



# EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT **International and European Law**

An evaluation of the quality of the Bachelor of Arts in International and European Law  
at Vesalius College

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vluhr



**EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT  
INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN LAW**

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## PREFACE BY THE VLUHR QA BOARD

The assessment panel reports its findings on the Bachelor of Arts in International and European Law. This programme is assessed in the spring of 2019 on behalf of the Flemish Higher Education Council (VLUHR).

First of all, this report is intended for the programme involved. This assessment report provides the reader a snapshot of the quality of the programme and is only one phase in the process of the ongoing concern for educational quality. After a short period of time the study programme may already have changed and improved significantly, whether or not as an answer to the recommendations by the assessment panel. Additionally, the report intends to provide objective information to a wide audience about the quality of the evaluated programme. For this reason, the report is published on the VLUHR website.

I would like to thank the chairman and the members of the assessment panel for the time they have invested and for the high levels of expertise and dedication they showed in performing their task. This assessment is made possible thanks to the efforts of all those involved within the institution in the preparation and implementation of the assessment site visit.

I hope the positive comments formulated by the assessment panel and the recommendations for further improvement provide justification for their efforts and encouragement for the further development of the study programme.

**Petter Aaslestad**  
*Chair VLUHR QA Board*



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# **SECTION 1**

## General Section



# **PART I**

## International and European Law

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

In this report, the assessment panel International and European Law announces its findings with regard to the Bachelor of Arts in International and European Law at Vesalius College. This study programme was assessed in the spring of 2019 on behalf of the Flemish Higher Education Council (VLUHR).

This assessment procedure is part of the VLUHR activities in the area of external quality assurance in Flemish higher education which are meant to ensure that the Flemish universities, university colleges and other statutory registered higher education institutions are in compliance with the relevant regulations imposed by law.

### **2 THE ASSESSED STUDY PROGRAMME**

In accordance with its mission, the assessment panel visited the Bachelor of Arts in International and European Law at Vesalius College from May 16 to 17, 2019.

## 3 THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

### 3.1 Composition of the assessment panel

The composition of the assessment panel International and European Law was ratified on November 26, 2018 and January 16, 2019 by the VLUHR Quality Assurance Board. The NVAO sanctioned the panel composition on March 4, 2019. The assessment panel was subsequently installed by the Quality Assurance Board by its decision of March 18, 2019.

The assessment panel had the following composition:

- Chairman of the assessment panel:
  - **Prof. dr. Jan Smits**, full professor and academic Director, Maastricht European Private Law Institute, Maastricht University
- Domain experts:
  - **Prof. dr. Peter Bursens**, full professor, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, University of Antwerp
  - **Prof. dr. Petra Foubert**, professor, Faculty of Law, UHasselt; lawyer
- Student-member:
  - **Dylan Couck**, master's student in Law, Ghent University

Klara De Wilde, coordinator of the Quality Assurance Unit of the Flemish Higher Education Council, was project manager of this educational assessment and acted as secretary to the assessment panel.

The brief curricula vitae of the members of the assessment panel are listed in Appendix 1.

### 3.2 Task description

The assessment panel is expected:

- to express substantiated and well-founded opinions on the study programme, using the assessment framework;
- to make recommendations allowing quality improvements to be made where possible;
- to inform society at large of its findings.

### 3.3 Process

#### 3.3.1 Preparation

The study programme was asked to compile an extensive self-evaluation report in preparation for the educational assessment. An assessment protocol, with a detailed description of the expectations regarding the content of the self-evaluation report, was presented by the Quality Assurance Unit of VLUHR for this purpose. The self-evaluation report reflects the accreditation framework.

The assessment panel received the self-evaluation report a number of months before the on-site assessment visit, which allowed for adequate time to carefully study the document and to thoroughly prepare for the assessment visit. Additionally, the members of the assessment panel were asked to read a selection of recent Bachelor's theses.

The assessment panel held its preparatory meeting on April 18, 2019. At this stage, the panel members were already in possession of the assessment protocol and the self-evaluation report. During the preparatory meeting, the panel members were given further information about the assessment process and they made specific preparations for the forthcoming on-site assessment visit. Special attention was given to the uniformity of the implementation of the accreditation framework and the assessment protocol. Also, the time schedule for the assessment visit was agreed upon (see Appendix 2) and the self-evaluation report was collectively discussed for the first time.

#### 3.3.2 On-site visit

During the on-site visit the panel interviewed all parties directly involved with the study programme. The panel spoke with those responsible for the study programme, students, teaching staff, educational support staff, alumni, and representatives from the professional field. The conversations and interviews with all these stakeholders took place in an open atmosphere and provided the panel with helpful additions to and clarifications of the self-evaluation report.

The panel visited the programme-specific infrastructure facilities, including the library, classrooms and computer facilities. There was also a consultation hour during which the assessment panel could invite people or during which people could come and be heard in confidence.

Furthermore, the institution was asked to prepare a wide variety of documents to be available during the on-site visit for the assessment panel to consult as a tertiary source of information. These documents included minutes of discussions in relevant governing bodies, a selection of study materials (courses, handbooks and syllabuses), indications of staff competences, testing and assessment assignments, etc. An additional selection of recent Bachelor's theses and Capstone papers was required to be available for inspection. Sufficient time was scheduled throughout the assessment visit for the panel to study these documents thoroughly. Additional information was requested during the on-site visit when the assessment panel deemed that information necessary to support its findings.

Following internal panel discussions, provisional findings were presented by the chairman of the assessment panel in conclusion of the on-site assessment visit.

### **3.3.3 Reporting**

The last stage of the assessment process was the compilation of the panel's findings, conclusions, and recommendations into the present report. The panel's recommendations are separately summarised at the end of the report.

