

PROGRAMME REVIEW

Master of Arts in Diplomacy and Global Governance
Master of Arts in Global Security and Strategy

Vesalius College

Brussels - May 2021

PROGRAMME REVIEW MASTER OF ARTS IN DIPLOMACY AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AND MASTER OF ARTS IN GLOBAL SECURITY AND STRATEGY

VLUHR Quality Assurance
Ravensteingalerij 27
1000 Brussels
T +32 (0)2 792 55 00

This report is electronically available at <https://www.qualityassurance.vluhr.be/assessment-reports>.

Legal deposit number: D/2021/12.784/3

Contents

- Preface VLUHR Quality Assurance Board 3
- Programme review 4
 - Introduction 4
 - Panel composition 4
 - Review principles 4
 - Preparation 5
 - Site visit 5
 - Assessment report 5
- Programme report 6
- Conclusion 14
- Summary of commendations 15
- Summary of recommendations 16
- ANNEX 1: ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS 17
- ANNEX 2: CV PANEL MEMBERS 18
- ANNEX 3: SITE VISIT SCHEDULE 19
- ANNEX 4: DOCUMENTS CONSULTED 20

Preface VLUHR Quality Assurance Board

This assessment report deals with the programme review of the Master of Arts in Diplomacy and Global Governance and the Master of Arts in Global Security and Strategy of Vesalius College. This programme review was conducted by an independent panel of experts in March 2021.

This report is intended for all stakeholders of the programmes and provides a snapshot of its quality following the review principles for quality assurance for programme assessments in Flanders. As chair of the VLUHR Quality Assurance Board I hope that the panel's findings, judgements, recommendations and commendations will advance these programmes. Additionally, this report intends to provide information regarding the quality of the programmes to a wider audience. For this reason, this report is published on the website of VLUHR QA.

I would like to thank all members of the panel for the time they invested and the dedication they showed carrying out this programme review. At the very same time, this review was only possible because of the commitment of all those involved at the programmes. I hope this report does justice to their efforts.

Petter Aaslestad

Chair VLUHR Quality Assurance Board

Programme review

Introduction

This assessment report presents the findings, judgements, commendations and recommendations regarding the Master of Arts in Diplomacy and Global Governance and the Master of Arts in Global Security and Strategy¹ of Vesalius College. For the administrative details of the institution and the programmes involved see Annex 1.

This programme review was carried out in accordance with the Manual for Programme Review.² Andreas Smets, Policy Advisor at VLUHR QA, was project manager of this programme review.

Panel composition

The proposal of candidate panel members was approved by the VLUHR Quality Assurance Board on the 5th of October 2020. The composition of the panel was ratified by the VLUHR Quality Assurance Board on the 20th of November 2020.

The panel was composed as follows:

- Michael (Mike) Smith, Honorary Professor In European Politics, PAIS, University of Warwick
- Agnes Batory, Professor and Pro-Rector for Social Sciences and Humanities, Central European University
- Jan Orbie, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Ghent University.
- Emma Moerman, master student International Politics, Ghent University

A short cv of the panel members is included as Annex 2.

Review principles

The programme review was conducted in accordance with the eight quality features. These features are the characteristics of a high-quality higher education programme, defined by NVAO and tied in with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015). For each programme whose quality is satisfactory, the presence of the following quality features is guaranteed:

1. The programme's learning outcomes constitute a transparent and programme-specific interpretation of the international requirements regarding level, content, and orientation;
2. The programme's curriculum ties in with the most recent developments in the discipline, takes account of the developments in the professional field, and is relevant to society;
3. The staff allocated to the programme provide the students with optimum opportunities for achieving the learning outcomes;
4. The programme offers the students adequate and easily accessible services, facilities, and counselling;
5. The teaching and learning environment encourages the students to play an active role in the learning process and fosters smooth study progress;
6. The assessment of students reflects the learning process and concretises the intended learning outcomes;
7. The programme provides comprehensive and readable information on all stages of study;
8. Information regarding the quality of the programme is publicly accessible.

¹ Till the end of the academic year 2020-2021 the programme is known as Master of Arts in Global Peace, Security and Strategy.

² <https://www.qualityassurance.vluhr.be/documents>

In addition, a programme ensures the involvement of internal and external stakeholders on the one hand and external and independent peers and experts on the other hand, in a continuous pursuit of quality development. If applicable, the programme must also comply with relevant regulations with respect to the admission of graduates to corresponding posts or professions.

Preparation

In preparation of the programme review, the programmes compiled a self-evaluation report in accordance with the VLUHR QA Manual for Programme Review. The panel received the informative and conclusive self-evaluation report well in advance and studied this document and its annexes thoroughly. The panel also studied a wide selection of Master's theses and consulted the virtual learning environment of the programmes.

On the 19th of February 2021 the panel members attended a training session organised by VLUHR QA. During this session, the panel members were informed about the programme review process. Special attention was given to the status of the programmes, quality assurance in Flanders and Europe, the Review Principles and interviewing techniques. Also, a schedule for the site visit was agreed upon, enclosed as Annex 3. Finally, the self-evaluation report and the consulted Master's theses were discussed in depth to prepare the site visit.

