



B Bestuurskunde
M Public Governance
Tilburg University

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Summary

BSc Public Governance (*Bestuurskunde*)

This evaluation concerns a three-year full-time programme of 180 EC taught in Dutch. The programme stands out among Dutch public administration degrees through its focus on public governance with a legal foundation. It is offered by the Tilburg Law School, addresses the interplay between public administration and the political and societal environment, and is embedded in public administration practice. The profile, mission and objectives of the bachelor programme align with the domain-specific reference framework and the Tilburg Educational Profile. The intended learning outcomes take into account the Dublin Descriptors, as well as the Dutch and European Qualification Frameworks, and reflect the substance, level and orientation of the programme.

The teaching-learning environment is strong. The curriculum is coherent and aligns with the mission and profile of the programme. The course contents allow students to acquire the intended learning outcomes. Several courses contain extensive elements of practice to prepare for the labour market. The educational philosophy is clearly visible in the specific didactic approaches. The modest student intake allows for small-scale education, dynamic and interactive courses and personalised attention from staff. Student guidance and support are well developed. The teaching staff combine substantive, methodological and research expertise with educational and assessment skills. Their enthusiasm, commitment and availability contribute to a student-centred, safe and inclusive learning community.

The programme has a robust assessment system, which is embedded in the provisions and policies of the school and the university. The Assessment Programme ensures the connection between assessment methods, courses and programme learning outcomes. The course coordinators are trained and supported to develop good quality exams and transparent assessment criteria. Since the previous accreditation, the thesis assessment procedures were enhanced. A sample review showed that the final scores reflect the quality of the respective bachelor theses and that assessors independently complete each evaluation form in an insightful way. The provisions for assessment quality assurance are comprehensive. The bachelor programme is in competent hands with the Examination Board, whose capacity in staffing and time allocation has been expanded in recent years.

Public governance students who eventually graduate from the bachelor programme have achieved all learning outcomes. Based on its sample review, the panel thinks highly of the bachelor thesis quality. The acquired competencies allow bachelor graduates to pursue master programmes in Tilburg and elsewhere in the Netherlands or abroad.

Diversity is on the radar of the programme, the department, the school and the university. The programme creates a safe and welcoming environment that is inclusive of all forms of diversity. While gender diversity is in balance at student level, the number and rank of female staff teaching in the bachelor programme is lagging behind.

The panel's overall assessment of the programme is positive. Nonetheless, it identified a few areas where there is room for improvement. The bachelor programme may want to:

- set up a permanent advisory structure of alumni and professional field representatives;
- enhance the feasibility of the internship and the study period abroad;
- actively seek a more balanced representation of (senior) female staff on the programme.

MSc Public Governance

This evaluation concerns a one-year full-time programme of 60 EC taught in English. The panel endorses the decision of the management with regard to the language of instruction in the MSc Public Governance. It found the rationale that was given for offering the programme in English well thought through and strongly motivated.

Offered by the Law School, the master is a generic advanced level governance programme with a clear Tilburg flavour. Recently, the mission, profile and objectives of the programme have been sharpened to further underline the interdisciplinary approach, the comparative and transnational perspective, and the attention for transformative change in society. Per September 2024, master students will acquire (even) more transferable skills across disciplinary, organisational and jurisdictional boundaries. This new positioning maintains the research strengths of the public governance group, creates a distinguished profile next to the bachelor degree, and allows for more specialization. The profile, mission and objectives of the master programme continue to align with the domain-specific reference framework and the Tilburg Educational Profile. The intended learning outcomes take into account the Dublin Descriptors, as well as the Dutch and European Qualification Frameworks, and reflect the substance, level and orientation of the programme.

The teaching-learning environment is strong. The curriculum is coherent and course contents allow students to acquire the intended learning outcomes. Several courses contain extensive elements of practice to prepare master students for the labour market. The panel thinks the envisaged curriculum changes will enhance the attractiveness of the programme. The educational philosophy is – and will remain – clearly visible in the specific didactic approaches. The student intake allows for small-scale education, dynamic and interactive courses and personalised attention from staff. Student guidance and support are well developed. The teaching staff combine substantive, methodological and research expertise with educational and assessment skills. Their enthusiasm, commitment and availability contribute to a student-centred, safe and inclusive learning community.

The programme has a robust assessment system, which is embedded in the provisions and policies of the school and the university. The Assessment Programme ensures the connection between assessment methods, courses and programme learning outcomes. The course coordinators are trained and supported to develop good quality exams and transparent assessment criteria. Since the previous accreditation, the thesis assessment procedures were enhanced. A sample review showed that assessors complete each evaluation form in an insightful way. Moreover, the master thesis scores are much more adequate than in the previous review and aligned in all cases with the appreciation of the panel. The provisions for assessment quality assurance are comprehensive. The master programme is in competent hands with the Examination Board, whose capacity in staffing and time allocation has been expanded in recent years.

Public governance students who eventually graduate the master programme have achieved all learning outcomes. Based on its sample review, the panel thinks highly of the master thesis quality. Moreover, the programme constitutes an important lever for the career of its graduates who invariably find a job that is commensurate with their level and with the domain of their studies.

Diversity is on the radar of the programme, the department, the school and the university. The programme creates a safe and welcoming environment that is inclusive of all forms of diversity. While gender diversity is in balance at student level, the number and rank of female staff teaching in the master programme is still lagging behind. Moreover, the programme's international orientation would benefit from a more geographically diverse audience.

The panel's overall assessment of the master programme is positive. Nonetheless, it identified a few areas where there is room for improvement. The programme may want to:

- set up a permanent advisory structure of alumni and professional field representatives;
- enhance the feasibility of the February intake, the Governance Clinic, and the Internship;
- communicate and market widely the updated master programme;
- actively seek a more balanced representation of (senior) female staff on the programme.

Score table

The panel assesses the programmes as follows:

B Public Governance

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 5: Diversity	meets the standard
General conclusion	positive

M Public Governance

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 5: Diversity	meets the standard
General conclusion	positive

The chair and the secretary of the panel hereby declare that all panel members have studied this report and that they agree with the judgements laid down in the report. They confirm that the assessment has been conducted in accordance with the demands relating to independence.

Prof. Andrew Massey
Chair

Mark Delmartino
Secretary

Date: 6 March 2024

Introduction

Procedure

Assessment

On 28 and 29 November 2023, an independent peer review panel visited the Tilburg Law School (TLS) at Tilburg University (TiU) to assess the quality of two degree programmes: the BSc Public Governance and the MSc Public Governance. This visit is part of the cluster assessment Public Administration, involving 20 degree programmes at eight higher education institutions across the Netherlands. The assessment followed the procedure and standards described in the NVAO-EAPAA agreement signed on 18 May 2021. Programmes and institutions participating in this cluster assessment want to obtain accreditation by both the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Body (NVAO) and the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation (EAPAA).

On request of the cluster Public Administration, quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment of the different programmes. It composed the peer review panel in cooperation with the institutions taking into account the expertise and independence of the members and ensuring consistency within the cluster. The composition of the panel was approved by EAPAA on 11 September 2023 and by NVAO on 14 September 2023.

The coordinator at Academion, Peter Hilderling, instructed the panel chairs on their role in the site visit according to the Panel chair profile (NVAO 2016) in May, and briefed the cluster panel members on the NVAO-EAPAA assessment procedures in June 2023. On behalf of Academion, Mark Delmartino and Esther Poort – both NVAO-certified secretaries – liaised with the institutions and assisted the panels before and during the site visits. Afterwards, they drafted the assessment reports in close co-operation with the chairs and panels.

Assessment of TLS programmes

The panel assessed two degree programmes at Tilburg University. Both programmes have their roots in the Legal Public Administration programme, which was established in 1983. When the bachelor/master structure was introduced in September 2003, the current programmes became fully-fledged degrees offered in Dutch.

The BSc Public Governance (*Bestuurskunde*) is a three-year full-time programme that amounts to 180 EC and is taught in Dutch. Between 2017 and 2020, it also featured an English-language track that has been discontinued. While the panel has reviewed a few theses of the final cohorts of the English-language track, the bachelor programme at the time of the accreditation visit is offered only in Dutch. In comparison to other public administration programmes in the Netherlands, the BSc Public Governance contains a relatively large number of law-related courses. This legal foundation, together with its focus on the interplay between public administration and its political and societal environment and its embeddedness in public administration practices, constitutes the distinguishing profile of the Tilburg programme.

The MSc Public Governance is a one-year full-time 60 EC programme. Since 2016 it is taught in English targeting both Dutch and international students. In addition to common core courses, students choose a domain profile. Embedded in the Tilburg profile, the MSc programme lives up to its title Public Governance through a strong focus on the governance of complex societal challenges and the changing roles and responsibilities of governments, markets and networks.

