

Assessment report
Limited Framework Programme Assessment
Bachelor International Business Administration
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

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1. Executive summary

In this executive summary, the panel presents the main considerations which led to the assessment of the quality of the Bachelor International Business Administration programme of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, which has been assessed according to the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, as published on 20 December 2016 (Staatscourant nr. 69458).

The panel regards the programme to be well-organised and to be thoroughly embedded in the School of Business and Economics.

The programme objectives are sound and relevant. These objectives cover the business administration domain, and meet domain-specific framework of reference requirements. The panel is positive about the balance of the academic and professional orientation in the objectives. The profile of the programme is clear, the Bachelor International Business Administration and Bachelor Bedrijfskunde programmes of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam each having clearly distinct profiles. The panel appreciates the programme having been benchmarked against programmes in this field in the Netherlands and abroad. The benchmark adds to the clarification of the programme profile and strong points.

The intended learning outcomes of the programme meet the programme objectives, are well-articulated and conform to the bachelor level.

The panel is positive about the student numbers in the programme and appreciates the efforts to balance the student body composition. Prospective students are well-informed about the nature of the programme. The entry requirements are appropriate. The admission procedures, including the matching days, are adequate. The panel welcomes the Summer school courses.

The panel is positive about the contents of the curriculum. The intended learning outcomes have been mapped systematically to the curriculum components. The courses in the curriculum are up to standard and have been adequately tailored to the programme profile. The curriculum is well-balanced in terms of academic knowledge and skills and professional skills. The panel also welcomes the integration of the academic skills into the courses. Although scientific knowledge and skills are undoubtedly strongly represented in the curriculum, the panel proposes to present these more explicitly, maybe in the form of a separate teaching-learning trajectory in order to enhance the coherence of the programme. The panel welcomes real-life cases being addressed in courses.

Programme management and lecturers are very dedicated to achieve high-quality education. The lecturers in the programme are regarded by the panel to be well qualified. They are active researchers in their fields and competent teachers. The directors of this programme and the Bachelor Bedrijfskunde programme work together closely. The panel regards the number of lecturers in the programme to be adequate. The panel welcomes the intensity of interaction among programme management and lecturers.

The panel is positive about the educational infrastructure of the programme. Student-activating teaching has been well-developed. The educational concept and study methods are in line with the programme characteristics. The programme is working on new study methods, which is positive. The number of hours of face-to-face education and class sizes are adequate. Study guidance is organised satisfactorily. The panel appreciates the programme promoting student community building. Although the study load of the programme is high, the proportion of students completing the programme in four years is appropriate.

The examinations and assessment rules and regulations of the programme are up to standard. The panel considers the position and the activities of the Examination Board to monitor the examinations and assessments of the programme to be adequate. Policies adopted are clear.

The examination methods adopted by the programme are consistent with the goals and contents of the courses. The effects of free-riding in group assignments are appropriately mitigated and countered. The panel proposes to introduce more multi-disciplinary elements in the examinations. The panel also advises to smoothen the transition from group assignments to the individual Bachelor thesis project. As students may lack individual feedback in the case of group assignments, the panel suggests to raise the level of individual feedback in these cases.

The supervision and assessment processes for the Bachelor thesis projects have been well-organised. Students are offered appropriate supervision. As the Red Flag Decision is interpreted differently by supervisors and students, the panel suggests to align these interpretations. The assessment procedures are up to standard, involving two examiners assessing the work separately and on the basis of elaborate rubrics scoring forms with relevant assessment criteria.

The panel considers the measures ensuring the validity, reliability and transparency of examinations and assessments to be satisfactory. The panel is positive about the programme assessment plan.

The examinations of the courses of the programme are up to standard. The Bachelor theses match the intended learning outcomes. No theses were found by the panel to be insufficient. The grades for the theses are supported by the panel.

The panel considers the programme graduates to have reached the intended learning outcomes and to be qualified to enrol in master programmes in this domain.

The panel that conducted the assessment of the Bachelor International Business Administration programme of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam assesses this programme to meet the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, judging the programme to be satisfactory. Therefore, the panel advises NVAO to accredit the programme.