Site visit

Given stringent COVID-19 regulations, the review of the programmes was conducted online on the 23th and 24th of March 2021. During this 'site visit', the panel conducted interviews with all those involved in the programmes in order to gain insight into the quality of the programmes, including management, students, teaching and supporting staff, alumni and employers. These interviews took place in an open and constructive atmosphere and provided the panel, in addition to the documents studied (see Annex 4 for an overview), relevant insights regarding the quality of the programmes. In order to give all stakeholders the opportunity to talk confidentially to the panel there was a free consultation. The panel attended a presentation about the facilities at the campus. At the end of the site visit, the panel discussed its findings, judgements, recommendation and commendations with the programme management in a co-creative session. After a final panel meeting, the panel shared its main conclusions with the programme management in an oral report.

Assessment report

In the subsequent assessment report the panel provides the findings, judgements, recommendations and commendations regarding the quality of the programmes as a whole and all study tracks. At the end of this report a conclusion, readable for a wide audience and including an advice for accreditation is formulated, as well as a list of commendations and recommendations. The programme management was given the opportunity to respond to the draft of this report before finalisation.

Programme report

This report covers the evaluation of the Master of Arts in Diplomacy and Global Governance and the Master of Arts in Global Security and Strategy³ at **Vesalius College**. The College was founded in 1987 by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and Boston University's Metropolitan College. The College offers four bachelor programmes (three from the fall of 2021) and the two master programmes that are the object of this evaluation.

Vesalius College started offering the two master programmes in the academic year 2018-2019. It concerns the Master of Arts in Diplomacy and Global Governance (MADGG) and the Master of Arts in Global Peace, Security and Strategy (MAGPSS). From 2018 to 2021, the programmes have been offered in two different formats: students could either take the 90 ECTS option or the 120 ECTS option. However, the 120 ECTS programme proved to add too little added value to the 90 ECTS component and has been hard to manage for the College, the panel was informed. From 2021-2022 onwards, both master programmes will be offered in two reduced formats: 60 ECTS and 90 ECTS. In general the 60 ECTS track focuses more strongly on the academic track, while the 90 ECTS programme comprises more practical elements such as the internship and the capstone course. The 60 ECTS track allows the students to lay down the basis for both specialized careers in the professional field and Master after Master if they wish to further consolidate their studies. The 90 ECTS option offers students the possibility to gain a full-year intensive Master with an intensive practical component.

Together with the change in amount of ECTS, the College proposes to change the name and focus of the Master of Arts in Global Peace, Security and Strategy to Master of Arts in Global Security and Strategy (MAGSS). The existing programme consisted of a peace component, next to a focus on security and strategy. The panel learned that the peace component was assessed to be less linked to the other two components by students and teaching staff. This lack of fit became more explicit after a staff member specializing in peace studies left the college. With the new proposed programme, standing at 60/90 ECTS, rather than at 90/120 ECTS, and after the departure of a faculty member specialized in peace studies, the choice was made to reorient the programme towards a focus on global security and strategy.

According to the panel, the rationale for the change in amount of ECTS and change of focus of the MAGPSS is clear and is reflected in the content of the proposed new tracks and programme. At the moment of the online visit, the College was in a transition period. Nevertheless, the panel was able to gain insight into the current situation of the two tracks of the two master programmes. The panel collected evidence on the 90 ECTS and 120 ECTS track for the MADGG and the MAGPSS. The panel also received a clear view on the future vision of the two tracks and especially on the new focus of the Master of Arts in Global Security and Strategy (MAGSS). Therefore, some of the considerations and recommendations in the report are made in respect of the future tracks and for the new programmes.

The **Master of Arts in Diplomacy and Global Governance** intends to offer an academic programme that combines the theory and practice of diplomacy with the theory, practice and challenges of global governance, at the level of an initial academic master. Even so, the master aims to combine an International Relations-based broad specialisation with an inter-disciplinary approach to the disciplines, with scholarly and policy-oriented courses in International Relations, Political Science, History, and Economics. The **Master of Arts in Global Security and Strategy** aims to provide students with a unique high-level, high-quality and policy-relevant academic graduate programme that concentrates on differing interpretations of strategy, security and geopolitics by bringing together key perspectives from the sub-fields of Security Studies and Strategic Studies. As such, the programme aims to offer two perspectives on the major issues, institutions and actors, theories and processes of key themes related to the causes of war, prevention of war, as well as global security governance. As mentioned above, the peace component is not explored in detail in the new master programme, although relevant elements of it are retained in the focus on security and strategy.

³ Till the end of the academic year 2020-2021 the programme is known as Master of Arts in Global Peace, Security and Strategy.

The panel learned that the two master programmes offer various perspectives on the major issues, institutions and actors, theories and processes of key themes related to their specific subdiscipline. The programmes foster students' acquisition of fundamental knowledge of the theory and practice of International Relations in the specific subdisciplines. Both programmes provide the students with a methodological foundation for conducting independent and original research in the specific field. During the meetings, it became clear to the panel that the master programmes are perceived as 'professional' degrees by the students, professional field and alumni, meaning the programmes aim to train future young professionals. In this light, the substantial research component in especially the master theses seems not completely aligned with the objectives of the programmes. The panel encourages the programme management to develop a clear vision on this area and to reconsider the learning outcomes (which currently do not explicitly mention research goals) in this regard..