Site visit

In the months preceding the visit, the secretary, panel chair and TLS team discussed the programme of the site visit. This resulted in a comprehensive schedule that is presented in Appendix 3. The panel wants to express its gratitude for the way these sessions were organized by the TLS team and for the enthusiasm and openness of the participants towards the panel.

In the run-up to the site visit, the panel studied the self-evaluations and accompanying materials TLS had put at disposition. An overview of these materials is provided in appendix 4. Furthermore, the panel reviewed a sample of 15 theses per programme, which were representative in terms of final grades and examiners. The theses were selected by the panel chair in consultation with the secretary. The selection was based on anonymized lists of students who graduated in the academic years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. The panel wants to thank the team at TLS for the high-quality materials and for their assistance in making the documents available in time.

The panel members studied the materials and reviewed the theses and their assessments, and reported their initial findings to the secretary. The secretary processed this input in a document, which served as a basis for discussion during the preparatory meeting on 22 November 2023. This meeting focused on mapping the key strengths of the respective programmes, on listing the issues that required further discussion on site, and on identifying pieces of additional information. During the meeting, the panel indicated it appreciated the Podcast as an original and useful way of the bachelor students to provide their input. On behalf of the panel, the secretary reported the outcome of the meetings to the team at TLS on 23 November.

The Open Consultation Hour for students, teaching and support staff involved in the degree programmes under review was scheduled alongside the preparatory meeting. One person used this opportunity to discuss individually and confidentially with the panel.

Towards the end of the visit, the programme representatives and the panel discussed pathways for further development in the so-called Development Dialogue session. A separate report on this session will be produced by the TLS team. The outcome of this session has no impact on the findings, considerations and conclusions in the present assessment report.

At the end of the site visit, the panel chair publicly presented the preliminary findings of the panel on the two degree programmes according to the NVAO-EAPAA framework.

Report

After the site visit, the secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings. This report is structured along the five NVAO-EAPAA standards. The report was first submitted to the coordinator at Academion for peer assessment and then to the panel for feedback. After processing this feedback, the secretary sent the draft report to TLS in order to have it checked for factual inaccuracies. The secretary discussed the ensuing comments with the panel chair, implementing changes where relevant. The panel then finalized the report, and the coordinator sent it to Tilburg University.

Panel

The following panel members were involved in the cluster assessment:

- Prof. Andrew Massey, professor of Government, King's College London – chair;
- Prof. Monique Kremer, professor of Active Citizenship, University of Amsterdam – chair;
- Prof. Ernst ten Heuvelhof, emeritus professor of Public Administration, Delft University of Technology;

- Prof. Peter Bursens, professor of Political Science, University of Antwerp;
- Prof. Ellen Wayenberg, professor of Public Governance and Management at Ghent University and member of the EAPAA Accreditation Committee;
- Prof. Calin Hintea, professor of Public Administration and Management at Babes-Bolyai University and member of the EAPAA Accreditation Committee;
- Prof. Thurid Hustedt, professor of Public Administration and Management at Hertie School Berlin and member of the EAPAA Accreditation Committee;
- Dr. Hester Glasbeek, advisor Leadership Development at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, and Senior Partner of Reflect Academy: For Leadership in Learning;
- Anje-Margreet Woltjer MSc, director of SPO Utrecht;
- Prof. Ria Janvier, professor of Social Law, University of Antwerp;
- Prof. Leo Huberts, emeritus professor of Public Administration, Vrije Universiteit;
- Prof. Heinrich Winter, professor of Public Administration, University of Groningen;
- Wim de Boer MSc, lecturer Public Administration and Governance at Haagse Hogeschool;
- Prof. Tanja Klenk, professor of Public Administration and Public Policies, Helmut-Schmidt-University Hamburg;
- David Van Slyke PhD, professor of Public Administration, The Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs;
- Prof. Geske Dijkstra, emeritus professor of Governance and Global Development, Erasmus University Rotterdam;
- Prof. Esther Versluis, professor of European Regulatory Governance, Maastricht University;
- Prof. Zoe Radnor, professor of Service Operations Management, Aston University;
- Prof. Sophie Vanhoonacker, professor of Administrative Governance, Maastricht University;
- Prof. Kees van Paridon, emeritus professor of Economics, Erasmus University Rotterdam;
- Prof. Tannelie Blom, emeritus professor of European Integration, Maastricht University – referee;
- Tom Hillenaar BSc, master student Engineering and Policy Analysis, Delft University of Technology – student member;
- Sibel Gökbekir BSc, master student of Complex Systems Engineering and Management at Delft University of Technology, and of International and European Union Law at Erasmus University Rotterdam – student member.

The panel assessing the Public Governance programmes at Tilburg University consisted of the following members:

- Prof. Andrew Massey, professor of Government, King's College London – chair;
- Prof. Ellen Wayenberg, professor of Public Governance and Management at Ghent University and member of the EAPAA Accreditation Committee;
- Prof. Ernst ten Heuvelhof, emeritus professor of Public Administration, Delft University of Technology;
- Prof. Esther Versluis, professor of European Regulatory Governance, Maastricht University;
- Sibel Gökbekir BSc, master student of Complex Systems Engineering and Management at Delft University of Technology, and of International and European Union Law at Erasmus University Rotterdam – student member.

Mark Delmartino assisted the panel and drafted the assessment reports.

Information on the programmes

Name of the institution: Tilburg University
Status of the institution: Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment: Positive

Programme name: *B Bestuurskunde (Public Governance)*
CROHO number: 56627
Level: Bachelor
Orientation: Academic
Number of credits: 180 EC
Specialisations or tracks: not applicable
Location: Tilburg
Educational minor: applicable
Mode(s) of study: Fulltime
Language of instruction: Dutch
Submission date NVAO: 1 May 2024

Programme name: M Public Governance
CROHO number: 66627
Level: Master
Orientation: Academic
Number of credits: 60 EC
Specialisations or tracks: not applicable
Location: Tilburg
Mode(s) of study: Fulltime
Language of instruction: English
Submission date NVAO: 1 May 2024

Description of the assessment

Organization

The two degree programmes under review fall under the responsibility of the Tilburg Law School (TLS), one of the five schools/faculties at Tilburg University. The School is headed by the Dean. TLS consists of five departments, which are led by management teams under the leadership of a Head of Department. The public governance scholars involved in the two programmes are mostly part of the Public Law & Governance department. Each degree programme has its own Academic Director who is responsible for the content, quality and delivery of the education. Every programme features a Programme Committee of students and academic members. At TLS, all programme committees meet jointly to discuss education-related matters. The School has one Examination Board It is assisted by a Thesis panel and an Assessment Committee, which includes an assessment panel . Students have the opportunity to think along and participate in decision-making at TLS through the Faculty Board, the Faculty Council and the Programme Committees.

Previous accreditation

In the previous accreditation round, the panel arrived at a positive conclusion on both degree programmes. It did not issue any strong recommendations but made a few suggestions for improvement. The current panel noticed that these suggestions have been considered in a systematic way and integrated in the respective programmes. The panel appreciates in particular the improvements made with regard to thesis assessment in both bachelor and master programmes. This and other developments/adjustments will be reported in the respective standards.

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

Findings

Profile

The Tilburg Law School is responsible for the two degree programmes under review. The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the positioning of public governance in a legal faculty with a focus on interdisciplinary cooperation is quite unique in the Netherlands. The combination of a legal foundation, a focus on the interplay between public administration and the political and societal environment, and an embeddedness in public administration practices constitutes the distinguishing profile of research and education of public governance in Tilburg.

According to their missions both bachelor and master programme aim to deliver academically educated public administration professionals who – at their respective bachelor and master levels – can make a contribution to public administration in a variety of roles taking into account changing societal contexts. Students should become versatile professionals, who are flexible in their field of operation, can carry out and evaluate research, advise public sector organizations, devise policy, provide leadership, and transcend the boundaries of specific subject areas. Public governance graduates from Tilburg University can tackle complex societal issues and lead transformative change in society. The panel noticed during the different sessions on site that the programmes effectively deliver on their mission and objectives: students are trained to become generalists who grasp the complexity of societal challenges, reflect on what they have learned,

apply it in practice, and eventually take up strategic positions in government, public and non-governmental organizations. During their studies, they have come to comprehend the institutional structure of public governance, as well as the role of agency in public governance when fostering change.