Rotterdam, 25 March 2019

Dr. C. Terlouw
(panel chair)

drs. W. Vercouteren
(panel secretary)

2. Assessment process

The evaluation agency Certiked VBI received the request by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam to manage the limited framework programme assessment process for the Bachelor International Business Administration programme of this University. The objective of the programme assessment process was to assess whether the programme would conform to the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, published on 20 December 2016 (Staatscourant nr. 69458).

Having conferred with management of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam programme, Certiked invited candidate panel members to sit on the assessment panel. The panel members agreed to do so. The panel composition was as follows:

- Dr C. Terlouw, educational researcher in Higher Education, emeritus lector Intake and Transition Management Higher Education (Saxion), former director Teaching Training Institute, University of Twente (panel chair);
- Prof. dr. P.J. van Baalen, professor Information Management and Digital Organisation, University of Amsterdam (panel member);
- Prof. dr. M. De Ceuster, professor of Finance, University of Antwerp, academic director Master programmes of Finance, Real Estate, Personal Financial Planning, Antwerp Management School (panel member);
- Prof. dr. ir. R.E.C.M. van der Heijden, professor Innovative Planning Methods, Nijmegen School of Management, Radboud University Nijmegen (panel member);
- M. Speelberg MSc, student Master Global Business and Sustainability, Erasmus University Rotterdam (student member).

On behalf of Certiked, drs. W. Vercouteren served as the process coordinator and secretary in the assessment process.

All panel members and the secretary confirmed in writing being impartial with regard to the programme to be assessed and observing the rules of confidentiality. Having obtained the authorisation by the University, Certiked requested the approval of NVAO of the proposed panel to conduct the assessment. NVAO have given their approval.

To prepare the assessment process, the process coordinator convened with management of the programme to discuss the outline of the self-assessment report, the subjects to be addressed in this report and the site visit schedule. In addition, the planning of the activities in preparation of the site visit were discussed. In the course of the process preparing for the site visit, programme management and the Certiked process coordinator regularly had contact to fine-tune the process. The activities prior to the site visit have been performed as planned. Programme management approved the site visit schedule.

Well in advance of the site visit date, programme management sent the list of final projects of graduates of the programme of the most recent years. Acting on behalf of the assessment panel, the process coordinator selected the final projects of eight graduates of the last few years. The reduced number was approved by NVAO on 6 November 2018. The grade distribution in the selection was ensured to conform to the grade distribution in the list, sent by programme management.

The panel chair and the panel members were sent the self-assessment report of the programme, including appendices. In the self-assessment report, the student chapter was included. In addition, the expert panel members were forwarded a number of final projects of the programme graduates.

The assessment panel chair and the process coordinator discussed the assessment process procedures and the site visit schedule. The panel chair was informed about the profile of panel chairs of NVAO, serving as the briefing for panel chairs, as meant in the NVAO profile of panel chairs.

A few days prior to the site visit, the designated panel chair decided not to take up that position. Having conferred with programme management, the new chair was proposed to NVAO to replace the designated chair. NVAO agreed to the new panel chair taking up this position. The newly appointed panel chair was informed by the process coordinator about the assessment process procedures and about the profile of panel chairs of NVAO.

Prior to the date of the site visit, all panel members sent in their preliminary findings, based on the self-assessment report and the final projects studied, and a number of questions to be put to the programme representatives on the day of the site visit. The newly appointed panel chair studied all programme documentation and participated fully in the preparations of the site visit. The panel secretary summarised this information, compiling a list of questions, which served as a starting point for the discussions with the programme representatives during the site visit.

Shortly before the site visit date, the complete panel met to go over the preliminary findings concerning the quality of the programme. During this meeting, the findings of the panel members, including those about the final projects were discussed. The procedures to be adopted during the site visit, including the questions to be put to the programme representatives on the basis of the list compiled, were discussed as well.

