 'Goed bestuur', although substantively relevant, has too short a duration and long lecture hours. MTBO, on the other hand, is seen as a subject that can be taught over a shorter period of time to stimulate attendance in the lecture hall. Some students therefore propose switching Goed Bestuur with MTBO.

### 7.4 Thesis

The preparation of the courses for the thesis and the depth of the specializations are not perceived as sufficient. Each specialization only has two courses in the Master's programme, which according to the students does not feel sufficient to gain enough knowledge about the subject of their specialization. The students expressed that because there are only two courses focused on the subject of specialization, they feel more like electives. There is also not enough space for all students to write their thesis with a teacher that has enough knowledge of the specialization. This was particularly an issue in the largest specialization 'Besturen van Veiligheid'

The students experience the first phase of the thesis very differently. Some students experience a lot of study load in combination with MTBO, while others experience too little. Tutors also differ in the amount of support they offer to students and in what they require from students. Students believe that there should be fair opportunities to find a supervisor and that there should be equal opportunities for feedback and contact moments for all students.

### 7.5 Academic level

The academic level of the master is criticized by students. The students believe that a large part of the academic level of the master depends on the interaction between teachers and students. They state that they expect a master's degree to provide them with sufficient incentive to actively participate, and that discussion and participation are important components of a Master's level study. They believe that interaction is not sufficiently stimulated in most courses and suggest that attendance and involvement should be compulsory. The level of the Master's also differs greatly per course and teacher. In general, students believe that there should be more interaction and that teachers should encourage that interaction.

### 7.6 Conclusion

The students were generally positive about the content of the courses. However, it is important to discuss the feedback from the students on the timing and structure of the courses and to take this into account in the further development of the courses. It is also important that there is better consultation between



the teachers in order to avoid different expectations and to have a clear standard when assessing the work of the students.

There are many areas for improvement for the Master's programme, especially for part-time students. The structure of the courses and thesis should be rethought to provide a better experience for students. More attention should be paid to the depth of the specializations and the supervision of the thesis. Finally, the academic level of the master should be improved by stimulating more interaction between teachers and students.