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**Using your discretion: active representation of Dutch government trainees: A qualitative case study of New Professionals and Rijkstrainees**

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# Using your discretion: active representation of Dutch government trainees

*A qualitative case study of New Professionals and Rijkstrainees*



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## Preface

A few months ago, I embarked on this adventure. Without knowing what to expect and with some apprehension about what would come, I began this thesis. During my bachelor's, I became increasingly interested in the necessity of diversity and inclusion to foster the presence of a wide range of perspectives and viewpoints. I often observed that not everyone is born with the same opportunities and possibilities. Opening your own doors is not always easy, especially if you don't know where to find such a door.

Over the past decade, events have unfolded that have painfully exposed and exacerbated inequalities in the Netherlands. Drastic changes are needed to bridge the gap between the government and society, as well as the divide between the privileged and underprivileged. It is essential that the Dutch government accurately reflects society so that people can recognize themselves in policies and find recognition in what is determined for them. Hopefully, this will eventually lead to more unity and understanding.

Writing this thesis has been an incredibly educational process. It also marks the near end of my academic career and student days, a special period in which I have learned a lot academically, professionally, and personally. This project has been a valuable addition to my personal development.

I would like to thank my dear friends and colleagues for their support during the writing of my thesis. Especially Gwendolyn Linders, who helped and encouraged me tremendously during this process.

Additionally, I want to express my gratitude to my parents, sister Puck de Klijne, and partner Enrico de Wild for their unwavering support and motivation throughout my academic career.

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Last but not least, I would like to thank all the trainees who participated in this research for their time, insights, and useful observations.

I wish you a pleasant reading experience.

Fleur de Klijne  
Rotterdam  
January 5, 2023

## Abstract

This thesis investigates the representative bureaucracy theory within the context of the Dutch government. Specifically, it examines how conditions facilitating the translation from passive to active representation may explain potential differences in the degree of active representation of minority groups between New Professionals and Rijkstraineés. To explore this, a qualitative research method was employed, opting for a comparative case study. A total of 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted with trainees from both groups. The findings indicate that the selected factors, namely differences in trainee programs, policy congruence, internal political support, and external political support, have little to no impact on the degree of active representation. However, a difference in the degree of active representation between the two groups was identified. It was revealed that New Professionals more frequently engage in active representation. This difference appears to be primarily associated with distinctions in the approach of the recruitment processes of the programs, rather than with the goals or organizational structure of the programs.

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## 1.0 Introduction

The theory of representative bureaucracy addresses the demographic composition of public organizations to mitigate potential tensions between democracy and bureaucracy, aiming for a representative bureaucracy that ensures legitimacy, effectiveness, and strong implementation capacity (Groeneveld & Van der Walle, 2010, p. 240). Representative bureaucracy can be divided into the phenomena of passive and active representation. Whereas passive representation pertains to the demographic alignment of the bureaucracy with a broader population, active representation is characterized by bureaucrats actively supporting the interests of their constituents, making policy decisions that favor a specific group within the agency's clientele, typically by removing discriminatory barriers (Mosher, 1968; Hinderer, 1993). Research in the field has particularly focused on the active representation of gender and race. Examples include Keiser et al. (2002), who examined active gender representation in the field of education, and Meier et al. (1990), who investigated the active representation of African American street-level bureaucrats.

Historically, representation primarily applied to the ruling class, but as the middle and working classes grew in size and influence, a shift in thinking occurred, recognizing that traditional upper-class management hindered bureaucratic effectiveness (Groeneveld & Van der Walle, 2010, p. 244). To have a legitimate and well-functioning bureaucracy, public organizations should mirror the diversity in society. The increasing diversity in society, driven by immigration and a higher proportion of women in the workforce, has fueled the motivation for a representative bureaucracy grounded in morality, legitimacy, performance, effectiveness, and efficiency (Groeneveld & Van der Walle, 2010, p. 248, p. 252, p. 254). In the Dutch context, it is essential for bureaucracy to mirror the composition of society, given the decreased trust in government (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2023), and because citizens have been increasingly burdened with responsibilities (Wagemans & Peters, 2023, p. 50). The degree of

representation may be called into question when the policy vision significantly deviates from the perspective of citizens. Experiencing less influence on governmental actions can cast doubt on the level of representation, potentially impacting democratic legitimacy (Wagemans & Peters, 2023, p. 50).

In general, the desire for a more diverse organization is rooted in cultural, social, and ethnic diversity, aiming for a better reflection of the labor force. This includes promoting awareness by addressing unconscious biases in recruitment, evaluation, and career progression, and fostering a more diverse staff to align with strategic goals and address societal issues (Çelik, 2021, p. 353). Policy instruments for equal opportunities, such as quotas, recruitment targets, diversity training, networking, mentorship programs, and affirmative action, can be employed to achieve representation (Groeneveld & Van der Walle, 2010, p. 253). Affirmative action involves the proactive allocation of resources to prevent discrimination based on gender or ethnic background (Burstein, 1995). It utilizes methods not only to discourage but also to actively prevent discrimination (Crosby & Cordova, 1996). While affirmative action is proactive, "equal opportunity" is a passive policy focused on ensuring that discrimination is not tolerated once detected (Crosby et al., 2006, p. 586). Currently, the Dutch government emphasizes the inflow and progression of diverse talent, retaining employees with non-Western migration backgrounds, and raising awareness and preventing biases (Rijksoverheid, n.d.). Furthermore, other initiatives include training for inclusive recruitment and selection, improving the recruitment and selection process, offering personnel development training, conducting research on the effectiveness of diversity interventions, and raising awareness through initiatives such as 'Diversity Week' (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2023b, p. 21). However, achieving diversity goals remains challenging due to intertwining interventions impeding the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion policies,



where a mere increase in diversity does not automatically lead to greater inclusivity (Çelik, 2021, 353).

Social and political changes led to the emergence of an "equal opportunities approach" regarding representative bureaucracy. Recognizing that the government is not a legitimate organization when certain groups are overrepresented, the Dutch government has implemented several instruments (Algemene Bestuursdienst, 2019). Examining the policy instruments mentioned by Groeneveld and Van der Walle (2010, p. 253), an example of an instrument of affirmative action can be found at the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sports (HWS), who started the New Professionals Program (NPP) two years ago. The program has ensured the presence of a *streetwise* public official. The Ministry of HWS' goal by implementing the NPP program is to achieve a better match between policy and implementation. Deviating from the classic recruitment and guidance process, individuals differing from the conventional image of government trainees are entering the Ministry. Candidates must have completed a bachelor's or master's degree at applied sciences or university level, and recruitment is furthermore focused on who the candidate is and what their values and experiences are. The interviews revolve around self-reflection, personal development, and the individual, rather than previous work experience or academic background.

According to deputy secretary general at HWS Abigail Norville, the *streetwise* civil servant does not meet the classic admission criteria but contributes to 'bridging the gap between society and government' (Toe Laer, 2023). An important factor in the case of the NPP program, is that candidates are recruited through referral, in contrast to classic civil servants who enter through programs such as the Rijkstraineeprogram, a popular traineeship that has strict admission criteria and high competition. In 2016, two thousand candidates entered the application process for 135 jobs at ministries and parliament (Van der Schrier, 2016). According to Marieke Jansen, division manager at HWS, the difference between the two

programs is rooted in the premise of recruitment approach: "The starting point within this program is fundamentally different. Instead of seeking a suitable candidate for a position, you look for a position for a suitable candidate. After our introductory conversation with (...) the NPP candidate recommended to us, we quickly found a match. [...] We receive people with genuinely different, valuable knowledge, and experience. [...] Without the program, we would not have found these people... and they would not have found us either" (Van Rooij, 2023).

Passive representation does not directly imply the existence of active representation. Researchers have identified several factors that can contribute to this translation in a government context (Keiser et al., 2002; Yun, 2020; Sowa and Selden, 2003; Henderson, 1979). This thesis will adopt conditions from frameworks that were developed by Keiser et al., (2002), and Yun (2020) namely policy congruence, internal political support, and external political support. Furthermore, the influence of the trainee program on the degree of active representation of minority groups will be studied. These conditions have not been applied in research in the context of Dutch civil servants or trainees before.

Furthermore, according to Bishu and Kennedy (2020), within the framework of the representative bureaucracy theory, certain characteristics such as disabilities, age, LGBT status, religion, and country of origin have both been understudied and not studied at all (p. 580). Furthermore, the authors argue that the lack of studies addressing intersectional identities, diverse geographic and policy contexts, and utilizing qualitative methods hinders the comprehension of the connection between passive and active representation (Bishu and Kennedy, 2020, p. 1) Therefore, this thesis focuses on researching the degree of active representation of minority groups, with a focus on ethnic, cultural, and religious characteristics, gender and sexuality, and (physical) disabilities and neurodivergence. Whereas previous research has focused on specific minority groups, this qualitative study uses the self-identification of the trainees' minority group to explore possible engagement in active

representation. Furthermore, due to a lack of the utilization of qualitative methods in the field of representative bureaucracy, this thesis employs a qualitative research method, conducting interviews to gain qualitative insights on the influence of these conditions on active representation of minority groups by trainees.

Given the necessity of a representative bureaucracy for the aforementioned reasons, this research can contribute to determining the extent to which the new recruitment strategy adds value to achieving a representative government. Additionally, this study may offer fresh insights into how, or to what extent, trainees engage in active representation. Potential barriers to active representation can also be identified, and it is useful to explore whether the factors identified in the context of bureaucracies abroad are applicable in the Dutch context.

### **1.1 Problem statement and research question**

To gain a deeper understanding of the extent to which the trainee program, discretion, policy congruence, internal political support, and external political support influence a potential difference in the level of active representation of minority groups between the New Professionals Program and the Rijkstraineeship, a research question has been formulated to address this thesis: *To what extent and how does the trainee program influence the degree of active representation?*

### **1.2 Guide for reading this thesis**

This thesis consists of a total of five chapters. Following the introduction in chapter one, a theoretical framework is presented in chapter two, in which the theory of representative bureaucracy is expanded upon. The trainee programs will be introduced and linked to the theory of representative bureaucracy. Afterwards, the conditions that can aid in the translation from passive to active representation are introduced, followed by the expectations for this research and a conceptual framework that will be used in this research. Chapter three is focused on the research methods and the conceptualization of the variables. After that, the results are shared in

chapter four by presenting the findings that resulted from the interviews. These will then be analyzed in the light of the theory. Finally, this thesis concludes with a conclusion, discussion, and policy implications in chapter five. Two appendixes have been added to this document. Appendix I includes the interview guide that was used, and Appendix II contains an example of a group code network that was employed to code the qualitative data deriving from the interviews.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

In this theoretical framework, the representative bureaucracy theory is introduced. The two trainee programs and their recruitment methods are explained and linked to the representative bureaucracy theory. Subsequently, attention will be given to the conditions that, according to Keiser et al. (2002), Yun (2020), and Henderson (1979, 1988), can facilitate the transition from passive to active representation. Two of these conditions are deemed "necessary conditions" by Keiser et al. (2002), namely *discretion* and *policy salience*. Without the presence of these conditions, active representation cannot occur. However, these factors alone are not sufficient; the transfer from passive to active representation is influenced by other institutional and contextual factors (Keiser et al., 2002, p. 557). Keiser et al. (2002), Yun (2020), and Henderson (1979, 1989) identified the presence of a *critical mass* or *internal political support*, and the presence of *external political support* to affect this transfer. This study examines the trainee programs, policy salience, critical mass/internal political support, and external political support, as these are the factors that are expected to explain why there is a possible difference in active representation between the two trainee programs.

Other conditions identified by Keiser et al. (2002) include the organization's mission, hierarchy, stratification, and professionalization. These factors are also mentioned by other authors (Sowa & Selden 2003; Gool 2008; Riccucci & Van Ryzin 2016; Louwerse & Andeweg 2020; Andersen 2017). Although not used in this research, these conditions are relevant for

discussion due to their significance to the representative bureaucracy theory and will be covered less extensively. Furthermore, this chapter ends with a conceptual framework.

## **2.1 Dependent variable**

*Representative bureaucracy* is based on the notion that diversity in the public workforce will help ensure the representation of interests from diverse groups in policy formulation and implementation processes (Bradbury & Kellough, 2007). The theory suggests that bureaucrats' demographic characteristics affect their attitudes and that these attitudes make them implement policies in ways that are favorable to clients who share their demographic background (Andersen, 2017, p. 410-411). The demographic composition of employees at public organizations contribute to “mediating tensions between democracy and bureaucracy”, contributing to legitimacy, implementation capacity, and effectiveness (Groeneveld & Van de Walle, 2010, 240).

Mosher (1968) branched the concept into *passive* and *active* representation. Passive representation covers the degree to which the background of civil servants reflects the population and is used to gain legitimacy of a government from society (Yun, 2020, 149). Active representation implies the active use of one's position as civil servant for promoting the interests of and make administrative choices that support their social group (Groeneveld & Van de Walle, 2010, Yun, 2020, 134).

When a bureaucrat engages in active representation, they “press for the interests and desires of those whom he is presumed to represent, whether they be the whole people or some segment of the people” (Mosher, 1968, 11). Though active representation is predominantly seen as the degree to which a bureaucrat seeks to advance the interests of the group they share a demographic background with, Mosher's definition does not include the link between the bureaucrat's demographic background and the group they seek to actively represent, whilst this is the case in further empirical research by other scholars (Andersen, 2017, 402). Active

representation is often found in institutions who do not primarily focus on minority issues, and where low percentages of minority groups have been employed (Selden 1997). Active representation can occur through making beneficial decisions for the clients belonging to a social group, engaging in changing organizational policies to ameliorate the position of clients, through the transmission of representative bureaucrats' behavior towards non representative bureaucrats (Meier & Xu, 2023, p. 891), and the other way around (Yun, 2020). In this research, an example of active representation could be, but is not limited to, the initiation of policy proposals, advocating for minority groups in communication, organizing activities that create awareness surrounding topics that are salient for the minority group, advancement of inclusive strategies in for example recruitment, creating awareness of inequalities or disparities towards colleagues, and addressing blind spots.