The study programme director was given the opportunity to reply to the draft version of this report. The assessment panel considered this response and included elements of it into the final version when deemed appropriate.

## PART II

### Table with scores

The following table represents the assessment scores of the assessment panel on the four generic quality standards set out in the assessment framework.

For each generic quality standard (GQS) the panel expresses a considered and substantiated opinion, according to a two-point scale: satisfactory or unsatisfactory. The panel also expresses a final opinion on the quality of the programme as a whole, also according to a two-point scale: satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

In the report of the study programme the assessment panel makes clear how it has reached its opinion. The table and the scores assigned ought to be read and interpreted in connection to the text in the report. Any interpretation based solely on the scores in the table, is unjust towards the study programme and passes over the assignment of this external assessment exercise.

Explanation of the scores of the **generic quality standard**:

**Satisfactory (S)** the study programme meets the generic quality standard

**Unsatisfactory (U)** the generic quality standard is unsatisfactory

Rules applicable to the final **opinion**:

**Satisfactory (S)** The final opinion on a programme is 'satisfactory' if the programme meets all generic quality standards.

**Unsatisfactory (U)** The final opinion on a programme is 'unsatisfactory' if all generic quality standards are assessed as 'unsatisfactory'.

**Satisfactory for a limited period (S')** The final opinion on a programme is 'satisfactory for a limited period', i.e. shorter than the accreditation period, if, on a first assessment, one or two generic quality standards are assessed as 'unsatisfactory'.

	<b>GQS 1 Targeted outcome level</b>	<b>GQS 2 Educational learning environment</b>	<b>GQS 3 Outcome level achieved</b>	<b>GQS 4 Structure and organization of internal quality assurance</b>	<b>Final opinion</b>
<b>Bachelor of Arts in International and European Law</b>	S	S	S	S	S



# **SECTION 2**

Report of  
the study programme



# VESALIUS COLLEGE

## Bachelor of Arts in International and European Law

### SUMMARY OF THE ASSESSMENT REPORT

#### Bachelor of Arts in International and European Law Vesalius College

*From 16 to 17 May 2019, the Bachelor of Arts in International and European Law of Vesalius College has been evaluated in the framework of an educational assessment by a peer review panel of independent experts. In this summary which describes a snapshot, the main findings of the panel are listed.*

#### Profile of the programme

The objective of the Bachelor of Arts in International and European Law (BAIEL) is to provide students with a broad and well-rounded foundation of international and European law as well as a broad understanding of history, politics, communications and economy. This approach is in line with the liberal arts philosophy of the College. In doing so, the programme prepares the students for a career in international governmental and non-governmental organisations that are looking for (junior) staff with knowledge of international and/or European law and a background in social science. The programme explicitly does not aim to train students for a career in practicing law.

## Programme

The programme of the BAIEL is organised in six semesters and counts 180 ECTS. The curriculum consists of courses of 6 ECTS each that are clustered in four pillars: methods, theory, auxiliary sciences and elective courses. The students progress through the programme by taking a mix of compulsory and elective courses. The law courses are the core of the curriculum. Besides these law courses, courses in the fields of economics, politics, ethics and communication are offered, which correspond with the liberal arts nature of the programme and the College.

The programme is concluded with two integrative assignments: the bachelor thesis and the capstone paper. The combination is a feature of all bachelor programmes of the College and is in line with the profile of the College to offer programmes with an academic and vocational orientation. The bachelor thesis puts the emphasis on the academic skills of the students. It is an individual work, in which the student has to prove to be able to execute independent academic research in the legal domain. In the capstone paper, the focus lies on the professional skills. Students work in group on a complex real-life problem of a client.

The curriculum does not include an obligatory internship but students who wish to gain professional experience can choose an internship as an elective course. The students can choose out of a catalogue of 50 to 60 profiles in companies, embassies and organizations. As these profiles are linked to all programmes of the College, it is important to ensure that sufficient internships in law are offered.

The programme offers the students an international learning environment. Lectures, courses and communication are in English. Furthermore the student population of the College is highly international.

The College teaching philosophy is based on TPEL (Theory-Guided, Practice-Embedded and Experiential Learning). Some elements are reflecting this approach like small classes and interaction in the lessons, but in general the way of teaching remains somewhat traditional. The College should elaborate on the implications of 'liberal arts' for the teaching methods that are used.

The admission requirements are available on the website of the programme. Applicants submit an application form. Admission decisions take into account the candidate's secondary school performance, examination

results and English language proficiency, as well as demonstrated personal qualities and character. Non-native speakers of English should provide proof of proficiency in English.

### **Evaluation and testing**

The programme uses different but still somewhat traditional assessments formats. The programme should diversify more the assessment formats (f.e. oral presentations, debates, integrated assignments and peer assessments).

Each course lecturer is responsible for the assessment assignments but (s) he can rely on an extensive teaching manual which describes an explicit approach to assessment, testing and examination of students. The use of grading rubrics is mandatory and this enhances transparency, making the assessment criteria explicit for the students. Although the use of rubrics is a positive element, not all courses have yet rubrics that are appropriate to assess the law domain. The programme is aware of this and invests time and effort into the adjustments.

As the bachelor thesis was recently introduced in the programme, the evaluation was based on standardised rubrics, which also need to be adjusted to assess the law domain. The four-eyes-principle (a second reader) was not yet in place but in future, the Head of Department will take up this role. The capstone paper, on the other hand, is always presented to the client. In that way it is not necessary to have a second reader.

For all courses the same minimal grade to pass is in place. As the bachelor thesis and the capstone paper are indicated to be the two integrative elements, the programme should reconsider the minimal grade to pass these courses.