The panel acknowledges the unique features of the Tilburg public administration programmes in the Dutch higher education landscape. During the site visit, it discussed with the programmes how the bachelor and master programmes differed from each other within this context in terms of mission, profile and unique selling proposition. In so far as the bachelor programme is concerned, management, teaching staff, students and alumni indicated in several discussions during the visit that the programme delivers a foundational public administration curriculum with a substantial legal component. According to the management, the focus of the master programme in contrast to the bachelor programme has been less outspoken so far. In recent years the generic advanced level governance programme with some but limited room for specialization proved not very attractive for TLS bachelor graduates, nor did it generate the expected (intern)national inflow from outside the university. Students who graduated the TLS bachelor indicated to the panel that the master programme could do more to distinguish itself from the undergraduate programme. For them it was not a surprise that many bachelor graduates decided to pursue a (different) master study (elsewhere): their decision was not based at all on a perceived lack of quality, but on the assumption that the master would be too much alike / a mere continuation of the bachelor programme. The programme management has therefore been working on a programme revision, which was approved recently and will be implemented as of the academic year 2024-2025. Henceforth, the mission, profile and objectives of the master programme will underline the interdisciplinary approach, the comparative and transnational perspective, and the attention for transformative change in society. Moreover, the programme will place more emphasis on providing students with transferable skills such as entrepreneurial and strategic thinking, as well as collaboration skills across disciplinary, organisational and jurisdictional boundaries. According to the panel, this new positioning makes sense as it maintains the research strengths of the public governance group, yet sharpens the profile of the master and offers a curriculum that is more distinctive from the bachelor programme. Moreover, the revised profile and curriculum will allow for more explicit specialization than it has been the case up to now.

Intended learning outcomes

The panel established, based on the extensive and informative sections and appendices in the self-evaluation reports, that there is a close connection between the profile and objectives of the bachelor and master programme on the one hand, and their respective sets of intended learning outcomes on the other hand. The intended learning outcomes had been formulated when the programmes were established in 2003 and have since been amended and updated, in accordance with the domain specific reference framework (DSRF) for Public Administration, Public Governance, and Governance and Organization programmes (PAGO). Moreover, their formulation reflects the five Dublin Descriptors and aligns with both the Dutch and European Qualification frameworks at the levels 6 and 7, respectively. The learning outcomes of both bachelor and master programme are presented in Appendix 1 to this report.

The learning outcomes of the master programme have recently been slightly revised to emphasize the public governance (instead of public administration) character of the study and include explicit reference to collaboration skills and exercising leadership in teams. Furthermore, the learning outcomes of both bachelor and master programmes reflect the Tilburg Educational Profile, which is built on the pillars Knowledge, Skills and Character. In addition to acquiring knowledge and skills, which are addressed in several learning outcomes, the university considers it important that students develop as individuals, hence the attention in all programmes to character building: students are stimulated to develop a critical mindset, to assess ideas and opinions, to form nuanced opinions and to become self-reflective individuals bearing responsibility for

their own work and for collective results. As academically trained public administration professionals, students (should) develop a sense of social responsibility and perform proper and ethically sound research. These elements are incorporated in the learning outcomes on making judgements, on communication and on learning skills. In the bachelor programme for instance, students are expected to demonstrate a high level of responsibility, self-discipline and initiative. In addition to the newly added outcome on collaboration skills and exercising leadership, the master programme also emphasises that students should not only analyse but also evaluate theory and practice.

In sum, the panel found that the intended learning outcomes are formulated adequately as they reflect the substance (public governance) and orientation (academic) of the respective programmes. Although the learning outcomes follow the same set-up, the panel also established that there is a clear difference between the formulations for the bachelor and the master programme and that each set of learning outcomes reflects its own level properly. Moreover, the learning outcomes are embedded in the European and Dutch qualification frameworks and align with the disciplinary PAGO requirements and the educational profile of Tilburg University.

Professional field

In the previous accreditation visit, the then panel suggested that the programmes would benefit from a more systematic involvement of alumni and employers in curriculum development and in assuring the quality of the programmes. The current panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that both programmes have followed-up on the advice. The bachelor programme has intensified contacts with the alumni association, among others by setting up a yearly meeting to discuss the state of the programme. Moreover, the programme is in touch with employers who are involved in the internship and the course on consultancy and policy advice. At these occasions, employers share their viewpoint on the knowledge and skills of the students and on the quality, relevance and development opportunities of the programme. The master programme also organizes a yearly meeting with alumni and employers to discuss among others course and curriculum developments. In addition, both stakeholders are involved in the master programme as clients in the Governance Clinic, as providers of (research) internships, as participants in career events and as field trip hosts. Moreover, teaching staff on both programmes have close ties to the professional practice. In this way, they ensure that their first-hand experience on the required knowledge and skills is incorporated in their courses.

The current panel noticed that the involvement of alumni and employers has increased over the years, which in turn has provided useful insights regarding the relevance and development points of the public governance programmes in Tilburg. In this regard, the panel welcomed the findings of the alumni survey from 2022, which were summarized in the self-evaluation report. One of the survey suggestions was to clarify the job profiles for public governance students. The panel was informed that in the meantime, the programmes and the TLS Career Services have strengthened their collaboration among others by outlining clearer job perspectives and by attuning the career services to these profiles.

Alumni and employers emphasized during the discussion on site that they are committed to the programmes and interested in taking up a more active and systematic advisory role. While it welcomes the efforts of the programmes in recent years to capture the viewpoints of the employers and alumni on an ad hoc basis, the panel advises the programmes to set up a more permanent structure, for instance a professional advisory committee of alumni and employers. This body could advise systematically on curriculum developments and monitor the relevance of the public governance programmes in Tilburg. According to the panel, the above-mentioned developments in the master programme make the establishment of such body even more relevant.

Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel considers that the bachelor and master programmes are strongly embedded in both the educational philosophy of the university and the disciplinary organization of the school. The study of Public Governance at the Law School of Tilburg University takes up a specific position in the Dutch higher education landscape and aligns neatly with the disciplinary PAGO framework.

The panel considers that the profile and the objectives of the bachelor programme are very clear. They are reflected in the communication materials for (potential) students, as well as in the learning outcomes of the programme, and the course set-up of the curriculum. Students know that *Bestuurskunde* in Tilburg is about public governance with a strong law component.

The discussions on site have convinced the panel that the master programme is working on a profile and a curriculum that is equally specific. While the objectives of the master contain relevant elements – public governance from an interdisciplinary, comparative and international perspective with a focus on transformative change in society – the panel welcomes the decision to sharpen these profile elements. Moreover, the panel endorses the plans to adjust the curriculum contents in such a way that the master programme is attractive to both TLS bachelor graduates and students from other universities in the Netherlands and beyond.

The panel considers that the intended learning outcomes are formulated adequately and reflect the substance, orientation and level of the bachelor and master programmes. The small adjustments to their formulation have made the learning outcomes even more relevant to the specificity of the programmes. Moreover, the panel thinks highly about the connection between the learning outcomes and the Dublin Descriptors, the Dutch and European Qualification Frameworks and the Tilburg Educational Profile.

Since the previous accreditation visit, the programmes have intensified the contacts with alumni and employers. The panel considers that these initiatives have led to useful insights on the quality and relevance of the programmes, which in turn have been picked up by the educational management. The panel encourages the programmes to go even a step further and set up a permanent advisory structure to monitor the public governance programmes in Tilburg.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that both the BSc and MSc Public Governance meet standard 1 of the NVAO-EAPAA framework.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Findings

Curriculum BSc Public Governance

The bachelor Public Governance is a three-year full-time programme, which is offered in Dutch and consists of 180 EC. The curriculum is presented in Appendix 2 to this report. It is built around six learning pathways: Law & society, Policy & policy development, Government & institutions, Public organizations, Research &

skills, and Basic disciplines. Most courses, which usually amount to 6 EC, belong to one of the pathways. All courses in the first and second year and most of the third year courses are mandatory. This also applies to the internship in year two, which constitutes a core component of the programme. In the third year, students either take two electives from a restricted list of courses (12 EC), pursue a minor (18 EC) or go for a study period abroad. In order to prepare bachelor students for a master programme in Tilburg or elsewhere, five mandatory courses for a total of 30 EC are taught in English. An important component of the third year is the bachelor thesis trajectory (12 EC), which is spread over three quarters of the year and consists of a research proposal, a desk study and the thesis production. In a desk study of about 10,000 words, students apply the public administration knowledge and methodological skills they have acquired during the programme. During the trajectory, students have a series of feedback moments to discuss progress with their supervisor.

According to the panel, the curriculum offers a solid introduction into the relevant core disciplines of public administration. Its organization along six learning pathways is consistent. The panel gathered from the written materials – and in particular the assessment programme – that there is a clear connection between the respective courses and the learning outcomes at programme level. The panel endorses the choices of the educational management to include a mandatory internship and to limit the number of electives.

While the current curriculum has not changed much in terms of course titles, the panel was informed that there are more differences when looking at the actual contents. In this regard, the programme has picked up on the suggestions from the previous accreditation panel regarding the attention to economics, to professional practice and to pursuing individual domains of interest. The panel welcomes these adjustments and thinks they are for the better.

Curriculum MSc Public Governance

The master Public Governance is a one-year full-time programme, which is offered in English and consists of 60 EC. The curriculum is presented in Appendix 2 to this report. The academic year is divided in two semesters and four blocks. Students can enrol both in September and in February. The latter students start with the second semester courses and often enter the programme having in mind to complete it in 18 months.