## **2.2 Representative bureaucracy theory and minority groups**

Research on representative bureaucracy theory has primarily concentrated on active representation in terms of gender and race, exemplified by studies such as Keiser et al. (2002) and Meier and Stewart (1991). This study, however, adopts a unique approach by allowing participants to self-identify with their respective minority groups. The definition of minority groups encompasses differences in ethnic, cultural, religious, sexual, or gender identity, physical disabilities, or neurodivergence, drawing from various academic definitions. Because a broad definition that is applicable in this research could not be found, this definition comprises elements from multiple academic definitions, for example the definition of ethnic minorities by Isik et al. (2018, p.2) (“an ethnically defined group that is significantly smaller than a dominant other ethnically defined group within the population”), the definition of sexual minorities by Cochat Costa Rodrigues and Queirós (2017, p. 1) (“a variety of gender and sexual identities and expressions that differ from cultural norms. Usually, sexual minorities are comprised of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals”) is adopted. Furthermore, Wertlieb's (1985,

p. 1085) analysis of disability as minority status (disabled persons possess essential elements necessary for minority group status but differ from other groups in that they have nonparticipation, prejudice and discrimination camouflaged by an air of protectiveness, and more.) was used to formulate a broad definition.

In the Netherlands, discourse often centers around individuals with *migration backgrounds*, constituting over 25% of the population as of 2023 (CSB, 2023). Categorization into Western or non-Western migration backgrounds has become challenging due to the country's migration history. Non-Western migration backgrounds are defined as individuals born outside of Europe or having at least one parent born outside of Europe. In 2021, 14.1% of the Dutch population had a non-Western migration background, nearly half of whom were born in the Netherlands and belonged to the second generation of migrants (Pharos, n.d.). The proportion of employees in the Dutch government with a non-Western migration background is 13.8%, exhibiting substantial variations among ministries (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2023a, p. 120). For instance, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment has 31.7% of its staff with a non-Western migration background, while the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality has only 9.6% (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2023a, p. 120). Additionally, an observation reveals a concentration of employees with a non-Western migration background in the lower salary scales (scale 1-4) at 30.2%, with a minimal representation (2.1%) in the highest scales (17+) (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2023a, p. 120). Nevertheless, there has been an upward trend since 2018, with an increase of 2.9% in individuals with a non-Western migration background occupying positions in scales 10-13 and a 1.3% increase in scales 14-16 (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2023a, p. 120). This shows that the proportion of employees with a non-Western migration background comes close to the national proportion however, the representation of this group is low in higher scales.

While *women* don't numerically constitute a minority, gender inequality issues persist in the Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2023; Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2023). Despite an almost equal distribution between men and women at Rijksoverheid women continue to lag behind in both higher salary scales (scale 14-16: 37.3%, scale 17+: 37%) and lower salary scales (scale 1-4: 42.9%) (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2023a, p. 9). Efforts to address gender representation include inclusive recruitment and selection processes, aiming for more gender diversity in leadership roles.

Regarding the *LGBTIQA+ community*, approximately 4%-7% of the Dutch population falls within this category (Kuyper, 2018, p. 43). Though public opinion is positive, research indicates that living conditions for this group lag behind, and the representative bureaucracy theory suggests its potential to address inequalities (Kuyper, 2018, p. 43; Hooker, 2002).

*Religious groups* constitute a minority in Dutch society, with 43% still belonging to a religious denomination or philosophical group in 2022 (Schmeets & Houben, 2023). It is unknown how many individuals identifying with a religion are employed by the Rijksoverheid. Muslims experience discrimination more frequently than Christians and non-believers (69%, 32%, 37%, respectively) (Andriessen et al., 2020, p. 161), and there has been a significant surge in reported incidents of anti-Semitism (Heijs, 2023). No representative research has been found within the framework of the representative bureaucracy theory applied to the context of religion.

*Individuals with disabilities* encounter biases, discrimination, and limited accessibility (Schoorman & Visserman, 2023, p. 12). In total, 2 million Dutch citizens have a disability, including those with visual or hearing impairments, or mental, physical, or intellectual disabilities (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2016). The Rijksoverheid has set a goal of creating 1500 jobs for individuals with work disabilities, but the current status remains unknown (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2023a, p. 51). Individuals with disabilities more frequently experience unequal treatment and are subject to



negative attitudes compared to those without disabilities (Andriessen et al., 2020, p. 187). Moreover, they encounter more limited accessibility, leading to both practical and social impediments (Vermeij & Hamelink, 2021, p. 6). Notably, there's a lack of research exploring disabilities, conditions, and neurodivergence within the representative bureaucracy theory framework.

### **2.3 Representative bureaucracy theory and recruitment**

Concerning the policy instrument "affirmative action," the introduction of the New Professionals Program has been a strategy to enhance passive representation. In the following paragraphs, the New Professionals Program and Rijkstraineeprogram are introduced, highlighting how they align with the government's aim to achieve a representative bureaucracy.

#### *New Professionals Program*

The program's objective is to bridge the gap between society and the government, with trainees tasked to 'make an impact' (Toe Laer, 2023). The program lasts for a year, during which candidates work in a specific department without rotation. Candidates should have completed applied sciences (hbo) or university (wo), with emphasis placed on their values, life experiences, self-reflection, and personal development (Van Rooij, 2023). The recruitment of "streetwise" civil servants aims to improve diversity and inclusion, leading to a change in administrative culture by recruiting individuals with different perspectives on government-related issues (Rijksoverheid, 2023). Candidates are recruited through referral recruitment, where individuals are approached through personal connections. Additionally, a candidate may be contacted based on a previous application that led to rejection due to a lack of policy experience (Van Rooij, 2023). No assessments are conducted during this procedure. The second cohort of the program commenced in April 2023, consisting of 35 participants.

Co-founder and Deputy Secretary-General Abigail Norville indicates the search for individuals familiar with the government's shortcomings, as these insights contribute valuable

perspectives (Toe Laer, 2023). Notably, the New Professionals Program is not included in the Rijksoverheid Business Operations report, unlike the Rijkstraineeship. Limited information is available on the program's structure or post-program progression, except that only one candidate did not progress after the first cohort (van Rooij, 2023).

The program aligns with the representative bureaucracy theory as it involves affirmative action in recruitment, increasing passive representation. The program's goal ('making an impact' and 'bridging the gap between society and the government') can be linked to a potential transition to active representation. The program aims to better represent and reach previously underrepresented groups, contributing to the long-term goal of fostering a new administrative culture (Toe Laer, 2023).

#### *The Rijkstraineeprogram*

The program has been in operation for 25 years and is highly popular. In 2022, 163 candidates commenced the program (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2023a, p. 19). Rijkstrainees are recruited to work as "broadly deployable employees at the Rijksoverheid" [Central Government]. The program spans two years, during which trainees rotate through a maximum of four different departments. Admission requirements for the program differ from those of the New Professionals Program: candidates must hold a master's degree and must have graduated within the past two years. However, since this year, candidates with a bachelor's degree also have the opportunity to participate in the Rijkstraineeship, under the name "Rijks-hbo-trainee program." The recruitment process is focused on "the talents of candidates, regardless of gender or (cultural) background," to achieve a "broad and diverse group of Rijkstrainees." In 2022, a framework agreement was executed, with diversity and inclusion as award criteria, adjusting the selection procedure of the Rijkstraineeship (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2023a, p. 95). According to Abigail Norville, achieving a group of diverse participants has not been successful for the Rijkstraineeship, as

there is a focus on maximizing responses, which is not conducive to diversity and inclusion (Toe Laer, 2023). Because the admission criteria of the Rijkstraineeship are more specific than those of the New Professionals Program, it appears that fewer diverse individuals apply, as they may not always meet these criteria. Additionally, multiple assessments during the application process contribute to this difference. This highlights a clear distinction between the two programs. The approach differs, as the New Professionals Program serves as an affirmative action instrument, while the Rijkstraineeship places greater emphasis on equal opportunity in terms of recruitment. The connection of the Rijkstraineeship to the representative bureaucracy theory lies in its recruitment focus on acquiring diverse candidates. However, there is no affirmative action involved, as the admission criteria and procedures may exclude diverse talent.

#### **2.4 Necessary conditions for active representation**

*Discretion.* Bureaucrats need discretion in decision or policy making. Discretion is referred to by Gool (2008) as the ability to make decisions based on what one sees as fit. The use of a bureaucrat's discretion is inevitable, as superiors are unable to practically clarify what exactly is expected from the bureaucrat. These communication and control issues result in extensive freedom of action at large bureaucratic organizations (Gool, 2008, p. 4). In this research, it is therefore assumed that all participants have discretion in the administrative context they operate in. Therefore, since it is expected that all participants have discretion, this condition is not used in the conceptual framework, as it will not be able to explain a possible difference in active representation between the two trainee programs.

Sowa and Selden (2003) found that there is a positive relationship between administrative discretion and policy outcomes; the more discretion a bureaucrat considers themselves to possess, the higher the chance that they will produce policy outcomes that benefit minority interests. The bureaucrat can be operating at any level within the bureaucracy, but

must possess discretion to act on values they have (Ricucci & Van Ryzin 2016, p. 24). When this discretion is connected to a social group and purpose, it is likely that bureaucrats will engage in active representation, benefitting the citizens they represent (Ricucci & Van Ryzin 2016, 24). Andersen (2017, p. 411) agrees with the linking mechanism between passive and active representation being found in discretion, which can be connected to Sowa and Selden's (2003) results. They found that the correlation between administrative discretion and policy outcomes suggests that greater perceived discretion among bureaucrats increases the chances of generating outcomes favorable to minority interests. Alternatively, when administrators perceive limited discretion, they tend to avoid risks and refrain from making decisions aligned with their personal values and beliefs, thereby not actively representing minority interests. When bureaucrats do not consider themselves to possess discretion, they will not engage in active representation of minority interests, as they will be discouraged to base decisions on personal beliefs and values (Sowa & Selden 2003, p. 706). However, Yun (2020) states that minority leaders and bureaucrats who lack discretion can encourage other bureaucrats with discretion to actively represent. This "contagion effect" states that bureaucrats alter their attitude due to contact with representative bureaucrats, which leads to diminished stereotypes and increased transactions of ideas (Groeneveld & Meier, 2022).

*Policy congruence* refers to the match between a policy and its degree of support from the group it is meant to serve. There is policy congruence when the majority of the target group is supportive of a policy. Congruent policy preferences occur when citizens and representatives have a similar view towards an issue or share the same ideology (Louwerse & Andeweg 2020, 277). The match between a bureaucrat and the client group influences the likelihood that decisions will be in line in support of the group. Policy congruence is needed for active representation and becomes more likely when enacted policies are attractive to the group represented; the bureaucrat has to be professionally engaged with a policy domain that can

ameliorate the position of and benefit the interests of the group they are representing (Ricucci & Van Ryzin 2016, 24, Gool 2008 348). Meier (1993) and Selden (1997) found that representative bureaucracy is only possible when the issue is salient for a group. An example of policy salience is policy that is related to a demographic characteristic such as gender. Policy salience occurs when there is policy congruence with topics that are salient to the represented group. While all policy can become congruent, not all congruent policy is salient.

This factor is incorporated into the current study for several reasons. There is an expectation that this factor may explain a potential difference in the level of active representation of minority groups between the two groups. First and foremost, it is anticipated that New Professionals are more likely to encounter policy congruence and/or salience, given that recruitment is based on life experiences, and the starting point is "fundamentally different [from] seeking a suitable candidate for a position; instead, you are seeking a position for a suitable candidate" (Van Rooij, 2023). As a result, there is an expectation that New Professionals are more frequently matched to a role that aligns with their minority group in society, leading to a higher occurrence of policy congruence and/or salience compared to Rijkstrainees. An example of policy congruence in this study could be receiving a set of tasks aimed at improving outreach to hard-to-reach groups that, due to a language barrier, are not being reached effectively by the government. When the trainee belongs to a minority group of which members are poorly accessible due to language barriers, policy congruence is present.

**Expectation 1:** New Professionals more frequently encounter policy congruence in their work due to the difference in the starting point of the recruitment method and the expected match of life experiences they bring with the job they are assigned to, hence exhibiting a higher level of active representation.

## **2.5 Influential institutional and contextual conditions**

*Internal political support.* Yun (2020) states that engaging in active representation requires the loss of organizational rewards: individuals are worried about personal loss as a result of penalties from the organization and other colleagues. Political internal support and external support reduces the cost of representation and is obtained through interactions with other bureaucrats who support active representation efforts (Yun, 2020, p. 146). Internal political support implies that other bureaucrats from minority groups will protect their “in-group colleagues” who are active representatives, from the loss of organizational rewards (Yun, 2020, p. 148).

Bureaucrats are more likely to engage in representation when there is internal political support, also known as a “critical mass” of colleagues who share a represented identity, linking behavior at the individual level to the bureaucracy and recognizing the interaction between the individual and the organization in the formation of behaviors (Meier & Xu, 2022, p. 888). Multiple studies show that minority bureaucrats need to compose an adequate percentage of the organization’s workforce to be able to engage in active representation, and the size of the critical mass is dependent on the characteristics of the organization (Keiser et al., 2002; Meier, 1993; F. J. Thompson, 1976; Kanter, 1977).

