

Meeting the MBM Conditions 2021

Wittenborg University of Applied Sciences on meeting the NVAO 2020 Panel imposed conditions for the Master of Business Management programme

On 6 August 2020 NVAO awarded Wittenborg University of Applied Sciences (WUAS) with a positive initial accreditation of its Master of Business Management programme with 8 specialisations.

The decision was coupled with five conditions and a deadline to submit documentation on how WUAS has met the conditions should be submitted by 10 August 2021. This document contains the information requested.

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NB: this document is labelled 'Appendix 116P' as it is being used for the preparation of further accreditation, for instance the interim NVAO evaluation on standards 10 & 11 in the 2022-2023 academic year.

1 Introduction

Wittenborg University of Applied Sciences requested for initial accreditation procedure for its hbo-master Master of Business Management (henceforth MBM) programme by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO).

An expert panel put together by the NVAO has reviewed the documents prepared and presented by WUAS and visited the campus on the 9 June 2020, having held meeting with the different stakeholders of the institution.

The final conclusions of the panel were that the MBM programme met standards 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9, and partially met standards 2 and 10 in the NVAO extensive initial accreditation framework. Therefore, the panel advised NVAO to impose the following conditions to meet standards 2 and 10, within the period of one year:

Four (4) conditions to meet standard 2:

1. To develop and elaborate the profile of the programme further, especially to clarify the relation between the core business and management areas and the specialisations in the programme.
2. To teach students finance and accounting subjects to enable them to use financial information for strategic and tactical decision-making processes in organisations.
3. To step up and organise in a more formal way the involvement of the professional field in the development of the curriculum.
4. To make clear and explicit to prospective students that the research methods and techniques offered in the programme refer to practice-oriented, applied research and do not refer to academic research.

One (1) condition to meet standard 10.

5. To bring the assignments to be completed by students in the programme up to the required level.

This paper is organised so that the each of the next sections presents how WUAS arranged for meeting these five (5) imposed conditions by the NVAO.

2 MBM Specialisations

To develop and elaborate the profile of the programme further, especially to clarify the relation between the core business and management areas and the specialisations in the programme.

Considerations in the report of the NVAO panel *“The panel is positive about the specialisations being offered to students. The panel, however, finds the programme profile unclear in terms of the position of the core business and management areas and the position of the specialisations and the relation between these two. On the one hand, the focus of the programme is to teach students core business knowledge, skills and attitude. On the other hand, it aims to provide students with specific knowledge of specific economical sectors. The relation between the two and the intention of the programme with regard to the specialisations could be made more explicit. The panel advises to impose the following condition to be met: Programme management should develop and elaborate the profile of the programme further, especially to clarify the relation between the core business and management areas and the specialisations in the programme.”*

WUAS on meeting the MBM Specialisation Condition:

The Master of Business Management degree is a master of applied sciences and has been created in the same way as WUAS' other programmes. WUAS believes that all students should engage in more specific learning through specialisations towards the end of their bachelor or master programme. The WUAS concept is that broad bachelor and master programmes with specialisations, lead to degrees of applied sciences. WUAS uses its concept of a core programme with specialisations across all its curriculum – the BBA, the MBA and now the MBM. The success of this formula is actually in the direct link with the industries and the sectors WUAS students are interested in – following a specialisation allows students to focus on a sector, complete work experience or industry exposure in that sector and then focus on a final project in that sector

The Master of Business Management programme has a broad core of business and management modules. In order for students to apply their research and prepare for further employment or advancing their careers, students should focus on a particular industry or sector within the business management program. Although employers are looking for generalist knowledge, they are also looking for graduates who can apply what they have learnt.

In order for students to graduate as an applied sciences master, they should choose a company or sector in which they wish to do their applied research for the final thesis.

To enable this, WUAS has designed a programme that has a balance between core business subjects (8) and for specialisation subjects (traditionally known as electives). The specialisation subjects make up 20 of the total 90 EC credits (22%) however are essential to provide orientation and guide students towards their graduation assignment / final project, in order that the student can carry out applied research within a real-life business context. Often students complete a voluntary work placement at the company or sector they are linked to for their final project.