On 27 November 2018, the panel conducted a site visit on the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam campus. The site visit schedule was in accordance with the schedule as planned. In a number of separate sessions, panel members were given the opportunity to meet with School Board representatives, programme management, Examination Board representatives, lecturers and final projects examiners, and students and alumni.

In a closed session at the end of the site visit, the panel considered each of the findings, weighed the considerations and arrived at conclusions with regard to the quality of the programme. At the end of the site visit, the panel chair presented a broad outline of the considerations and conclusions to programme representatives.

Clearly separated from the programme assessment process, assessment panel members and programme representatives met to conduct the development dialogue, with the goal to discuss future developments of the relevant scientific fields and the consequences for the programme.

The draft assessment report was finalised by the secretary, having taken into account the findings and considerations of the panel. The draft report was sent to the panel members, who studied it and made a number of changes. Thereupon, the secretary edited the final report. This report was presented to programme management to be corrected for factual inaccuracies. Programme management were given two weeks to respond. Having been corrected for these factual inaccuracies, the Certiked bureau sent the report to the University Board to accompany their request for re-accreditation of this programme.

3. Programme administrative information

Name programme in CROHO: B International Business Administration
Orientation, level programme: Academic Bachelor
Grade: BSc
Number of credits: 180 EC
Specialisations: Accounting
Digital Business and Innovation
Economics
Entrepreneurship
Finance
Financial Management
Human Resource Management
Management Consulting
Marketing
Strategy and Organisation
Transport and Supply Chain Management
Location: Amsterdam
Mode of study: Full-time (language of instruction English)
Registration in CROHO: 50952

Name of institution: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Status of institution: Government-funded University
Institution's quality assurance: Approved

4. Findings, considerations and assessments per standard

4.1 Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

Findings

The Bachelor International Business Administration programme is one of the four bachelor programmes of the School of Business and Economics of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The School also offers master programmes, post-graduate programmes and research master programmes. The School Board, chaired by the dean, has the authority to deliver the programmes and ensure the quality of the programmes. Being assisted by the programme coordinator, the programme director of this programme is responsible for the contents, organisation and quality assurance of the programme. The Programme Committee, being composed of equal numbers of lectures and students, advises programme management on the programme quality. The Examination Board of the School has the authority to monitor the quality of examinations and assessments of all the regular programmes, including this programme.

The Bachelor International Business Administration programme is a three-year, academic bachelor programme in the business administration field. The objectives of the programme are to educate students broadly in this field, addressing people and process management within organisations, focussing on the people dimensions of organisations and being directed towards the international business context. Students are taught both academic and professional skills. Students are educated to approach business subjects and problems from multi-disciplinary perspectives and to make use of knowledge and understanding of key business administration disciplines. In addition, students are trained to take into account societal and ethical considerations. For the programme, the domain-specific frame of reference has been drafted. In the 2014 revision of the programme, the objectives were ensured to match professional field requirements. To that end, professional field representatives were consulted.

Programme management conducted a survey, benchmarking the programme against similar programmes in the Netherlands or abroad. Apart from similarities in contents, the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam programme distinguishes itself by more courses uniquely tailored to international context and by offering students ample opportunities to explore business administration sub-disciplines and to select the specialisation of their preference.

The programme objectives are to prepare students to continue their studies at master level in the business administration domain. Students are prepared to enter the labour market, but only very limited numbers of graduates do so.

The programme objectives have been translated into the intended learning outcomes of the programme. They conform to the School's generic learning goals for Bachelor programmes. The programme intended learning outcomes include, as the main points, theoretical and empirical knowledge about international business administration areas, knowledge and skills to conduct international research projects, knowledge and skills to analyse and solve international business problems, skills to work in cross-cultural environments, reflection on the societal and ethical dimensions of this domain, and self-directed learning skills.

Programme management drafted a table from which the matching of the intended learning outcomes to the Dublin descriptors for bachelor programmes may be inferred.

Considerations

The panel regards the programme to be well-organised and to be thoroughly embedded in the School of Business and Economics.