### **Services and student guidance**

Vesalius College is located in a building of the VUB campus, which also hosts VUB departments. The classrooms are well equipped and facilitate innovative teaching methods. Computers are available for students but most of them use wireless access on their own laptop. There are also small rooms available where students can work on assignments, alone or in team. The premises include a Faculty space for research and meetings. Also the students have their own meeting room in the building. The College has an agreement with the VUB that gives the students access to a range of facilities of the VUB, including the university library, cafeteria and sports facilities.

The students can rely on an adequate support during their studies. As the classes are small, there is a close contact with the teachers. Furthermore, an individual advisor is assigned to each student. This advisor is a staff member, is available if the student struggles with his study and advises the student throughout the study. The advisor works in close contact with the Academic Administration office which monitors the student's progression. In addition to the College services (including a psychologist, ombudsperson), the students can also rely on student's tutoring.

### **Study success and professional opportunities**

The feedback the panel received from students and alumni is very positive. All students aim to enrol in a master's programme and feel well prepared to do so. As the programme recently started, there are not so many alumni yet but those that the panel interviewed, expressed their satisfaction with the programme. They are studying in different master programmes abroad and were directly admitted to these programmes.

The representatives of the professional field were also very positive about the programme. They confirmed that there is a demand for (junior) professionals with a legal background who understand how international public organisations work. As future positions for graduates, 'lobbying' and 'assistants to MEPs' were recurrently mentioned.

## ASSESSMENT REPORT

### Bachelor of Arts in International and European Law

#### Vesalius College

#### Preface

This report concerns the Bachelor of Arts in International and European Law organised by Vesalius College. The assessment panel (further referred to as the panel) visited the study programme from the 16th till the 17th of May 2019.

Vesalius College is a non-statutory registered institution for higher education in Flanders. The College therefore is not subject to an institutional review. The panel assessed the study programme on the basis of the four generic quality standards (GQS's) of the VLUHR programme assessment framework. This framework is designed to fulfil the accreditation requirements, applied by the NVAO. For each standard the panel gives a weighted and motivated judgement on a two-point scale: unsatisfactory or satisfactory. In assessing the generic quality assurance, the concept of 'generic quality' means that the standard is in place and the programme meets the quality standards that can reasonably be expected, from an international perspective, of a Bachelor's programme in higher education. The score satisfactory points out that the programme meets the generic quality because it demonstrates an acceptable level for the particular standard. The score unsatisfactory indicates that the programme does not attain the generic quality for that particular standard.

The panel's opinions are supported by facts and analyses. The panel makes clear how it has reached its opinion. The panel also expresses a final opinion on the quality of the programme as a whole, also according to the same two-point scale.

The panel assessed the quality of the programme as it has been established at the time of the site visit. The panel has based its judgement on the self-evaluation report and the information that arose from the interviews with the programme management, with lecturers, students, representatives of the professional field, alumni and staff responsible at programme level for internal quality assurance, internationalization, study guidance and student tutoring. The panel has also examined the course materials, bachelor theses, exams and assignments and standard answering formats, and relevant reports available. The panel has also visited the educational facilities during the site visit at the institution.

In addition to the judgement, the panel also formulates recommendations with respect to quality improvement. In this manner, the panel wants to contribute to improving the quality of the programme. The recommendations are included in the relevant sections of the respective standard. At the end of the report there is an overview of the suggestions for improvement.

### **Context of the study programme**

The Bachelor of Arts in International and European Law (BAIEL) is an academic bachelor programme, organised by Vesalius College. In addition to this programme, the College offers three other bachelor's programmes (Global Communication, International Affairs and Business Studies) and two master's programmes (Diplomacy & Global Governance and Global Peace, Security & Strategic Studies).

Vesalius College is situated in Brussels and was founded in 1987 by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and the Boston University's Metropolitan College. The College became independent from the VUB in 2000. At the college level the main decision body is the Steering Committee, consisting of the Dean and associate Deans, the Heads of Department, the Director of the International Programmes, Projects and Outreach, the Coordinator for Student Learning and Faculty Support and the Director of Administration and Finance. Two other governance bodies work in close communication with the Steering Committee: the Faculty Meeting, including all teachers of the College, and the Academic Quality Committee, consisting of the Dean, the associate Dean for Teaching, the Heads of Department and the External Examinators. On departmental level, the central decision-making body concerning the programme is the Departmental Council. The Council consists of the Head of Department, all teaching staff of the department and a student representative. There are four departments in the College of which the International and European Law Department is one. A new Head of Department was appointed in January 2019.

Vesalius College positions itself as a College of Global Affairs. This is in line with the BAIEL that offers a combination of international and European law. Additionally the College focus on the international and global aspects improves the synergies between the bachelor's programmes. The College offers programmes, based on interactive teaching, to an international student population. The programmes are entirely taught in English.

The BAIEL was launched in 2015-2016 after a successful initial accreditation. The programme started with 16 students. In May 2019 the programme counts 30 students.

### Generic quality standard 1 - Targeted Outcome Level

**The assessment panel evaluates the targeted outcome level for the Bachelor of Arts in International and European Law as satisfactory.**

The **objective** of the BAIEL is to provide students with a broad and well-rounded foundation of international and European law as well as a broad understanding of history, politics, communications and economy. This approach is in line with the liberal arts philosophy of the College. In doing so, the programme prepares the students for a career in international governmental and non-governmental organisations that are looking for (junior) staff with knowledge of international and/or European law and a background in social science. The programme explicitly does not aim to train students for a career in practicing law.

The programme has defined 14 **programme specific learning outcomes (PSLO)**, subdivided in three domains, addressing (1) knowledge and understanding of International and European law, the international system and the European integration process, international law-making, European institutions and decision-making processes; (2) applying knowledge and understanding (including the ability to use appropriate research methods, to work in team and communication skills) and (3) attitudes. To indicate that the PSLO are in line with the Flemish Qualifications framework, the programme compared the PSLO with the domain specific learning outcomes of the Bachelor in Law (LL.B) offered by the Flemish universities.