WUAS has chosen the specialisations on the basis of its experience (in the bachelor and MBA programme that all have a similar approach with specialisations), market needs, and especially important, its graduate experiences (assurance of learning).

WUAS has experience with the chosen specialisations; in the past it has offered (taught 70%) of a master's of international management in the four hospitality sector specialisations (since 2012) together with the UK University of Brighton (henceforth UoB), who awarded the degree, and since 2015 has been offering business and management specialisations in its own NVAO accredited MBA programme.

The partnership with the University came to an end in 2020, as expected and planned for due to Brexit and the development and NVAO accreditation of the Master of Business Management programme which enabled WUAS to continue and expand this programme.

The Brighton Master of Management, with specialisations was also an applied sciences degree however was only valued at 55 EC credits in the Netherlands ECTS regulation, which is 28 study hours per EC credit, compared to 20 in the UK. Therefore, WUAS based its MBM on the already accredited MBA programme (90 EC). The experience WUAS gained from working with the University of Brighton was valuable in developing its own master's programmes, having learnt the concept of two lecturers teaching every module, peer review, moderation of results and especially the monitoring of assurance of learning by students through regular feedback sessions and tracking of alumni career pathways.

Programme Profile from the MBM Self-Assessment Report:

In 2008 the Dutch NVAO published a document called The Higher Education Qualifications Framework in the Netherlands, a presentation for compatibility with the framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. This document showed the relationship (in 2008) between the Netherlands' qualification framework within the binary system and the European Qualifications Framework. Special attention was paid to the difference between a University of Applied Science and a Research University. The NVAO explained these differences in the table shown at [Appendix 251P](#).

In the development of its master WUAS has made use of its experiences in offering programmes and modules with both a more practical approach as is traditionally seen at Dutch Universities of Applied Science (HBO) and programmes and modules that have a more academic, research-based methodology. In addition, programmes offered jointly with UoB have provided important quality input to the master.

Taking into account both the Dublin Descriptors and the NVAO guidelines the master (MBM) and its Final Qualifications benefits from;

- A programme that is in line with the second cycle Dublin Descriptors
- a 90 European Credit programme, over 1.5 years
- modules that reflect both a practical and a research-based methodology
- a core team of lecturers who have both academic and practical experience, supported by teachers from practice where suitable

At [Appendix 224P](#), the Core Final Qualifications are shown in relation to the Dublin Descriptors. At [Appendix 251P](#) is shown how the programme is in line with the Dublin

Descriptors (Second Cycle) and Assessment criteria of the accreditation framework, HBO and WO profiles from the NVAO, published in *“The Higher Education Qualifications Framework in The Netherlands, a presentation for compatibility with the framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area”* (2008)¹

Qualification and Competence Goals

The qualification and competence goals of the master are, at least, in line with those of a master’s degree from a University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands: through a combination of knowledge gained from text books, scientific research literature, exposure to business practice and the application of understanding and knowledge, students reach a stage at which they can start their (international) careers or continue their studies in the Netherlands or abroad.

- “holders of HBO Master’s degrees have obtained the qualifications for the level of independent and/or management level professional practitioner in an occupation or spectrum of occupations, and have reached the level needed to work in a multi-disciplinary environment in which a HBO degree is either required or would be of use.”

In line with the all-round domain specific qualification and competence goals of a Netherlands HBO degree, WUAS graduates will show the following:

- ability to work independently;
- ability to develop or generate new ideas and communicate these and be pro-active;
- ability to think ahead and actively change processes to improve them;
- develop an analytical capability based on experience;
- quickly ascertain the effect of change within organisations;
- ability to quickly prioritise;
- ability to quickly gain an overview of an organisation;
- ability to understand complex situations;
- has a broad understanding of business as well as a deeper understanding of work field specific issues (specialist);
- has good written and spoken presentation skills;
- has the ability to work in autonomous teams and values the input of peers;
- has developed a good understanding of the social – economic environment, and maintains this;
- has the ability to socialise with fellow graduates and academics;
- has the ability to take worthwhile decisions both long-term and short-term based on available facts and existing situations;

