

Outcomes Development Dialogue
Bachelor Politologie/Political Science (BPol)
Master Political Sciences (MPol)
Master Conflict Resolution and Governance (CRG)

held on April 5 16:00-17:00, REC B9.22 (Common Room Political Science)

In line with the NVAO assessment framework, each study programme or cluster of study programmes conducts a ‘development dialogue’ (*ontwikkelgesprek*) with the assessment panel during the assessment visit. During this development dialogue, possible improvements are discussed from a development perspective, the agenda is drawn up by the study programme. Although the development dialogue is part of the programme review, the recommendations are not part of the accreditation assessment. Pursuant to the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act, Article 5.13, paragraph 6, we publish the recommendations that follow from this development dialogue with this document.

The most recent results of the programme accreditation can be consulted at:

<https://www.nvao.net/nl/besluiten/opleidingen> or <https://www.nvao.net/en/decisions/educations>

Please note that the dialogue was held for three programmes together. Recommendations often concerned all three programmes. Therefore, there is one document for the three programmes.

The dialogue took place on April 5, 2023, between the expert panel, the programme directors and programme coordinator CRG, the director of the College and the director of the Graduate School of Social Sciences (chairing the meeting), the chair of the department of Political Science, the chairs of the examinations board, the chair of the programme committees, the policy advisor and the programme manager/coordinator. The meeting took place in the Common Room of the Political Science Department. The minutes (see below as of next paragraph) were taken by the panel’s secretary and were agreed upon by the panel and the programmes afterward.

1. CRG: How can we prevent practice from being crowded out of the curriculum?

The CRG programme integrates practical and academic components due to its focus on the fields of Conflict Resolution and Governance. The practical focus is clearly present in the programme. CRG has established an Advisory Board of senior practitioners who advise the programme on the incorporation of practice. These practitioners act as lecturers in the programme and function as key figures linking the programme to the professional field and help students find internship places. They also participate in CRG’s annual conference. Also, CRG students all follow an internship.

Its practice orientation sets the master’s programme CRG apart within its academic context. The programme management is concerned that this practice orientation can cause tension with the academic orientation of the master’s programme and that practice might get crowded out because of this. It asks the panel for input on controlling the balance between an academic and a professional orientation.

The panel is quite positive on how the programme is managing the balance between the academic and the professional thus far. It noticed that the inclusion of practice and practitioners in CRG is done carefully, through well-designed teaching methods, and always in relation to theory. For instance, students are taught to interview practitioners, which is a useful skill in the research they execute during their fieldwork. Students that the panel interviewed were able to link theories they learnt to the practice they encountered in the programme and in their fieldwork. The panel sees this well-designed combination of academic and practical elements as an asset to the programme and its alumni. The panel sees no danger that academic and practical elements would crowd each other out since they are taught in such close relation to one another.

The involvement of practitioners as lecturers in the programme creates some issues with HR strategies, since these lecturers don’t fit the standard university criteria for promotion and career development. An option to find out how to work around such issues is to look at programmes in a similar situation, such as Anthropology.

2. BPol/MPol: How can you maintain standards for similar elements in the curriculum in a growing and diverse department?

The BPol and MPol have grown significantly in size and staff, which creates a challenge in maintaining standards for similar elements in the curriculum. The programmes see their current more diverse staff as a strength and want to allow them space to bring in their unique perspectives. This creates tension with harmonization and standardization initiatives aimed at creating similar circumstances for all students in the programme. Both the BPol and the MPol have various specializations whose approaches can vary. Should there be a set of shared standards, and what differences can be allowed?

The panel members recognize these doubts and discussions. Especially in interdisciplinary departments or faculties, there can be different takes on teaching and examination, for instance on what a thesis should look like. Talking about these differences and calibrating between disciplines and specializations is important as an ongoing process to define the balance between autonomy and regulations. In this process, it is also important to set down a baseline of shared standards, even if this may be met with some resistance.

The panel noticed during the site visit that in the BPol and MPol, thesis supervisors choose their own second readers (in the MPol, the programme director and the chair of the examinations board check the list to make sure there are no standard pairings). This leads to choosing second readers of the same specialization or field, so that calibration and discussion of grading and grading practices beyond the own specialization becomes more limited. The programmes opt for this method precisely because they want the second reader to be a specialist able to assess the thesis well and entirely.

The panel suggests that particularly in the BPol, non-specialized second readers might be assigned to create more dialogue between departments and specializations. In the experience of the panel, this is done elsewhere (where for instance philosophers read political science theses) and works quite well. As a panel member reported, an *esprit de corps* was created throughout the faculty thanks to a culture of calibration and discussion.

According to the panel, it all depends on how you define the role of the second reader and whether this reader is seen as equivalent to the first reader or rather as a sounding board with a control function. In the BPol and MPol programmes, the second reader has a strong role and jointly with the supervisor decides upon the final grade. This is done differently at other universities. In some, the second reader performs a general reading and only sees the final product; in others, they give their input on the research proposal during the thesis trajectory. It is important to have a clear definition of the position and role of the second reader and to share this with the students.

The panel and programmes agree that independent of their specific role, the second reader cannot be abolished altogether. A second reading of the thesis is needed for the sake of clarity, accountability and reliability towards the students. Also, the conversations between first and second readers on final assessment are valuable. This is especially the case when many new staff members are included as examiners who need to be introduced to shared evaluation standards.