

## **The Hague University of Applied Sciences**

### **Reassessment Bachelor European Studies**

048A2023.01

## Summary

In September 2023 the reassessment of the bachelor programme European Studies of The Hague University of Applied Sciences took place. The original assessment of this study programme took place in November 2020. In the original assessment the audit panel assessed that standard 1, 2 and 3 meet the generic quality requirements. Standard 4, the Achieved Learning Outcomes was assessed as partially meeting the generic quality requirements. The audit panel expected that the improvements needed could be achieved within two years.

After an improvement period of two years the audit panel revisited the study programme on 21 September 2023 and reassessed the quality of standard 4 Achieved learning outcomes. The panel concludes that standard 4 now also meets the generic quality requirements. Therefore, the audit panel assesses the quality of the bachelor programme European Studies as **positive**.

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# Introduction

This is the assessment report reassessing standard 4 of the Bachelor Programme European Studies that is offered by The Hague University of Applied Sciences. The reassessment is conducted by an audit panel compiled by Netherlands Quality Agency (NQA) on behalf of The Hague University of Applied Sciences. Prior to the reassessment the audit panel has been approved by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO).

## *Reason and process*

During the previous assessment on 24 November 2020, the panel came to the conclusion that the Achieved learning outcomes (standard 4) partially meet the generic quality requirements. Improvement conditions were defined by the panel in order to fully meet the required quality standard. After receiving the assessment report the study programme drafted an improvement plan that was submitted in April 2021 to NVAO. Based on the assessment report and the improvement plan the NVAO decided on 17 November 2021 to grant an improvement period until 16 November 2023.

This reassessment report describes the findings, considerations and conclusion of the panel regarding the improvements and the quality of standard 4 Achieved learning outcomes. Prior to the audit visit the panel studied the improvement plan, a progress report and several documents related to the improvement conditions. The panel also examined fifteen graduation portfolios of the most recently graduated students. On 21 September 2023 the panel revisited the study programme. During this audit visit the panel discussed the progress and improvements with students, alumni, supervisors, lecturers, the Examination Board, the assessment committee and the programme management and the faculty director. The information and visit have enabled the panel to reassess standard 4 Achieved learning outcomes. The reassessment report was prepared according to the *Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (NVAO, 2018)* and the *NQA-protocol 2022 for Limited Programme Assessment*.

The reassessment was conducted by the same panel as in 2020, with the exception of Mr Rijnders who in 2020 at the last moment was unable to attend the previous assessment. The audit panel for this reassessment consisted of:

Drs. D.J.N.M. Rijnders	Panel chair	Owner of Rijnders Onderwijs Advies,
Dr. J. Boonen	Domain expert	Senior lecturer Global Studies (Maastricht University), Senior researcher Global Minds Research (Zuyd University of Applied Sciences),
B. Sandbrink, MA	Domain expert	Policy Officer, Ministry of the Interior Land NRW,
F. Hoornstra	Student member	B European Studies, NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences.

Ir. A.B.C. Hoitink, NQA-auditor, acted as secretary of the panel.

The panel declares that the assessment of the study programme was carried out independently.

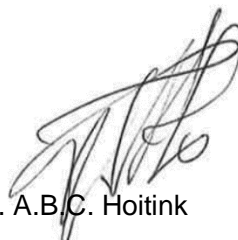
Utrecht, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Panel chair



Drs. D.J.N.M. Rijnders

Panel secretary



ir. A.B.C. Hoitink

### Basic Data of the Study Programme

Name of study programme as in CROHO (Central Register of Study Programmes in Higher Education in the Netherlands)	B European Studies
ISAT-code	34419
Orientation and level study programme	Higher profession-oriented education (hbo)
Level study programme	Bachelor
Degree	Bachelor of Arts
Number of study credits	240 EC
Variant (s), including a possible 3-years track for VWO (pre-university education) in case of a study programme of higher profession-oriented education	4-Year Programme (ES4): 240 EC 3-Year Programme (ES3): 180 EC
Specializations	Business Management Public Policy & Governance
Location	The Hague, the Netherlands
Teaching language	English

## Conditions for improvement of standard 4

During the previous assessment in 2020 the panel pointed out several shortcomings regarding the Achieved learning outcomes (standard 4) and formulated the following six conditions for improvement:

1. Develop a shared vision on the European dimension in graduation products.
2. Apply and maintain stricter criteria as to the subject matter of the Work Placements and final projects, so that they all have a clear European dimension.
3. Improve the preparation and guidance process regarding practice-oriented research skills, with specific attention for the following subjects:
  - **Problem analysis:** defining the problem and research questions at an early stage in the process.
  - **Theoretical framework:** applying insights from existing theory to the challenge in practice, to make a stronger link between theory and practice.
  - **Data gathering and analysis:** using an appropriate data gathering instrument to gather the data needed to answer the research questions (link questions and data gathering).
  - **Findings, conclusions and recommendations:** building a link between theory, own data gathering and a practical recommendation requires some further attention.

Intensify the guidance of the students when working on their final projects and establish a proper feedback culture. Include clear go/no go moments in the process of making the final project.