Furthermore, master graduates,

- have the ability to lead people and motivate teams;
- have the ability to communicate conclusions;
- are flexible and can cope with uncertain situations;
- show creativeness and innovation through the ability to introduce new thoughts alongside normal theory;
- show social competence, through self-reflection, cultural adaptability, and openness to other ways of thinking: is empathic;

¹ <https://www.nvao.net/system/files/pdf/NQF%20Dutch%20National%20Qualifications%20Framework.pdf>

At WUAS students are always encouraged to develop their skills and competencies from within an international environment and with an internationalisation (globalisation) prospective. As described above, the Final Qualifications have been developed from the Professional Profile (See matrix in [Appendix 222P](#)) and have been aligned with descriptors such as the Dublin Descriptors (Matrix in [Appendix 224P](#)) and the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences' (AUAS) Domain Competencies (Matrix at [Appendix 226P](#)). Here the WUAS Domain specific requirements of Business Administration are also shown in relation to those of the AUAS. WUAS is not obliged by law to follow the domain competencies of the state-funded universities of applied sciences (AUAS), however, it wishes to indicate a clear relationship with them.

All aims and objectives of modules are aligned with the Final Qualifications; this can be seen in the matrixes in [Appendix 228P](#) and [Appendix 230P](#).

3 Finance & Accounting in MBM

To teach students finance and accounting subjects to enable them to use financial information for strategic and tactical decision-making processes in organisations.

Considerations in the report of the NVAO panel: *“The panel notes the finance and accounting area to be underrepresented in the curriculum. In the panel’s opinion, knowledge of this area is important for students to acquire. The panel advises to impose the following condition to be met: Students should be taught finance and accounting subjects to enable them to use financial information for strategic and tactical decision-making processes in organisations. The relevance of finance and accounting subjects should be acknowledged by programme management as part of the core business knowledge and skills components of the programme.”*

WUAS on meeting the Finance & Accounting in MBM Condition:

The Master in Business Management programme is designed in an integrated way to equip students to be competent managers within the current business environment. Based on the overall programme goals we have designed the modules in each programme to ensure a proper balance in all key management areas, with an enhanced focus on the specialized areas of the different pathway. Understanding the need for sound financial management skills, we have developed the programme so that some components of financial management are embedded in the modules currently covered in the programme.

Furtherance to the advice given by the accreditation panel we have adopted a three-pronged approach to ensuring that we meet and exceed the required compliance level given in the advisory. We have enhanced the current programme with substantial new financial and accounting content, both at the theoretical, and the applied level.

Firstly, we have redesigned one of the core modules in the programme to reflect a substantial financial component. The module, Financial and Strategic Management (SM41), which is required for all specializations will add a substantive financial and accounting component both at the theoretical and practical level within this programme. This module will be co-taught by experts in this discipline ensuring that students are well grounded in Financial and Accounting theory and practice. As part of the aims and objectives of this module students should be able to assess and evaluate the principal concepts and techniques used in financial decision making. They should also be able to analyse, interpret and evaluate financial reports.

Secondly, we have integrated into the programme a major financial and accounting project as part of the curriculum for all specializations. Students will be involved in a project week assignment where they will individually and in groups work on extensive financial and accounting projects. The project week module (PW41) consists of three independent mini applied research-based projects. These research assignments are designed as practical hands-on activities in which students solve real-world problems from/industry. These are generally integrated projects where various content areas within the domain are covered. One of the project week assignments will be solely dedicated to financial decision making. This is achieved in one of two ways, primarily by students solving problems for regular companies or through advanced simulations. We have a good relationship with the business community in the region which provides us the opportunity to engage our students in tackling and provide solutions for companies in the region.

Thirdly, because we are not content with meeting only the panel requirements, in addition to the above two measures we have arranged for all MBM students to take the Management Accounting and Finance module (FIN41) offered in the MBA programme as an elective. The programme has been structured such that students taking this extra module can do so without it impacting their regular modules and without any additional cost.