Given the available documents, the profile of the programme was in the beginning not entirely clear to the panel. The profile could be better defined in the self-assessment report, but became clearer during the site visit. It can be described as a 'law study for non-lawyers in the public international sphere'. The PSLO seem suited to realise this. Academic methods and legal methods are part of the PSLO. With regard to the level and orientation of the programme, the panel considers that the PSLO comply with the requirements of a programme at bachelor level with academic orientation and are in line with the characteristics specified in the Flemish Qualifications Framework.

It is the panel's opinion that the BAIEL is an ambitious, innovative programme that pioneers in offering a non-traditional law degree. It is a unique programme and therefore the profile of the graduates is difficult to benchmark. In the interviews, the management emphasized that the programme does not aim to train practicing lawyers. In that respect it puzzled the panel why the PSLO were matched with the domain specific learning outcomes of the LL.B. To avoid misunderstanding for future accreditations, the panel advises to benchmark against the programme's competitors, in Belgium or abroad (e.g. US pre-law programmes or US style liberal arts programmes).

Given the specific profile of the programme, it is important to be transparent about what the programme is: not a law degree, but more of a 'pre-law' programme in the US sense. The interviews made it clear to the panel that the staff, students and alumni are aware of that. Students and alumni confirmed that they want to work on legal issues in an international environment but not as a practicing lawyer. Nevertheless, the panel suggests to be even clearer about the profile of the programme and especially about the opportunities it offers to the labour market and the students (for instance by indicating this more prominent on the website).

The extent to which the PSLO match the current requirement from an international perspective by **discipline specialists**, is difficult to answer as they involve specialists from several disciplines. The fact that alumni are being accepted in LL.M. programmes in Europe and in JD programmes in the USA is proof that specialists value the BAIEL programme at Vesalius.

The panel was also interested in the **professional opportunities** for graduates of the BAIEL. The representatives of the professional field were very positive about the programme. In the interviews they confirmed that there is a demand for (junior) professionals with a legal background who understand how international public organisations work. As future positions for graduates, 'lobbying' and 'assistants to MEPs' were recurrently mentioned. There seems to be an international market for these graduates, the panel observed.

**To conclude**, it is the panel's opinion that the BAIEL has a unique profile in training legal specialists who have the knowledge, skills and attitudes to pursue a career in the public international sphere. The PSLO reflect this profile and comply with the requirements of a programme at bachelor level with academic orientation. The interviews showed that the

programme is valued from both academic and professional points of view. As a conclusion, the targeted outcome level is judged as “satisfactory” by the panel.

### **Generic quality standard 2: Educational Learning Environment**

**The assessment panel evaluates the educational learning environment for the Bachelor of Arts in International and European Law as satisfactory.**

The programme of the BAIEL is organised in six semesters and counts 180 ECTS. The **curriculum** consists of courses of 6 ECTS each that are clustered in four pillars: methods, theory, auxiliary sciences and elective courses. The students progress through the programme by taking a mix of compulsory and elective courses. The course codes indicate the level of the course, starting with 100 level courses, over 200 level towards 300 level courses. The students have to choose eight elective courses. Four of these electives must be chosen from a closed list of Major Electives, as shown in the table below. These electives are meant to deepen the understanding of specific fields of law or institutions and processes related to the EU and international organisations. For the electives (Free Electives) the students can choose courses of the other bachelor programmes.

Overview of the curriculum:

Methods	Theory		Auxiliary Sciences	Elective Courses
Introduction to Academic Writing and Critical Thinking (HUM101G)	Introduction to International and European Law (LAW101G)	Introduction to Legal Principles and Theories (LAW101G)	Global Politics (POL101G)	Four Major Electives + Four Free Electives
	Business Law (LAW111G)		Introduction to Economics (ECN101G)	Major Electives: - Environmental Law - International Banking Law and Financial Regulation - Competition Law - Humanitarian Law - Comparative Constitutional Law - Intellectual Property Law - European Organizations - International Commercial Arbitration - Corporate Governance - Social Cause Marketing - Lobbying in the EU - Global Advocacy - The EU's Approach to Democratization and Human Rights - EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy - International Organizations and Global Governance - Internship (from year 2)
Methods: Legal Analysis, Research & Writing (LAW271G)	Advanced Business Law (LAW211G)	Rhetoric (CMM211G)	Human Communication (CMM101G)	
Intermediate Qualitative Research Methods (SSC271G)	Legal Aspects of Migration (LAW202G)	Criminal Law (LAW203G)	Global Ethics (HUM103G)	
		EU Constitutional Law (LAW222G)	Global Ethics, Leadership & Personal Development I (HUM203G)	
	Human Rights (LAW303G)	EU Law of the Internal Market (LAW322G)	Global Ethics, Leadership & Personal Development II (HUM303G)	
Capstone in International and European Law (LAW391G)				
BA Thesis in International and European Law I (LAW395G)				
BA Thesis in International and European Law II (LAW396G)				

Based on the documents, the panel concludes that the curriculum is in line with the targeted PSLO. Although not based on a traditional law curriculum, the law courses are the core of the curriculum. Besides these law courses, courses in the fields of economics, politics, ethics and communication are offered, which correspond with the liberal arts nature of the programme and the College. The panel believes that the curriculum could be even better suited to meet the needs of the graduate the programme is aiming for. Now the core programme seems very much geared towards law courses, while the aim of the bachelor also allows for a different type of core courses (for example including sociology, (legal) history, etc.). The panel suggests to think through the current core curriculum with a view to the profile of the graduate. Another suggestion concerns the name of the liberal arts pillar. The panel suggests to look for a better suited name than 'auxiliary sciences'.