When critical mass is not present at a public organization, the minority group will not be able to generate policies that will benefit their social group due to suppression of the dominant group (Yun, 2020, p. 135). Numbers of critical mass must be sufficient in order to get these topics of the agenda and express support for development (Meier & Xu, 2021, p. 894). Multiple studies show that minority bureaucrats must compose a sufficient percentage of the organization’s workforce for active representation to be possible, and critical mass is essential in producing policy outputs because of suppression of a “dominant group” or organizational mass (Yun, 2020, p. 135). Meier (1993) found that critical mass at public organizations must

be 16%-26% of the total workforce. When a certain decision is not included in the regular proceedings or could result in consequences that are deemed as negative by an organization, bureaucrats can face risks when engaging in active representation (Meier and Xu, 2021, 891). Not all choices concerning the client group will fall in the typical range of a bureaucrat's decision, which can lead to potential collective influence of fellow bureaucrats. When this occurs, the presence of critical mass can become significant for an individual bureaucrat, as a group of bureaucrats making akin decisions can communicate them that the organization either accepts such departures from the norm, or that they are able to count on support from colleagues in the case of repercussions following the decision (Meier & Xu, 2021, p. 891). This can also occur within groups of bureaucrats whereby colleagues will protect bureaucrats in lower positions who engage in active representation to minimize the loss of organizational rewards (Yun, 2020, p. 148). However, when the individual's discretion zone includes the decision they want to make, there is no critical mass necessary (Meier & Xu, 2021, p. 891).

This factor is incorporated into the current study for several reasons. There is an expectation that this factor may explain a potential difference in the level of active representation of minority groups between the two groups. This expectation arises from the program's objectives, which is anticipated to include a higher proportion of New Professionals belonging to a minority group and engaging in more interactions with colleagues from similar (minority) backgrounds. Additionally, due to the program's overarching goal of "making impact," it is expected that colleagues will be more supportive of active representation efforts by trainees for their respective minority groups. Because of a potential higher degree of internal political support, there is a potential higher degree of active representation for New Professionals. In the context of this research, internal political support could manifest in colleagues endorsing initiatives related to the active representation of a minority group within the ministry, such as a religious minority. A concrete example could involve a trainee

advocating for increased awareness of religious holidays, with colleagues supporting this initiative and thereby alleviating concerns about the potential loss of organizational rewards.

**Expectation 2:** Due to the objective and goal of the program, New Professionals experience a higher degree of internal political support and will therefore exhibit a higher degree of active representation.

*External political support* refers to the presence of a leader at an organization who belongs to a minority group, or a leader who supports the minority group and shares the same values. Henderson (1979) states that expected norms of behavior in organizations can lead to discouragement of bureaucrats to represent minority interests. A minority leader could reduce the loss of organizational rewards to bureaucrats who engage in active representation (Yun, 2020, p. 148). This individual shares the same values or origins (Henderson, 1979), and might either overtly or covertly aid minority bureaucrats in active representation by relieving them from compliance with rules in the organization and support policy proposals or decisions that are beneficial to a group (Yun, 2020, p.135).

According to Henderson (1988), representatives from minority groups have the capacity to engage in the political struggles required to implement policies that promote the interests of minority communities, and they can also offer support and protection to administrators who have become outspoken proponents of these policies. Dolan (2000, p. 525) found that men and women show more female-friendly attitudes when there is a higher number of women in top federal administrative positions, leading to more gender sensitive public policy. Women in leadership positions face lower risks in improving the status of other women in the workplace due to their hierarchical position, whilst bureaucrats in lower positions might conform to “the bureaucratic ethic of neutrality” (Dolan, 2000, p. 513). These findings demonstrate that minority leaders have the opportunity to engage in supporting active representatives in lower



ranks due to a lower risk of losing organizational rewards. In turn, they are removing the risks of losing organizational rewards for lower ranked bureaucrats.

This factor is included in the current study for several reasons. There is an expectation that this factor may explain a potential difference in the level of active representation of minority groups between the two groups. It is anticipated that New Professionals may experience a higher degree of external political support due to the program's objectives and will therefore show a higher degree of active representation. The trainees are recruited with the goal of instigating a transformation in the organizational culture and bringing their life experiences to provide novel perspectives within the ministry. Consequently, there is an expectation that individuals in leadership positions will endorse their perspectives and, by extension, support initiatives, recognizing the necessity of incorporating these new perspectives. Furthermore, there is an expectation that the presence of individuals like Abigail Norville, who play a significant role in both the New Professionals program and the upper echelons of the ministry, could potentially eliminate, or mitigate any risks associated with the loss of organizational rewards for lower-ranked bureaucrats. This aligns with findings from Dolan's study (2000) concerning gender, illustrating how individuals in leadership positions can diminish the risks of organizational repercussions for subordinates.

**Expectation 3:** Due to the long-term goal of the New Professionals Program, and mitigated risks of losing organizational rewards from individuals in higher echelons of the ministry, New Professionals experience a higher degree of external political support and will therefore exhibit a higher degree of active representation.

## **2.6 Other institutional and contextual factors**

*The mission* of an organization can contribute to the translation from passive into active representation. Both minority and non-minority bureaucrats are able to incorporate goals into the organization when an organization's mission includes the assistance of a certain group

(Keiser et al., 2002, p. 775). For bureaucrats who are not from the group that is to be assisted, it is necessary that they adopt an advocacy role. For bureaucrats who share the demographic characteristics, it is easier to incorporate goals into the organization due to the “common demographic predisposition” considering the goals set in the mission (Keiser et al., 2002, p. 775). Furthermore, there is a higher degree of active representation automatically, as there is a higher degree of passive representation in organizations with an “advocacy mission”. This might occur, but will not be as prevalent, in organizations that do not have an advocacy mission (Keiser et al., 2002, p. 775). In the current study, this factor is not considered. Despite variations in missions across the two trainee programs, trainees operate within a ministry that possesses its own mission, and the Rijksoverheid, which also maintains its distinct mission. Moreover, the government is obligated to maintain neutrality in disseminating a mission, and none of the missions explicitly address the concerns of a minority group. Therefore, it is anticipated that this factor cannot account for any potential difference in active representation between the two trainee programs.

*Hierarchy.* In general, *hierarchy* implies centralization of coordination and control powers in an organized and layered structure. Superiors have managerial power, which is strengthened to direct actions and shape organizational strategies. In public organizations, this structure enables departments and individuals to be assigned specific tasks and responsibilities where they can be held accountable by superiors on the basis of set goals, assessment of outcomes and performance evaluation (de Boer, Enders & Leisyte, 2007; Bonaccorsi & Daraio, 2007). According to Keiser et al. (2002), hierarchy at an organization can weaken the link between passive and active representation because of depersonalization of relationships. They found that representation in terms of gender worked better when there is low hierarchy in an organization (Keiser et al., 2002, p. 562). In order to increase active representation for gender,

the structure of the organization, passive representation in general, and representation at the top of the hierarchy are important (Keiser et al., 2002, 563).

*Stratification* is used as an institutional variable in Keiser et al. (2002) and is studied together with hierarchy. Earlier, the distribution of stratification of individuals within the bureaucracy had been studied in terms of passive representation (Sigelman & Karnig, 1976; Riccucci, 1987). Consequently, several measures of stratification have been proposed to assess the extent to which women and people of color are dispersed across the upper echelons of the organization (Riccucci & Saidel, 1997, p. 424). Lewis (1988) has stated that these ratios are not indicators of representative bureaucracy, but instruments to measure the degree of integration of minorities in bureaucracies. Nonetheless, Keiser et al. (2002) found that in schools with more administrators that are women, higher ACT, SAT and advanced placement rates for girls could be found (p. 562). Stratification, like hierarchy, are both mentioned to be possible institutional barriers that are creating glass ceilings for women (Keiser et al, 2002, p. 563).

The factors of stratification and hierarchy are excluded from consideration in this study for practical reasons. Given that the current investigation focuses on the active representation of "minority interests," it is practically unfeasible to examine the presence or distribution of individuals within the organization belonging to a minority group. However, in cases where gender and classifications such as race are binary categories, such an examination is possible. In the present study, it is not applicable. Furthermore, it is anticipated that this factor cannot account for any potential difference in active representation between the two trainee programs.

*Professionalization.* Keiser et al. (2002) state that professionalization influences bureaucratic output because of the incorporation of a bureaucrat's goals and values into the organization. When bureaucrats who perceive advocating for a group as their main role dominate an organization, one can expect that the outputs will be distributed to benefit that group (Keiser et al., 2002, 557). In the present study, this factor is not considered as the trainees

have not been employed by the government for an extended period. Consequently, it is not anticipated that there has been a permeation of personal goals and values from the trainees to the organization already. The professionalization undergone by the trainees thus far is primarily shaped through a personal development program and an internal training program encompassing sessions on work processes and job-related skills (Rijksoverheid, n.d.). Therefore, it is anticipated that this factor cannot account for any potential difference in active representation between the two trainee programs.

## 2.7 Conceptual framework

In response to the discussed representative bureaucracy theory, a conceptual model (Figure 1) has been developed, encompassing factors that could explain a potential difference in the level of active representation between the two groups. The model indicates an expectation that the chosen independent variables will influence the degree of active representation of minority groups by trainees within the Dutch government. The selected independent variables include the trainee programs, policy congruence, internal political support, and external political support.

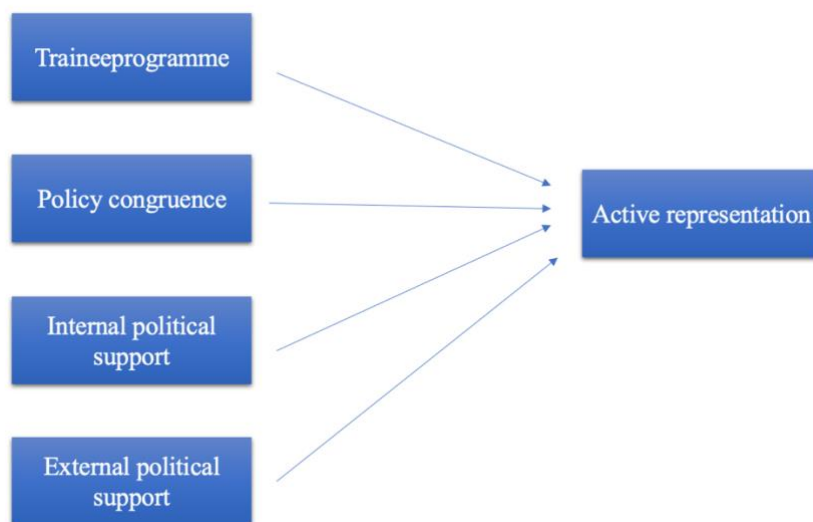


Figure 1.

### **3.0 Methods**

The third chapter of this thesis will delve into the methodology employed in this study. First, the methods utilized for data collection are explored. Following that, the participants involved in this research are identified, as well as the contextual setting in which the study unfolded. Subsequently, the variables that were previously explained will be operationalized. The chapter will then outline the approach used for data analysis in this research. Finally, a conclusion to the chapter will include a discussion on the reliability and validity of the research method.

#### **3.1 Methods of data collection**

This research is deductive in nature, whereby the existing theory on representative bureaucracy was the starting point for the development of a conceptual model that includes the independent variables. The research method for this thesis will be a comparative case study, for which the qualitative data will be collected through interviews with a total of eleven bureaucrats. Five of these bureaucrats are civil servants who are trainees at the Rijkstraineeship, and six of these bureaucrats are civil servants who are or were employed through the New Professionals Program at HWS. These interviews will be semi-structured in nature. The research is therefore cross-sectional in nature, as all data will be collected in one period in time and multiple groups will be observed at once. Furthermore, the research is observational, as there will be no interventions or experimental treatment through manipulation of an independent variable. The choice for qualitative research and interviews is grounded in the notion that experiences and perceptions are not quantifiable. There are many perceptions and stereotypes of minority groups. Interviews provide a suitable method to align as closely as possible with the genuine experiences of the interviewee (Vermeij & Hamelink, 2021, p. 23).

#### **3.2 Participants and context**

The interviews were conducted with New Professionals and Rijkstrainees who identify as non-binary or as female. Due to the absence of further data on other demographic characteristics of

the trainee groups, selecting participants based on gender proved to be the easiest way to establish a common characteristic for all participants as a starting point. According to Sargeant (2012, p. 1), it is crucial in qualitative research to purposefully select participants based on research questions, theoretical perspectives, and available evidence. Therefore, equalizing minority status for all participants emerged as the most effective way to identify a general commonality for both groups. Additionally, this study utilizes self-identification of minority status, allowing for the possible inclusion of active participation of other minority groups beyond gender.

The selection of participants has taken place via LinkedIn. The participants received a message with a short introduction to the research topic and an invitation for an interview. After approval, the participants were sent an agenda invitation and link to the online meeting via MS Teams. Furthermore, the participants received a letter of consent which they signed to approve of the recording of the interview and use of data. Though the participants are anonymous, a distinction in reference to the person is made to clarify whether the participant is a Rijkstraine, or a New Professional. This enables a clearer understanding of the results in chapter 4. Figure 2 includes an overview of the participants. This table includes information on the participant, their gender, age, ministry they work at, if they consider themselves to be part of a minority group, and what social group they belong to. For two Rijkstrainees, their social groups are unspecified, as they did not answer this question, but did consider themselves to be part of the majority group in Dutch society. This information has been collected during the interviews and was not known or available upon selection of the participants.

Participant	Gender	Age	Ministry	Minority status	Social group
RTP1	NB	24	OCW	Yes	LGBTQIA+, neurodiverse, raised in rural province
RTP2	F	27	IenW	No	Unspecified
RTP3	F	26	IenW	Yes	Non-Western migration background
RTP4	F	26	BZ	No	Unspecified
RTP5	F	26	OCW	No	White middle class family, university educated, neurodiverse
NPP1	F	25	VWS	Yes	Bicultural, muslim, first generation student
NPP2	F	28	VWS (RVS)	Yes	Non-Western migration background, dyslexia
NPP3	F	30	VWS	Yes	Non-Western migration background, raised in a religious community
NPP4	F	27	VWS	Yes	LGBTQIA+
NPP5	F	33	VWS (RVS)	Yes	Woman of color, raised in a religious community
NPP6	F	28	VWS (ZIN)	Yes	Jewish

## Figure 2.

Figure 3 provides an overview of the abbreviations used in Figure 2.