4. Make the assessment forms of the final projects more insightful.
5. Elaborate the feedback for students on the final version of their final projects.
6. Make comprehensive competency matrices with the old and new competences to make clear where each competency is assessed in the programme at which level. Students need to be well informed about which competences they need to meet during the graduation phase and which products they need to deliver to demonstrate that they meet these competences.

The study programme has drawn up an improvement plan and progress report according to these improvement conditions. In this reassessment report the findings and consideration are presented in a similar structure.



## Standard 4 Achieved learning outcomes

*The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.*

### Conclusion

The study programme **meets** the generic quality requirements for this standard. The panel concludes that the study programme made considerable improvements and sees that the study programme has developed towards the recommended direction. The management created a solid foundation for this development and provides appropriate conditions for sustainable improvement. There is a shared vision on the European dimension. This vision is recognizable in the graduation products examined by the panel. Also, the assessment criteria for the European dimension are defined. They are implemented and subsequently discussed within the programme team. The development and implementation of the practice-oriented research are well-paced. The panel notes immediate adjustments in the research modules and notes also that the study programme is aware of the steps still to be taken. The panel is convinced that the adjustments that have been initiated will continue. The feedback on Final Projects has improved and the new assessment forms provide students more insight. The panel finds it positive that the examination board and the assessment committee have been closely involved in these improvements. The examination board was also consulted on the development of the competency matrices. There is a structure in place to revise these matrices when needed. As a whole the panel can confirm that the study programme has met all the conditions of improvement.

### Substantiation

The panel notes significant improvements since the previous audit visit in 2020. During the recent visit it became apparent that the team of staff members is in control and is committed to meet the conditions of improvement. The panel commends the more integrated manner in which the study programme is organized. Staff members feel support from the management and have reached a mutual understanding on the requested improvements, such as the European dimension. Students also confirm that there is a clear focus on the European dimension and on practice-oriented research. The teaching of subjects has shifted from a more discipline-based to a more integrated approach of the study programme. According to the panel this is an important reason for the improvements achieved.

### **A shared vision on the European dimension and stricter criteria for the subjects of Work Placements and Final Project (conditions 1 and 2)**

The first two conditions for improvement are clearly achieved. First of all, an underlying vision on European dimension was formulated. Then the vision was extensively discussed with external stakeholders and shared with all staff members in order to create ownership. Also, the vision has been connected to the competencies of the study programme. The European studies of The Hague University of Applied Sciences defines this vision as follows: “*‘Europe’ is defined as the multi-stakeholder collaboration that takes place among countries, businesses and organizations*

*within Europe, along the lines of the rules & regulations as they are designed, proposed, adopted and implemented by the institutions of the EU, guided by the European norms & values in all its variety and diversity as well and sometimes driven and steered by European Funds”.*

In the progress report the progress achieved is extensively documented. In this document the monitoring of the progress on these two conditions is also well documented. Based on the interviews the panel confirms the general awareness and commitment amongst students, staff, management and committees regarding the criteria for the European focus of placement and final project subjects. This is also supported by the fifteen graduation portfolios examined by the panel. The subject and assessment criteria demonstrate that the European dimension is sufficiently applied in the Work Placements and Final Projects.

### **Preparation and guidance in practice-oriented research (condition 3)**

The preparation and guidance in practice-oriented research has been improved. The documentation shows that in the current curriculum the research design course is reviewed, and for the new curriculum a new practice-oriented research line is designed. For the study programme 'practice-oriented' implies that research starts from practical problems. Students are expected to apply theory to practical challenges. Practice-oriented also implies that students are able to translate the findings of research into advice or an innovation for the professional practice. The research line indicates that first year students learn how to find reliable sources and how to logically present information. In the second year, students learn to collect quantitative and qualitative data to answer a research question using a theoretical framework. In the third year, students learn about various professional products and in the final year they learn how to write a report on a professional product.

The Applied Research module in year 2 has been redesigned. Students are now instructed to use real-life, external assignments for their research. They are trained to conduct practice-oriented research and learn to report on practice-oriented research. According to the panel this is appropriate preparation for the Final Projects. The panel notes that guidance has improved. Students mention that they experience better supervision. For the full implementation of practice-oriented research additional efforts are needed, like sufficient external commissioners for the Final Project. The staff members are aware of this, and it has their attention. The panel understands that this needs time. The panel commends the solid and aligned focus of management and staff, the development track towards more practice-oriented research is clear. The panel would like to suggest applying less strict research schemes. The panel considers the study programme and staff to be ready to make the shift from research products towards professional products.

### **Insightful assessment forms and improved feedback on Final Projects (conditions 4 and 5)**

The adjusted assessment forms for Final Projects are providing the insight the panel requested. The panel agrees with the decision to introduce one comment box for overall qualitative feedback. The panel confirms that this comment box is a valuable tool for qualitative feedback on the final paper. In addition to the adjustment of the forms, several calibration sessions were

organised with supervisors and second readers in order to come to a similar approach on giving feedback to students. Based on the examined Final Projects, the panel notes that the feedback given still varies from rather concise to very extensive. The panel understands that sometimes this is related to the extent of oral and written documenting of feedback. The feedback has improved since the previous assessment and the panel notes the awareness that further improvement is needed.