The programme objectives are sound and relevant. These objectives cover the business administration domain, and meet domain-specific framework of reference requirements. The panel is positive about the balance of the academic and professional orientation in the objectives, both orientations being adequately addressed. The panel regards the profile of the programme to be clear, the Bachelor International Business Administration and Bachelor Bedrijfskunde programmes of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam each having clearly distinct profiles.

The panel appreciates the programme having been benchmarked against programmes in this field in the Netherlands and abroad. The benchmark adds to the clarification of the programme profile and strong points.

The panel regards the intended learning outcomes of the programme to meet the programme objectives and to be well-articulated. The panel has established the intended learning outcomes to conform to the bachelor level.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 1, Intended learning outcomes, to be satisfactory.

4.2 Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment

The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Findings

Up to the year 2017/2018, the number of incoming students was restricted to 200 students, due to the *numerus fixus* regulation being in force for this programme. The programme has set the target for the composition of the student body at 50 % Dutch and 50 % international students. The programme has abandoned the *numerus fixus* enforcement, as this hampered arriving at the desired composition. More Dutch students than international students tended to apply. Therefore, the programme introduced entry requirements. The entry requirements are the pre-university (vwo) diploma, including Mathematics A and/or B certificates. Students with other backgrounds, in particular non-Dutch degrees, have to meet equivalent requirements and are to give proof of adequate knowledge of mathematics and proficiency in English. Prospective students are informed about the programme. They have to attend matching days, during which they may test their capacities to complete the programme and have interviews with programme representatives. Thereupon, students are given an advice by programme management on entering the programme. Students are offered online Summer school courses to prepare them for the programme.

The curriculum of the programme takes three years to complete and carries a total study load of 180 EC. Programme management presented a table, showing the mapping of the intended learning outcomes and the courses. Practically all courses, both compulsory and elective courses, are tailor-made for this programme. Only two courses in the third year are shared by this programme and the Bachelor Bedrijfskunde programme. In the first two years of the curriculum, students are primarily introduced to the core disciplines of business administration, such as strategy, organisation, marketing, human resource management, accounting, and finance. In addition, students are trained in academic thinking, analysing and argumentation in courses on academic skills, mathematics, statistics and qualitative and quantitative business research methods. The courses in the first two years explicitly address international dimensions of business administration. In the second semester of the second year, students take electives, introducing them to the differences from the business administration perspective between developed and emerging economies. At the end of year two, an integration course is scheduled. In this course, students address business cases and do concise research projects, integrating the acquired knowledge and skills. In the first semester of this third year, all students go on international exchange. In the second semester of the third year, students take two specialisation courses and complete the Bachelor thesis project (12 EC) within their specialisation. Students are brought into contact with the professional field by doing real-life company cases and by guest lectures. Talented students, with grade point averages of 7.5, may take the honours programme. This programme encompasses courses, carrying an additional study load of 24 EC in the last two years and 6 EC for the trial course in the first year.

A total number of 96 lecturers are involved in the programme. They are permanent staff members and active researchers in one of the research departments of the School of Business and Economics. These staff members often have contacts with industry, being able to link subjects to the professional practice.

In addition, flexible staff is deployed. Flexible staff should hold the Master degree and may lecture in tutorials or supervise Bachelor thesis projects. They do not have the right to be examiners. Of the permanent staff members, about 73 % have PhD degrees and about 67 % are BKO-certified. Students are generally content with the accessibility and the educational and academic capabilities of the lecturers. Course coordinators meet regularly to discuss gaps between and overlap of courses. Course coordinators and the programme coordinator discuss on a regular basis adjustments of courses, and results of student surveys. For courses in the third year, specialisation coordinators and minor coordinators are invited as well. In addition, lecturers meet in general meetings.