### Abbreviations:

Gender: NB = non-binary, F = female

OCW (Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap) = Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science

IWS (Infrastructuur en Waterstaat) = Ministry of Infrastructure and Watermanagement

BZ (Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties) = Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations

VWS (Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport) = Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport

RVS (Raad Volksgezondheid en Samenleving) = Council for Public Health and Society

ZIN (Zorginstituut) = Health Institute

## Figure 3.

Some New Professionals work at agencies that are an independent advisory body (RVS) and an independent administrative authority (ZIN) to the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports. The Council for Public Health and Society provides advice regarding policies related to public health and society. The Health Institute takes an independent position in between the ministry of HWS, and organizations that arrange health insurance and health provision. This means that they are working in Uitvoering (execution), and not in Beleid (policy), Toezicht (supervision), or Staf/HR (Staff/HR). RTP1 and RTP4 are working in execution too, but not at an independent

agency. NPP4 works in Staff/HR. Due to the small number of participants, the sample is not representative for all Rijkstrainees and New Professionals.

### **3.3 Interview guide**

When conducting the semi-structured interviews, the interview guide that can be found in Appendix I was used. The interview guide consists of three separate parts. Though the sequence of the questions is important, the semi-structured nature of the interview allows for follow-up questions that are not included in the initial list of questions. The first basic questions are about identifying information such as age, gender, job role, and ministry. These questions therefore pertain to passive representation. Furthermore, this section enables one to identify if the participant perceives themselves to be a member of a minority group, and what social group they belong to. Before the interview started, the participant received a short introduction to the topic, and the definition that is used in this research when discussing “minority groups”. In the following sections, the identified social group will be utilized to formulate questions pertaining to the independent variable. For example, when the participant considers themselves to be part of a certain minority group, observation of active representation, policy congruence, internal and external political support will be combined with the group the participant perceives themselves to be a part of.

The second section pertains to the use of discretion to enhance the position of one’s social group and therefore signs of active representation, and the presence of policy congruence. Furthermore, potential differences between the trainee programs are identified, as the trainee is asked about their experiences in the trainee program, and if they experience these differences. The third section is about internal political support, and external political support. The questions in the second and third section were inspired by the discussed literature, and questions that were included in the interview protocol that was sent by dr. Petra van den Bekerom. These questions are related to the active representation of gender in education and were therefore useful in drafting the questions for the active representation of minority interests in this research.



Furthermore, an example of a question inspired by the literature, is that of question 12: “Are you working in a policy domain that can serve the interests of your counterparts in the citizenry?”, which is inspired by an excerpt from Riccucci and Van Ryzin (2016): “There must be policy congruence between bureaucrats and those they represent. Bureaucrats must work in a policy domain that would serve the interests of their counterparts in the citizenry” (p. 24).

### **3.4 Operationalization of variables**

This chapter explains how the dependent variable and independent variables are operationalized. A table containing conceptualization and operationalization can also be found as an instrument in understanding the concepts used in this research. This table includes the concept, definition, indicator, and the questions used to measure the concepts.

#### **3.4.1 Dependent variable**

First, a set of basic questions related to passive representation are posed. Participants are asked about their gender, educational level, whether they belong to a minority group, and if so, whether they can specify which minority or social group they belong to. To ascertain active representation, participants are first asked about their perceived level of discretion, and if they can make decisions based on their own judgment. Furthermore, the participants are queried about whether they would approach policies that are not related to their minority/social group differently. Additionally, participants are asked if they believe policies better align with minority groups when crafted by individuals belonging to those minority groups. Furthermore, participants are asked to provide examples of instances when they exercised discretion to make decisions connected to their social group, identity, and/or purpose. Specific questions are asked regarding the examples of instances in which participants utilized tools to enhance the position of their social group in society.

#### **3.4.2. Independent variables**

*Differences between trainee programs.* The participants are asked why they decided to participate in the New Professionals Program or Rijkstraineeprogram and if they can identify the differences between the trainee programs.

*Policy congruence.* The congruence of policy was measured by asking the participant about the presence of involvement in policy that affects the social group they are part of. If this is the case, the participant will be asked to give an example of the policy domain. When finding out if these policies are salient to demographic characteristics of the group, this will be done by asking if the policy domain serves the interests of counterparts in the citizenry and the salience of the issue.

*Internal political support (critical mass).* To find out if the participant considers themselves to receive internal political support, and if they perceive the presence of a critical mass, they will be asked if there are other civil servants who are engaging in active representation. Adding to this, the participant is asked if these colleagues are supporting their, or other colleagues' efforts in active representation. To find out more about a critical mass, the participant is asked if they think it matters how many minority bureaucrats are working at the ministry, if the minority-majority ratio influences how they deal with policy, if contact with colleagues from other groups influences how they handle policy that relates to their social group, if there is a sufficient percentage of minority bureaucrats, if support for policies relating to minority groups exceeds a quarter of staff, and if superiors influence their perceptions of what issues are most pressing for the client group or society. The minority-majority ratio is important, as influence from the majority group could result in a lower degree of critical mass. This also counts for the influence of superiors.

*External political support.* The participant will be asked if there is external political support through the presence of a leader who belongs to a minority group or shares the same values. Furthermore, the participant is asked to formulate the minority group the leader belongs to in their opinion and will be asked if this person is actively reducing the loss of organizational rewards. To simplify this question, this will be assessed by asking if the minority leader would support the person in career advancement (promotions or expansion of responsibilities) and

support by defending the active representative should they face consequences from other colleagues who do not support active representation.

### 3.4.3 Operationalization table

Concept	Definition	Indicator	Measures
Passive representation	Passive representation covers the degree to which the background of civil servants reflects the population and is used to gain legitimacy of a government from society (Yun, 2020, 149).	A descriptive representation of the current demographic profile, without necessarily ensuring active engagement or influence in decision-making processes.	Q7: Do you identify as a person belonging to a minority group? If so, which minority group(s)? Q8: How would you describe the demographic group you belong to in terms of sexuality, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion and/or age?
Active representation	Active representation implies the active use of one's position as civil servant for promoting the interests of and making administrative choices that support "their" social group (Groeneveld & Van de Walle, 2010, Yun, 2020, 134).	The participant is engaging in practices whereby they are using their discretion to improve the position of their minority/social group. They handle policy differently for other types of clients than for their own and find it a better fit if policies that are meant to serve a certain minority group are made by people that belong to the minority group. Furthermore, the participant provides examples of active representation, for example engagement in advocacy for a minority group, initiating policy proposals, etc.	Q10: Do you have discretion in your position as a civil servant, and can you make decisions based on your own judgment? Q13: Do you use your discretion to match decisions related to your social or group identity and purpose? Q14: Do you handle policy differently for different types of clients? Q15: Do you think policy will be a better fit for minority groups if the policy is made by people belonging to the minority group? Q: Can you give an example of a time when you have used an instrument to implement a certain change that favors the position of your group?
Trainee program	The trainee programs are built on different recruitment strategies, have different objectives, and have different goals.	The participant identifies differences between the two programs. This is especially interesting when the participant links the differences, or their experiences in the program and possible engagement in active representation, to these differences.	Q9: Why did you apply for the Rijkstraineeprogram/decided to participate in the NPP? Q: What do you consider the biggest difference between the Rijkstraineeprogram and New Professionals Program?
Discretion	The ability to make decisions based on what one sees as fit (Gool, 2008). Is a necessary condition for active representation (Keiser et al., 2002).	The participant has the ability and authority to make decisions.	Q10a: Do you feel like you have discretion in your position as civil servant at the ministry you work for? Q10b: Can you make decisions based on your own judgment?
Policy congruence and salience	The match between a policy and its degree of support from the group it is meant to serve. Is a necessary condition for active representation (Keiser et al., 2002). Bureaucrats have to work in a policy domain that serves the interests of their counterparts in society (Ricucci & Van Ryzin, 2020, p.24) Policy salience occurs when there is congruence with topics that are salient to the represented group (Meier, 1993; Selden, 1997).	The participant is working in a policy domain that could serve the interests of their counterparts in the citizenry. For salience, the policy is related to salient issues for the social group the participant belongs to. They use discretion to match decisions related to the social group identity and purpose. Furthermore, they handle policy differently for groups that are different from their own social group.	Q11: Does the ministry you are currently employed at involve itself in policy that affects the social group you are part of? Q12a: Are you working in a policy domain that can serve the interests of your counterparts in the citizenry? Q12b: Are these related to salient issues for your social group?

Internal political support	Critical mass in an organization, reducing the costs of representation due to required loss of organizational rewards, which is obtained through interactions with other bureaucrats who support active representation efforts (Yun, 2020). The presence of critical mass can lead to counting on support from other colleagues when repercussions occur, or deviation from organizational norms (Meier & Xu, 2021; Yun, 2020). According to Meier (1993), critical mass at public organizations must be 16-26%.	The participant receives support from colleagues when seeking to improve the position of their social group. Furthermore, the presence of colleagues engaging in active representation can be useful for the critical mass that needs to be obtained. Contact with colleagues from other minority groups can increase the critical mass. Lastly, the minority-majority ratio and influence from superiors is of importance in being able to engage in active representation due to institutional norms, but also due to the critical mass that can be influenced by these phenomena.	Q18: Do you feel that there are other civil servants from minority positions who are active representatives of a social group protecting their in-group colleagues from the loss of organizational rewards? Q19: Do you think it matters how many minority bureaucrats work at the ministry you work for? Q20: Does the majority-minority ratio influence how you deal with policy? Q21: Does contact with colleagues from other minority groups influence how much effort you put into policy that relates to their social group? Q22: Is there a sufficient percentage of minority bureaucrats at the ministry you work for? Q23: Do you think the support for policies related to benefiting the position of your social group exceeds about a quarter of staff?
External political support	"External political support suggests that a minority leader can [...] reduce the loss of organizational rewards to active representatives." (Yun, 2020, p. 148). A minority leader may either explicitly or implicitly help minority bureaucrats become active representatives by freeing them from pressure to comply with organizational rules (Henderson, 1988), and supporting their policy proposals that benefit the social group (Winn, 1989) (Yun, 2020, p. 135).	There is a minority leader or leader with similar values who supports the participant in engaging in active representation. This is needed to relieve institutional pressures. The use of discretion should not lead to negative consequences for active representation to be achieved, and superiors should aid in relieving this.	Q16: Do you feel like using your discretion and making choices that benefit your social group can lead to negative consequences for you in your job? Q17: Do you feel that there is external political support for your social group? For example, is there a person in a leadership position who belongs to a minority group? Q24: Do your superiors influence your perceptions of what issues are most pressing for the client group?

**Figure 4.**

### 3.5 Methods of analysis

The interviews are conducted via MS Teams and recorded. For practical reasons, the interviews were conducted in Dutch. The audio has been transcribed afterwards and coded. The coding has been done via atlas.ti, and the codes were based on the questions. The codes were split into subcodes including different categories, to ensure a clear overview of trends in answers. This resulted in a total of 27 code groups, of which an example of a network group code for the independent variable internal political support can be found in Appendix II. Furthermore, the codes were split into groups which represent the dependent variable and independent variables. For example, the question “Do you feel like using your discretion and making choices that benefit your social group can lead to negative consequences for you in your job?” was split into subcodes “yes”, “no”, “different”, and belonged to the group “external political support”. In vivo coding helped with linking certain trends in answers to overarching codes. For example,

“*samenspraak*” was a recurring answer to a question pertaining to the use of discretion and was therefore added as a code to that code group. After identifying certain patterns, interviews were coded sentence by sentence. This revealed new observations, leading to the process of identifying notable differences in the light of greater themes that were identified. After having prepared the data, the analysis was conducted in three steps, which Sargeant (2012, p. 2) describes as deconstruction, interpretation, and reconstruction. First, the data was deconstructed by reading the transcripts and further breaking down the data into categories. Following that, the codes and categories were compared to find similarities and differences during the interpretation stage and were finally reconstructed through contextualization of findings in light of the representative bureaucracy theory.

### **3.6 Reliability**

The reliability of the research method is connected to the ability to replicate or repeat results or observations, which can be enhanced by employing a similar approach across multiple observations (Hak, 2004, p. 505, p. 506). Joppe (2000) defines reliability as the degree to which results can be consistently reproduced under a similar methodology. This means that the results are consistent over time and display an accurate representation of the studied population. This especially pertains to quantitative research. In the case of qualitative research, since it is focused on understanding and interpreting significance, experiences, and social phenomena, replication is not always possible or relevant, since the objective of the study is to formulate a new perspective (Hutchinson, 1988). Therefore, the description of the context of the data collection is important in describing reliability (Kirk & Miller, 1986).

In the case of this research, the data collection has been conducted in circumstances that were similar for all participants. Therefore, the reliability of the research method is high. All trainees were interviewed via MS Teams and received a short introduction about the research before starting the interview. The explanation revolved around the structure of the interview, definitions for certain concepts that would be used (such as the definition of minority groups),

and the position of the participant to ask questions, interrupt, and decline to answer questions. The same interview questions were asked to all participants however, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for follow-up questions. This can lead to a lower degree of reliability due to the possible differences in the amount of data collected per person, or because of bias. In the case of this research, there is no sign that the semi-structured nature of the interviews has resulted in a lower degree of reliability.

After the interviews, the audio files were transcribed in a similar manner. Following the development of the transcripts, the files were all coded in the same method. Finally, the codes were analyzed using the same method for all interviews. This contributes to the reliability of the research method due to the similar treatment for data in the consecutive stages. However, the process of data collection and analysis has only been conducted by one researcher, which means that there is no researcher triangulation. Researcher triangulation can mitigate bias because there is not sole dependence on the viewpoint of one researcher (Arias Valencia, 2022, p. 9). Researcher triangulation was not possible in this research, since the thesis is to be written alone. However, the absence of cross-validation in this research, does not seem to have influenced the reliability of this study.