The panel noticed that quite a few courses, especially in the pillars methods and auxiliary sciences, are organized together with the students of the other bachelor programmes and incoming study abroad students. Although the panel favors an interdisciplinary approach, it is concerned whether the legal focus is sufficiently present in these courses. It is the panel's opinion that the curriculum would strongly benefit from courses with a clear focus on legal issues. This suggestion is in line with the findings of the external examiner (the role of the external examiner is explained in GQS 4).

The panel is satisfied with the academic and research component in the curriculum. First year students get an introduction in academic writing and critical thinking. This course is obligatory for all students of the College. In the second year, students receive a thorough introduction to legal analysis, research and writing and in the third year into qualitative research methods. The panel finds it important that staff involved in the programme is also involved in legal research in order to guarantee the academic quality of the curriculum (see also below).

The methods and theory tracks culminate in two integrative elements: **the bachelor thesis and the capstone**. The combination is a feature of all bachelor programmes of the College and is in line with the profile of the College to offer programmes with an academic and vocational orientation. The bachelor thesis was only recently introduced (2018) and puts the emphasis on the academic skills of the students. The thesis is an individual work, in which the student has to prove to be able to execute independent academic research in the legal domain. The bachelor thesis is

split up in two courses, to guarantee a good and equal start for all students in writing their bachelor thesis. In the capstone paper, the focus lies on the professional skills. Students work in group on a complex real-life problem of a client. The capstone course is organized together with the students of International Affairs (IA). The panel was initially in favor of a capstone course specific for this programme. But the interviews with the teaching staff and the students convinced the panel of the added value of offering this course together with IA. Another issue that the panel discussed was the choice for a thesis and a capstone instead of one integrative assignment. The panel agrees that by doing so the dual academic and vocational focus is expressed more clearly. The panel suggests to consider other possibilities to integrate academic and vocational skills.

The curriculum does not include an obligatory **internship** but students who wish to gain professional experience can choose an internship as an elective course. The students can choose out of a catalogue of 50 to 60 profiles in companies, embassies and organizations. As these profiles are linked to all programmes of the College, the panel suggests to ensure that sufficient internships in law are offered. The interviews made clear that the internships are well organized, involving an interview between student and employer before the start of the internship and the guidance of two mentors, one of the College and one of the employer. A staff member coordinates the internships.

The programme offers the students an **international learning environment**. Lectures, courses and communication are in English. Furthermore the student population of the College is highly international. Most of the students come from the US (38%), Belgium (24%), France (4%) and Germany (4%). As the students and Faculty confirmed during the interviews, this diversity is used in the debates and strengthens intercultural competences.

The panel has examined the **course materials** via the electronic learning environment and the folders on display during the site visit. The content is up to standard. The progression in the courses from level 100 to 300 is clear. The courses have specific learning objectives which are linked to the PSLO. All course folders are made uniformly, following the guidelines of the teaching manual (see GQS 4). All information about the courses and what is expected of the students can be found in the course syllabus. Especially the rubrics (see GQS 3) are very useful for the students to prepare for the assignments. Furthermore, the lecturers point out what is expected of the students at the start of each course and just before the exams.

The College **teaching philosophy** is based on TPEL (Theory-Guided, Practice-Embedded and Experiential Learning). Some elements are reflecting this approach like small classes and interaction in the lessons, but in general the panel finds the way of teaching still somewhat traditional. The panel suggests to elaborate on the implications of 'liberal arts' for the teaching method that are used. This suggestion is in line with the remarks in the external examiners' report. The panel advises the College to make use of the expertise of the VUB in innovating its teaching methods.

The **admission requirements** are available on the website of the programme. Applicants submit an application form. Admission decisions take into account the candidate's secondary school performance, examination results and English language proficiency, as well as demonstrated personal qualities and character. Non-native speakers of English should provide proof of proficiency in English. Approximately 60% of the accepted students actually register to study at the College. The tuition fee is high compared to the other Flemish higher education institutions. The panel was interested to know if the College has a policy to diversify the student body and give students of less privileged background the opportunity to register. The College confirmed that Academic Excellence Scholarships exist. At the moment 12 (partial) scholarships are granted including 1 scholarship in the BAIEL. The panel suggests to use the scholarships more as an active policy for diversification of the student's population in order to strengthen the intercultural competences in the programme.

Vesalius College is located in a building of the VUB campus which also hosts VUB departments. The panel was guided around the premises and was impressed by the **facilities**. The classrooms are well equipped and facilitate innovative teaching methods. Computers are available for students but most of them use wireless access on their own laptop. There are also small rooms available where students can work on assignments, alone or in team. The premises include a Faculty space for research and meetings. The panel appreciates that the students have their own meeting room in the building. The College has an agreement with the VUB that gives the students access to a range of facilities of the VUB, including the university library, cafeteria and sports facilities.

In terms of **study guidance and tutoring**, it is the panel's opinion that the students can rely on an adequate support during their studies. As the classes are small, there is a close contact with the teachers. The students confirmed in the interviews that the (teaching and supporting) staff is very

accessible for extra information or feedback. Furthermore, an individual advisor is assigned to each student. This advisor is a staff member and is available if the student struggles with his study. Furthermore (s)he advises the student throughout the study helping to decide on their course selection for the upcoming semester, on a study abroad semester or internship. The advisor works in close contact with the Academic Administration office which monitors the student's progression. In addition to the College services (including a psychologist, ombudsperson), the students can also rely on student's tutoring.