The educational concept of the programme is geared towards student-activating teaching. Students are encouraged to do assignments, participate in projects and analyse information, such as news articles. The number of hours of face-to-face education in the programme is on average 14 hours per week in the first two years and on average 12 hours per week in the third year. During the Bachelor thesis project, the number of hours is about 4 hours per week of individual supervision and group meetings. The teaching methods in the programme are mainly large-scale lectures and smaller-scale tutorials. The class sizes in tutorials are maximum of either 30 students or 60 students. The students-to-staff ratio in the programme is about 45/1. In tutorials, students work on case projects, engage in discussions, debates or role plays and do presentations. Innovative teaching methods are being considered. The School innovation coordinator assists in the introduction and implementation of these methods. Students are at regular intervals informed about the curriculum structure and the choices in the curriculum. The programme schedules regular events to foster student community building. Student group composition in tutorials is diversified for students to work with students from other cultures. For study guidance, students may turn to the programme study advisors. In line with the Binding Study Advice, students must obtain 42 EC in the first year. The study load of the programme is high. Students have to study hard to meet programme requirements. The drop-out rates in the programme are about 20 % to 30 % for the last few years, by far the most students dropping out in the first year. For the last years, the proportion of students completing the programme in three years is on average 35 % and the proportion completing the programme in four years is about 80 % (proportions of students re-entering the programme in the second year). The average study duration of the programme graduates amounts to somewhat less than four years.

Considerations

The panel is positive about the student numbers in the programme and appreciates the efforts to balance the student body composition. Prospective students are well-informed about the nature of the programme. The entry requirements are appropriate. The admission procedures, including the matching days, are adequate. The panel welcomes the Summer school courses to prepare students for the programme.

The panel is positive about the contents of the curriculum. The intended learning outcomes have been mapped systematically to the curriculum components. The courses in the curriculum are up to standard and have been adequately tailored to the programme profile. The curriculum is well-balanced in terms of academic knowledge and skills and professional skills. The panel also welcomes the integration of the academic skills into the courses. Although scientific knowledge and skills are undoubtedly strongly represented in the curriculum, the panel proposes to present these more explicitly, maybe in the form of a separate teaching-learning trajectory in order to enhance the coherence of the programme. The panel welcomes real-life cases being addressed in courses.

Programme management and lecturers are very dedicated to achieve high-quality education. The lecturers in the programme are regarded by the panel to be well qualified. They are active researchers in their fields and competent teachers. The directors of this programme and the Bachelor Bedrijfskunde programme work together closely. The panel regards the number of lecturers in the programme to be adequate. The panel welcomes the intensity of interaction among programme management and lecturers.

The panel is positive about the educational infrastructure of the programme. Student-activating teaching has been well-developed. The educational concept and study methods are in line with the programme characteristics. The programme is working on new study methods, which is positive. The number of hours of face-to-face education as well as the class sizes are adequate. The study guidance is organised satisfactorily. The panel appreciates the programme fostering student community building. Although the study load of the programme is high, the proportion of students completing the programme in four years is appropriate.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 2, Teaching-learning environment, to be good.

4.3 Standard 3: Student assessment

The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

Findings

The programme examination and assessment procedures are aligned with the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam policies on examination and assessment quality and the School of Business and Economics assessment policies in this respect. Principles and procedures for the programme examinations and assessments have been laid down in the programme assessment plan.

The Examination Board of the School has the authority to monitor the quality of examinations and assessments of the programme.

In all of the courses, multiple examinations are scheduled. Examination methods adopted are, among others, written examinations with open-ended questions, multiple-choice examinations, individual assignments, group assignments, group cases or projects, and presentations. Free-riding in group projects or assignments is countered by peer review among group members. At least 50 % of the final grade for courses should be based upon individual performances by students. In the first two years, this is 60 %.

The Bachelor thesis project procedures are listed in the manual. Students are offered a range of topics for their theses, but may also suggest their own topics. Topics proposed should be within the confines of the students' specialisations and should have international dimensions. Every one of the students is entitled to supervision by their own supervisor. Supervision of the Bachelor thesis projects is organised in both individual and group meetings, and amounts to about four hours per week. Students are given feedback by their supervisors on their interim products. About halfway the thesis project process, students are assessed on their progress in the so-called Red Flag Decision. The outcome of this decision may be negative, pointing to insufficient progress and indicating it to be unlikely that the student will complete the project. Students are advised on options to remedy the problems identified. Two examiners independently assess the Bachelor thesis and meet to discuss the assessment and the grade. They use the rubrics assessment form. The form includes a range of assessment criteria, such as problem definition, methodology, theory, research design, overall argumentation, presentation (by means of video), and professional work attitude. All criteria have to be graded at least satisfactory. All theses are checked for plagiarism.