### **3.7 Internal validity**

The internal validity pertains to how accurately one can conclude that there is a causal relationship between two variables or infer that the lack of the relationship suggests the absence of the cause (Cook & Campbell, 1979, p. 3). With this comes the selection of participants in qualitative research to reduce the potential of a biased sample. Participant selection has to be done purposefully in order to ensure representation of important elements of the research question, which ensures the quality or authenticity of the data (Sargeant, 2012, p. 2). First and foremost, the absence of data on the demographic backgrounds of the total groups of Rijkstrainees and New Professionals blocks the ability to select on the basis of shared characteristics for the participants outside of gender. This can be of influence on the results, as

the sample is not representative of all trainees in the two programs. A different composition of participants might lead to different results.

Since this research is about the possible active representation of minority groups and potential difference in the degree of active representation between the two groups, but not all participants might consider their gender as a minority status, purposive selection of participants was not completely possible. This is because minority status, outside of gender, is not always visible. This could influence the results, as not all participants might consider themselves to be part of a minority group, and will therefore not engage in active representation, as there is no “need” to do so. Furthermore, there might be more opportunities to engage in active representation at ministries that engage more in social policy due to the presence of policy congruence and possibly salience. Apart from that, due to the novelty of the New Professionals Program, the thus far unclear structure of the program and ambiguity in expectations might impede the possibilities of engaging in active representation. Considering the discussed limitations to the internal validity of this study, the internal validity of this research is low.

### **3.8 External validity**

External validity pertains to the generalizability of the results to the broader population that is researched (Toshkov, 2016, p. 173). Starting with a practical limitation, is the number of participants in this study. It cannot be rejected that the participants might not be representative of the entire group, nor both entire groups. Furthermore, there are fewer New Professionals than Rijkstrainees due to the age of the program, and they do not share the same status. Apart from that, during participant selection, New Professionals were more apprehensive in accepting interviews than Rijkstrainees. They demanded more information beforehand and mentioned having to discuss participation with a superior. This was not the case for Rijkstrainees, who immediately accepted or declined participation. Due to the observed apprehensiveness of New Professionals, it might be the case that they are less inclined to answer certain questions truthfully, due to fear of organizational loss. Furthermore, a general limitation is that

institutional and contextual circumstances could lead to answers from both groups that are socially acceptable. Considering the discussed limitations to the external validity of this study, the external validity in this research is low.

## **4.0 Results**

The following chapter contains the results of the data collection. First, the trainee programs are discussed: the contextual differences between the programs, differences in personalities of the trainees in the two groups, and institutional differences between ministries and job types. After that, active representation is discussed. This section includes results on the use of discretion to enhance the position of one's social group, trainees' approaches in handling policy that concern groups outside of their social group, the alignment of policy with minority groups when this is made by individuals from the respective minority group, and how trainees are engaging in active representation of minority groups.

Moving on, the expectations pertaining to the independent variables of policy congruence, internal political support, and external political support, are discussed. Following the section on the independent variables, there will be an analysis of the data. Finally, some general observations will be shared.

### **4.1 Contextual differences between the Rijkstraineeprogram and New Professionals Program**

In general, the New Professionals exhibit a more critical approach towards the program and possess a greater awareness of the distinctions between the Rijkstraineeship and the New Professionals Program. For instance, some Rijkstrainees were uninformed about the existence and content of the New Professionals Program, whereas all New Professionals were acquainted with the Rijkstraineeship. The fundamental structure of the programs aligns: trainees engage in professional activities four days a week, with one day dedicated to training sessions. The transition processes differ as well, given that Rijkstrainees often have direct opportunities for progression. NPP2 noted that while the New Professionals Program expresses an intention to



retain trainees post-program, this cannot be guaranteed. They added that Rijkstrainees undergo a comprehensive two-year preparation period, resulting in practically certain potential career start within a ministry after completing the program.

NPP4 indicated that Rijkstrainees are strategically matched with specific roles or positions, whereas New Professionals tend to be in surplus. Consequently, it is at times unclear to coordinators, managers, and directors what role the New Professional will assume. NPP2 noted that the Rijkstraineeship has a well-defined and organized structure: the “destination” of the trainee, predetermined projects, and the expectations of supervisors are all clearly established at the start of the traineeship. Conversely, there are as of now no clear pre-established expectations regarding who the New Professionals are, and what their presence within a ministry signifies (NPP 3). However, several participants mentioned that this ambiguity is primarily due to the program's early stage and that the second cohort year (2023) is still perceived as an experimental phase or pilot.

While no Rijkstrainees expressed dissent about the program, this is different for the New Professionals group. Some been reported by having personally encountered challenges during the traineeship or hearing about such issues from their colleagues. These experiences can be attributed to various factors but are primarily linked to the fact that the traineeship is still in its early stages, and the fact that the current cohort is only the second cohort. Expectations, both for the trainees and their colleagues within the respective departments, are unclear thus far (NPP2). Furthermore, the essence of proactivity is emphasized (NPP2), and a notable level of attrition is observed due to the presence of diversity, but a lack of inclusion. NPP6 stated: *"I think that gradually there is an awareness that it is important to take more into account in recruitment. However, much more needs to be done in retention. A lot more should be done in those higher echelons indeed. There needs to be more awareness. For example, specific language use (that is still used) which can be perceived as unpleasant."* Additionally, concerns

were raised about the group size (NPP4), and not everyone is content with the label "streetwise civil servants" (NPP6). Despite these challenges, individuals expressed satisfaction with the way the application process unfolded (NPP4, NPP6). Furthermore, NPP5 expressed that she is glad that individuals who do not conform to the ideal criteria, such as lacking the appropriate education, are still afforded opportunities through the NPP. She states that even without possessing the conventional qualifications, she is genuinely optimistic that diverse perspectives are being acknowledged, leading to progressive changes within the ministry.

#### **4.2 Personality differences between the Rijkstrainees and New Professionals**

*Motivation.* NPP2 indicated that the motivation for participation may likely differ between Rijkstrainees and New Professionals: *"I think NPP participants are generally very grateful to have been hired. I think RTP participants as well, but there is a certain atmosphere within RTP where it is seen as a logical next step after the masters. In contrast, NPP participants would see participation as an opportunity they try to make the best of and learn as much as possible."*

NPP1 notes differences in privileges and life experience. She states, *"I am the oldest of a family of four and have had to open many doors for myself. While another RTP participant, for example, has a father who already works for a ministry. That person received a lot of information from an early age. I didn't."*

*Diversity.* NPP1 indicates that she finds New Professionals more diverse than Rijkstrainees when considering diversity in the broadest sense. While there are different types of people in the Rijkstraineeprogram, the New Professionals Program is more diverse due to differences in cultural background, sexual orientation, religion, neurodiversity, and disabilities.

*Language use and level of thinking.* NPP2 mentions that there is friction in terms of progression with some colleagues. As mentioned earlier, Rijkstrainees almost immediately start working for the ministry after their traineeship. New Professionals, on the other hand, have to apply for positions, which can be challenging: *"Many people working at the ministry are accustomed to a certain type of language use and a certain level of thinking. Of course, not all*

*NPP participants have that; we are streetwise civil servants.*" NPP5 states that she initially felt like an outsider because she couldn't relate to the way her academically trained colleagues speak and the academic language used in the advisory reports. She is not academically educated herself. NPP4 also states that contrary to expectations, the onboarding was not difficult. RTP4 shared her opinion about the assessment and recruitment policy for the Rijkstraineeprogram: *"There is a challenging assessment that you have to submit. So, imagine, for instance, you have two non-Dutch parents. You have to fill in a textual dossier. If your grammatical writing skills are perhaps not quite at the level they want to see or something, then you are quickly ruled out. This doesn't mean you're not a good policy maker. Especially with things like, I don't know, all those tools that exist now, that shouldn't be an issue at all". This is affirmed by NPP5, stating: "The way we entered was not at all cumbersome, despite initial expectations. It has been a different process. For instance, we didn't have to undergo any assessment. I believe the current RTP assessment excludes many individuals. The NPP, in this regard, serves as a good example of how recruitment can be approached."*

#### **4.3 Institutional differences between ministries and job types**

*Ministries.* A notable difference between ministries is the extent to which the ministry engages in social policy. Several trainees have pointed out that being unable to advocate for the social group to which they belong is attributed to the nature of topics the ministry deals with. According to RTP2, active engagement in representation is primarily feasible when working in a ministry closely associated with social policy: *"It often depends on the ministry where you are employed. For instance, people I talk to from social affairs or HWS often mention that there are individuals who actively engage in advocacy there. I believe the more social the policy, the greater the likelihood of individuals actively involved. Activists may be a strong term, but there are certainly individuals who fit that description."* RTP3 indicates that the ministry where she is employed, Infrastructure and Water Management, is a practical ministry, and she does not encounter policies or awareness regarding, for example, persons with disabilities.

*Job types.* Another difference is linked to the tasks performed by the trainee within their respective branch. The various branches (policy, execution, staff/HR, supervision) entail different types of responsibilities. For example, RTP4 works under the executive branch, and is writing an advisory report, which is limiting her autonomy. Within the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations, she has little involvement with the policy branch, thus not encountering policies that would impact her social group. NPP5 also works for an executive organization, allowing her to provide advice on her social group, but due to the organization's independence, she must consider all social groups and remain neutral. NPP4 operates in the Staff/HR department within HWS, stating that she does not have much involvement with external social policies. On the other hand, NPP2 has had the opportunity to improve the position of her social group as she is working on an advisory report on mental health, a topic personally relevant to her. Further details on this are discussed in the section on policy congruence.

#### **4.4 The use of discretion to enhance the position of one's social group**

Using one's discretion to enhance the position of one's social group in general is a practice undertaken by nearly all trainees. However, nuances exist within this trend. While some indicate that they refrain from such actions due to their relatively short appointment in a specific position (NPP1), or because the organizational position is independent and engaging in such actions would not be perceived as neutral (NPP5), others assert that it is an inherent aspect of government work (RTP5). Perspectives of as many individuals as possible are considered in this process (NPP2), and there is an acknowledgment of the use of discretion to support one's social group when supported by compelling arguments. It is also noted that "everyone" is currently involved in such efforts, as reaching minority groups is often challenging (NPP3). For instance, NPP3 highlights that the language level and usage in government communication may exclude a significant portion of the population. Drawing from personal experience with a father who is not proficient in the language at that level, she expresses shock at the difficult language

used in official correspondence for those not fully proficient in the language. She consistently voices her concerns in the hope of prompting improvement. Additionally, she mentions an example of a program targeting specific neighborhoods with a focus on addressing the issue of obesity. Having a non-Western migration background herself, regarding the neighborhood-level program, she remarked, *"The percentage of people with obesity is much higher among non-Western individuals. And that's something I brought up. Are we going to do something about that too? I know that if I weren't there, it wouldn't have happened. It's something I keep in mind."*

*Limits to the use of discretion.* Often, it was emphasized that an ability to work independently and make autonomous decisions is expected, and always in consultation with colleagues. This is primarily due to the necessity of coordinating policy decisions with other departments and multiple layers within the organization. While acknowledging a certain degree of responsibility, it was noted that collaborative decision-making ("samenspraak") with colleagues is appreciated. The responsibility is structured in such a way that multiple individuals review a choice. NPP2 asserted that decisions must pass through multiple layers, regardless of what ministry you are working at. Only directors or deputy secretaries-general are exempt from the need of obtaining approval. They have full discretion. *"I can strongly advocate for something and express that we must pursue a particular course of action. However, if at any point the council or someone above me decides to go in a completely different direction, then it's over. At that point, I am expected to restrain my opinions,"* stated NPP2.

RTP1 concurred, emphasizing that while opinions and perspectives can be shared, the larger context determines the course of action. Despite the trainee's expertise suggesting a particular option as the best, superiors will make the final decision. If they reject it, that marks the end of the opinion. NPP1 added that policy approval requires a presentation to the management team (MT) members. As a subject specialist, there is freedom in expressing one's

views on the topic. Approval can be granted by the MT members after the presentation, ultimately reaching the advisor to the director-general. Furthermore, NPP5, employed by the Council for Public Health and Society, highlighted the challenge of implementing certain internal changes due to the independent and neutral status of the organization and its associated legal responsibilities. While there is some freedom of choice, certain frameworks must be adhered to.

#### **4.5 Approach to policy and policy alignment**

With regards to the way trainees approach policy for groups that differ from their own social group, many underscore the importance of involving other groups and addressing less reachable demographics. While some individuals in their daily tasks may not be directly involved in engaging with other groups or formulating policies in general, when being faced with drafting policy for other social groups, they seek to discuss approaches, adapt work visits, and acquire internal and external knowledge about the group. This is achieved through initiatives such as reaching out to colleagues or involving societal organizations. Despite references to neutrality (NPP2) and a standard approach (NPP3) for policy writing, the overarching goal is generally to represent as many voices as possible. The emphasis is on engaging not just about people but with people. On a group level, there are no notable differences in the answers to this question.

*Policy alignment.* While all New Professionals believe that policies better align with minority groups when made by individuals from the respective minority or minority groups in general, Rijkstrainees are more critical of this notion and express dissent more frequently. For instance, RTP3 states: *"I would consider it a generalization if I were to say yes now, because I believe there are so many competent people working on policies. Even if they themselves do not belong to a minority group for which they are formulating policy, they have likely acquired knowledge through interviews, panel discussions, or civic participation, allowing them to make well-considered policy choices. Ultimately, policy advisors do not make choices; politicians do. So, I would say no."* Additionally, Rijkstrainees discuss the importance of including the group

but assert that it doesn't work when the policymaker is a member of the group (RTP2). They also acknowledge that although excluding certain groups has an impact on policy, it is not feasible to include every group proportionally (RTP5).