The panel met a Faculty of enthusiastic and committed **staff** members, who are very knowledgeable in their respective fields. The quality of the staff has been mentioned as one of the strong points of the programme by several students and alumni. The core Faculty consists of three permanent members (1.85 FTE) including the Head of Department. For courses that are organized jointly with the other bachelor programmes, the BAIEL can rely on four Faculty members (3.75 FTE). All core Faculty members hold a PhD. In addition, the programme employs 10 adjuncts which adds another 2.0 FTE. These adjuncts combine their mandate in the College with assignments in the professional field or in other higher education institutions. Most of the adjuncts hold a PhD as well. The combination of permanent and adjunct staff members supports the academic and vocational profile of the programme.

Although the panel is convinced of the added value of the adjuncts, it was initially concerned about the high number of adjuncts compared with the permanent staff. More specifically the panel wondered how the programme management ensures a coherent teaching environment. However, in the interviews the staff tackled this concern. First, all course requirements are explained in the teaching manual. Secondly, a Coordinator for Student Learning and Faculty Support provides educational training for Faculty and adjuncts. Thirdly, at the start of each semester a workshop is organised to discuss specific aspects of teaching and assessment. All Faculty members, including the adjuncts, need to attend these workshops. Finally, the Head of Department monitors that all courses adhere to the overall vision of the programme through an intensive academic quality procedure (see GQS 4). Furthermore, the adjuncts confirmed that they can always count on the support of their colleagues. Although the programme had some setbacks due to the departure of the former Head of Department and needed some time to appoint a successor, the panel is convinced that the programme management is aware of the need to socialize the adjuncts and has taken the appropriate actions to keep the programme aligned.

Another concern of the panel was the available time for research of the staff. The workload of the Faculty is rather heavy, combining teaching activities with coordinating assignments and intensive student-guidance. In the interviews the Faculty expressed the importance of research but at the moment the time for research is limited to 20% and mostly centred in the summer period when there are no courses. In the interviews the panel heard that the current system to balance the work load for teaching, research and coordinating/supporting activities is being revised. This opens opportunities for a better balance. As already mentioned the panel finds it important that staff involved in the programme is also involved in research in order to guarantee the academic quality of the curriculum. Given the small size of the College, there are no formal research groups. Instead, each of the lecturers have their own network of research. On college level the associate Dean for Research and Grants supports the Faculty in their research grant application activities.

The staff number is more than sufficient in relation to the **number of students**. The student population is fairly limited but the programme management believes there is a great potential, looking at the number of international schools, international organisations, embassies and multinationals in the proximity of Brussels. One of the tasks of the new Head of Department is to promote the programme. The College aims at a steady growth of 3 to 4 students per programme per year.

**To conclude**, it is the panel's opinion that the curriculum, staff and facilities link together to make up a coherent learning environment. The panel agrees with the set-up of the curriculum although the curriculum could be further improved to better meet the needs of the graduate that that programme is aiming for. The course materials are up to standard. The programme can rely on an enthusiastic and committed teaching and supporting staff. The number of adjuncts is rather high but the College took measures to ensure the coordination among the different types of staff members. The facilities and services supplied to the students are overall sufficient to enable the students achieving the PSLO. As a conclusion, the educational learning environment is judged as "satisfactory" by the panel.

### Generic quality standard 3 - Outcome Level Achieved

**The assessment panel evaluates the outcome level achieved for the Bachelor of Arts International and European Law as satisfactory.**

The self-assessment report describes the **assessment and examination policy** that the College has developed to ensure that the assessments are streamlined and consistent, not only within a programme but also across programmes. First, at College level a teaching manual has been drafted which describes an explicit approach to assessment, testing and examination of students. This manual is a comprehensive document that enables coherence in assessment, testing and examination. This manual contains a syllabus template for course development and it makes clear that grading rubrics are mandatory. These rubrics are linked to the course objectives which fit the PSLO. Furthermore the manual outlines the criteria that assignments should meet to obtain a given grade; the major-specific progression in testing across the 100, 200 and 300 levels; guidelines regarding the types of assignments at each of these levels and exam templates. All Faculty members have received training on how to define good course objectives (geared to the PSLO) and assessment methods. The teaching and assessment approach is discussed in the teaching working classes. Second, course folders including the exam questions and assignments, are assessed by several persons, including an external examiner. This check is done before, during and after each semester (see GQS 4). Finally, the Academic Quality Committee monitors all quality insurance and improvement measures (see GQA 4). The panel appreciates the comprehensive assessment system which applies to all programmes and courses. The use of rubrics is a positive element which enhances transparency, making the assessment criteria explicit.

The panel was interested to see how the system works in practice. The panel examined a **sample of assessments** and corresponding rubrics. In general, the assessments seem appropriate, given the PSLO in this specific programme. The panel did make the following observations. Not all courses have rubrics that are appropriate to assess the law domain. Part of the explanation is the fact that a push was made for standardization in assessment at the College level following the 2015 accreditation of the other programmes. In the interviews the staff indicated that they are aware of the need to create better fitting rubrics and already invested in customized rubrics for some courses. The panel suggests to continue the efforts. As the panel mentioned in GQS 2, the teaching is somewhat traditional and this

is reflected in the assessments formats. The panel suggests to diversify the assessment formats like oral presentations, debates, integrated assignments and peer assessments. This suggestion is in line with the findings of the external examiner.

The panel also looked into the **bachelor theses**. As the thesis was recently introduced in the programme, only 5 theses were available. The panel found that four theses met the standards of a bachelor's level whereas one was less convincing. It became clear during the interviews that the evaluation of the theses was based on standardised rubrics, which the course lecturer would like to adjust. Furthermore the bachelor theses still needed to be assessed by the EE and the AQC. The panel also noticed that there was no second reader involved in the assessment. It is the panel's opinion that a second reader is necessary. In the future, the Head of Department will take this role.