### **Comprehensive competency matrices to clarify competency assessment throughout the programme (condition 6)**

After the previous accreditation the study programme consulted educational advisors and decided to apply the AuCom-model to describe the competence levels. This model distinguishes three competence levels in which the degree of autonomy and the complexity of the task and context are combined. Next, a new competence matrix was designed for the new curriculum and the competence matrix was revised for the current curriculum. Subsequently, the matrices were approved by the examination board and were communicated to students and staff. Students are aware of these competences and find them to be valuable for preparing professional products and for the examinations. The panel notes that both matrices provide a clear overview of the competence levels per year and per module. They are a valuable basis for the development of the new curriculum, such as for the competence-based assessments and for the new personal leadership line. In the new curriculum, students reflect each year on their growth for each of the required competences.

Finally, the panel commends the additional efforts to bring more Europe into the study programme. A good example is the new strategic personnel plan that is implemented. Expertise on European competences has become a significant recruitment criterion. Several new colleagues joined the staff team with a background in European governance and with experience in applied research. The European dimension has also been a guiding principle for staff development. The programme intensified the cooperation with the THUAS research group Changing Role of Europe. The panel is impressed by the improvements that have been implemented. According to the panel the practice-oriented research can become a distinctive programme feature of value for organisations and business in the European perspective.

# General conclusion of the study programme

## Assessments of the standards

The audit team comes to the following judgements per standard:

	B European Studies
<i>Standard 1 Intended Learning Outcomes</i>	Meets the generic quality requirements
<i>Standard 2 Teaching-Learning Environment</i>	Meets the generic quality requirements
<i>Standard 3 Student Assessment</i>	Meets the generic quality requirements
<i>Standard 4 Achieved Learning Outcomes</i>	Meets the generic quality requirements

## Considerations and conclusion

Since the last visit the panel concludes that significant progress has been made considering the improvement conditions regarding Standard 4 Achieved Learning Outcomes. The panel examined fifteen graduation portfolios, studied the progress report with relevant documentation and interviewed students, staff, examination board, assessment committee and the programme management. Based on the examined work, the information presented, and the interviews conducted the panel concludes that Standard 4 Achieved Learning Outcomes meets the generic quality requirements. Therefore, the audit panel assesses the quality of the study programme European Studies offered by the Hague University of Applied Sciences as **positive**.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Programme 21 September 2023

Time	Activity	Participants
10.00	Welcoming the Panel	Faculty director Management & Organisation, Programme Manager European Students
10.00 - 10.30	Panel Review	
10.30 – 11.00	Interview Management	Faculty director Management & Organisation, Programme Manager European Students, Team leader / lecturer European Studies, Team leader / lecturer European studies.
11.00 – 11.15	Panel Review	
11.15 – 11.45	Students/Alumni, who can report on the Graduation Phase	Alumni (July 2023) Student, master thesis and internship Alumni (July 2023) Alumni (July 2023)
11.45 -12.30	Panel Review and Lunch	
12.30 -13.00	Supervisors/Lecturers, involved in the Graduation Phase	Lecturer ES and chair of the study programme advice committee Lecturer and Final paper coordinator (graduation committee member) Lecturer ES and final project supervisor steering committee Lecturer ES and involved in research line, Lecturer ES and placement coordinator and final paper coordinator.
13.00 – 13.15	Panel Review	
13.15 – 13.45	Exam Board	Chair exam board, Member exam board, Member exam board, Chair assessment committee and also member of the exam board.
13.45 – 14.45	Panel review	
14.45 – 15.00	Feedback	Panel feedback and result of the re-accreditation process

## **Appendix 2: Documents examined.**

Assessment form Final Papers new graduation phase,  
Assessment form Placements new graduation phase,  
Competence Matrix ES4 and ES3 (current curriculum),  
Competence Matrix ES4 and ES3 (new curriculum),  
Course manual Applied Research Skills,  
Documentation on informing staff about the improvement plan,  
Final Paper Guide,  
Final Paper Student Guide,  
Final Project/Dissertation guide,  
General design instructions for the new ES curriculum,  
Graduation Phase at European Studies,  
Improvement Plan B European Studies,  
Masterclass presentation on the improvement plan and research skills,  
Module book Research Design for the Public Sector Year 3 Semester 2,  
Planning and Reports of Pilots.  
Power Point presentation on the improvement plan,  
Professional Skills of ES alumni,  
Programme and Exam regulations European Studies.  
Programme Framework European Studies,  
Progress Report Re-accreditation 2023,  
Research line new ES curriculum,  
Research Themes Private Specialization,  
Research Themes Public Specialization,  
Several evaluation reports on Work Placement and Final Projects,  
Several reports on Calibration Sessions Placement Portfolios,  
Several reports on Calibration Session Final Papers,  
Strategic Personnel Planning,  
Vision on the European Dimension,  
Work Placement Manual.

Fifteen Graduation Portfolios of recently graduated students.