In contrast, New Professionals emphasize the importance of involving experts with lived experiences in policymaking, advocating for a combination of expertise and diverse perspectives. NPP2 comments on this: *"I think it's an eternal debate, but it has to be a combination. So, 'by and with,' let's put it that way. Because you need to translate it into policy. And that's obviously very difficult if it's only done by those who have experienced it. That translation has to be made, and all other perspectives need to be considered. Because you have to look at legislation and financing, you simply need a different kind of expertise. So, I believe it has to be this combination. Currently, it's divided 90%-10%. 10% by experiential experts and 90% by civil servants who have no experience with it. And I think that should shift. It should definitely move towards 60-40."* Others mention that policymakers in higher positions are unaware that policies are not yet inclusive (NPP4) and argue that while many things can be learned, without personal experience, it's challenging to comprehend how groups can be reached (NPP3).

#### **4.6 How trainees are engaging in active representation of minority groups**

Several instances exist wherein trainees have been able to achieve outcomes that enhance the position of their social group(s). It is noteworthy that, among the concrete examples provided by four individuals, three originate from the New Professionals. NPP6 emphasized that New Professionals are “expected” to engage in active representation, distinguishing them from Rijkstrainees.

For instance, NPP2 used her expertise to ensure the inclusion of a passage in an advisory report by the consultancy organization within the Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport, focusing on mental health. Though this topic is not exclusive to a certain minority group, it matches with her own history with mental health and that of persons struggling with mental

health. NPP3 instigated the implementation of a program related to her social group, addressing the issue of obesity, particularly prevalent among non-Western individuals. Additionally, she drew attention to the language proficiency in government communication, a matter pertinent to her, given her father's limited proficiency at that level. Furthermore, she continued to inform colleagues about reaching thus far marginalized groups. She also played a role in a project concerning vegetable gardens, highlighting its lack of inclusivity due to the assumption that everyone possesses a garden—an oversight not recognized by her colleagues who all own homes with gardens.

During her tenure at the Health Institute (HWS), NPP6 participated in organizing National Coming Out Day and facilitated the introduction of new key cords featuring the LGBT-flag. Furthermore, she orchestrated a symposium on Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) and conducted a training on unbiased selection for sixty participants from the Health Institute. She advocated for follow-up training and increased assessment within target demographics to institutionalize D&I as a structural component. Furthermore, RTP4 is organizing an event aimed at raising awareness of violence against women, which relates to her due to her gender.

#### **4.7 Policy congruence**

The expectation associated with the independent variable "policy congruence" is as follows.

**Expectation 1:** *New Professionals more frequently encounter policy congruence in their work due to the difference in the starting point of the recruitment method and the expected match of life experiences they bring with the job they are assigned to, hence exhibiting a higher level of active representation.*

*Congruence.* Examples of broader themes that could impact the social group include diversity within long-term care, homelessness, environmental issues, and the housing market. NPP1, identifying as a bicultural woman, notes that the topics within her portfolio of long-term care relate to diversity within the healthcare field. She emphasizes that diversity in healthcare



affects her social group, although it resonates more broadly, for other ethnic and cultural minorities as well. NPP2 mentions dealing with homelessness in her work, a subject not directly relevant to her social group. RTP2 mentions addressing environmental issues at work, which also have implications in her daily life, although she doesn't consider it a highly important topic. RTP4 mentions that her ministry is involved in housing, and she feels a connection to the narrative, particularly regarding housing seekers or starters. However, she does not associate this with factors unique to her social group.

*Saliency.* Direct overlaps between topics and the trainee's social group are evident in the responses of several trainees. These topics are easier to categorize under policy saliency due to their relevance and notable nature for the social group. The mentioned topics include student financing and loans, women's emancipation, violence against women, mental health, LGBTQIQA+ rights, and systemic changes within cultural heritage.

RTP5 mentions dealing with the Dutch Student Finance Organization (DUO), which falls under the ministry where she works (OCW). She identifies herself as belonging to the "*pechgeneratie*," a generation often burdened by higher study debts due to the Loan System and limited access to student financing. She also deals with women's emancipation and education, emphasizing their significance in conjunction with the growing gender pay gap. Additionally, she is involved in an event focusing on increasing awareness of violence against women. NPP2 discusses providing advice on mental health within the ministry where she works (HWS). This topic resonates with her due to her personal journey with mental health, making the ministry's advice align with her expertise. However, mental health issues are not exclusive to the social group she identifies herself with. RTP1 mentions working on the topic emancipation, where they are specifically occupied with LGBTQIQA+ rights, which is salient to them considering the minority group they belong to. Furthermore, they are working on a program addressing

systemic changes within cultural heritage, particularly important for volunteers outside of the Randstad, and tied to their upbringing in the province of Friesland.

#### **4.8 Internal political support**

The expectation associated with the independent variable "internal political support" is as follows.

**Expectation 2:** *Due to the objective and goal of the program, New Professionals experience a higher degree of internal political support and will therefore exhibit a higher degree of active representation.*

*Active representation from colleagues.* Although there were several examples provided of ways in which colleagues represent their social groups, these were predominantly instances of passive representation. Examples included the presence of colleagues representing various groups within the queer community, individuals with diverse ethnic backgrounds, members of diversity groups, or the presence of New Professionals contributing to diversity in general. An example of an event resulting from active representation by a colleague is an event organized during Ramadan, which became a significant event compared to previous years, which led to more awareness surrounding the religious activities that are related to Ramadan (NPP6).

*Regarding support from colleagues for active representation, RTP3 indicates that she certainly does not receive this. NPP3 states that this varies significantly: "when I mention that I come from a very closed religious community, that is taken very seriously. However, when I have a conversation about diversity and inclusion, I really encounter resistance. Some say they don't know what to think about the NPP because the Rijkstrainees are also very diverse. Probably, those people have been in their position longer and have a better overview. But that's quite funny, you really encounter resistance sometimes."* Additionally, RTP1 mentions that while there are people who support them, it is important to bring forth one's own perspectives, even when not entirely in agreement. Expressing one's own experiences is crucial because they are not the same for everyone.

NPP4 refers to how the LGBTIQAI+ policy is conveyed within HWS. She mentions that colleagues who do not belong to the LGBTIQAI+ community feel that a lot is being done for LGBTIQAI+ issues and that considerable attention is given to them. Sometimes, this is perceived as excessive, for instance, when the rainbow flag is raised “again”. Additionally, there is room for improvement in terms of messaging and communication, as noted by RTP1. RTP1 states, *"Also [bringing about change] with communication. An interview was conducted with me, which was shared on Instagram and LinkedIn. They communicate this very broadly, like, look how well we are doing. But at the same time, so much goes wrong internally in the system, which is not suitable for me (in terms of gender identity). And that is also very difficult, and they don't handle it well. But that is not really talked about because they don't communicate those things outwardly. Unfortunately, it went wrong, and that is really super annoying."* They add that, in addition to the report published at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs earlier this year exposing internal racism, there are also critical reports about other ministries. This also includes ministries focused on topics such as emancipation. Despite colleagues portraying that things are going well, this is not always the case. RTP1 also provided an example where they talk about negative and hateful reactions on the internal communication platform when it comes to sensitive topics. This is distressing for individuals who do not identify with such responses.

*Quantity of civil servants from minority groups.* All respondents emphasize the importance of having an adequate number of civil servants at the ministry who can identify with a minority group. It is indicated that having the civil service reflect society accurately is crucial (NPP1) and that it is important for incorporating diverse perspectives, norms, values, and interests (RTP2). Furthermore, loneliness and the sense of isolation for employees when the work environment is not perceived as diverse is mentioned, which is leading to an unsustainable work experience (RTP1). In connection with this, it is mentioned that the numbers are currently low and predominantly exist in the lower ranks: *"the higher you go, the*

*more homogeneous and whiter the people are. I think the numbers matter but are not yet high enough in higher positions" (NPP4). NPP2 wonders how it could be implemented: "what you see now with the NPP program, we are here, but what does that mean? Can we really contribute to a different kind of policy? Can we bring forward a new perspective? It would be nice if there were a quota [...], only I also see the downside of that now. [...] You want to be hired for who you are, not for the specific minority someone belongs to. I think a quota is necessary, only I wouldn't want to implement that permanently in the policy."* This aligns with what RTP5 mentions about intersectionality, which is not reflected in diversity policies. She points out that in the "lists" of personal characteristics (found in the operations and diversity and inclusion policies), intersectionality is not considered, and people are more than just the category they are counted in. NPP3 also states that achieving a reflection of society and involving a sufficient number of civil servants from minority groups is challenging: *"If you look at people with a different sexual orientation or people with a different ethnic background and just take all of the Netherlands into account, you should actually also consider to what extent it is representative of the entire society. And that doesn't mean the majority has a different sexual orientation because the norm is still not that most people are heterosexual. When is it actually representative? It's not when the majority has a different ethnic background, necessarily."* RTP4 would not prefer a quota but believes that the promotion of an inclusive employer identity should be continued. She thinks the Government is already making efforts in this regard and does not believe that inclusivity should be forced. *"I believe there should be a positive work atmosphere where everyone is welcome and feels heard, and active attention should be devoted to fostering such an environment."*

*Minority-majority ratio.* Almost all trainees indicate that the minority-majority ratio has no influence on how they deal with policy. However, NPP2 states that she remains neutral in situations where she disagrees with the majority. She mentions that if she doesn't support

something, she will remain neutral to go along with it due to factors that come into play when she doesn't go along with the majority. She mentions doing this because she doesn't want to lose her job and, consequently, her financial stability.

*Contact with colleagues from a minority group.* Virtually all participants indicate that having contact with colleagues from minority groups leads them to work harder for policies that affect these groups. Input from minority colleagues is also mentioned as valuable (NPP3), although it is noted that many colleagues are academically educated, which means that people with a lower level of education are not heard (NPP4). Knowing a person from a specific group provides a better understanding of certain issues, such as organizing public holidays within HR (RTP4), recognizing, and acknowledging blind spots (RTP1), and better supporting colleagues from another minority group (RTP5): *"Today (day after election results), the atmosphere is very bad. People are really anxious, especially colleagues with a migration background who are deeply affected. It gives you chills. And then you think, we really have to work very hard to ensure that the tone set now doesn't have unpleasant consequences for people you know and who they know... knowing someone personally or having a colleague who can explain it well to you leads to so much more understanding."*

*Sufficient percentage of colleagues from minority backgrounds.* None of the participants found, or could assert with certainty, that there is a sufficient percentage of colleagues from minority backgrounds. NPP1 suggested that she believes the percentage is higher throughout the ministry but lower at the managerial level. RTP3 mentioned that not every minority status is visible, citing individuals with disabilities, which can be both visible and invisible.

*A quarter of staff.* While not every participant could confidently state whether more than a quarter of their colleagues would support policies benefiting their minority group or minority groups in general, NPP1 indicated that she thinks meeting a quarter is indeed necessary to get a policy document approved. This is because, practically, the policy document goes through

many people before reaching the discretionary department. RTP2 expressed skepticism about having more than a quarter supporting minority policies, attributing this to generational differences and age. Additionally, RTP1 stated that support in their case is selective since more than a quarter of their colleagues would not support policies improving the position of LGBTQ+ individuals or policies aiding neurodiverse persons. However, RTP1 believes there would be support for policies improving the situation of individuals in rural areas due to political pressure, rather than intrinsic motivation and understanding of the situation.

*Influence by superiors.* The responses to the question about influence by supervisors vary widely. More than half of all trainees state that supervisors do not influence their opinion on what matters most for society. RTP2 mentioned that the opinions of supervisors often differ from hers but emphasize differences rather than exerting influence. NPP4 thinks this depends on the team someone is in, and NPP5 says that there is room to remain independent and objective. This may be due to the organization where she works, an independent body of HWS. She indicates distancing herself from political discussions due to the organization's independence and suggests it might be different if she worked at HWS. RTP4 does not think she is easily influenced but zooms out to align with what is objectively considered most important for society. RTP5 states that this objectivity comes with a downside; the subject she works on (emancipation) does not always yield economic benefits, while she and her colleagues would like a significant budget for it. Although the management team does not influence her, they do support her.

On the other hand, NPP3 indicates that what is considered most important for society largely stems from politics, which can be challenging for colleagues and supervisors: *"The citizen has chosen. You choose a cabinet. You know what topics the cabinet finds important, and you just have to go along with that. That's the people's opinion."* RTP1 agrees and says that political sensitivity must be considered. Deviating from this must be well justified, and there is

a chance of rejection for initiatives that deviate. NPP6 mentioned that during her time at HWS, there was an agenda and a yearly plan where the managers chose the path. However, she could get topics on the yearly plan or agenda when she found them important, and she was able to do so. The executive team and teammanagers made these decisions.

An overview of the answers to the questions pertaining to internal political support can be found below.

	NPP1	NPP2	NPP3	NPP4	NPP5	NPP6
Q18	No representation Yes support	No	Yes	Yes	No representation Yes support	Yes
Q19	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Q20	No	Yes, consequences	No	No	No	No
Q21	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Q22	Yes	Yes	Depends	Inaudible	No	No
Q23	Unclear	Unclear	Depends on topic	Inaudible	Yes	Unclear
Q24	No	Yes	Yes, politics	No	No	Yes

Q18: Do you feel that there are other civil servants from minority positions who are active representatives of a social group protecting their in-group colleagues from the loss of organizational rewards?

Q19: Do you think it matters how many minority bureaucrats work at the ministry you work for?

Q20: Does the majority-minority ratio influence how you deal with policy?

Q21: Does contact with colleagues from other minority groups influence how much effort you put into policy that relates to their social group?

Q22: Is there a sufficient percentage of minority bureaucrats at the ministry you work for?

Q23: Do you think the support for policies related to benefiting the position of your social group exceeds about a quarter of staff?

Q24: Do your superiors influence your perceptions of what issues are most pressing for the client group?