At the time of the accreditation visit, in the academic year 2023-2024, the first semester consists of five mandatory courses that together shape the interdisciplinary approach to studying complex societal challenges. In addition to four substantive courses (24 EC), the Governance Clinic (6 EC) is an independent group research on a real-world problem commissioned by a real-life client. The second semester includes a mandatory course (6 EC), an elective (6 EC, which can be replaced by an internship of the same size), a thesis seminar (6 EC) and the master thesis (12 EC). In the third block, students develop a research proposal (as part of the thesis seminar) and in the fourth block, they demonstrate through the master thesis their ability to address theoretically and empirically a complex problem in the realm of public governance. The programme offers four thematic specializations: Governing the transition to a sustainable society; Justice, security and the governance of risks; Governance for health, education and welfare; and Democratic governance and digital innovation. These specializations are developed in the master thesis, but students can increase their thematic focus by opting for a relevant assignment in mandatory courses, the governance clinic and the elective. The specializations reflect the research domains of the department and are coordinated by full professors.

According to the panel, the curriculum manages to cover in the scope of 60 EC not only advanced level core disciplinary knowledge on public governance but also a professional career-oriented clinic and the opportunity for specialization. The panel gathered from the extensive and informative written materials –

including the assessment programme – that there is a clear connection between the profile and the curriculum, as well as between the learning goals of the respective courses and the learning outcomes at programme level.

While also the master curriculum had not changed much in terms of course titles compared to the previous accreditation visit, the panel was informed that there are more differences when looking at the actual course contents. In this regard, the programme has picked up on the suggestions from the previous accreditation panel regarding the attention to the interdisciplinary character and specialization opportunities. The panel welcomes these adjustments and thinks they are for the better.

The discussion with master students provided a mixture of positive inputs and points for improvement. On the one hand, students indicated that a lot of (small) changes have been made to the contents and the delivery of the curriculum, which contributed to an incremental increase in the quality and attractiveness of the programme. Moreover, students were particularly positive about the variety of educational backgrounds of their fellow students, as well as of the knowledge, expertise and availability of the teaching staff. However, several students also indicated that there is room for better and more detailed communication before and during the programme, for instance on the (feasibility of the) curriculum that is offered to the February intake or on the opportunities and limitations of the specialization track. Students often took the elective because it was too difficult to organise an internship for only 6 EC. One student remarked that “it is nice as a student to be in the driver’s seat of your study, but then you also need to know what you want and what is possible”. The panel understands both the positive and the development points raised by the students. In terms of communication, it has advised the educational management to look into the issue, also in view of the envisaged adjustments to the curriculum.

During the visit, the panel discussed at length the plans of the educational management to update the master curriculum. While intentions had been announced in the self-evaluation report, the panel was informed during the visit that the plans had recently been approved. Hence, as of September 2024, the master will expand its focus on the governance of transformative change. The updated curriculum is built around three specialization tracks (Governance of Justice, Security and Risk; Governance of Education, Health and Welfare; Governance and Politics of Democratic Innovation) that are addressed in foundational track course, the master thesis trajectory and up to two electives. The Governance Clinic will be expanded to include more theoretical substance on the governance of transformative change (12 EC), while keeping an eye on the effective study load. The panel endorses these curriculum changes, which constitute a much sharper translation of the master profile and objectives. According to the panel, the updated curriculum is also likely to attract/retain more bachelor graduates from TLS.

Language of instruction

The master programme is offered in English since a major curriculum revision in 2016, which was endorsed by the previous accreditation panel. The MSc Public Governance targets both Dutch and international students. In order to guarantee the quality of the programme, English proficiency standards are set for both incoming students and staff. The current panel was informed that the choice for English is motivated by the programme’s international profile and the use of the International Classroom as a didactic method. The variety of perspectives of students from different national and cultural backgrounds enlivens the discussions in class and enables students to experience the challenges that come with working together across borders. In addition to exposing Dutch students to different viewpoints, the programme also offers international students a different, Dutch, perspective on public governance.

Students indicated to the panel that they appreciate the comparative and transnational perspective of the programme, as well as the variety of geographical, cultural and disciplinary backgrounds of their fellow students. They were also positive about the language proficiency of both staff and students. If anything, they would like the composition of the student cohorts to be more balanced because the majority of master students is Dutch. Although this imbalance does not impact so much on the group atmosphere in individual cohorts, it does affect the educational opportunities that are connected to an international classroom. The panel agrees to the latter point, which had also been reported by the programme management.

The panel is confident that the sharpened profile and the curriculum revision will further enhance the international orientation of the programme. It also shares the optimism of the educational management that the master programme new style will attract more students from Tilburg, the Netherlands and abroad. The panel, therefore, endorses the decision of the management to offer the master programme in English and thinks that the adjusted curriculum constitutes a strong motivation to maintain English as language of instruction. Moreover, the programme's focus on public governance and transformative change is a valid argument according to the panel to also have an English language programme title.

Learning environment

The panel gathered from the extensive written information on the educational philosophy that both bachelor and master programmes are embedded in an educational vision that is shared at both university and school level. In so far as the bachelor programme is concerned, this vision emphasizes that first-year students should get specific support to facilitate a smooth transition from pre-university to university education. TLS has implemented a comprehensive programme, PASS, that allocates among others to every first-year student a staff mentor and student mentors. Another element in the vision is the focus on character building, which takes place in a vibrant academic community of students and teaching staff. The bachelor programme therefore strives for a variety of teaching methods to engage, activate and motivate students. According to the educational vision, bachelor students should experience the practice of public administration during their study, hence the mandatory internship component and the Consultancy and Policy Advice course where students do a research and advisory assignment for a public sector organisation.

Having identified in the written materials that didactics are a strong point of the bachelor programme, the panel got ample confirmation during the discussions with students and staff that the programme is indeed built on robust educational principles. Teaching staff is didactically trained to deliver the programme in line with these principles, and students appreciate the small-scale environment, the activating teaching methods, the study support mechanisms, the professional practice components, the didactic skills of the staff and the availability of the programme management.

The panel obtained a similarly positive view on the learning environment in the master programme. The student-centred pedagogy uses a variety of didactic methods, including tutorials in small-scale interactive class settings such as flipped classrooms. The class dynamics are also enhanced through forms of problem-based, project-based and experiential learning, with students actively exploring real-world governance challenges. Furthermore, master students can rely on a mentoring system involving student buddies, the programme coordinator, the programme director, the education coordinator and the student counsellor. In terms of academic and/or professional guidance, teaching staff support individual students by offering them access to their personal networks in academia and practice.

During the visit, the panel obtained ample confirmation also from master students and staff that the learning environment is strong and that it definitely constitutes an asset for studying public governance in Tilburg. Students who studied both the bachelor and master programme were highly positive about the didactic

approaches, the atmosphere, the staff and the student support mechanisms. They emphasized that these approaches were different in the two programmes and properly reflected the undergraduate and graduate levels of the respective studies.

Student intake and success rate

Compared to other public administration studies in the Netherlands, the intake of the Tilburg programmes is rather modest. Since the previous accreditation visit, the yearly intake in the Dutch track of the bachelor programme has fluctuated between 52 and 74 students; the addition of an English track between 2017 and 2020 led to a temporary increase with 30 students. The panel was informed that the current intake of around 50-60 bachelor students, mostly from the wider Tilburg region, is quite steady and does not give raise to concern regarding the viability of the programme. The current intake levels allow for small-scale education in several courses and for an optimal deployment of the above-mentioned educational principles. In case of a sudden increase, the current staff and facilities are such that they could absorb a yearly intake up to 80 students.

Having studied the completion rates, the panel discussed the bachelor programme's success rate with students, staff and management. Data provided by the programme show that between 10% and 26% of the students finish the programme within the nominal duration of three years, while between 53% and 69% does so in four years. Students indicated that each curriculum component is feasible in its own right, although the (mandatory) internship and the (optional) study period abroad tend to cause some delay in the study rhythm. Because it proves difficult to find a relevant internship of (only) 20 days, most students decide to spend more time on the internship. Although the internship allows students to gain experience and lay the foundations for a professional network, spending more than twenty days "on the job" jeopardizes the feasibility of completing the curriculum in time. Similarly, the study period abroad often takes longer than the credits connected to the courses taken at the host institution. This in turn may delay the study progress of those who go abroad, and could discourage fellow students from taking the opportunity. Hence, the panel invites the programme to look for solutions that enhance the feasibility of these highly interesting and overall much appreciated – curriculum opportunities. Another cause for the modest success rate is that students often combine their study with other activities that are somehow linked to their decision to study public governance. In fact, several students are involved in (local) politics, volunteer in non-governmental organisations, or perform a board year in their study association. The panel learned that staff is aware of these activities and supports such engagement, provided these students also continue to progress in their studies.