The panel also looked into the **capstone paper**. The panel had no special remarks concerning this paper. The capstone paper is always presented to the client. In that way it is not necessary to have a second reader.

The major remark of the panel concerning the assessments is that the lecturers seem to give students higher **grades** than what would be appropriate looking both to the quality of the assessments (including the theses and capstone) and the rubrics used. The panel discussed this issue in depth with the Faculty. The interviews made clear that the Faculty was aware of the risk of grade inflation and that the College has the tools to monitor the bachelor's level. Especially the fact that the assessments are discussed within the AQC before disclosure of the grades, convinced the panel. This gives the opportunity, if necessary, to level the grades.

Relating to the grades, the panel discussed the cut-off point to pass or fail the programme. In the interviews it became clear that a D-grade is necessary to pass a course but overall the student needs a C-grade to graduate. This implies that a D is sufficient to pass the bachelor thesis and capstone. As both courses are indicated to be the integrative elements of the BAIEL, the panel asks to increase the minimal grade to pass these courses. In the interviews the panel noticed that the cut-off point was not clear amongst the staff which needs to be addressed.

The feedback the panel received from **students and alumni** is very positive. All students aim to enrol a master's programme and feel well prepared to

do so. As the programme recently started, there are not so many alumni yet but those that the panel interviewed, expressed their satisfaction with the programme. They are studying in different master programmes abroad and were directly admitted to these programmes.

**To conclude**, it is the panel's opinion that Vesalius College has introduced an appropriate system of assessments, testing and examination that applies to all programmes and courses. All courses are using rubrics and the criteria are linked to the course objectives, which are in tune with the PSOL. The rubrics make the grading transparent and valid. The assessments studied by the panel seem at bachelor's level, although the number of theses and capstone papers were limited. The major issues are the application of the rubrics, the risk of grade inflation and the pas/fail cut-off, but the College has the appropriate tools in place to monitor the quality of the assessments, the panel observed. Furthermore the positive feedback of the students and the graduates show that the programme achieves its targeted outcome level. As a conclusion, the outcome level achieved is judged as "satisfactory" by the panel.

#### **Generic quality standard 4 - Structure and organisation of internal quality assurance**

**The assessment panel evaluates the structure and organisation of internal quality assurance for the Bachelor of Arts International and European Law as satisfactory.**

The **internal quality assurance system** (IQS) on College level was introduced in spring 2018. The newly created Academic Quality Committee (AQC) is the key body of the IQS and coordinates all quality assurance and improvements measures. Two new positions of associate Dean were introduced as well. The associate Dean for Teaching (ADT) convened the teaching excellence committee with professors from different programmes who discussed the educational approach and assessment procedures. These discussions led to the creation of the teaching manual (see GQS 3). The associate Dean for Research and Grants sets the minimum expectations for research output and supports the Faculty in their grant application activities. Furthermore the position of Coordinator of student learning and educational development was created, who combines the position of a study counsellor with the additional task of supporting Faculty development related to teaching excellence.

The College put in place a comprehensive set of **tools for the PDCA-cycle**.

The teaching manual describes the common standards for syllabi, course content, student progress, exams, tests and assessments. Before the start of the semester, professors submit the course folders to their Head of Department (HoD) and to the ADT. They check whether the courses meet the standard. The advice for corrections must be implemented before the start of the semester. Students have an opportunity to submit an 'early evaluation' in Week 4 about basic aspects such as whether the syllabus is respected and whether they are satisfied with the course so far. These brief early evaluations allow the HODs and AQC to spot any potential problems early on and act while the course is still ongoing. Mid semester, the professors submit their exam questions to the HoD and the AQC, who check whether the exams are compliant with the College standards, using a template. After the semester, students evaluate again all courses but more comprehensively. After the exams, the AQC and the external examiner (EE) review all folders and check the course content, the quality of the graded assignments and the overall quality of the courses. The external examiners submit a written report of their findings, indicating that a course is 'in need of improvement', 'adequate' or 'best practice'. The results of the check of the courses by the EE and the HoD, together with the results of the student evaluations, are discussed with each professor. If a course is given the recommendation 'in need of improvement', the HoD and the professor agree on an improvement plan that is closely monitored. The AQC uses the reports of the EE to identify areas for college wide improvement and organises teaching workshops to tackle these topics. The panel is impressed by the comprehensive system that has been installed and that seems to work. The panel agrees that such a system has its value to introduce a quality culture in a new programme. The panel suggests to consider some fine-tuning, e.g. EE reviewing each year a different sample of courses.

The panel was in particular interested in the review by the **external examiners**. For each programme an EE is appointed for three years. The EE are invited twice a year to the College to examine all course folders. For the first three-year period, the courses of BAIEL were examined by the EE of the programme International Affairs. From 2018 on, a dedicated EE for the BAIEL is appointed. In the interview the EE explained that he not only checks the grading and exams but also assesses all elements in the course folders. In the meetings with the AQC the findings concerning individual courses are discussed but the EE also give feedback on the level of the programme. As the EE for BAIEL was only recently appointed, only seven courses of Spring 2018 have been examined. He graded one course as best

practice, one course with room of improvement and 5 courses as adequate. To what extent BAIEL has acted upon the recommendations of the EE, is not clear as the follow up meeting is planned after the site visit. Based on the interviews with the programme management, the panel is confident that the suggestions will be taken into account.

Based on the interviews the panel is satisfied that the different **stakeholders** are involved in the internal quality assurance. The teaching staff is involved through Faculty and department meetings. This is complemented by individual follow-up meetings. Additionally, the teaching workshops provide not only opportunities for training but also for feedback to the HoD and the AQC. The students are represented in Faculty and department meetings. Additionally, students can give further feedback through student evaluations. There are not so many alumni yet, but based on the documents of the College, alumni are represented in the Faculty meetings and they can give further feedback through periodic alumni surveys. The College gets feedback of the professional field through the assignments of the capstone courses and the internships but also through the adjuncts.