According to the panel, the goals are translated into clear learning outcomes that met the standards of the Flemish Qualification Framework and the domain-specific learning outcomes regarding level and orientation. The programmes have put a great deal of effort into refining the learning outcomes since the last accreditation and in benchmarking them against major international frameworks. This has resulted in a reduction in the overall number of proposed learning outcomes. The panel finds this a very effective way of focusing the programmes and encouraging discussion among the teaching staff. However, the programmes should be encouraged to further refine and focus some of the learning outcomes because the distinction between the tracks is not entirely clear when looking at the learning outcomes. The programmes are encouraged to explore the learning outcomes in relation to the introduction of a 60/90 ECTS suite of programmes as opposed to the existing 90/120 suite and to create clear distinction between the two versions. Another recommendation is to refine the learning outcomes in relation to the interdisciplinarity, multi-disciplinarity or sub-disciplinarity of the programmes. The fact that multidisciplinary is apparently also used as a synonym of interdisciplinarity (in the report and also in discussions) indicates some lack of clarity in the use of these concepts and their implications for the programme.

The programmes work in a consistent way in transferring the learning outcomes into learning objectives for each course. Each course identifies learning objectives in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes and builds the course content, the course materials and the tasks and assignments around stated goals. In this way the learning outcomes lead to a consistent programme. In both tracks, the **60 ECTS Option** includes five foundational courses in the first trimester (30 ECTS). The second trimester includes two compulsory courses (12 ECTS), a Thesis (12 ECTS) and two Electives (6 ECTS). The **90 ECTS Option** comprises five foundational courses in the first trimester (30 ECTS); three compulsory courses (18 ECTS), Thesis Writing II (3 ECTS) and three Electives (9 ECTS) in the second trimester (30 ECTS in total); the Capstone (9 ECTS); Thesis (15 ECTS); 1 elective (including an internship) (6 ECTS) in the third trimester (30 ECTS in total).

The foundational courses are designed to lay down the theoretical and methodological basis for specialised knowledge in the field of each programme. For both programmes, foundational courses also aim at strengthening the research skills. During the second semester, students are exposed to specialised knowledge in the fields of study. According to the panel, the courses in the first and second semester allow the students to develop a solid knowledge and skills in their selected discipline. The panel advises the programme team to reflect upon the extent to which the foundational courses in semester 1 of the programmes cater for the diverse backgrounds of the students accepted onto the programmes. It seems that in some respects these courses are repetitive and pitched at too low a level for students with a bachelor in International Relations or Political Science, and are designed for students without background in these disciplines. It would be advisable to either differentiate the course offering according to the requirement for relevant background or not, or alternatively not admit students from disciplines too far from the subject matter unless they have undertaken appropriate preparation.

In addition to compulsory courses, during the second trimester, students can choose among a variety of electives. In this respect, the panel commends the strong partnerships, especially the collaboration with the Institute for European Studies (IES) under the umbrella of the Brussels School of Government. The College benefits from the expertise of the IES clusters in specific policy areas which enriches both master programmes with the addition of expertise in specific areas. The introduction of theme packages of electives from the IES is a positive step in enabling the achievement of the proposed learning outcomes for the programmes, and in capitalising on the opportunities created by the creation of the Brussels School of Governance. These electives may be a significant addition to the existing programmes, bringing into play the expertise available through the IES, and it is important

that students should be given clear guidance on processes of choice and focus and that IES elective courses are aligned to the level of the MADGG and MAPSS students. Given the relatively small numbers of students on the programmes so far there are some restrictions on choice within the programme (see further). The programme management should be encouraged to provide a clear statement of the process by which electives will be chosen to run, or not to be offered, in the programmes or to modify teaching, learning and assessment methods for small numbers on courses.

The programmes' curricula tie in with the most recent developments in the discipline, take account of the developments in the professional field, and are relevant to society. The panel commends that non-western views on diplomacy, global governance, security and strategy are regularly mentioned in the self-evaluation report, although it was not entirely clear for the panel how this is incorporated in the courses, and why it is not mentioned in the learning outcomes. The panel would encourage the programme team to analyse the curriculum and programmes content as a whole in light of decolonisation and non-western points of view, if this remains a pronounced part of the faculty's intentions behind the curriculum.

The programmes include a **thesis**, a preparation course on research methods and a thesis preparatory seminar. The theses contain introduction, literature review, a section on research design and methodology, analytical sections and conclusion. Students are guided by a master thesis supervisor to discuss initial ideas for the thesis and practice the core elements of thesis writing, including the drafting of the research question, the literature review and their theoretical framework. According to the panel, the theses incorporated into the two programmes provide an effective way of giving the students an opportunity to pursue research topics. The panel examined a sample of theses, and stated that the evidence demonstrated that they produce good results. During the meetings with the alumni, the panel learned that the guidance and supervision of students when working on the theses varies, depending on the availability of the teaching staff. Therefore, the programme management should be encouraged to refine further the guidance given to students on the thesis-writing process and on the appropriate expectations in relation to support during the process.

In comparison with the 60 ECTS programme, the 90 ECTS programme comprises **more practical elements such as the Capstone and an internship** (30 ECTS). The Capstone is a project, where students work on a real-life problem by applying their knowledge to a concrete policy problem. The internship consists of a 150-hour placement at a partner institution of the College within the framework of the Vesalius College Internship Programme. It provides an opportunity for students to gain professional experience in an international environment that can help students to orient their career choices after graduation and build relationships with professionals and organisations. The internship is highly valued by students as a component of the programmes and should be commended. The distinction between the 60 and 90 ECTS versions is clear when looking at the additional courses in the 90 ECTS version.