The number of students enrolled in the master programme has fluctuated in recent years: after a one-time high of 41 students in 2021-2022, the intake dropped to 23 in 2022-2023. The panel was informed that the latest intake figures cause concern with the programme and school management. The number of international students enrolling in the MSc Public Governance remains modest and the throughput from the bachelor programme is smaller than envisaged. Hence the decision of the educational management to reconsider the profile and adjust the curriculum as of September 2024. The current staff and facilities are such that they could absorb a yearly intake of around 50 master students. According to the panel, the revised curriculum should be communicated/marketed widely, not only within TLS and Tilburg but also far beyond.

Having studied the data provided by the programme, the panel noticed that the completion rates are adequate. While between 40% and 50% finish the master programme within the nominal duration of one year, around 80% does so in two years. The panel was informed that many students complete the programme in 18 months because of a small delay or because they entered the programme in February. Both staff and students mentioned that the recent introduction of thesis circles has reduced the average time

dedicated to the master thesis, and is an effective way of avoiding further delay. According to the students, each curriculum component is feasible in its own right, although the effective time spent on the Governance Clinic exceeds the nominal study hours associated with six credits. Most students opt for the elective because it is difficult to organise a short-term internship of 6 EC. Hence, the panel invites the programme to look for solutions that enhance the feasibility of these highly interesting and overall much appreciated – curriculum opportunities. Finally, also master students admitted – and staff confirmed – that their political, societal and/or managerial activities tend to jeopardise a timely completion of the study.

Staff

The public administration scholars involved in the bachelor and master programmes are for the most part based in the Department of Public Law and Governance at the Tilburg Law School; some of the involved staff is based in other departments and/or schools. The department consists of a multidisciplinary team of about 20 professors, lecturers and researchers who focus on public law, public administration, governance and politics. According to the current TLS Strategic Plan, one of the core research themes for both public administration and legal experts is Global Law and Governance. The teaching staff have extensive research experience and are involved in disciplinary networks at national and international level. Several lecturers also occupy positions in public sector organizations. The panel noticed that there is a clear connection between the substantive expertise of the staff and the courses and specialisations of the bachelor and master curricula.

The panel gathered from the detailed staff overviews that the lecturing team in the bachelor and master programmes consists of a mixture of senior and junior staff with different but strong disciplinary backgrounds and proper didactic qualifications, such as the University Teaching Qualification. The didactic skills of lecturers are evaluated annually as part of the progress and development interviews, while their educational approaches, methods and practices are discussed in course coordinator meetings.

The panel was informed that the current teaching staff is more diverse than at the time of the previous accreditation. Further to the suggestion of the previous panel, the team is more balanced in terms of male-female, Dutch-international and senior-junior lecturers. In addition to their substantive expertise and didactic skills, staff are increasingly apt to apply their knowledge in a particular domain – notably safety and security, climate and energy, and digitalization – which in turn increases the possibilities for (master) students to specialize.

Students indicated both in their student chapter/podcast and during the discussions on site that they highly appreciate the teaching staff for their substantive expertise and their didactic skills, as well as for their commitment and availability. The relatively small number of students in both bachelor and master programmes allow the staff to give detailed feedback on assignments and actively involve students in class discussions. According to the students, the staff play an important role in creating a safe and pleasant learning environment. Based on the discussions it had with staff, the panel endorses the positive viewpoint of the students: the staff representatives during the visit were invariably enthusiastic and committed to the university, the school and the students.

Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel considers that the teaching-learning environment of the two programmes is robust. This appreciation applies not only to the curriculum but also to the educational approach and the staff. Furthermore, the panel endorses the decision of the management with regard to the language of instruction in the MSc Public Governance. It found the rationale that was given for offering the programme in English well thought through and strongly motivated.

According to the panel, each programme has a dedicated curriculum that is coherent in itself and aligns with the respective mission and profile of the programme. There is a clear connection between the programme learning outcomes and the course contents and learning goals. The bachelor programme continues to occupy a unique position in the Dutch higher education landscape because of the connection between Public Governance and Law. The master programme recently reconsidered its curriculum; the panel endorses the plans to make the curriculum sharper and more focused per September 2024.

The panel considers that the educational philosophy is clearly visible in the specific didactic approaches of the programmes. The modest student intake allows for small-scale education, dynamic and interactive courses and personalised attention from staff. The education is clearly student-centred. In line with the educational vision, the programmes form tight communities with a high quality learning environment. Moreover, the courses contain extensive elements of practice to prepare bachelor and master students for the labour market. Student guidance and support are well developed, and several stakeholders are involved in ensuring/facilitating student wellbeing. In this regard, the respective mentoring schemes in the bachelor and master programme are to be commended.

The panel thinks highly of the teaching staff, who bring substantive, methodological and research expertise to the programmes and combine their academic knowledge with educational qualifications and language skills. Moreover, the staff contributes to the student-centred learning environment through their enthusiasm, commitment and availability.

In addition to all positive considerations, there are two elements in the teaching-learning environment that require attention and/or improvement. First, several points bachelor and master students brought up for improvement – notably but not exclusively the organization of the internships, the length of the study period abroad, the feasibility of the February intake, and the room for specialization – were linked to communication and to raising expectations. The panel suggests the programme teams to enhance the feasibility of these components and communicate clearly on these points towards current and future students.

Second, commending the efforts of the educational management to redesign the curriculum, the panel advises the department, school and university to communicate/market widely the innovative features of the master programme.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that both the BSc and MSc Public Governance meet standard 2 of the NVAO-EAPAA framework.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

Findings

Assessment system

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the system of assessment in both bachelor and master programmes is embedded in the assessment provisions and policies of the

university and the school. Three principles are particularly important in the assessment policy: (i) assessment is seen as integral to the learning process. Hence, exams are not an end in themselves but a means to support the development of students; (ii) assessment is an opportunity for students to experience ownership of their own learning process. Hence, students are actively engaged in learning and thinking about how to gauge their progress and how to demonstrate their achievement of the learning objectives; (iii) assessment is a preparation for a future career in public governance and society at large. Hence, exams are not only focused on theory and knowledge but also on skills, and at least partly use real-life cases and/or contexts. The discussions on site have convinced the panel that these valuable principles are effectively implemented in assessing the courses of both programmes.

The panel established that there is a clear connection between the assessment methods, the course learning goals and the intended learning outcomes at programme level. Having studied the assessment programme of both bachelor and master programmes, the panel noticed that both programmes are using a variety of methods to assess the intended learning outcomes, and that each learning outcome is assessed in multiple courses and in different ways. Many bachelor courses use a written exam combining multiple choice and open questions, while about one third of the courses combine a written exam with an individual assignment. Still other courses are assessed through a combination of individual and group assignments. The panel was informed that the number of individual writing assignments is motivated by the belief that future public administration professionals should be able to express themselves well in writing. All master courses (except for the thesis/seminar) have at least two forms of assessment, including at least one assignment in combination with a written or oral exam or a presentation.

The discussions on site furthermore confirmed that course coordinators are well trained and supported to produce valid, reliable and transparent assessments. Students from their side confirmed that they receive good and timely information on the assessment and the scoring rubrics, and that they are entitled to receive feedback afterwards.

During the visit, the panel discussed with several stakeholders how the programmes address the raise of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI). Students and staff mentioned that the use of ChatGPT and other forms of generative AI is discussed in class every time a new assignment is announced. Students have been informed – and by now are aware – that a plagiarism scan is likely to notice the use of ChatGPT and that any unquoted use of the system would be considered as plagiarism. While a comprehensive university-level policy is reportedly forthcoming, the course coordinators, educational management and the Examination Board have been transforming an initial draft policy paper into practical tips for students and staff. The panel was informed that at first (in the previous academic year 2022-2023) the emphasis was on preventing fraud, and that the focus now (in 2023-2024) is on explaining and finding a common way how to use ChatGPT in a constructive way.

In sum, the panel found that there is a clear assessment policy at both course and programme level, which is embedded in the wider setting and provisions of the school and the university. Each programme adopts a good range of assessment methods, which taken together constitute a fair and relevant mixture to test a variety of competences. The panel endorses the programmes' focus on developing writing skills as an important strength for future public administration professionals. It also welcomes the efforts of the course coordinators – and the support and training opportunities offered to staff – to design good quality exams and rubrics. Finally, the panel noticed that there is solid attention among all stakeholders for the threats and opportunities of generative AI.

Thesis assessment

At the previous accreditation visit, the then panel reported that both programmes could enhance their respective thesis assessment. While they had at disposition an adequate thesis evaluation form, it was not used in an optimal way. In fact, many evaluation forms could have contained more extensive feedback, as well as a more insightful justification of the score. In addition, the master programme needed to tighten its assessment procedures to avoid over-grading.