**To conclude**, it is the panel's opinion that the College has developed a comprehensive internal quality system. An Academic Quality Committee has set up which is monitoring all programmes and courses to be sure that the PSLO and course objectives are met, based upon a transparent and reliable assessment system. All the necessary tools are now in place to implement the PDCA-cycle. Course folders are being assessed by several persons, including an external examiner. The results are discussed with the professors and improvement actions are taken if necessary. Therefore, the panel evaluates standard 4 'structure and organisation of internal quality assurance' as satisfactory for the programme.

## Final judgement of the assessment panel

Generic Quality Standard 1 – Targeted outcome level	S
Generic Quality Standard 2 – Educational learning environment	S
Generic Quality Standard 3 – Outcome level achieved	S
Generic Quality Standard 4 – Structure and organization of internal quality assurance	S

As the Generic quality standards 1, 2, 3 and 4 are evaluated as satisfactory, the final judgement of the assessment panel about the Bachelor of Arts in International and European Law at Vesalius College is satisfactory, such according to the decision rules.

## Summary of the recommendations for further improvement of the study programme

### Generic quality standard 1 – Targeted Outcome Level

- In the future, benchmark the BAIEL profile with the programme's competitors, in Belgium or abroad (e.g. USA pre-law programmes or US or Europe style liberal arts).
- Continue to be very clear about the profile of the programme, the follow-up masters and job prospects for graduates.

### Generic quality standard 2 – Educational learning environment

- Think through the current curriculum and the teaching methods with a view to the profile of the programme as a 'law and liberal arts' education.
- Consider to offer a more legal focus in the liberal arts courses.
- Be more innovative when it comes to teaching methods.
- Make sure there are sufficient internships in the domain of law.
- Use the scholarships as an active policy for diversification of the student's population and to strengthen the intercultural competences of the students in the programme.
- Increase the time for research of the full-time Faculty.
- Keep engaging adjuncts to socialize them in the College teaching philosophy, grading system etc.

### Generic quality standard 3 – Outcome Level Achieved

- Revise the rubrics and make them more suited for law.
- Develop law specific rubrics for thesis and capstone.
- Introduce a second reader for the thesis.
- Rethink the cut-off grade, in particular for the thesis and capstone.
- Monitor the risk for grade inflation.

### Generic quality standard 4 –

#### Structure and organisation of internal quality assurance

- Evaluate the IQS after a few years and consider whether some fine-tuning is in place.





# **APPENDICES**



## APPENDIX I

### Curricula vitae of the members of the assessment panel

**Peter Bursens** is Professor of Political Science at the Department of Political Science of the University of Antwerp. He teaches on the topics of European integration and multilevel political systems. His research agenda focuses on European decision-making, Europeanization, federalism and democratic legitimacy of multi-level political systems. He is senior member of the Politics and Public Governance Research Group (P&PG) of the University of Antwerp. He also holds a Jean Monnet Chair ad personam on 'skills teaching in European Union Studies', through which he develops simulation games and assessment tools for skill teaching in EU studies, and he is director of the University of Antwerp Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence ACTORE.

**Dylan Couck** is a master's student in Law at the Ghent University. He is a student representative in several committees at the university and at the Faculty of Law and Criminology. He is also a Board member of the Flemish Union of Students.

**Petra Foubert** studied law at the Universities of Antwerp and Leuven. She did her PhD at Leuven, on the legal protection of pregnant workers in the EU and the US. In 1999 she obtained an LL.M. from Harvard Law School (US), with a scholarship from Fulbright Belgium and the Belgian American Educational Foundation (BAEF). After her studies she taught at HUBrussel (EHSAL) and the University of Tilburg. Since 2009 she has been a professor at the Law faculty of Hasselt University, where she teaches 'Principles of Law' and 'Advanced employment law'. From 2011 till 2018 she also served

as a programme director. Petra's research area is (European) social law, with a special interest in non-discrimination. She is a member of several editorial boards and is a frequent speaker at national and international conferences, seminars and workshops for academics and practitioners. In addition to her academic work, she is also a lawyer at the Leuven Bar.

**Jan M. Smits** is Professor of European Private Law at Maastricht University and is Dean of the Faculty of Law. Jan Smits publishes, teaches and supervises students in the fields of (Dutch, European and comparative) private law, comparative law, legal theory and 'law and...' approaches. He has a special interest in the foundations of private law, questions of legal harmonisation (in particular in Europe and Asia), jurisprudence, methodology and internationalisation of law. He has taught at various universities in the Netherlands, Belgium, Finland, South Africa and the United States. Jan Smits is a member of several editorial and advisory boards and is an elected member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. Apart from his academic activities, he is a deputy judge in the Amsterdam Court of Appeal.

## APPENDIX II

### Time schedule of the site visit

#### Thursday May 16, 2019

11:00–13:00	internal consultation + analysis of the study material + lunch
13:00–14:00	programme management
14:00–14:15	internal consultation
14:15–15:15	students, including a student involved in student representation
15:15–15:30	internal consultation
15:30–16:30	teaching staff, including lecturers involved in educational debate
16:30–16:45	internal consultation
16:45–17:15	external examiners
17:15–17:30	internal consultation
17:30–18:30	graduates and professional field
18:30–18.45	internal consultation
19:30	diner panel

**Friday May 17, 2019**

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8:30–9:00	internal consultation
9:00–10:00	programme-specific infrastructure
10:00–11:00	supporting staff
11:00–12:00	consultation hour
12:00–13:00	lunch
13:00–13:30	programme management
13:30–15:30	final consideration
15:30	oral report

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