In both programmes and tracks, **the workload** is high, the students told the panel. According to the evidence provided at the visit, the issue of workload is very variable, according to the background of students and to the scheduling (for example) of assessment tasks. The programme management is aware of this and organises discussions with students in order to address this problem. The panel commends that programme management has taken a proactive role in attempting to address this. All courses now apply a workload calculator in their syllabus, which is a good tool according to the panel. Also the staff are responsive to students' needs in this area. The panel encouraged the programmes to continue their efforts to achieve greater consistency in the scheduling of assessment tasks and overall workload for the students, taking account of the variable backgrounds of individual students.

The master programmes have been delivered by a core group of **permanent faculty members** on permanent contracts and have been **enhanced by adjunct faculty members**. The core faculty's areas of expertise cover the key domains of the curricula. More specialised or practice-oriented courses are taught by adjunct faculty members in the light of their expertise. The panel notes that the staff is enthusiastic and of high quality. The panel recognises that teaching staff is specialised in the different aspects of the study field. Many of them are worldwide recognised experts in their field of competence, invited speakers at international conferences and institutions and have received international awards. The faculty members as well as several adjunct faculty members have a strong research background and publication record. The faculty members seem to be dedicated

and have good collegial relationships. The panel also commends that the adjunct faculty members seem to be well integrated into the faculty. The professional expertise and the networks that adjunct staff bring into the programmes is another plus.

The panel is positive about the staff student ratio - indeed, the faculty number is very high considering the small enrolment the programs have had so far. There is evidence in the self-evaluation report that there has been considerable turbulence in staffing, but that this has been addressed effectively. The creation of the Programme Director role appears to have had a salutary effect and to have intilled a considerable element of stability and consistency into the existing programmes.

The panel would make two recommendations regarding the staff. The teaching staff is almost exclusively composed of male faculty members. Therefore, the panel is of the opinion that the programmes must be encouraged to continue the implementation of policies related to gender and diversity among the teaching, management and support staff. Second, the teaching staff should monitor the extent to which professional tutors dedicate time to contact with students, to ensure consistency as far as possible. The rationale is that the panel was made aware of variations between adjunct and professional tutors in terms of their availability to students outside formal classes, and that this should be monitored to ensure consistency, as far as possible.

It is clear that the staff have done their utmost to provide students with effective support and especially during the past year in difficult circumstances. Students feel that they receive strong and effective support from the staff, with some variations in terms of staff availability and responsiveness. The role of Programme Director is a success factor and provides a very effective focus for the overall direction of the programmes, and for the maintenance of high standards in the teaching and learning processes. At the same time, the role of the Programme Director is very vulnerable due to the lack of a sustainable management structure (see further).

The staff have been assisted very effectively in this effort by the **Office for Teaching and Learning Innovation (OTLI)**. The OTLI effectively serves as a hub for the college's teaching staff. The Office was involved in a wide range of activities in the areas of teaching, training, e-learning, blended learning and research. It focused on the use of technology to enhance learning. It has actively sustained the teaching staff in experimenting with a variety of course formats, from face-to-face to blended to fully online. The panel states that the innovations initiated via the OTLI have been especially fruitful and contributed substantially to the student experience.

An important task of OTLI during the **COVID-19 pandemic** was the development of an online teaching platform. The COVID-19 pandemic has added to this by demanding the provision of on-line information and the development of virtual teaching and learning processes. It is clear that the innovations provide a strong foundation for further development and that at least some of these will persist in the post-COVID environment. Also the construction of a virtual student community, and the provision of opportunities for on line consultation, have mitigated the effects of the COVID challenge. It is evident for the panel that the operation of the OTLI has acted as a powerful catalyst for the improvement of information sources, including those housed on the Canvas learning portal. Although there is some inevitable variation between the courses and there have been some inevitable communication problems, these are minimal and inherent to unexpected changes. The Programme Director and the staff are aware of this and should be encouraged to work for greater consistency. Overall, the evidence provided during the visit, by staff and students, testified to the effectiveness of the methods adopted over the past year.

The panel commends the pedagogical approach of the programmes. The programmes bridge the theory-practice divide by placing pedagogical emphasis on '**Theory-guided, Practice-embedded and Experiential Learning (TPEL)**', by constantly letting theory speak to actual practice and vice versa. The focus on TPEL benefits the programmes by linking academic perspectives with practice-oriented applications and internship opportunities according to the panel. The TPEL approach is visible in the course contents, the course materials and in the assignments. The TPEL approach leads to a blended learning environment with theoretical and research based elements, combined with practical and policy making aspects. This approach creates a learning environment reflecting the later professional working context and is highly valued by the students, the alumni and the professional field.

A College-wide **Teaching Manual** delineates an explicit approach to teaching and assessments, and is an important tool for fostering coherence across and within the two programmes. The Manual relies on a unified grading scale, and outlines the overall criteria that assignments and exams should meet to obtain a given grade. The Teaching Manual further provides a syllabus template, which is binding for all faculty members. The panel commends the Teaching Manual.

The panel learned from its meetings and its examination of documents that a large **variety of teaching forms** are used. The relatively small size of the programmes allows for good interaction between the students and the staff. This interaction certainly encourages the students to play an active role in the programmes. The students met by the panel stated that the staff is very open, approachable, and always ready to help the students.