	RTP1	RTP2	RTP3	RTP4	RTP5
Q18	Yes	Yes	No representation, yes support	Unclear	Yes
Q19	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Q20	No	No	No	No	No
Q21	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Q22	No	No	No	Unclear	Unclear
Q23	No, depends on politics	No	Yes	Unclear	Yes
Q24	Yes, politics	No	No	No	No

Q18: Do you feel that there are other civil servants from minority positions who are active representatives of a social group protecting their in-group colleagues from the loss of organizational rewards?

Q19: Do you think it matters how many minority bureaucrats work at the ministry you work for?

Q20: Does the majority-minority ratio influence how you deal with policy?

Q21: Does contact with colleagues from other minority groups influence how much effort you put into policy that relates to their social group?

Q22: Is there a sufficient percentage of minority bureaucrats at the ministry you work for?

Q23: Do you think the support for policies related to benefiting the position of your social group exceeds about a quarter of staff?

Q24: Do your superiors influence your perceptions of what issues are most pressing for the client group?

#### 4.9 External political support

The expectation associated with the independent variable "external political support" is as follows.

**Expectation 3:** *Due to the long-term goal of the New Professionals Program and mitigated risks of losing organizational rewards from individuals in higher echelons of the ministry, New Professionals experience a higher degree of external political support and will therefore exhibit a higher degree of active representation.*

*The use of discretion and negative consequences.* RTP5 mentions that despite the presence of autonomy and its use, individuals are still bound by the loopholes in the law and policies. Using autonomy tactically and achieving the desired result is highly appreciated by colleagues. However, pushing too hard, accidentally bypassing someone, or putting someone on the spot can backfire. RTP5, nevertheless, doesn't think this would lead to irreversible consequences due to the collaborative and social work environment she is in. NPP1 states having an open relationship with MT members and not being hindered in using her autonomy to improve the position of her social group. NPP5 says that it would not quickly lead to negative consequences. However, there are sensitive topics where discussions are difficult. She adds that these discussions would not lead to internal exclusion. RTP4 mentions receiving training on handling mistakes and that it is not necessarily bad to make choices that may turn out poorly. There is guidance and space.

On the other hand, NPP6 indicates that stepping outside imposed boundaries can lead to negative consequences. RTP1 thinks it mainly depends on the team in which someone works but believes that many people may not understand the use of autonomy to benefit the social group and find it unfair. NPP2 suggests that one must know well who is on the other side at such moments: *"You can also shoot yourself in the foot if they realize that you have a certain interest that does not align with the rest of the group. So, the minority, as it were. Then, if you*



*push too hard, your idea can also be dismissed, and you might not be taken very seriously next time. So, I try to see when I can do it and when I cannot."*

*Presence of a minority supervisor.* Except for two New Professionals, all respondents indicate the presence of supervisors belonging to a minority group. It is noteworthy that several New Professionals mention Abigail Norville in their responses, unlike the Rijkstrainees. NPP1 mentions that the presence of her supervisor, who is also a bicultural woman, actively seeks experiences about the New Professionals Program and the training process. NPP2 states that her supervisor, also a woman from a minority group, strongly supports the program. However, she emphasizes that this is not automatic. RTP4 mentions gender representation among superiors, with female coordinators, mentors, and directors. However, she thinks that women only occasionally belong to a minority group. RTP5 shares that there is a supervisor who is of the same gender preference. Furthermore, the MT consists of individuals who are white and cisgender.

New Professionals find the presence of Abigail inspiring. NPP3 says: *"When I see her... then I get the feeling of... Can I do that too? You know? Or can I achieve that too? And just her presence is sometimes sufficient for people who look non-European. We could also do that [become a DSG]. That's a position [DSG] we can also hold."* NPP4 sees her as someone who strongly supports the program and can imagine that it is not always easy to be in her position because not everyone welcomed the New Professionals Program with open arms. NPP5 thinks that the presence of people from a minority group can work positively across the board and contribute to the perspectives of the minority group when someone in a high position shares their experience on topics they have experience with. NPP6 shared that in her department, the entire MT, consisting of around thirty people, were a homogenous group.

Regarding support from supervisors when making choices based on improving the position of one's minority group, responses are somewhat divided. NPP1 is positive and states

that her supervisor comes to her with questions about her social group. They also discuss non-work-related matters such as wearing a hijab, which NPP1 started wearing a while ago. NPP2 mentions that her supervisors have not yet had to stand up for her due to her minority status or instances of discrimination. RTP2 believes that supervisors provide support for minorities when it fits into larger visions and that they are open to input. It has been emphasized that they can bring a new perspective within the ministry. RTP1 has indicated that their supervisor wants to support them and is passionate about it, although they have different experiences at the intersectional level and come from different generations. Their supervisor also belonged to a small minority when they started at the ministry and has experienced relatively similar experiences.

Below, an overview of the answers that were given by the participants relating to the questions for external political support can be found.

	NPP1	NPP2	NPP3	NPP4	NPP5	NPP6
Q16	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Q17	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
External political support?	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No

Q16: Do you feel like using your discretion and making choices that benefit your social group can lead to negative consequences for you in your job?

Q17: Do you feel that there is external political support for your social group? For example, is there a person in a leadership position who belongs to a minority group?

	RTP1	RTP2	RTP3	RTP4	RTP5
Q16	Yes	No	No	No	No
Q17	Yes	Unknown	Yes	Yes	Yes
External political support?	No	Unknown	Yes	Yes	Yes

Q16: Do you feel like using your discretion and making choices that benefit your social group can lead to negative consequences for you in your job?

Q17: Do you feel that there is external political support for your social group? For example, is there a person in a leadership position who belongs to a minority group?

#### 4.10 Analysis

##### *Contextual differences between the Rijkstraineeprogram and New Professionals Program.*

The interviews highlighted that New Professionals express a more critical perspective on the trainee program compared to Rijkstrainees. While all New Professionals are informed about the Rijkstraineeship and its differences, not all Rijkstrainees are aware of the New Professionals Program. Both programs involve working four days a week at the ministry and one day of training. However, significant differences stem from their distinct approaches rooted in recruitment strategies. The Rijkstraineeship seeks the right candidate, while the New Professionals Program seeks the right position for the candidate, leading to strategic matching for Rijkstrainees and potential surplus for New Professionals. Trainee turnover varies, with Rijkstrainees prepared for ministry positions, while New Professionals aim for retention post-program, though not guaranteed. The absence of clear guidelines for New Professionals creates unclear expectations, contrasting with the well-defined guidelines of the Rijkstraineeship and expectations of and from Rijkstrainees.

##### *Personality differences between Rijkstrainees and New Professionals.*

Multiple New Professionals highlight differences in personalities between the two trainee groups. Attempts are made to identify distinctions in motivation and reasons for participation, life experiences and privileges, diversity, as well as language use and thinking levels. Given the objectives of the New Professionals Program, it seems logical that these differences are observed. It appears that the implementation of the program has contributed to increased diversity in these aspects. However, certain New Professionals face friction, particularly in their duties and potential career progression, as there is an expectation of a certain level that not every New Professional possesses. As mentioned by NPP2, the trainees are described as "streetwise civil servants," implying that they may not immediately meet existing expectations. Expectations regarding language use and level of thinking could be an obstacle in the

experience of New Professionals, as well as for progression after the program. This goes hand in hand with the differences in recruitment. Additionally, it is noted that the current assessment of the Rijkstraineeship excludes individuals who could have been effective policymakers but may not meet the expected level.

*Institutional differences between ministries and job types.*

The focus on institutional differences between ministries and job types is crucial. New Professionals work solely at the Ministry of HWS or an affiliated advisory organ, while Rijkstraineeships operate across various ministries or executive organs. In terms of ministries, the level of engagement in social policy varies, influencing trainees' advocacy for their social groups. The nature of topics within a ministry affects the feasibility of active representation. For instance, a Rijkstraineeship heard from HWS trainees that active representation is more likely in ministries closely associated with social policies. This suggests that New Professionals, dedicated to HWS or affiliated organizations, may have increased opportunities for advocacy due to the social nature of their policies, although variations may exist across different branches within ministries.

Differences also emerge in job types within different branches, impacting tasks and responsibilities. Those in the executive branch may encounter autonomy limitations, affecting their involvement in policies related to their social groups. The organization's nature, whether executive or independent, further determines the extent to which trainees can provide advice on social groups. In summary, these institutional and job-related distinctions significantly shape the experiences and opportunities for New Professionals and Rijkstraineeships.

*Using discretion to enhance the position of one's social group.* Generally all trainees commonly use discretion to advocate for their social groups, but variations exist. Some refrain due to short-

term appointments or organizational independence, while others see it as intrinsic to government work. Perspectives of many individuals are considered, with a recognition that discretion can support social groups when backed by compelling arguments. However, challenges in reaching minority groups are acknowledged, with language barriers hindering communication accessibility. While discretion is valued, there are limits as independent decisions must align with departmental policies. Collaborative decision-making is emphasized, requiring approval from higher authorities, exemplified by NPP2 and RTP1. Despite expertise, final decisions often rest with superiors, marking the end of individual opinions. Approval processes involve presentations to management teams, ensuring alignment with organizational frameworks, as illustrated by NPP1 and NPP5 in specific organizational contexts.

*Approach to policy and policy alignment.* Trainees highlight the importance of involving various social groups in policy discussions and adapting approaches to address less reachable demographics. Despite references to neutrality, the overarching goal is to represent as many voices as possible, emphasizing engagement not just about people but with people. Regarding policy alignment, New Professionals advocate for a combination of expertise and diverse perspectives, emphasizing the importance of involving experts with lived experiences in policymaking. They suggest a shift from the current division of 90%-10% (civil servants without experience vs. experiential experts) to a more balanced 60-40 distribution. In contrast, Rijkstrainees express more skepticism, stating that competent individuals, even if not from a specific minority group, can make well-considered policy choices. They also acknowledge challenges in including every group proportionally and highlight the limitations of policymaking by individuals from the represented group.

*How trainees engage in active representation of minority groups.* New Professionals generally acknowledged the importance of active representation within the government. Participants suggested that clearer frameworks and guidelines within the New Professionals program would provide more opportunities for engagement in active representation. Several trainees, particularly New Professionals, have demonstrated tangible achievements in advancing the interests of their social groups. New Professionals utilized their expertise to include a mental health passage in an advisory report, initiated a program addressing obesity in non-Western individuals and advocated for more inclusive government communication, and played a pivotal role in organizing National Coming Out Day, introducing LGBT-flag key cords, and promoting diversity and inclusion at the Health Institute. One Rijkstraine is actively organizing an event to raise awareness about violence against women, aligning with her personal experiences. Notably, New Professionals, as emphasized by NPP6, are expected to actively engage in such representation, setting them apart from Rijkstrainees.

*Policy congruence.* Expectation 1 was based on the idea that New Professionals more frequently encounter policy congruence in their work due to the difference in the starting point of the recruitment method and the expected match of life experiences they bring with the job they are assigned to, hence exhibiting a higher level of active representation. Overall, most trainees indicate the presence of policy congruence, although policy salience is less common. Policy congruence is often linked to broader societal themes that may impact the respondent's social group. Not in all cases, a direct connection is made between the subjects they engage with and the specific social group they are part of. Policy congruence is, in real numbers, not higher for New Professionals. Both Rijkstrainees and New Professionals indicate experiencing policy congruence. Frequently, the topics are linked to broader social themes that may respectively impact their social groups. However, it is noteworthy that New Professionals highlight subjects

related to social diversity, while Rijkstrainees more often mention topics with broad social implications not unique to their social group. This difference may arise from the fact that New Professionals consider themselves to be part of a minority group more frequently than Rijkstrainees.

*Internal political support.* Expectation 2 contained the notion that due to the objective and goal of the program, New Professionals would experience a higher degree of internal political support, and would therefore exhibit a higher degree of active representation. On group level, both New Professionals and Rijkstrainees do not possess all operationalized components of internal political support. The participants discuss various aspects, including the nature of representation by colleagues, the quantity and influence of civil servants from minority groups, the importance of contact with minority colleagues, and the role of superiors. The majority of trainees perceive active representation as crucial but note variations in support and perspectives within their respective ministries. Furthermore, there is no presence of a critical mass, and this is attributed to generational differences, age, and politics. Additionally, it was found that there are challenges in achieving diversity and inclusion, including the limited representation of minority groups in higher positions and the need for a balanced approach to policymaking that incorporates both expertise and diverse perspectives. No evidence has been found indicating that New Professionals experience a higher degree of internal political support. This expectation had arisen from the idea that New Professionals operate in a different context due to the objective of the program. However, they do not receive more internal political support, and often operate in a similar context the Rijkstrainees operate in. Furthermore, there is no indication that the presence of internal political support in this context results in a higher degree of active representation.

*External political support.* Expectation 3 included the idea that due to the long-term goal of the trainee program and mitigated risks of losing organizational rewards from individuals in higher echelons of the ministry, New Professionals experience a higher degree of external political support and will therefore exhibit a higher degree of active representation. Overall, opinions regarding potential negative consequences at the individual level are divided. There is no significant difference at the group level, as both Rijkstrainees and New Professionals indicate that there is room to use autonomy without experiencing negative consequences. Additionally, two New Professionals and one Rijkstrainee suggest that negative consequences could occur if this is done with the wrong person or if one steps outside the established boundaries. When comparing the possibility of using one's discretion to benefit their social group without negative consequences, and external support from superiors, we see that in real numbers, there is a similar amount of external political support for both groups. In that case, external political support is not higher for New Professionals.

The presence of minority supervisors and supervisors who share the same values is highlighted, with most respondents indicating the existence of such supervisors. The inspirational impact of having a supervisor from a minority group, exemplified by Abigail Norville, is noted by several New Professionals. They see her as a role model and a source of inspiration, and her presence is considered important for encouraging diversity in leadership positions. The trainees also discuss positive interactions with their supervisors, including discussions about social groups, non-work-related matters, and expressions of support for minorities when fitting into larger visions. In summary, the trainees acknowledge the nuanced dynamics of using autonomy in their roles, and the presence of minority supervisors is seen as inspiring and supportive, contributing to a more diverse and inclusive work environment. No evidence has been found indicating that New Professionals experience a higher degree of external political support. This expectation had arisen from the idea that New Professionals



operate in a different context due to the objective of the program. However, they do not receive more external political support, and often operate in a similar context the Rijkstrainees operate in. Furthermore, there is no indication that the presence of external political support in this context results in a higher degree of active representation.

