

Besluit

**Accreditatierapport en -besluit met een positieve beoordeling van de
accreditatieaanvraag voor de opleiding Master of Science in Urban Studies (master)
van de Vrije Universiteit Brussel i.s.m. Universität Wien, Université Libre de Bruxelles,
University of Copenhagen, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid en Universidad
Complutense de Madrid**

datum	1. Inleiding
28 augustus 2013	Bij brief van 22 maart 2013 heeft het instellingsbestuur van de Vrije Universiteit Brussel te Brussel een accreditatieaanvraag ingediend bij de Nederlands-Vlaamse
onderwerp	Accreditatieorganisatie (NVAO) voor de opleiding Master of Science in Urban Studies
Definitief	(master). Deze aanvraag is ontvangen op 22 maart 2013 en ontvankelijk verklaard op
accreditatierapport en -besluit	27 juni 2013.
(001651)	
bijlage	
1	De accreditatieaanvraag steunt op het visitatierapport van een externe beoordeling uitgevoerd door een visitatiecommissie ingesteld door de Vlaamse Universiteiten en Hogescholen Raad (Vluhr).

De visitatiecommissie kende de volgende samenstelling:

Voorzitter:

- Prof. dr. Stijn Oosterlynck, Assistant Professor at the department of Sociology; Universiteit Antwerpen;

Leden:

- Prof. dr. Sophie Watson, Professor of Sociology at the Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University in Milton Keynes, United Kingdom (vakdeskundige);
- Prof. dr. Joseph Heathcott, Associate Professor of Urban Studies at The New School in New York, USA (vakdeskundige);
- Dr. Guido Cuyvers, Departementshoofd Departement Sociaal Werk, Katholieke Hogeschool Kempen (onderwijsdeskundige);
- Mr. Karel Van den Berghe, student Bachelor in Geography, Universiteit Gent (student-lid).

Secretaris:

- Mrs. dr. ir. Els Van Zele, staff member of the Quality Assurance Unit of the Flemish Higher Education Council (VLUHR);

De visitatie heeft plaatsgevonden op 26 en 27 september 2012. Het visitatierapport dateert van februari 2013.

De NVAO komt tot de volgende vaststellingen:

- De externe beoordeling is opgesteld en onderbouwd overeenkomstig het toepasselijke Accreditatiekader bestaande opleidingen hoger onderwijs Vlaanderen van de NVAO en volgens de daarbij behorende beslisregels;
- De visitatiecommissie heeft voor de externe beoordeling het door de Vluhr vastgestelde visitatieprotocol gevolgd;
- De externe beoordeling verschaft inzicht in de samenstelling van de visitatiecommissie;
- De externe beoordeling bevat een onderzoek ten gronde naar de aanwezigheid van voldoende generieke kwaliteitswaarborgen.

De NVAO is in het licht van het vorenstaande tot de slotsom gekomen dat de externe beoordeling over de voorliggende opleiding regelmatig en gedegen tot stand is gekomen.

3. Inhoudelijke overwegingen

De NVAO steunt haar inhoudelijke besluitvorming in hoofdzaak op de onderstaande elementen uit het visitatierapport.

The programme 4Cities) is co-organised by 6 universities at 4 locations:

- Brussels: VUB- Department of Geography at the Faculty of Science and ULB - Department 'Institut de Gestion de l'environnement d'Aménagement du Territoire' (IGEAT) at the Faculty of Sciences and at the Department of Social and Labour Sciences at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences;
- Vienna: Universität Wien - Department of Geography and Regional Research, at the Faculty of Earth Sciences, Geography and Astronomy;
- Copenhagen: Københavns Universite - Department of Arts and Cultural Studies at the Faculty of Humanities;
- Madrid: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid - Department of Geography at the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy and Universidad Complutense de Madrid - Department of Sociology at the Faculty of Political Science and Sociology.

Doelstellingen

The panel finds that the programme's objectives adequately attend to the development of academic skills, to recent developments in the discipline, and to the processes by which new theories are formed. However, more attention should be paid to competence-oriented learning. A competence matrix can provide the evidence that all the programme competencies are covered. The programme is by its nature truly international. All the involved institutions value the 4Cities master as a truly international master programme and an example of how synergy can be found across discipline boundaries and sites to establish a strong international brand.

The panel is impressed by the pioneering role in the bottom-up Europeanization of higher education, both in terms of the specific learning and the ways in which the programme and the learning experience are designed. They believe that the final qualifications are derived from the relevant academic disciplines and research fields and capture very well the essence of urban studies as a multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary field of research and practice. The panel is convinced that the pronounced mission statement is successfully carried out by the management team and provides a clear context for the discipline related objectives of the programme but they would like to encourage the master to clarify and write down its mission more extensively.

