

# Report development dialogue

BSc Public Administration and Organization Science (*Bestuurs- en Organisationswetenschap*)

MSc Public Administration (*Bestuurskunde*)

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Friday 1 December 2023

## Attending

*Prof. Andrew Massey – Professor of Government, King’s College London*

*Prof. Ellen Wayenberg - Hoogleraar aan de faculteit Economie en Bedrijfskunde, Ugent*

*Em. Prof. Ernst ten Heuvelhof- Hoogleraar Bestuurskunde, TUDelft*

*Prof. Zoe Radnor - Pro-Vice Chancellor for College of Business and Social Sciences, Aston University*

*Sibel Gokbekir – Student Complex Systems Engineering and Management TUD + International and European Union Law EUR*

*Mark Delmartino – Secretary of the panel*

*Dr. Duco Bannink - Programme Director MSc PA*

*Dr. Christine Teelken - Programme Director BSc PAOS*

*Drs. Boris Slijper - Programme Coordinator MSc PA*

*Dr. Romy van der Lee - Programme Coordinator Bsc PAOS*

*Drs. Thérèse Onderdenwijngaard - Coordinator Mentorate*

*Renée Hartog MSc - Lecturer*

*Loes Wijnen MSc – Minutes*

## Bachelor

### 1.

**Bachelor PAOS (Public Administration and Organisation Science) profile: developments for the near and further future. There is a chance that due to our internal outlining our overall profile becomes less clear. Should we continue and sustain this broadness, perhaps extend it further into a broader social science programme or should we reverse and develop towards more disciplinary focus?**

The panel recommends to look at the wider landscape in the Netherlands, where there are various programmes. Where do you want to position yourself? Make a clear choice. The intake of the programme is good, the students are satisfied, the external board is satisfied, so the panel sees no reason to change.

The programme management asks whether it is a good idea to keep a generic bachelor and the possibility to specialize in the master.

The panel believes that a generic programme with different pathways is recommended. Crosslinks with police and forensics is really popular. In the UK, the more applied programmes do better. The fact that the VU has an academic core of almost 30 EC sets the programme apart already from other programmes.

The panel recommends to focus on what the programmes see as their USP and be aware what society asks. A programme has to be relevant, robust and reflective. What is public administration in today's world? Global orientation as well as very local level are important. Put yourself in the position of the students, to see what they see and what they would like to do.

## 2.

**Mentorate in the bachelor: we are currently providing a mentorship both by students (in the first year) and by lecturers (in the first and second year, voluntary). Should the mentorate be further developed and extended or should we aim for a more limited, perhaps more 'demand-oriented' approach?**

The plans the panel heard to bring in a second year mentorate were well received. Students were enthusiastic about the current mentor programme. It is important to find a balance between first and later years. They do warn that you should not have mentors who do not really want to be a mentor, then you can do more harm than good.

The panel sees most students will not easily approach the pastoral help available, so they need to be taught how to signpost effectively. Mentors can help students learn how to be an adult and to build resilience. Currently, only when students need it they start looking for help. Do they then know who to approach?

The mentorate coordinator notes that engagement of students has gone down since Covid. How do we reach out to them? It would be preferred if mentors of the first year could remain the students' mentor for the years after, but they are not always available for that long a period.

The panel gives examples of how students are monitored in the UK and the US, where their attendance to class, handing in assignments on time and checking Canvas are all registered. If they don't do enough, there are alarm bells ringing and the students will be contacted and might even get dismissed. This is not something the panel would recommend. However, it is important to offer them help. For example, as soon as students get the information on the elective period in year three, someone should step in and ask them: do you have a plan yet? What can we do to help? Be concrete in the follow up.

Finally, the mentorate is not just there for addressing problems, it's also about community building. The panel expects this will play an even bigger role in the future.

## Master

### 3.

**MTBO (Methods course) in the master: we have a bit of trouble to precisely position the Methods course in the curriculum. We need to help students making methodological choices, but we also need to provide some insight in methods that student need to develop an academic understanding of their field and to develop their research questions and methods for their thesis. How tight should the relation between the Methods course and the thesis trajectory be?**

The background of this issue is first discussed. It is presumed in the programme that students have already learned interview techniques etc, but they still need a refresher. There was a 1EC course from sociology before, but that was hard to organize. The thesis and the methods course currently start at the same time. If a substantial amount of the bachelor students would continue in the master, methods would not need to be addressed in the master anymore, but that's not the case. Furthermore, the

students may have done their bachelor a long time ago. However, students who did methods already extensively in their bachelor may be irritated they have to do it again in the master.

Two panel members give examples of how it is done in their programme. In one, methods are done asynchronously. They work with standard materials and they apply it in different scenarios. There are workshops and the basics are taught through an online learning platform. It's focused on a research question or proposal that is graded. In the second, the thesis is 60 out of 180 credits. They start with quantitative and then qualitative methods and students have to pass. They finish it in one term and then continue to writing the thesis. They can't do the thesis unless you finished the methods course. Students find it helpful in their later work too.

The panel's main advice is to approach this issue in a blended, asynchronous way.

#### 4.

**Master's Thesis: starting next academic year, we rescheduled our Master's Thesis from a 24 EC-trajectory (2021-2022; 2022-2023) back into the old situation of an 18 EC-thesis (2020-2021 and before). We did this because the recent change into a 24 EC-thesis (which is the current situation the accreditation committee evaluated) did not lead to a strong increase of nominal graduations, because the Governance of Security-track considered a set of two track-specific courses a bit too tight and to harmonize the original tracks to the new track on AI starting next academic year. We considered a strong point of the programme with a 24 EC thesis that students had the room to get a grip on the field they are studying and build their own research questions (as a PA-practitioner would have to do when, e.g., writing a policy document); we consider a strong point of the programme with an 18 EC thesis that we have more room to develop the understanding of the fields that we discuss in the various tracks. What are the thoughts of the committee with regards to these considerations?**

The panel recommends to extend the period in which the thesis can take place, without expanding the number of credits for it. Give students time, don't put them under pressure. Perhaps start sooner with methods. Put checks in the process, to make sure students do their work in time. Have a mid-thesis review, to let them show what they have been doing so far. Spreading it out can also help spreading the workload for both parttime and fulltime students.