The programmes developed the **assignments and assessments** on the basis of the learning outcomes for each course. The panel learned that the reduction of learning outcomes has encouraged an open discussion with the staff on how to systematically embed learning outcomes into the courses and, relatedly, how to design the most pertinent assignments for each course. In this respect, each 6 ECTS course uses at least two assignments. The students have been exposed on the one hand to a progressive approach to research writing and on the other hand to a variety of policy skills, including simulations, poster panels, video projects, conflict analysis, position memos, policy briefs, policy papers. The panel notes that there is good variety of assessment methods. According to the panel it is clear that assessment tasks are closely related to learning outcomes, and that this relationship is effectively policed by the Programme Director. The differentiation in assessments and a more pronounced embeddedness of practical elements in the programmes according to the TPEL approach (theory- and policy-oriented assignments) is commended.

The panel examined a sample of **syllabi**. The learning outcomes are well tested in the syllabi and appear to cover the content very well. The panel commends the detailed course syllabus of the programme. This syllabus contains all information about the curriculum, its learning outcomes, its teaching staff and teaching and examination methods. The programmes are encouraged to ensure that the teaching material be made available to students as soon as possible, because students remarked that teaching material was sometimes available too late.

The college policy requires the programmes to include in the syllabus the *grading rubrics*, along with information on the assignments and mark descriptors developed throughout the grading scale. So, the structure of the assignments and the criteria in use for assessing them are explained in the syllabus of each course. In this way, the programmes strive for clarity on expectations and transparency of criteria of assessment, which is highly appreciated by the students and commended by the panel. The rubrics increase the validity and reliability of grading, and reduce grade inflation. The use of rubrics by all faculty members is checked and enforced through the Academic Quality Committee (AQC) procedures. The panel noted that the rubrics are widely used and it is clear that the Programme Director has done much to ensure consistency in this area. To consolidate the improvements that have been made, the staff should be encouraged to use the rubrics consistently and to provide feedback according to them.

The rubrics and grading scale are also used in the assessment framework for the master theses. The theses seem to be graded in line with standards applicable in the area, according to the panel. The teaching staff is encouraged to continue their efforts to ensure consistency of structure, style and word length in relation to the thesis component of the programmes.

Overall the students do get **adequate feedback**, according to the panel. Some students told the panel that there were some individual problems (eg. profs not being accessible for supervision) but these may be isolated incidents. The Programme Director is receptive to comments from the students on this point.

To monitor and to improve the quality of the educational and assessment system, Vesalius College launched the **Academic Quality Committee (AQC)**. Every year the AQC performs a circular process of quality control. Prior to the start of the semester, the AQC procedures require all staff to submit their syllabuses to the Programme Director who verifies that the course learning objectives are in line with the programme learning outcomes, that the expected students' workload is adequate, and that the course materials are at the right academic level and up-to-date. During the trimester, all faculty members submit their final exam questions to the Programme

Director for evaluation and approval. Again, the Programme Director checks whether the level of exam questions adheres to the progression levels, whether instructions for students are sufficiently clear, and whether the exam length is suitable. At the end of the semester, the AQC procedures stipulate that both the Programme Director and an external examiner review all course folders. All teaching staff are required to submit a course folder for each course that they have taught during the semester. By the end of the academic year, the AQC acts in order to examine the folders of all courses offered during that period.

The feedback loop includes students, internal and external evaluations. Each semester, students have the opportunity to provide feedback on the courses. Early in the semester there is a short collective evaluation to detect any major problems. Toward the end of the semester, students have a longer, more formal opportunity to communicate their views concerning the course content and the teaching methods.

The panel commends the AQC procedures and the presence of the external examiner. The panel commends that the courses in this way are subject to continuous review in terms of their fit with the programmes and in terms of their currency in relation to both academic approaches and real-world trends. Although the college has elaborated formal AQC procedures, the panel notes that this process is rather run in an informal and ad hoc way by the Programme Director and the faculty. The Programme Director provides additional support and guidance to all faculty to ensure that they are integrated into the work of the programmes as much as possible and rapidly familiarise themselves with all the academic quality procedures and the academic level expected. The process seems most of the time to be effective, but creates a huge workload and responsibility for the Programme Director and depends heavily on the effort of the faculty members. The programme management should reflect on the need for a more formalised overview of the curriculum to oversee course content and to avoid gaps and overlaps. Probably the announced Programme Board, which is not yet installed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, can play a role in this. The panel encourages the programmes to ensure that the **Programme Board** meets at an early date, to establish a formal forum for the exchange of information and views among the various stakeholders in the programmes.

Vesalius College offers the **programmes in cooperation with (international) partner institutions** such as the Institute for European Studies (IES), the Belgian Royal Military Academy (RMA) and the Egmont Institute - The Royal Institute of International Affairs. The cooperation focuses on the exchange of electives, faculty and research topics. Also the College benefits from a strong network of adjunct professors and Vesalius has strong ties with other organisations in Brussels. The advantage of the College is the Brussels based location in the centre of Europe and in the middle of the European institutions which brings the student in close contact with the reality of policy-making from the perspective of the professional field. The students were very positive about the internship, the networking and career opportunities and teachers from the professional field. This allows the students to play an active role in the international policy making community during their studies.