Also, in addition to introducing finance and accounting aspects to the core of the MBM, WUAS also proposes to implement a new specialisation in finance, for MBM students. WUAS already offers a Finance specialisation in its recently re-accredited MBA programme. By introducing the specialisation / elective modules into the MBM, WUAS will be able to strengthen its team of MBM lecturers, who in turn will be able to support the solutions describe above.

In the specialisation of finance, the 4 elective / specialisation modules will be:

- Management Accounting & Finance
- Financial and Monetary Economics
- Corporate Finance
- Venture Capital and Private Equity

See the curriculum of the MBM specialisation in Finance on the next page.

Master of Business Management in Finance				
Year 1, Semester 1				
Block	Module / Subject	Contact Hours	ECs	Module Code
1 / 5 (1) ²	Globalisation, Society & Culture	36	5	MO44
1 / 5 (2) ³	Management Accounting & Finance	36	5	FIN41
1 / 5 (2)	Research Methods Introduction (Final Project)	9	(-)	GA41
2 / 6 (1)	Micro & Macroeconomics - Global Perspectives	36	5	EC41
2 / 6 (2)	Financial and Monetary Economics	36	5	FIN43
3 / 7 (1)	Professional Inquiry	36	5	WP41
3 / 7 (2)	Supply Chain – Operations & Strategy	36	5	ITL41
Year 1, Semester 2				
5 / 1 (2)	Research Methods (Final Project)	36	5	GA41
5 / 1 (1)	Corporate Finance	36	5	FIN42
6 / 2 (2)	The World Economy	36	5	EC42
7 / 3 (1)	Venture Capital and Private Equity	36	5	FIN45
7 / 3 (1)	Strategic Management	36	5	SM41
Semester 2 (1 & 2)	Project Module (3 Project Weeks, linked to Final Project)	36	5	PW41
Total Year 1			60 Credits	
Year 2 (1 Semester /Term)				
1 Block (6 weeks)	Professional-Based Learning	N/A	5	WP42
2 Blocks (12 weeks)	Final Project	N/A	25	GA43
Total Year 2			30 Credits	
Total Credits MBM			90 Credits	

² (1) is Semester 1 for part-time students

³ (2) is Semester 2 for part-time students

4 Professional Field Involvement in the Curriculum Development

To step up and organise in a more formal way the involvement of the professional field in the development of the curriculum.

Considerations in the report of the NVAO panel. *“The panel notes the consultations of professional field representatives by programme management in the process of setting-up and designing this programme, but sees these consultations as largely informal and as less well-structured. The panel advises to impose the following condition to be met: Programme management should step up and organise in a more formal way the involvement of the professional field in the development of the curriculum. This condition is advised by the panel to align the programme with professional field needs. The professional field structured input dates back from the professional profile, which was drafted in 2006 and not specifically for this programme.”*

Note

Before explaining the actions taken (below) WUAS would like to emphasise that in the past 15 years it has had regular updates of its professional profile for business administrators and managers, based on its initial findings in 2006. This has been done through formal regular meetings with a professional field advisory panel, in various forms and methods – sometimes with the panel and sometimes with a larger group of business representatives and academics and the panel. The original professional field advisory panel actually became the WUAS Advisory Board in 2013, as the discussions on what WUAS should teach students were often mixed with overall strategy and direction. A natural occurrence when advising what was at the time a very small business school. The Advisory Board, made up of industry representatives still meets and advises WUAS at least 4 times a year. WUAS apologises for not making the role of the professional field clearer, however fully agrees that a return to a structured and separated Professional Field panel will benefit the programme and the school.

WUAS on meeting the criteria Professional Field Involvement in the Curriculum Development

In order to strengthen the involvement of the professional field in the development of the curriculum, the Education Board decided to appoint a group of professionals to the Professional Field Panel. This panel aims to include two (2) members from the Advisory Board, and five (5) alumni.

The Professional Field Panel is anticipated to meet at least once a year while the maximum number of meetings happening in a given calendar year is limited to two.

The decision to include alumni in this panel was made to leverage on the valuable input on market and industry developments, given their unique position having experienced the programme planning, delivery and the final outcome of the programmes offered at WUAS.