The current panel gathered from the written materials, its own sample review and the discussions on site that both programmes have addressed the above-mentioned concerns swiftly and comprehensively. In case of the bachelor programme, the thesis evaluation form was adjusted and assessors were urged to provide students with informative feedback, as well as a proper justification of their scores on the different assessment criteria. The adjustments made to the thesis trajectory - combining the research proposal and the thesis in one course with seven feedback moments - have contributed to students receiving more and better quality feedback all along the thesis trajectory.

As part of its external review, the panel studied a representative sample of 15 bachelor theses. While the quality of the theses is addressed in the next section on Achieved Learning Outcomes, the panel also looked at the completed evaluation forms. The bachelor thesis evaluation form features nine criteria: five on content and four on form. The content criteria are scored and weighted, while the form criteria contribute to adjusting the final score. The panel was overall very satisfied with the way the bachelor theses had been assessed. This appreciation concerns both the overall scores students obtained for the thesis and the assessors' written feedback on the evaluation form. In fact, the panel members found that each thesis had obtained a score that was in line with what they would have graded. Moreover, almost all forms provided insightful feedback on the thesis criteria and the respective scores. In case students submitted a reworked version of the thesis, the assessors provided relevant feedback that highlighted the improvements compared to the first attempt. As a point for further attention, the panel thinks that the evaluation forms could better show how the two assessors scored the thesis individually, rather than only presenting the final result. Moreover, the panel suggests to include more explicitly in the assessment (form) the degree of creativity and innovativeness of the student's work.

In case of the master programme, thesis assessment occupies an important place in the overall assessment system. Since the previous accreditation visit, particular attention has been paid to the consistency and accuracy of the assessment process. In this regard, several calibration sessions have been held with all staff involved in the thesis trajectory. During these sessions supervisors and second readers were not only informed about the process, but also discussed, reviewed and compared concrete cases of research proposals and master thesis products. Moreover, the Examination Board has asked its Thesis Panel to take up a more active role in monitoring the quality of thesis assessment in terms of justified scores and adequate feedback.

As part of its external review, the panel studied a representative sample of 15 master theses. The evaluation form contains four scored criteria: research question, method, analysis, and conclusion. An additional criterion on language, style and citation is graded with pass/fail, while the result of the thesis defence can adjust the final score. Both assessors fill in a separate form in which they score and provide feedback on each criterion. The final grades are presented in a joint assessment. The panel was overall very satisfied with the way the master theses had been assessed. This appreciation concerns both the overall scores students obtained for the thesis and the assessors' written feedback on the evaluation form. In fact, the panel members found that almost all theses had obtained a score that was in line with what they would have

graded. Moreover, almost all forms provided insightful feedback on the thesis criteria and the respective scores.

In sum, the panel found that the master programme had taken proper steps since the previous accreditation visit to reach a shared understanding of the assessment process. These efforts have also paid off as the current panel found that the theses were not over-graded. Moreover, the feedback is extensive, transparent and reflects that students must have been well supervised. In fact, students could learn a lot from the comments on the form as each criterion received a grade as well as insightful feedback from both assessors.

Assuring assessment quality

The panel was informed that the quality of assessment in the two programmes under review is safeguarded by the TLS Examination Board (EB), which operates at school level. The EB has eleven members. The chair, vice-chair and one member form the Executive Committee and meet every week. The Plenary Committee consists of a lecturer member from each department and two external members from the professional field. The EB also established a Thesis panel and an Assessment Committee, which includes an assessment panel. These bodies are responsible for checking the quality of the assessment through a random sample of course exams and thesis evaluations. It is a deliberate choice of the school to install one EB for all TLS programmes to ensure unity of policy in fraud prevention and quality assurance.

The previous assessment panel expressed concern about the remit of the then Examination Board given the number of programmes and students it had to cater for. It advised the EB to take up a more active position by monitoring systematically the implementation of its measures and by enforcing its recommendations. The current panel noticed that the capacity of the EB was considerably strengthened since the previous accreditation. More time has been allocated to the chair and vice-chair, while the Executive Committee expanded with one lecturer and the Plenary Committee with an additional external member. Moreover, the secretarial support of the EB was increased and TLS assessment specialists are now providing support for the assessment and thesis panels and for the Executive Committee. In September 2023, the EB capacity was further enlarged to anticipate possible cases of fraud connected to the use of large language models in distance exams. The panel also established that the EB is now taking up a more active role in monitoring and enforcement. The EB checks through the Assessment Committee whether quality is delivered in line with the TLS Assessment Policy and advises the Faculty Board on measures to be taken.

The panel gathered from the discussion with the EB that their capacity has effectively increased and that its members have relevant and extensive expertise. The panel acknowledges that a school-wide EB effectively ensures a joint viewpoint on assessment quality assurance and a common implementation of the assessment rules and regulations. Moreover, the members ensure that the composition of the EB is representative for the different TLS programmes, including the BSc and MSc Public Governance. The increased staffing and time allocations allow the EB to dedicate sufficient time to its different tasks and programmes. This capacity has allowed the Public Governance programmes to enhance the quality of their thesis evaluation forms and the consistency in thesis grading. Furthermore, the EB members informed the panel that there are good and short connections between the EB and the programmes, which in turn contributes to ensuring that important developments and recommendations are followed-up and implemented.

Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel considers that assessment is organized in a similar – and exemplary – way in the bachelor and master programmes Public Governance. The assessment provisions are embedded in comprehensive policies and regulations that were developed at

university and school level. The Assessment Programme clearly indicates for both the bachelor and the master programme that there is a connection between the assessment methods, the course learning goals and the intended learning outcomes at programme level. Each programme features a mixture of assessment methods. The course coordinators are trained and supported to develop good quality exams and transparent assessment criteria.

The panel thinks highly of the thesis assessment quality in both programmes. It commends the assessment stakeholders for the way in which they addressed the recommendations of the previous panel and found the results regarding the completed evaluation forms and the level of final scores highly satisfactory. Its own sample review showed that in every case the final score reflected the quality of the thesis and that the feedback by the supervisor and second assessor was transparent and insightful. If anything, the bachelor programme may want to indicate how each assessor scores the thesis (criteria) individually and independently, and include a criterion to assess the student's work on creativity and innovation.

The panel considers that the quality of assessment is an important and recurring issue in the day-to-day implementation of the degree programmes under review. The panel welcomes the increased allocation of staff and time to the Examination Board since the previous accreditation visit, which in turn ensures that the safeguarding of assessment quality is in competent hands with the Examination Board.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that both BSc and MSc Public Governance meet standard 3 of the NVAO-EAPAA framework.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

There are two ways to establish whether the programme learning outcomes have been achieved – through a quality review of the final products and through checking what graduates are doing after they finished the programme. The panel has looked at both elements when assessing the end level qualifications of the bachelor and master programmes.

Thesis quality

The bachelor programme culminates in a bachelor thesis (12 EC). In this final product, which is based on desk research, students apply the public administration knowledge and methodological skills they have acquired during the programme. As part of its external review, the panel studied a sample of 15 bachelor theses submitted in the academic years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. The sample was representative in terms of final scores and included a variety of thesis supervisors. The selection also included a few theses from the English-language track that in the meantime has been discontinued. Overall, the panel found that each thesis fulfilled at least the minimum standards of a final product at academic bachelor level. It also agreed in all cases with the final score given by the assessors: theses with a high score were indeed of better quality than those who received a lower (pass) mark.

Reporting on their thesis sample review, the panel members indicated that the thesis topics were varied and relevant. The theses were well written and often of high quality. The sample demonstrates that students are

well trained in the different stages of the research structure, that they achieve a decent theoretical level, that they know how to link public administration theory to practice, and that they are stimulated to reflect on their findings in a wider environment. The empirical level differed considerably across the sample but was always more than sufficient. As points for attention in the future, the panel advises the bachelor programme / thesis supervisors to monitor that the research question that students use to perform their desk research is sufficiently delineated, and that they stick to studying relevant conceptual/theoretical literature which is connected to the central research question. While the panel understands the rationale for a strict thesis format with standard headings, there should be room for some flexibility and creativity, which in turn will enhance the readability of the final products.

In the master programme, the thesis trajectory (18 EC) consists of a seminar and a thesis. After developing a research proposal in the seminar, students demonstrate their ability to address theoretically and empirically a complex problem in the domain of public governance. As part of its external review, the panel studied a sample of 15 master theses submitted in the academic years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. The sample was representative in terms of final scores. Overall, the panel found that each thesis fulfilled at least the minimum standards of a final product at academic master level. It also agreed in almost all cases with the final score given by the assessors: theses with a high score were indeed of better quality than those who received a lower (pass) mark.

Reporting on their thesis sample review, panel members indicated that the master theses were well written, well-structured and contained a good level of analysis. The thesis topics were relevant. Several theses used a variety of theories and overall demonstrated more depth than the bachelor sample. The theses at the upper end used original research and were of near-publishable quality. Contrary to the previous accreditation panel, the current panel noticed that the varying qualities of the respective theses were properly accounted for in the scores and evaluation forms. Hence, theses from the current sample that obtained a high score were indeed of very good quality. This finding seems to confirm the statement in the self-evaluation report that there is an overall improvement in the theoretical, methodological and empirical level of the master theses.