The panel finds that the programmes have **good relationships with the stakeholders**. One of the key strengths of the programmes is that their orientation gives an active and continuing role to the involvement of a range of stakeholders internally and externally. The Advisory Board plays a crucial role in the involvement of external stakeholders from the professional field. The Advisory Board provides recommendations on the quality of the programmes and suggests modifications as required by the changing dynamics of the fields on diplomacy and global governance and security and strategy respectively. The students are able to register their views about the appropriateness of teaching and learning methods, especially via the student representatives. Since 2018-2019, students have elected two student representatives that have taken charge of channelling student requests and communicating their general impression on the Programmes. The Programme Director meets regularly with the students. In this way there is evidence of active student engagement with the development of the programmes. This has helped in identifying overlaps among courses, detecting logistical problems, signalling technical issues, adjusting the workload. The panels thinks that establishment of the above mentioned Programme Board and the continuation of the Advisory Board should consolidate this set of relationships in a more formal way. The panel also believes that the development of a student evaluation of the programmes as a whole, on top of the course evaluation according to the AQC procedure can be insightful.

On the involvement of the stakeholders, the panel encouraged the programme management to consider how to establish an effective alumni network, to take advantage of the growing number of graduates from the

programmes. An impressive aspect of the visit was the session with alumni and professional stakeholders, who provide a very positive account of the programmes and their effectiveness. These alumni and professional stakeholders have a clear view on further improvement of the programmes. The panel thinks it is important for the programmes to create a sustainable involvement with the alumni and therefore recommend to establish a formal alumni network.

The **student enrolment** for the programmes has evolved over time, with total numbers around 18 annually.

| | 2018-2019 | 2019-2020 | 2020-2021 |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| DAGG 90 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| DAGG 120 | 2 | 0 | 5 |
| DAGG total | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| GPSSS 90 | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| GPSSS 120 | 9 | 7 | 10 |
| GPSSS total | 11 | 10 | 15 |
| Total | 16 | 11 | 21 |

To some extent, numbers were negatively affected due to the turbulent beginning of the two programmes in the first year. This consideration notwithstanding, the most recent numbers show the increasing popularity of these programmes, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the academic year 2020-2021, some 82 applications were processed, out of which 50 were accepted. The panel notes that the total number of students increases year after year. The panel suggest that the programme should develop a clear vision on the preferred numbers of students. The international character of the student body is positive according to the panel and makes it possible that students bring in their own experiences from a global perspective. The enrolled students have a very varied background - including bachelors in engineering or bachelors in natural sciences. For the panel it is not so clear why this range of students are enrolled in the programmes. Therefore, the panel suggest to develop more transparent criteria and procedures on student enrolment.

The new or accepted **students are briefed about the requirements, demands and objectives** of the programmes at the beginning of each academic year. During the orientation students attend various sessions allowing them to familiarise themselves with all aspects of college life. With COVID19, the most recent orientation was offered in a mixed format. Students who were physically in Brussels were invited to come to campus for the 'Brussels' specific components. The general information sessions, which also provide useful information for those students who were not in Brussels were conducted online, through Canvas. Also the Catalogue is the basic document for students enrolled at Vesalius College. It outlines the key procedures, rules and regulations of the educational offerings at the College.

Throughout their studies, the students have a wide range of services, as they enjoy easy access to advice, support and mentoring by their individual study advisor and the **Student Support Assistant**. It is clear for the panel that there is a high level of relevant support available to students on the programmes, and that services are provided in a timely and effective manner. The services afforded to students seem generally adequate and appropriate and are fit for purpose given the special needs of the international student population. At times, the processes are rather informal, and the teaching staff should be encouraged to provide more formal guidelines and processes where this is appropriate. In the past year, during COVID-19, these services have continued to function effectively, with inevitable adjustments. The programme management has been able to sustain the delivery of high-quality services to students given the inevitable problems of access and contact and the lack of face to face interactions. As a minor point of attestation, the panel recommends to give more transparency and adjustment of expectations about career counselling and fees for careers guidance.

The students have **access to all the facilities required** for succeeding on their programme of study, such as computer and library facilities. Since March 2019, some investments have been made in order to provide online/ mixed teaching and the preparation of the classrooms for COVID-19 proof teaching.

The **information on the programmes** appears exhaustive and easily accessible on the website. This includes e.g., an overall description of the programme and its objectives, regulations including the admission requirements, educational organisation, evaluation procedures, conditions to receive the diploma and financial aspects. In this way, the college succeeds in communicating transparently about its master programmes to all who are interested. On the website also a link to the report of the initial accreditation by NVAO can be found. The panel encouraged the programme management to reflect on whether there should be more detailed information on the quality of the teaching and assessment, perhaps including extracts from AQC documents and/or external examiner reports.

Conclusion

The panel's overall judgement on the Master of Arts in Diplomacy and Global Governance and the Master of Arts in Global Security and Strategy (two tracks) based on the documentation provided and on the further evidence provided and discussions that took place during the visit, is positive. The presence of the quality features is guaranteed. Therefore the panel notes that the quality of the programmes is satisfactory and recommends further accreditation of the programmes.