Criteria to be fulfilled by the members of the Professional Field Panel:

- One of the members of the WUAS Advisory Board will chair this panel

- At least one of the two meetings should be held in person at one of the campus locations (at the beginning of the Academic year), and the interim meeting can be an online meeting
- Panel members will be offered a letter of appointment for two years from the date of appointment. In addition, and a letter appreciating the contribution of the panel members will be issued by WUAS.

Duties of the Professional Field Panel

- To contribute to validating the learning competencies, through their active participation in discussions on the content of the modules
- To update on new industry development and point out the need to develop new specialisations
- To ensure alignment of programmes and modules with the requirements of the job markets
- Introduce and initiate new/missing skills and knowledge competencies to be incorporated in the programmes/modules based on market trends

The first meeting of the Professional Field Panel was held on 14 June 2021, online in MS Teams with a members of the Advisory Board, a member of supporting faculty from industry (who co-teaches on 2 modules) and 2 alumni representatives who are working at companies in the Netherlands. The next meeting will be held in the winter term of the academic year 2021-2022.

Also present at each meeting will be the heads of school, responsible for the master of business management programme, the assurance of learning manager, who will analyse the feedback given and the secretary to the Education Board who will ensure adequate documentation before and after the meeting.

5 Applied Research

To make clear and explicit to prospective students that the research methods and techniques offered in the programme refer to practice-oriented, applied research and do not refer to academic research.

Considerations in the report of the NVAO panel: *“The panel acknowledges the research orientation of the programme. The panel, however, finds the research orientation of the programme quite unclear in terms of the distinction between academic research and applied research. For this programme, practice-oriented, applied research is to be expected. Programme management is not explicit in this sense. The panel advises to impose the following condition to be met: Programme management should make clear and explicit to prospective students that the research methods and techniques offered in the programme refer to practice-oriented, applied research and do not refer to academic research.”*

WUAS on meeting the Applied Research Condition

WUAS finds it essential for many reasons tied to its mission and vision, that its prospective students are made fully aware that they are going to a business school which offers degrees accredited under the concept of applied science, and that the research methods and techniques offered in the programme, although compliant with international standards, are focused entirely on practice-oriented, applied research and not on fundamental research.

WUAS has strengthened its information provision to prospective and current students by promoting the following on its website, as well as including it in the Education and Examination Guide (EEG) which constitutes the terms and conditions for its customers (students).

The website publication, that is communicated to prospective students is: [The Applied Sciences University - Applied Research versus Fundamental Research University \(wittenborg.eu\)](http://wittenborg.eu)

The text of this webpage is as on the following pages.

“The Applied Sciences University – Applied Research versus Fundamental Research University”

Academic Courses, Programmes and People within a University of Applied Sciences

Wittenborg is a University of Applied Sciences, which means that its bachelor's and master's degree programmes are related to the concept that graduates should be able to find new and better work or improve their current working situation – this means that degree programmes at universities of applied sciences always lead to direct improved employability chances of students and graduates.

As a university of applied sciences, as any university in Europe, Wittenborg applies European standards to its degree programmes, such as the European Credit Transfer System and levels of higher education as described in the 'Dublin Descriptors', to which universities in the European Union adhere in their bachelor's and master's programmes.

In the Netherlands, higher education is split into a binary system, with research universities and universities of applied sciences. Research universities provide degree programmes that focus on fundamental/basic or scientific research with the aim of improving scientific theories for better understanding and prediction of natural or other phenomena. On the other hand, universities of applied sciences, such as Wittenborg, focus purely on programmes leading to greater employability and, therefore, the research that students carry out in the bachelor's and master's programmes, although adhering to international academic standards, is clearly applied research.

Academic in English versus ‘academisch’ in Dutch

Another important note is that in English ‘academic’ refers to higher learning or formal study at an institution for higher learning, such as a university of applied sciences or a research university. Academic can also refer to the qualifications obtained, the curriculum, the programme, or courses. In the Netherlands, the word ‘academic’ must not be confused with the word ‘academisch’, which refers to study and study programmes at a research university (‘universiteit’).