The panel concludes that the programma adequately emphasizes knowledge development. Current developments and new trends are integrated into the programme and there is a strong attention to experience in the professional field through the multitude of (fieldwork) assignments and projects throughout the programme. The programme pays good attention to the development of research skills and research attitudes. In practice, students tend to fall back on the methodologies of their prior discipline to conduct research for their Master's theses. However, the panel encourages the programme to continue its emphasis on the integration of methods and perspectives across disciplines.

The programme adequately materializes the aims and objectives, both with respect to the level and orientation and with respect to the discipline-specific requirements. It gives students good opportunities to obtain the final qualifications and it creates adequate conditions to enter the professional field. The materials in the programme are up to date, relevant and covering all necessary aspects. Moreover, the 4 participating cities provide a sound basis for comparative analysis and experience. The programme is highly responsive to suggestions for improvements and so far, it has addressed all the challenges except the translation of the final qualifications into clear learning targets (in terms of competences) for the course components. The panel is convinced that this will be important.

The programme provides a thoroughly coherent, logical, and rigorous path of study. All courses contribute to the examination of various aspects of urban studies, neatly distributed over the 4 semesters, with a gradual evolution from the more introductory analytical module towards more project-oriented inter-disciplinary modules. Each semester in itself offers a coherent section of course components. At the same time, each semester builds on the previous semester, creating a developmental arc toward higher learning that culminates in the Master's thesis. At the end of each semester, an assessment is organized. The Master's thesis is supervised throughout the two years.

The students commented that the workload is substantial but feasible. The workload is not perfectly evenly spread over the 4 semesters but they know beforehand when to hand in assignments and when workload peaks occur. Imbalances in the past have been addressed adequately and adjustments were debated before having been implemented. The workload for any particular course also depends on the background of the student. The panel found that most information about the study time is qualitative in nature and is not measured by means of standard procedures, applicable to measuring workload. It is of the opinion that more formal workload measurement instruments should be introduced to monitor the workload in a more consistent manner.

Students' application and the selection is centralized and managed by the coordinators, but students can subscribe in one of the contributing universities. The admission requirements are clearly formulated. They comply with the university policies, regulations and institutional codes of practice on recruitment and admissions. The panel is of the opinion that the number of students (20) is favorable for the deployment of the programme's methodological concept. The panel is of the opinion that the International Academic Board of the programme has a good grasp and control over the intake process and is aware of the differences in the prior knowledge of its students. The panel suggests to organize specialized preparatory courses for students lacking some elements of the required and useful prior knowledge.

Pagina 4 van 9 The Master is a two years, 120 study ECTS-credits study programme. This is in line with the formal regulations described in the Act on the Restructuring of Flemish Higher Education.

The programme applies a strong methodological concept towards studying various aspects of cities, by having them live in the cities they examine through scholarship. In the view of the panel constitutes 'Living the city' a signature asset of the programme. The programme uses a good variety of learning activities in each semester. The panel believes that the majority of the teaching methods aligns with the didactic concept but suggests, in accordance with the students' request, the inclusion of more discussions and more interactive approaches. The panel is of the opinion that the materials for the distinct courses are of an overall good quality. Each university uses its own online learning environment to support the courses, and students seem to cope the use of six different platforms.

The panel evaluates the examination questions as having an overall adequate quality and fairly representing a cross-section of the subjects addressed in the distinct courses. There is a good variety of test- and examination formats, consistent with the different evaluation traditions and the 4 different national systems and in line with the university policies. There is no system to guarantee the quality of the examinations. Lecturers make their own examination questions, in line with the objectives for the course. The panel suggests an external examiner or a mechanism to control the quality of the examinations for the programme as a whole should be considered. The transparency of marking the examinations could be improved. Students have a right to ask for feedback but at some universities they need to be quite pro-active to obtain personal feedback about their results.

The thesis comprises 30 ECTS, which is in conformity with the regulations in the Act on the Restructuring of Higher Education in Flanders.

The panel evaluates the academic level of the theses as adequate. Most students use research methods they learned in their previous study programme. The panel recommends that the programme encourages to integrate more than one method, approach, or theoretical framework into the Master's theses.

The Master's thesis guidance consists several workshops and seminars held each semester and each student has a supervisor. The thesis is evaluated by the supervisor and a second reader. The students defend their Master's thesis in front of a jury, formed by professors of the programme. There is no one single approach towards supervision of the Master's theses. Students and the panel suggested introducing a more predefined format, outlining the rights and obligations of the student.