The master programmes are young programmes, first accredited in 2018-2019 and running for three years at the moment of the site visit. In that short time, the programmes have provided a very good experience and positive outcomes for students. The programmes model, with small groups of students and accessible teaching and support staff, provides a strong basis for the continued development of the programmes. The programmes ensure that students have every opportunity to achieve the relevant learning outcomes. Even when this model was under pressure during the most challenging of times (COVID-19), the key features have been maintained and this is reflected in evidence from both students and teaching and support staff provided during the visit.

It is clear that students have strongly positive views of the programmes and of the outcomes to which they lead. The programmes have generated development and innovation in a number of areas, and the proposed changes to programme structures and titles are entirely appropriate. The distinctive emphasis of the programmes in terms of their approach to teaching and learning (TPEL), the creation of a well-qualified core of staff, the use of eminent adjunct professors and the engagement of professionals in the teaching and learning process as well as through internships and visiting lectures leads to comprehensive and consistent curricula.

The Programme Director in particular has exercised a strong and consistent role in assuring the continuing quality of the teaching and learning process. It is also clear that the Programme Director and others are strongly committed to ensuring the continued development and effective delivery of the programmes.

The teaching manual, the rubrics and information meetings for lecturers, the pairing of core faculty with adjunct faculty and the extensive monitoring of assessment ensure that the practices on assessment are shared and understood, valid and reliable.

The assessment system and the overall framework of internal Academic Quality Control (AQC) is consolidated at the College level. As a result, the master programmes benefit from a strong basis to support their programme-specific standards.

Summary of commendations

- The focus on Theory-guided, Practice-embedded, Experiential Learning (TPEL), benefits the programmes by linking academic perspectives with practice-oriented applications and internship opportunities.
- One of the key strengths of the programmes is that their orientation gives an active and continuing role to the involvement of a range of stakeholders internally and externally.
- The collaboration with the Institute for European Studies (IES) under the umbrella of the Brussels School of Government means that the College benefits from the expertise of the IES clusters in specific policy areas which potentially enriches both master programmes with the addition of expertise in specific areas.
- The detailed course syllabus of the programme contains all information about the curriculum, its learning outcomes, its teaching staff and teaching and examination methods
- The AQC procedures and the presence of the external examiner contribute to the fact that the courses are subject to continuous review in terms of their fit with the programmes and in terms of their currency in relation to both academic approaches and real-world trends.
- The teaching staff is specialised in the different aspects of the study field. Many of them are worldwide recognised experts in their field of competence, invited speakers at international conferences and institutions and have received international awards. The teaching staff have a strong research background and publication record, seem to be dedicated and have good collegial relationships. The professional expertise and the network of the staff bringing into the programmes is another plus.
- The role of Programme Director is a success factor and provides a very effective focus for the overall direction of the programmes, and for the maintenance of high standards in the teaching and learning processes, for example in the management of assessment and workload.
- The innovations initiated via the Office for Teaching and Learning Innovation have been especially fruitful and contributed substantially to the student experience. The COVID-19 challenge has added to this by demanding the provision of on- line information and the development of virtual teaching and learning processes. It is clear that the innovations provide a strong foundation for further development and that at least some of these will persist in the post-COVID environment.

Summary of recommendations

- refine and focus some of the learning outcomes, specifically in relation to the interdisciplinarity, multi-disciplinarity or sub-disciplinarity of the programmes.
- draw attention to the research versus professional profile of the programmes. The panel encouraged the programme management to develop a clear vision on this area.
- reflect upon the extent to which the foundational courses in semester 1 of the programmes cater for the diverse backgrounds of the students accepted onto the programmes.
- analyse the curriculum content as a whole and take further steps in light of decolonisation and integration of non-western views.
- provide a clear statement of the process by which electives will be chosen to be offered or cancelled in the programmes and modify teaching, learning and assessment methods for small numbers on courses.
- refine further the guidance given to students on the thesis-writing process and on the appropriate expectations in relation to support during the process.
- continue the efforts to achieve greater consistency in the scheduling of assessment tasks and overall workload for the students, taking account of the variable backgrounds of individual students.
- continue the implementation of policies related to gender and diversity among the teaching, management and support staff.
- monitor the extent to which professional tutors dedicate time to contact with students, to ensure consistency as far as possible.
- ensure that assessments are scheduled appropriately, although it is recognised that the past year has posed particular challenges in this area.
- make the teaching material available as soon as possible.
- reflect on the need for a more formalised overview of the curriculum to oversee course content and to avoid gaps and overlaps.
- establish a formal alumni network.
- develop a clear vision on the preferred student numbers and establish clear procedures for the student enrolment.
- reflect on whether there should be more detailed information on the quality of the teaching and assessment, perhaps including extracts from AQC documents and/or external examiner reports.