Programme management and the Examination Board have taken measures to promote the validity, reliability and transparency of examinations and assessments. In the assessment plan of the programme, the contents as well as the methods of the course examinations have been aligned to the course goals and the programme intended learning outcomes. Course assessment files specifying course examinations are being implemented and standardised. The Examination Board appoints the examiners. Draft examinations of courses are peer-reviewed by fellow examiners. Test blueprints and answer models are being introduced. The Examination Board screens course assessment files and will start to inspect Bachelor theses. Students are informed about fraud and plagiarism rules. The Examination Board handles cases. The number of cases is, however, rising.

Considerations

The examinations and assessment rules and regulations of the programme are up to standard, these being in line with Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and School of Business and Economics guidelines and policies. The panel considers the position of the Examination Board and the activities of the Board to monitor the examinations and assessments of the programme to be adequate. Policies adopted are clear.

The panel approves of the examination methods adopted by the programme. The methods are consistent with the goals and the contents of the courses. The effects of free-riding in group assignments are appropriately mitigated and countered. The panel proposes to introduce more multi-disciplinary elements in the examinations. The panel also advises to smoothen the transition from group assignments to the individual Bachelor thesis project. As students may lack individual feedback in the case of group assignments, the panel suggests to raise the level of individual feedback in these cases.

The supervision and assessment processes for the Bachelor thesis projects have been well-organised. Students are offered appropriate supervision. As the Red Flag Decision is interpreted differently by supervisors and students, the panel suggests to align these interpretations. The assessment procedures are up to standard, involving two examiners assessing the work separately and on the basis of elaborate rubrics scoring forms with relevant assessment criteria.

The panel considers the measures ensuring the validity, reliability and transparency of examinations and assessments to be satisfactory. The panel is positive about the programme assessment plan.

Assessment of this standard

The considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 3, Student assessment, to be satisfactory.

4.4 Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

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

The panel studied the examinations of a number of courses of the programme.

For their Bachelor thesis projects, students may choose the systematic literature review option or the empirical study option. About 25 % of the students select the former option and about 75 % of them take the latter. The average grade for these projects was 7.4 both for the years 2016/2017 and 2017/2018. The panel reviewed the Bachelor theses of eight programme graduates of the last two years.

The majority of the programme graduates proceed to enrol in academic master programmes of Dutch universities, being either Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam or other universities. The proportion of graduates doing so is about 70 %. Master programmes selected are, among others, Business Administration, Business Information Management, Finance and Investments or Supply Chain Management. These graduates tend to achieve good results in their master programmes. About 30% of the graduates continue their studies at foreign universities.

Considerations

The panel considers the course examinations to be up to standard.

The Bachelor theses the panel studied, match the intended learning outcomes. No theses were found by the panel to be insufficient. The grades for the theses are supported by the panel.

The panel considers the programme graduates to have reached the intended learning outcomes and to be qualified to enrol in master programmes in this domain.

Assessment of this standard

The considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 4, Achieved learning outcomes, to be satisfactory.

5. Overview of assessments

Standard	Assessment
Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	Satisfactory
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	Good
Standard 3: Student assessment	Satisfactory
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	Satisfactory
Programme	Satisfactory

6. Recommendations

In this report, a number of recommendations by the panel have been listed. For the sake of clarity, these have been brought together below. These panel recommendations are the following.

- To present scientific knowledge and skills more explicitly in the curriculum, maybe in the form of a separate teaching-learning trajectory.
- To introduce more multi-disciplinary elements in the examinations.
- To smoothen the transition from group assignments to the individual Bachelor thesis project.
- To raise the level of individual feedback in the case of group assignments.
- To align the interpretations of the Red Flag Decision among supervisors and students.