#### **4.11 General observations**

*In terms of the position of women*, the initial approach considered gender as a minority status for all participants. However, being a woman was not perceived as being part of a minority by the participants. For instance, RTP4 expressed the view that women no longer fall under the category of a minority. RTP5 noted that men are in the minority at her ministry, but she observed that men predominantly occupy higher positions. She speculated that this situation might gradually change. The New Professionals group did not highlight the experience of being a woman as a distinct minority status within the ministry, although this may vary across different ministries not covered in this study.

*Regarding minority groups* it is interesting that not every participant who, based on the applied definition of a minority group, identified themselves as part of such a group. These participants are both New Professionals, and this was unexpected due to the expectation that they would be more aware of being part of a minority group in society. However, follow-up questions focused on identifying social groups did reveal that they belonged to these minority groups. Additionally, it is noteworthy that neurodiversity (RTP1, RTP5) and dyslexia (NPP2) were mentioned during the identification of minority groups.

## **5. Conclusion**

This thesis aimed to identify if there is a difference in active representation of minority groups between the New Professionals Program and Rijkstraineeprogram, by looking at the independent variables of the differences between the programs, policy congruence, internal political support, and external political support. The research question this thesis aimed to

answer is: *To what extent and how does the trainee program influence the degree of active representation?*

Based on the qualitative data collection and further analysis of the data, it can be concluded that there is a difference in active representation between the two trainee programs, as New Professionals have presented more examples of instances in which they engage in active representation of minority groups. However, there are limited signs that this difference can be attributed to the conditions that have been applied in this research. Other conditions that are limiting and facilitating the engagement in active representation in the context of trainees, will be further elaborated upon in the discussion.

First and foremost, the differences between the New Professionals Program and Rijkstraineeprogram can be found primarily in the organizational differences of the programs, primarily when considering the differences in frameworks, program structures, and expectations on the trainee's and department's end. These unclear expectations coincide with insecurity for New Professionals at times and is mostly due to the pilot phase of the program. Furthermore, both trainee groups operate in similar environments when it comes to organizational and institutional frameworks, which is therefore not a factor that could contribute to a possible difference in the degree of active representation between the two groups. There is also a difference in perception of policy alignment. While New Professionals believe policies align better with minority groups when they are drafted by individuals belonging to these groups, Rijkstrainees are skeptical and express dissent more often. It is asserted that the difference in active representation between the two groups is not rooted in the goal of the programs, but rather due to the differences in the recruitment strategies. Because of this difference, the diversity of the New Professionals is most likely the reason for a higher engagement in active representation.

Considering policy congruence, it cannot be definitively stated that New Professionals encounter it more frequently due to the program's approach. There seems to be a higher occurrence of policy congruence because of the social nature of the policies New Professionals deal with, given that they all work at HWS or an affiliated organization. Additionally, New Professionals may experience more policy congruence because they more often identify as belonging to a minority group than Rijkstrainees. The perception of congruence varied between groups, with Rijkstrainees associating it more with broad social themes, while New Professionals linked it more to diversity-related issues in society.

Regarding internal political support, there is no evidence that it contributes to a higher degree of active representation. Trainees mention generational differences, differences in age, and political importance of themes and topics to be a hindrance in internal political support or the possible translation to active representation. There is support from colleagues, but a critical mass could not be identified. While the sense of support from colleagues may enhance the work environment and foster departmental familiarity, there is no indication that this support leads to increased engagement in active representation in this research.

Concerning external political support, it can be affirmed that there is no evidence indicating its contribution to a higher level of active representation. Trainees appreciated having leaders from minority groups or leaders sharing similar values, but there is no evidence in this research context that this translates into a shift from passive to active representation. Although New Professionals found the presence of Abigail Norville inspiring, her presence did not directly result in increased efforts for minority groups. Furthermore, the support from supervisors is in accordance with the larger visions for the ministry.

In response to the research question, it can be stated that the investigated conditions have limited influence on the level of active representation by New Professionals and

Rijkstrainees for minority groups, and the differences in active representation between these two groups.

## **6.0 Discussion**

### **6.1 Application to theory**

Research on the active representation of bureaucrats has identified specific conditions that facilitate the shift from passive to active representation, leading to positive policy outcomes for minority groups. However, these conditions have not been investigated within the context of civil servants or government trainees in the Netherlands. Moreover, existing research has primarily concentrated on gender and race in the realm of active representation, neglecting or under examining other demographic groups (Bishu & Kennedy, 2020). Additionally, Bishu and Kennedy (2020) have highlighted a prevalent emphasis on quantitative research methods in prior studies, overshadowing qualitative or mixed methods. Given the imperative role of representative bureaucracy in bureaucratic and democratic legitimacy, this study aimed to address gaps in the current literature. Specifically, it explored whether differences in the recruitment premise and objectives of the examined trainee programs contribute to variations in representation.

While no conclusive evidence emerged regarding the impact of policy congruence, internal political support, and external political support on the level of active representation, the observed difference in active representation between the two groups suggests a potential influence of diversity resulting from distinct recruitment processes. This indicates a measure of success, as the premise of the recruitment process is to recruit a group of diverse individuals for the New Professionals Program.

However, various constraints on active representation were identified, offering valuable insights for enhancing representative bureaucracy in Rijksoverheid's recruitment field and setting a foundation for future investigations. Despite the expectation for New Professionals to engage in active representation, unclear expectations from both trainees and departments appear

to limit such possibilities. Additionally, practical constraints for both trainee groups include their relatively short tenure at the ministry, hindering their ability to fully engage. The ministries' long-term visions and goals pose limitations on internal and external political support, affecting active representation possibilities for minority groups.

Institutional barriers, such as political influence and dependence on the cabinet's priorities, further restrict the advocacy for certain topics. Trainees' assigned roles, particularly those engaged in advisory or executive tasks, are bound by legal and organizational frameworks, as well as a requirement for neutrality. The ministry of employment also plays a crucial role, with ministries focused on social policy potentially fostering more active representation due to the social nature of their themes.

## **6.2 Limitations and recommendations for future research**

This research is constrained by the limited sample size of participants, leading to compromised external validity. Generalization of the results to a broader population is hindered by the exclusive representation of female and non-binary participants, and potential temporal differences. Additionally, not all participants identified themselves as belonging to a minority group. Future research could enhance its focus by concentrating on a specific minority group or ensuring all participants acknowledge their minority status. To delve deeper into the implications of the findings, future studies might consider a prolonged observation period or a different sample of Rijkstrainees and New Professionals. Inclusion of male participants in subsequent research could provide valuable perspectives. Exploring the active representation of civil servants or trainees within the same ministry or branch could yield insightful comparisons. Diversifying independent variables, such as those discussed in Keiser et al.'s theoretical framework (2002), may unveil new insights. Furthermore, studying the New Professionals and Rijkstrainees upon completion of the programs can be valuable. Are they eventually staying at Rijksoverheid, and if yes, in what capacity? Have their observations changed? This could provide interesting insights for theory, and the lessons learned can be

incorporated into the retention strategy of Rijksoverheid. Another interesting topic of research would be researching engagement in active representation among civil servants working at the Algemene Bestuursdienst. This organizational layer is the highest echelon of Rijksoverheid, which means that the use of their discretion would be interesting to research. Lastly, employing researcher triangulation, though not implemented in this study, could bolster the reliability of future research endeavors.

### **6.3 Practical implications**

Several practical implications have emerged from this study, primarily focusing on how Rijksoverheid can better manage the recruitment and retention of diverse talent in the future. This involves considering policy changes for recruitment and adjustments to enhance retention.

Regarding recruitment of diverse talent, a potential improvement lies in modifying the application procedure for the Rijkstraineeship. The study highlighted that strict admission criteria and challenging assessments exclude individuals who could be proficient policymakers. To maintain a certain level of thinking, working, and learning within the Rijkstraineeship, providing training and courses could be explored to enhance or sustain the required skills. This approach would prevent the direct exclusion of diverse talent, allowing them to contribute valuable perspectives to the ministry and eventually reach the desired level. Additionally, diversification of the Rijkstraineeship can be considered, offering opportunities for candidates who might otherwise have been overlooked. Classic candidates can still enter at their level and be challenged accordingly, while those who might have been excluded have a chance to contribute to the government. Drawing on lessons learned from the New Professionals Program, integrating NPP into the Rijkstraineeship is a potential strategy. Providing alternative positions for individuals who don't meet the graduation deadline is another consideration, recognizing the value of their work experience within the traineeship. A strategy that could aid the New Professionals Program in enhancing the program's visibility and fortifying the structure and

organization of the program would be expanding the program to other ministries. Seeing that the New Professionals aid in providing new perspectives, but also contribute to diversity, this is an interesting next step. Furthermore, taking into account intersectionality in the recruitment strategy would be valuable.

For retention of diverse talent, establishing clearer frameworks for New Professionals is crucial. This involves managing expectations for both trainees and future colleagues and supervisors. This clarity allows New Professionals to truly flourish in positions aligned with their personalities, increasing the likelihood of their willingness to continue after the program. The entry options for New Professionals should also be made more explicit since they need to apply for positions post-program, requiring clear guidance in this transition.

From the outset, it was noted in this thesis that diversity does not always lead to increased inclusion, emphasizing the importance of avoiding overlapping interventions (Çelik, 2021, p. 353). Several trainees have reported negative experiences due to generational differences or varying perspectives on certain topics. Therefore, Rijksoverheid should continue focusing on awareness and dialogue. The presence of minority group leaders was positively acknowledged, and though increasing their number practically may be challenging, interventions promoting diverse talent's progression into higher positions could be strategically implemented.

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# Appendix I

## Interview guide

### Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to engage in an interview with me. In this interview, I aim to discuss your experiences as a trainee. Prior to commencing, I would like to address your written consent. You have transmitted a completed and signed version of the original document to me via email, thereby agreeing to participate in this interview.

Your identity will not be shared, and only your responses will be deliberated in the outcomes of this research, with no reference to your name. Should you have any comments subsequent to the interview, please feel free to reach out to me.

As outlined in the consent form, the session is being recorded. Your endorsement of the form signifies your approval for this recording. The purpose of the recording is to accurately recall the content of our conversation for later reference during the analysis phase. The recording will not be shared with anyone, and upon the completion of my thesis, it will be deleted.

As indicated in the form, the interview is expected to last approximately 30 minutes. You are encouraged to interject at any point if you wish to add information or have questions or comments. If there is a question you prefer not to answer, kindly inform me, and we will proceed to the next query. If at any juncture you wish to terminate the interview, please communicate your preference, and I will conclude the session. Do you have any questions before we commence? Shall we begin?

A series of questions will follow shortly. I would like to inform you that, for the purposes of this research, the operational definition of minority groups is as follows: belonging to a group smaller than the majority group due to differences in ethnic, cultural, religious, sexual, or gender identity, having a (physical) disability, or being neurodivergent.

Do you have any questions before we start?

### Questions

#### **Section A - pertaining to passive representation and differences between the trainee programs**

1. What gender do you identify as?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your academic background?
  - a. Applied sciences
  - b. University bachelor
  - c. University master
4. What ministry are you currently working at?
5. When did you start working at this ministry?
6. Ben je werkzaam in Beleid, Staf/HR, Toezicht/Inspectie of Uitvoering?
7. Do you identify as a person belonging to a minority group?

If so, which minority group(s)?

8. How would you describe the demographic group you belong to in terms of sexuality, ethnicity, religion, or other characteristics?
9. What is the reason you applied for the Rijkstraineeprogram/decided to participate in the NPP?



10. What do you consider to be the biggest difference between the Rijkstraineeprogram and New Professionals Program?

**Section B - pertaining to active representation and policy congruence/salience**

11. Do you feel like you have discretion in your position as civil servant at the ministry you work for?

12. Does the ministry you are currently employed at involve itself in policy that affects the social group you are part of?

a. If yes,

i. Can you give an example of these policies?

b. if no,

i. Why not?

13. Are you working in a policy domain that can serve the interests of your counterparts in the citizenry?

a. If yes,

i. Are these related to salient issues for your social group?

14. Do you use this discretion to match decisions related to your social or group identity and purpose?

a. If yes, can you give an example of a time when you have used an instrument to implement a certain change that favors the position of your group?

15. Do you handle policy differently for different types of clients? For example, would you treat policy that concerns people from a different gender or age group differently than policy that concerns people that are similar to you?

16. Do you think policy will be a better fit for minority groups if the policy is made by people belonging to the minority group?

**Section C - pertaining to internal political support and external political support**

17. Do you feel like using your discretion and making choices that benefit your social group can lead to negative consequences for you in your job?

18. Do you feel that there is external political support for your social group? For example, is there a person in a leadership position who belongs to a minority group?

a. If yes,

i. What minority group does this person belong to in your opinion,

ii. Is this person actively supporting you in the loss of organizational rewards, such as a promotion or more responsibilities?

19. Do you feel that there are other civil servants from minority positions who are active representatives of a social group protecting their in-group colleagues from the loss of organizational rewards?

a. If yes,

i. Can you give an example?

20. Do you think it matters how many minority bureaucrats work at the ministry you work for?

21. Does the majority-minority ratio influence how you deal with policy?

22. Does contact with colleagues from other minority groups influence how much effort you put into policy that relates to their social group?

23. Is there a sufficient percentage of minority bureaucrats at the ministry you work for?

24. Do you think the support for policies related to benefiting the position of your social group exceeds about a quarter of staff?

a. If not, what share would you expect?

25. Do your superiors influence your perceptions of what issues are most pressing for the client group?

## Appendix II

An example of a code group network used for the independent variable “internal political support”.