ANNEX 1: ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of the institution | Vesalius College |
| Address, phone, e-mail, institution website | Pleinlaan 5, 1050 Brussel +32 (0)2 614 81 70 vesalius@vub.ac.be www.vesalius.edu |
| Name of the programme (degree, qualification) | Master of Arts in Diplomacy and Global Governance Master of Arts in Global Security and Strategic Studies (till 2020-2021 known as Master of Arts in Global Peace, Security and Strategic Studies) |
| Tracks | / |
| Level and orientation | Master of Arts |
| (Parts of) field(s) of study | Political Sciences |
| Language of instruction | English |
| The location where the programme is organised | Brussels |
| Study load (in ECTS) | 60 ETCS / 90 ECTS (till 2020-2021: 90 ECTS / 120 ECTS) |

ANNEX 2: CV PANEL MEMBERS

Michael Smith is Honorary Professor in European Politics at the University of Warwick and Emeritus Professor of European Politics at Loughborough University. He has published extensively on EU external policies and on EU diplomacy, and recent books include *International Relations and the European Union* (3rd edition, Oxford University Press 2017, edited with Christopher Hill and Sophie Vanhoonacker), *The Diplomatic System of the European Union: evolution, change and challenges* (Routledge 2016, edited with Stephan Keukeleire and Sophie Vanhoonacker) and *The European Union's Strategic Partnerships: global diplomacy in a contested world* (Palgrave Macmillan 2021, edited with Laura Ferreira-Pereira). He has been involved in many accreditation and review processes, both in the UK and elsewhere in the EU, including those related to programmes or research at the College of Europe, the Central European University and the London School of Economics.

Agnes Batory is a Professor at Central European University's School of Public Policy. She currently serves as CEU's Pro-Rector for Social Sciences and Humanities. She holds a PhD from Cambridge University. Her research interests include corruption and corruption control, party politics, and policy implementation and compliance problems in EU governance. She is co-editor of the recent book *Policy experiments, failures and innovations*, and her articles appeared, among others, in *Governance*; the *Journal of Common Market Studies*; the *Journal of European Public Policy*; *Public Administration*; *Democratization* and the *European Journal of Political Research*.

Jan Orbie is professor in European Union (EU) External Relations at the Department of Political Science at Ghent University (Belgium). He teaches on Theories of European Integration, Current Issues in EU Politics, EU Trade Politics, EU External Relations and Discourse Analysis in the Bachelor of Political Science and the Master EU Studies programme at the same university. His research concerns the external relations of the EU, with specific focus on external trade, development, humanitarian aid, human rights and democracy promotion from critical and normative perspectives.

Emma Moerman is a student International Politics at Ghent University with an interest in urban development in megacities. She has been a student representative for five years and has been active at degree-level, faculty-level, and university-wide level. Her interest lies in quality assurance and is currently a member of the quality assurance board of Ghent University. She also has been responsible for all dossiers concerning education and involved in social affairs, sustainability and digitalization at the Ghent Student Council for the last two years.

ANNEX 3: SITE VISIT SCHEDULE

Thursday 23 March 2021

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 09:30-9:40 | welcome |
| 09:40-11:00 | internal consultation panel |
| 11:00-11:15 | break |
| 11:15-12:15 | interview with the management of the master programmes |
| 12:15-12:30 | internal consultation panel |
| 12:30-13:30 | lunch break |
| 13:30-14:30 | interview with students |
| 14:30-14:45 | break |
| 14:45-15:15 | internal consultation panel |
| 15:15-16:15 | interview with the teaching staff |
| 16:15-16:30 | break |
| 16:30-17:00 | internal consultation panel |
| 17:00-18:00 | interview with graduates and professional field |

Wednesday 24 March 2021

| | |
|-------------|---|
| 09:30-10:00 | online facilities visit |
| 10:00-10:30 | interview with supporting staff |
| 10:30-11:30 | open consultation and additional interviews by invitation of the panel* |
| 11:30-13:00 | internal consultation |
| 13:00-14:00 | lunch break |
| 14:00-15:00 | final interview with the programme management (constructive dialogue) |
| 15:00-15:30 | final consideration + preparation oral report |
| 15:30-16:00 | oral report |

ANNEX 4: DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

Self-evaluation report Master of Arts in Diplomacy and Global Governance and Master of Arts in Global Security and Strategy, including the following annexes:

Course codes

Initial LOs for the MADAGG and MAGPSSS as proposed during the accreditation in 2018

Revised learning objectives (2019-2021)

Intended Learning Objectives at the course level and Programme Learning Outcomes (2019-2020)

The contribution of the proposed new courses to the achievement of the Learning Outcomes for the MADAGG and MAGSS programmes

Course descriptions - 2020-2021 - Master in Diplomacy and Global Governance (MADAGG) and MA in Global Peace, Security and Strategic Studies (MAGPSSS)

Course descriptions - 2021-2022 - Master in Diplomacy and Global Governance (MADAGG) and MA in Global Security and Strategy (MAGSS)

The MADAGG programme in a comparative perspective (benchmarking)

The MAGSS programme in a comparative perspective (benchmarking)

Internship Placement (2019-2020)

Guest lectures

Entry requirements

Current occupation of alumni (2018-2019)

Roster of 2018-2019

Roster 2019-2020

Roster 2020-2021

Short bio of the faculty

Scholarships

Dean's fund offered in the light of the Covid19 situation (2019-2020)

The organization of the 90 and 60 ECTS programmes

Overview of assignments

Grade distribution (2018-2020)

Standard Syllabus Template for MADAGG Courses (2018-2021)

Standard Syllabus Template for MAGSS Courses (2018-2021)

Sample syllabus (6 ECTS)

Sample Syllabus (3 ECTS)

Teaching and examination regulation

Folder Questionnaire

AQC Course Review Form

Student evaluation template

Working document on the organization of the thesis (September 2020)

AQC Reports (2018-2020)

List of titles MA theses - 2019-2021

Additional documents tabled during the site visit:

Selection of master theses

Master theses rubrics

Samples of teaching and learning material

Samples of examinations

Number of student per course