Performance of graduates

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that both the bachelor and the master programme constitute an adequate preparation for a follow-up study or professional career. Most bachelor graduates pursue a master study in the broad domain of public administration. As mentioned before, a considerable number of TLS graduates decide to continue their studies outside Tilburg. Data provided by the programme shows that those students often choose for a specialist master at Radboud, Erasmus or Leiden University. Some students enter the labour market directly upon graduation and usually find a job in accordance with their educational level within six months.

Students who finish the master programme tend to find a relevant job soon. After a few years they occupy a variety of strategic positions in politics, management, policy and regulation. The panel gathered from the interesting overview of entry-level jobs that most graduates (eventually) work on complex governance challenges and solutions, which confirms that they find employment that is in line not only with the level and orientation, but also with the mission and profile of the MSc Public Governance. Furthermore, the panel was informed that some graduates pursued a second – in this case specialist - master programme, or applied for a PhD position.

During the site visit, the alumni and professional field representatives indicated that recent graduates tend to have more labour market/professional skills than those who graduated years before. Once they enter the

labour market, public governance alumni from TLS tend to have good research, academic and presentation skills and stand out for their writing skills. Asked by the panel what the unique selling proposition is of TLS graduates, several alumni and employers mentioned that public governance graduates from Tilburg have a so-called “political antenna”, a well-developed sense of political and cultural understanding.

Considerations

Based on the written materials, the thesis sample and the discussions on site, the panel considers that Public Governance students who eventually graduate the bachelor and master programmes have effectively achieved all learning outcomes. Based on its sample review, the panel thinks highly of the thesis quality in both programmes. Compared to the thesis review by the previous panel, the master thesis scores are now much more adequate and aligned in all cases with the appreciation of the panel. The panel wants to commend the master programme for this improvement.

Furthermore, the panel considers that upon graduation students find a job that is in line with the objective of their respective programme. In this regard, the panel is convinced that the Public Governance programmes constitute an important lever for the career of their graduates. The competencies acquired by the bachelor graduates allow them to pursue master programmes in Tilburg and elsewhere in the Netherlands. The master programme offers a good quality and comprehensive preparation for professional employment as graduates invariably find a job that is commensurate with their level and the domain of their studies.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that both the BSc and MSc Public Governance meet standard 4 of the NVAO-EAPAA framework.

Standard 5. Diversity

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

Findings

Policy

The panel gathered from the written materials that the bachelor and master programmes comply with the university-wide guidelines and provisions on staff and student diversity. At central level, Tilburg University followed the Gender & Diversity Roadmap 2018-2021, which included pathways to diversify the academic community. While the university reported substantial accomplishments, it also conceded that not all goals had been reached. Hence, a new Strategic Plan 2022-2027 was drafted to continue and expand policies on diversity and inclusion. Moreover, all schools including TLS drafted a Diversity & Inclusion action plan, which contains several concrete actions in the areas of recruitment, selection, promotion and outflow that help increase the number of women in senior positions. According to the panel, these policies and actions support the school and the department in recruiting and promoting (more) female staff.

Student diversity

In the self-evaluation reports, both programmes describe diversity in a number of ways. The bachelor programme is attracting about 60% of male students and 40% of female students. As a Dutch-language programme, it caters for Dutch students: about three quarters of the yearly student intake consists of VWO-students (secondary school with an academic track), while a quarter completed the HBO-propedeuse (first

year of professional bachelor education). Although it was not possible to provide concrete data, the educational management informed the panel that every year the bachelor programme also welcomes first generation students, including from migrant origin, who live in the wider Tilburg region.

The master programme is increasingly attracting female students. Data provided by the programme show that in 2017, there were only 10% female students. In 2022, however, female students constituted for the first time the majority group. Although the programme targets international students, their intake has been rather limited (between 15% and 20%) until now. The programme does manage to attract students from different educational backgrounds and increasingly welcomes students with some years of relevant work experience. Moreover, every year a few Dutch students with a professional bachelor degree enrol after they have passed the pre-master programme. Master students mentioned in their discussion with the panel that they appreciate this variety of educational backgrounds in class.

Furthermore, students indicated that the programmes manage to create a safe and welcoming environment that is inclusive of all forms of diversity. In this regard, the panel acknowledges that programmes live up to one of the principles expressed in the educational philosophy, i.e. that knowledge, skills and character building are given substance in a lively academic community of students and staff. In terms of the diversity in student intake, the panel thinks the Dutch-language bachelor programme is doing well. The master programme intake is diverse in many ways. However, its international orientation and language of instruction should be triggers to attract a more geographically diverse audience.

Staff diversity

The panel noticed that staff diversity is described along different dimensions in the self-evaluation reports. The educational staff constitutes a mixture of male and female, national and international, junior and senior staff. In the bachelor programme about 25% of the educational staff is female, while this is the case for 4 out of 13 staff in the master programme. In both cases, female staff often have the rank of assistant professor. All full professors and associate professors are male. Moreover, there is no staff member of colour or with a migration background in the programme teams.

The panel acknowledges the statement in the self-evaluation report that there is still an undesirable imbalance in the staff when it comes to gender, nationality, rank, and ethnicity. While the programmes have sought to correct this imbalance, and will continue doing so, it reportedly is not entirely in their sphere of influence to do so. According to the panel, the recommendation of the previous accreditation panel – that the master programme should monitor the proportion of female staff – still holds, and can be extended to the bachelor programme, as well.

Eurocentric perspective

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that both programmes are steering away from a predominantly Dutch and/or Eurocentric perspective in their courses. In recent years, teaching staff have been asked to adopt a transnational and comparative perspective in their courses by also using non-Dutch and non-Western cases, and by contextualising and comparing the Dutch/Eurocentric cases that were discussed. The panel welcomes this attention for more comparative, transnational and non-Western perspectives and encourages the programmes to pursue their efforts in this regard.

Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel considers that diversity is on the radar of the programmes, the department, the school and the university. It welcomes the programmes' attention

to a variety of diversity dimensions and their attempt to include this variety in a dynamic and safe academic community of students and staff.

In so far as data are available, the panel considers that there is a good balance in the gender diversity among students in both programmes. Moreover, the master programme is successful in attracting students with a variety of study backgrounds. Given its international profile, the master programme would benefit from more international students.

While some female staff has been recruited in recent years, their number and rank are still lagging behind. The panel therefore repeats – and sharpens – the suggestion of the previous accreditation panel to not only monitor but also actively pursue a better balance in the number and rank of female staff in the department and on the programme. According to the panel, the policies and actions at central university level on recruitment, selection, promotion and outflow of female teaching staff should help implement this advice.

Finally, the panel welcomes the awareness of the staff team and their concrete actions to reduce the Dutch and Eurocentric perspectives in course materials. Acknowledging and applauding the comparative and transnational dimensions in the courses, the panel encourages the staff to also diversify the literature, cases and assignments beyond the Western cultural paradigms.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that both the BSc and MSc Public Governance meet standard 5 of the NVAO-EAPAA framework.

General conclusion NVAO-EAPAA framework

The panel has established that both degree programmes at Tilburg University meet all five NVAO-EAPAA standards under consideration: intended learning outcomes, teaching-learning environment, assessment, achieved learning outcomes and diversity.

As a result, the panel's overall assessment of the quality of the bachelor programme Public Governance is **positive**.

As a result, the panel's overall assessment of the quality of the master programme Public Governance is **positive**.

Development points

Given its overall positive conclusion, the panel does not issue any strong or binding recommendations. However, the materials and discussions have revealed a number of areas where the panel sees room for improvement. It advises the programme management to:

- set up a permanent advisory structure of alumni and professional field representatives;
- enhance the feasibility of the February intake, the internships, the Governance Clinic and the study period abroad;
- communicate and market widely the newly redesigned master programme;
- actively seek a more balanced representation of (senior) female staff on the programmes.

Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

BSc Bestuurskunde (Public Governance)

Knowledge and understanding	Applying knowledge and understanding	Making judgements	Communication	Learning skills
“Graduates of the bachelor’s program have basic knowledge and understanding of...”	“Graduates of the bachelor’s program are able to...”	“Graduates of the bachelor’s program are able to...”	“Graduates of the bachelor’s program are able to...”	“Graduates of the bachelor’s program ...”
<p>K1. theory and practice of the variety of political and administrative systems, in particular the Dutch political and administrative system.</p> <p>K2. theory and practice of agenda setting, policy-making, implementation, and evaluation in the public domain.</p> <p>K3. organizational theory and practice of organizations in the public domain.</p> <p>K4. governance theory and practices in the public domain.</p> <p>K5. the disciplinary foundations of public administration: political science, economics, sociology and, in particular, law.</p> <p>K6. epistemology, research designs, research strategies, and research methods in public administration.</p>	<p>A1. analyse and interpret common policy and organizational problems and issues in the public domain in the light of scientific concepts and theories in the field of public administration.</p> <p>A2. translate knowledge into policy recommendations that are both tenable and realistic.</p> <p>A3. design and conduct basic (desk-)research in the field of public administration, applying observational, interview, and survey methods.</p>	<p>M1. gather and interpret data to inform and make judgements about developments in the field of public administration .</p> <p>M2. critically assess developments in public administration’s societal environment from multiple (scientific and societal) perspectives.</p> <p>M3. critically assess research presented by others in the field of public administration.</p>	<p>C1. argue and communicate effectively and respectfully, in speech and writing, about developments in the field of public administration, with specialist and non-specialist audiences.</p> <p>C2. argue and communicate effectively and respectfully, in speech and writing, about (results of) research in the field of public administration, with specialist and non-specialist audiences.</p>	<p>L1. are able to collect, select and process relevant information quickly and efficiently, demonstrating a high level of responsibility, self-discipline, and initiative.</p> <p>L2. are able to apply the media-, computer- and project management skills that are necessary to undertake further study in the field of public administration with a high degree of autonomy.</p> <p>L3. have the appropriate learning skills and the curiosity to identify field-specific knowledge gaps and to stay up-to-date with developments in the field of public administration.</p>

Component 1: Knowledge and understanding:

A graduate of the master's program has knowledge and understanding of:

theory and practice of the variety of political and administrative systems, including a comparative international perspective
theory and practice of policy processes, such as agenda setting, decision-making, implementation and evaluation
organizational theory and the functioning of organizations in the public domains
governance theory and governance practice
disciplinary foundations of public governance in political theory, organizational studies, sociology and, in particular, in law and economics.

Component 2: Applying Knowledge and understanding

A graduate of the master's program is able to:

analyse and evaluate theory and practice of various international political and administrative systems
analyse and evaluate theory and practice of policy processes, such as agenda setting, decision-making, implementation and evaluation
analyse and evaluate organizational theory and the functioning of organizations in the public domains
analyse and evaluate governance theory and governance practice
analyse and evaluate disciplinary foundations of public governance in political theory, organizational studies, sociology and, in particular, law and economics

Component 3: Making judgments

A graduate of the master's program is able to:

analyse and evaluate epistemology, research designs, research strategies, and research methods within the field of public administration
contribute to intervene in governance challenges, taking into account political, legal and economic perspectives

Component 4: Communication skills

A graduate of the master's program is able to:

execute (applied) policy research independently and to communicate, argue and debate the results of the research both in speech as well as in writing
work together in teams on such (applied) research effectively, organizing and planning the work, and to exercise leadership in such teams

Component 5: Learning skills

A graduate of the master's program:

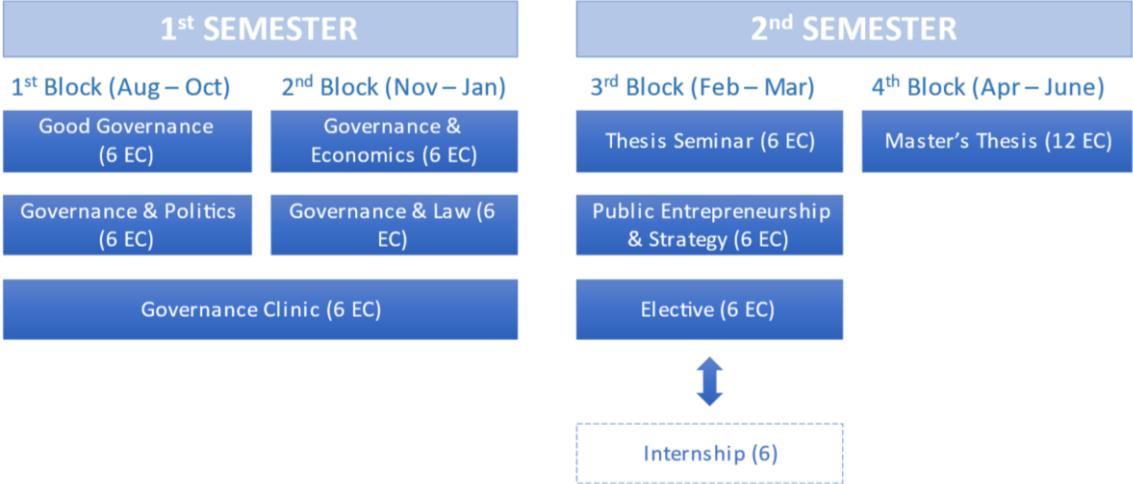
has entrepreneurial and strategic skills and public service ethos
is able to collect, select, and process relevant information on complex issues
demonstrates a high level of responsibility, integrity, self-discipline, adaptiveness and initiative in larger projects

Appendix 2. Programme curricula

BSc Bestuurskunde (Public Governance)

	Course (courses with an asterisk are taught in English)	EC	Semester	Block
First bachelor year	1. Start seminar Public Administration & Government	6	1	1
	2. Sociology	5	1	1
	3. Writing Skills	1	1	1
	4. Information Skills	0	1	1
	5. Constitutional Law	6	1	1 & 2
	6. Dutch Language Test	0	1	1 & 2
	7. Research in Public Administration 1	6	1	2
	8. Political Science*	6	1	2
	9. Public Policy Making	6	2	3
	10. History of Public Institutions	6	2	3
	11. Administrative Law	6	2	3 & 4
	12. Research in Public Administration 2	6	2	4
	13. Introduction to Organization Sciences	6	2	4
Second bachelor year	14. Public Management	6	1	1
	15. Media, ICT and Policy*	6	1	1
	16. Philosophy of Law	6	1	1 & 2
	17. Talent and Career Development	0	1	1 & 2
	18. Local and Regional Governance	6	1	2
	19. Introduction to European Governance*	6	1	2
	20. Market, State and Civil Society	6	2	3
	21. Public Finance	6	2	3 & 4
	22. Legal Protection against Government	6	2	3 & 4
	23. Research in Public Administration 3	6	2	4
	24. Internship Public Administration	6	2	4
Third bachelor year	25. Networks and Institutions in Public Administration	6	1	1
	26. Policy Analysis for Public Administration*	6	1	1
	27. Governance and the Rule of Law	6	1	1 & 2
	28. Consultancy and Policy Advice	6	1 & 2	2 & 3
	29. Philosophy of Administration Studies*	6	2	3 & 4
	30. Supervision, Performance and Accountability	6	2	4
	31. Bachelor's thesis Public Administration	12	1 & 2	2, 3 & 4
	32. Elective courses	12		

MSc Public Governance



Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

Tuesday 28 November 2023

- 15.00 Arrival and welcome
- 15.30 Internal meeting
- 16.00 Interview management
- 17.00 Interview Exam Committee
- 17.45 Interview professional field and alumni
- 18.30 Internal meeting and wrap-up of the day

Wednesday 29 November 2023

- 08.30 Arrival and internal meeting
- 09.00 Interview Bachelor students
- 10.00 Interview Bachelor staff
- 11.00 Interview Master students
- 12.00 Interview Master staff
- 12.45 Lunch and internal meeting
- 14.00 Final interview management
- 14.45 Internal deliberations
- 15.30 Oral feedback
- 16.00 Development dialogue
- 17.00 End of site visit

Appendix 4. Materials

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 theses and their evaluation for each of the two programmes under review. Information on the selected theses is available from Academion upon request.

In the run-up to the site-visit Tilburg University provided a Surfdrive environment with the following materials:

- Self-evaluation report Bachelor Public Governance, September 2023
- Self-evaluation report Master Public Governance, September 2023

Annexes:

- Organizational embedding of the Public Governance programmes
- Roles and responsibilities of the programme management team
- Development in enrolment and completion rates bachelor programme
- Tilburg bachelor programme in the light of domain specific requirements
- Bachelor curriculum
- Learning pathways bachelor 2022-2023
- Intended learning outcomes bachelor
- Courses and assessment methods
- Assessment programme BSc Public Governance
- Assessment programme MSc Public Governance
- Teaching methods
- Overview of allocated lecturing staff (2022-2023)
- Faculty data sheets BSc and MSc Public Governance
- Composition of the teaching team
- Lecturer – student ratio
- Education and Examination Regulations
- Bachelor thesis assessment form
- Student completion rate master programme
- Male-female ratio among master students
- Dutch-international ratio among master students
- Examples of entry-level jobs of master graduates
- TLS Assessment policy
- Annual report Exam Committee 2021-2022
- Minutes of the Programme Committees TLS 2022-2023

On request of the panel, the TLS team provided right after the site visit a note on the change in the MSc Public Governance programme as of September 2024.