Inzet van personeel

The research expertise and academic record of the staff involved in teaching in the programme is of a very good quality, demonstrated by the list of research outputs, relevant for the teaching in the programme. The staff demonstrates broad and active international research experience. The research of the staff is introduced in the lectures, and the students appreciate the teaching quality.

The teaching staff consists 6,58 FTE. Given the relatively small size of the student body, the student/ ZAP ratio of 3.8 is favorable. The distribution of the staff in age categories is fairly balanced, but 6 senior lecturers are near retirement. The panel would like to recommend attention to the formation of a new 'core faculty' for the programme and suggests that the responsibilities of the staff be explicitly indicated in their job descriptions and assessment

Pagina 5 van 9 frameworks in order to guarantee formal support of the institutions. The panel hopes that the new status of the Erasmus Mundus recognition would allow some more financial support for the management of the programme as well.

The panel evaluates the overall quality of the teaching staff as good. The master is mainly taught by the academic staff from the departments contributing to the programme at the six universities. The panel describes their expertise as very good in all six universities. The professors are experts in their research field, lead renowned research groups, are authorities in their respective domains and demonstrate good pedagogic knowledge and approaches. In addition, also numerous experts from the field contribute to the programme. The personnel policy is exercised by the local university regulations.

Voorzieningen

The panel notes that the facilities have an overall good quality. The various locations are amply equipped with modern techniques to foster effective learning. All universities associated with the programme dispose of good library facilities and once registered in a certain library, electronic access is available for the remainder of the programme. All students have their own laptop and have access to the local university networks. The teaching staff can easily be reached during the students' stay. At the beginning of the programme the programme director and the International Relations and Mobility Office (IRMO) central VUB service look into VISA issues, housing and social security issues. During the preceding semester, the programme coordinator in the next city informs students about practical things and the 'stay' in their city. Some students only obtain a VISUM—although all paper work is done in time—after the first 2 months of teaching and consequently, miss part of the programme. The panel supports the demand from the programme directors to address these issues at a higher administrative and legislative level.

The panel notes that the student support and guidance is very well organized and the academic staff can easily be reached and approached at the six institutions. The panel raises some concerns about the management structure for the master. Though rotation in principle is a good idea in order to more evenly spread the responsibility and the management workload over the different partners, there is a lot to be said for keeping the position and all the papers, files and other data in one place. A second concern is that the management at VUB is almost exclusively situated at the level of the programme and the faculty. The panel urges other supporting services (e.g. the Career Service) to take a stronger interest in this programme in order not to miss out on some valuable learning opportunities. The panel remarks that, while high by European standards, the total effective cost of the programme is well communicated to the students. It suggests that the Board constantly monitors and updates the actual cost of the programme, with the goal of minimizing the substantial cost for the students.

Interne kwaliteitszorg

The quality of the course components and of the programme as a whole is mainly guarded at the various universities. Various instruments and initiatives are taken. Good informal contact between the teaching staff and the students provides important input for the evaluation of the programme. The assessment panel is of the opinion that satisfactory means are established to guard the quality of the programme, but that there is still room for improvement, most notably by also having the semesters in Madrid and Copenhagen be evaluated separately.

Pagina 6 van 9 The programme is monitored by the Board and consistently evaluated after each cohort of students has graduated, and in addition after some semesters. The assessment panel finds that not only the results of these formal evaluations, but also the incentives stemming from the informal feedback of the students and of the alumni survey, clearly result in discussed strategies for further improvement of the programme. The panel evaluates the follow-up of the recommendations, made by the previous external quality control exercises (e.g. initial accreditation), as appropriate. In addition, the programme has also been evaluated or accredited by the domestic systems for external quality control in the various contributing universities.

The assessment panel is of the opinion that the involvement of the students is good, given the good formal structures that are in place (student representatives at the Board meetings) as well as the strong informal contacts, the evaluation of individual semesters and the strong commitment of the staff.

The informal contacts of the academic staff with the professional field function quitewell through their networks, but could be formalized.

Currently there is no real functioning alumni association for the programme, but the alumni value such a structure. The assessment panel suggests that the programme directors should support the founding of one. The assessment panel is further of the opinion that the alumni could be better heard in curriculum discussions as well.

Resultaten

The assessment panel finds that the aims and objectives of the master are indeed realized and that the Master's theses have an overall good quality. The quality of the course components is good and students have good opportunities to attain the objectives of the programme. The graduates are well prepared to enter the professional field. They find employment in a variety of sectors and engage in a wide range of occupations. The alumni, with whom the panel spoke all have jobs closely related to urban planning and social urbanism. The alumni all made particular reference to the usefulness of the networking opportunities gleaned through movement between four different cities across Europe.