Applied Research vs. Fundamental/Basic Research?

Often, we get asked the question: "What is our research good for"?

Applied Research Vs Fundamental Research

Applied Research at a University of Applied Sciences	Fundamental Research at a Research University
<p>Acquiring New Knowledge with specific Commercial Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Products ○ Procedures ○ Services <p>✓ Answer specific questions aimed at solving practical problems</p> <p>Applied Research creates new technologies, products and processes.</p> <p>Applied Research can lead to new fundamental questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Desire to expand knowledge ○ Curiosity driven ○ Answer why what or how questions ○ Increase understanding of fundamental principles ○ Does not have immediate commercial objectives ○ May not result in any solution or intervention in a practical problem. <p>Fundamental Research asks questions how and why things work.</p> <p>Fundamental Research can lead to new Products & Technology</p>
Bachelor & Master Degrees	Bachelor & Master Degrees

NB: The table above is based on a similar informatic approach from the University of Texas El Paso. WUAS is currently in the process of AACSB accreditation, recommended by NVAO, and its mentor is a professor at that university. It is vitally essential that WUAS presents itself as a university of applied sciences and that therefore it (its students and staff) carries out only applied research and not fundamental research.

6 Level of Assignments in MBM

To bring the assignments to be completed by students in the programme up to the required level.

Considerations in the report of the NVAO panel: “*The quality assurance measures for module examinations are adequate. The panel regards the quality and the level of the written examinations in the programme to be appropriate. The quality and the level of the assignments are, however, not up to standard. The panel advises to impose the following condition to be met: Programme management should bring the assignments to be completed by students in the programme up to the required level. As the quality assurance system for examinations and assessments is appropriate, the panel did not consider the programme not meeting this standard.*”

WUAS on meeting the Level of Assignments in MBM condition:

All exams and assessments within this programme are rigorously reviewed and checked at multiple levels within the organization. We have set clear criteria for all our assessments, which is to ensure at the end of each module that the learning objectives as described in the aims and objectives of the module would have been reached at the appropriate levels (4, 5, & 6).

Current measures

All exams and assessments in the MBM programme are developed and reviewed by at least two lecturers with expertise in that module. WUAS MBM modules are taught in principle by two teachers who are charged with developing and submitting the assessment for the module. As a key input to this process lecturers typically benchmark their exams with other institutions to ensure they are aligned with best practices in the academic field. WUAS (institutionally) provides detailed relevant guidelines for the development and grading of all assessments. This is to ensure that all relevant assessment standards have been met and all exams are comparable with the best practices in the field.

All submitted exams go through the exam review committee, who reviews the exams to ensure they are properly formulated and are at the required level of testing (primarily levels, 4, 5, & 6). It is only after this, that the exams are used for student assessments. In addition, every block, a sample of exams are randomly scrutinized by the Graduation and Examination Board (GEB), where they are further checked for compliance with the standards set by the GEB. All relevant information and feedback from the review processes is shared with the relevant lecturers who in turn are able to update their procedures and exams if necessary.

New additional measures

WUAS is regularly reviewing new ways and methods to improve its quality and one new measure instigated during the Covid-19 period was to ensure moderation (review) of all exams graded by module teachers, by the Exam moderation committee. WUAS set up a committee consisting of experienced examiners to carry out this review process. The committee also provides regular feedback with regards to the current state of the exams, the grading and how they can be improved. While not all exams are necessarily scrutinized as in the early days of Covid-19, WUAS has decided to maintain this process as an ongoing part of its quality process after the current pandemic.

In addition, WUAS has put in place a system where each module is assigned a module leader. The module leader is expected to coordinate the activities of the module across the different specializations and campuses. They are to serve as a final check before exams are sent to the exam review committee. Module leaders in principle are experienced lecturers and examiners and serve as an additional quality check in the process.

WUAS is confident that all these measures will bridge the gap identified by the Panel and further enhance the overall quality of the programme, and that when it provides NVAO with its interim report (standards 10 & 11) for the MBM at the end of the 2021-2022 academic year, as required, it will demonstrate this.