The majority of the students complete their study in the time foreseen and the dropout rate is very small. The master closely follows up on the results of teaching and reasons for dropout. The results indicate that the students benefit from the programme and obtain good positions in the professional field. With respect to further improvement of the programme, the panel suggests formulating real target figures, which could enforce managerial decisions to be taken in the future.

Conclusie

De NVAO is in het licht van het vorenstaande tot de slotsom gekomen dat het eindoordeel van de commissie deugdelijk is gemotiveerd. De NVAO kan zich dan ook aansluiten bij de bevindingen en overwegingen voor alle facetten en onderwerpen, zoals verwoord in het visitatierapport. De eindconclusie uit het visitatierapport wordt gevolgd.

De tabel geeft per onderwerp en per facet het oordeel van de visitatiecommissie weer.

ONDERWERP	ORDEEL	FACET	ORDEEL
1 Doelstellingen opleiding	V	1.1 niveau en oriëntatie	V
		1.2 domeinspecifieke eisen	E
2 Programma	V	2.1 eisen gerichtheid	G
		2.2 relatie doelstellingen - programma	V
		2.3 samenhang programma	E
		2.4 studielast	G
		2.5 toelatingsvoorwaarden	G
		2.6 studieomvang	OK
		2.7 afstemming vormgeving - inhoud	G
		2.8 beoordeling en toetsing	V
		2.9 masterproef	G
3 Inzet van personeel	V	3.1 eisen gerichtheid	E
		3.2 kwantiteit	V
		3.3 kwaliteit	G
4 Voorzieningen	V	4.1 materiële voorzieningen	V
		4.2 studiebegeleiding	G
5 Interne kwaliteitszorg	V	5.1 evaluatie resultaten	V
		5.2 maatregelen tot verbetering	G
		5.3 betrokkenheid	V
6 Resultaten	V	6.1 gerealiseerd niveau	G
		6.2 onderwijsrendement	G

Eindoordeel: positief

De onderstaande tabel geeft per onderwerp het globaal oordeel van de NVAO weer.

ONDERWERP	ORDEEL
1 Doelstellingen	V
2 Programma	V
3 Inzet personeel	V
4 Voorzieningen	V
5 Interne kwaliteitszorg	V
6 Resultaten	V

Eindoordeel: positief

6. Besluit¹

betreffende de accreditatie van de Master of Science in Urban Studies (master) van de Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

De NVAO,
Na beraadslaging,
Besluit:

Met toepassing van het decreet van 4 april 2003 betreffende de herstructurering van het hoger onderwijs in Vlaanderen, wordt het accreditatierapport en –besluit met positief eindoordeel voor de opleiding Master of Science in Urban Studies (master) van de Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Universität Wien, Université Libre de Bruxelles, University of Copenhagen, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid en Universidad Complutense de Madrid goedgekeurd en wordt de opleiding geaccrediteerd. Het betreft een opleiding zonder afstudeerrichtingen die te Brussel, Wenen, Madrid, Kopenhagen wordt georganiseerd.

De in het eerste lid bedoelde accreditatie geldt vanaf de aanvang van het academiejaar 2013-2014 tot en met het einde van het academiejaar 2020-2021.

Den Haag, 28 augustus 2013

Voor de NVAO,



R.P. Zevenbergen
(bestuurder)

¹ Conform de bepalingen vermeld in de handleiding accreditatie kan een instelling opmerkingen en bezwaren formuleren op het ontwerp van accreditatierapport. Bij e-mail van 21 augustus 2013 heeft de instelling gereageerd op het ontwerp van accreditatierapport. Dit heeft geleid tot een enkele correctie het accreditatierapport.

Pagina 9 van 9 **Bijlage 1 – Gegevens opleiding**

– naam instelling	Vrije Universiteit Brussel
– adres instelling:	Pleinlaan 2 B-1050 BRUSSEL BELGIË
	In samenwerking met:
	- Universität Wien
	- Universidad Complutense de Madrid
	- Universidad Autónoma de Madrid
	- University of Copenhagen
– aard instelling	ambtshalve geregistreerd
– graad, kwalificatie, specificatie	Master of Science in Urban Studies
– niveau en oriëntatie	master
– studieomvang	120 studiepunten
– opleidingsvarianten	
– afstudeerrichtingen:	geen
– studietraject voor werkstudenten:	-
– vestiging opleiding	Brussel, Wenen, Madrid, Kopenhagen
– onderwijstaal	Engels
– studiegebieden	Psychologie en pedagogische wetenschappen Wetenschappen Politieke en sociale wetenschappen
– bijkomende titel	geen