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Behandeld door
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Datum

27. OKT 2021

Ons kenmerk

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Onderwerp

Aanvraag verlenging accreditatie research master Archaeology

Geachte heer Kroes,

Hierbij verzoeken wij u om verlenging van accreditatie van onze research master Archaeology (CROHO 60133). Het visitatierapport is als bijlage toegevoegd. De opleiding heeft van het panel als oordeel 'positief onder voorwaarden' ontvangen. Derhalve is een herstelplan opgesteld. Dit plan, dat wij op korte termijn hopen vast te stellen, sturen wij u zo spoedig mogelijk na.

Wij verzoeken u de rekening voor verwerking van dit dossier te richten aan:

Rijksuniversiteit Groningen
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 t.a.v. Faculteit der Letteren
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Onder vermelding van Kostenplaats 150 101107.

Met vriendelijke groet,
 namens het College van Bestuur van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen,

b/c

prof. dr. J. (Jouke) de Vries



**RESEARCH MASTER'S
PROGRAMME ARCHAEOLOGY**

FACULTY OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN

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This report was finalised on 22 April 2021



REPORT ON THE RESEARCH MASTER'S PROGRAMME ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN

This report makes use of the NVAO's Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (September 2018) and the Specification of Additional Criteria for Research Master's Programmes (May 2016). It takes the criteria for limited programme assessments as its starting point, supplemented by the additional aspects for research master's programmes.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE PROGRAMME

Research master's programme Archaeology

Name of the programme:	Archaeology (research)
CROHO number:	60133
Level of the programme:	master's
Orientation of the programme:	academic
Number of credits:	120 EC
Location:	Groningen
Mode of study:	full time
Language of instruction:	English
Submission deadline NVAO:	01/11/2020, extension submission date until 31/10/2021 due to legislation WHW art. 5.16 lid 4

The digital assessment of the research master Archaeology in the Archaeology, Classics and Ancient Civilizations and Region Studies cluster at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen took place on 11 and 12 November 2020.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE INSTITUTION

Name of the institution:	University of Groningen
Status of the institution:	publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	positive

COMPOSITION OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The NVAO approved the composition of the panel on 2 June 2020. The panel that assessed the research master's programme Archaeology consisted of:

- Prof. dr. J. (Jacqueline) Mulville, professor Bioarchaeology and Director of Research and Impact at the School of History, Archaeology and Religion at Cardiff University (UK) [chair];
- Prof. dr. M.B.H. (Martin) Everaert, professor Linguistics at Utrecht University;
- Prof. dr. J. (Jeroen) Poblome, professor Classical Archaeology and director of the Sagalassos Archaeological Research Project (Belgium) and the KU Leuven Institute for Cultural Heritage;
- R. (Rory) Granleese, BA, research master student Archaeology at Leiden University [student member].

The panel was supported by dr. E. (Els) Schröder, who acted as secretary. She was supported by V.L. (Victor) van Kleef, MA.

WORKING METHOD OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The site visit to the research master's programme Archaeology at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen was part of the Archaeology, Classics and Ancient Civilizations and Region Studies cluster assessment. The following universities participated in this cluster assessment: University of Groningen, University of Amsterdam, Leiden University and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

On behalf of the participating universities, quality assurance agency Qanu was responsible for logistical support, panel guidance and the production of the reports. Dr. E. (Els) Schröder was project coordinator for Qanu. Dr. Els Schröder, dr. Irene Conradie and Victor van Kleef, MA, acted as secretaries in the cluster assessment.

The nine programmes of the four universities were scheduled to be assessed between April 2020 and June 2020. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic made site visits impossible, and all assessments, except the one at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, were rescheduled for more suitable dates in the fall and winter of 2020 and 2021. The project coordinator and the representatives of the programmes agreed to schedule digital assessments.

Panel members

The members of the assessment panel were selected based on their expertise, availability and independence. The panel consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. J. (Jacqueline) Mulville, professor Bioarchaeology and Director of Research and Impact at the School of History, Archaeology and Religion at Cardiff University (UK) [panel chair University of Amsterdam and University of Groningen];
- Prof. dr. K. (Kristoffel) Demoen, professor Ancient Greek Literature at Ghent University (Belgium) [panel chair Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Leiden University];
- Dr. G. (Gerhard) Anders, senior lecturer African Studies and International Development at the Centre of African Studies of the University of Edinburgh (UK);
- Dr. K. (Kim) Beerden, University Lecturer at the Institute for History of Leiden University
- Prof. dr. M.B.H. (Martin) Everaert, professor Linguistics at Utrecht University;
- R. (Rory) Granleese, BA, research master student Archaeology at Leiden University [student member].
- Em. Prof. dr. phil. J.U. (Jens-Uwe) Hartmann, professor Indian and Iranian Studies at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich (Germany);
- Prof. dr. J. (Johannes) Haubold, professor of Classics at Princeton University (United States);
- Em. Prof. dr. J.F. (John) Healey, emeritus professor in Semitic Studies at the University of Manchester (UK);
- Prof. D. (Dan) Hicks, professor of Contemporary Archaeology at Oxford University (UK);
- Prof. dr. E.H. (Helena) Houvenaghel, professor Spanish Language and Culture at Utrecht University;
- Prof. dr. T. (Thomas) Meier, professor for Pre- and Protohistory and executive director of the Heidelberg Center for the Environment of Heidelberg University (Germany);
- Prof. dr. E.M. (Eric) Moormann, professor Classical Archaeology at Radboud University;
- Prof. dr. J. (Jeroen) Poblome, professor Classical Archaeology and director of the Sagalassos Archaeological Research Project (Belgium) and the KU Leuven Institute for Cultural Heritage;
- Y.P. (Yannick) de Raaff, BA, research master student Archaeology at the University of Groningen [student member];

Preparation

At the end of March 2020, it became clear that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all universities would be closed until further notice. The RUG indicated an interest in organising a digital site visit since a conventional site visit was unlikely given travel policies as well as the applicable university standards and guidelines. The project coordinator asked the panel chair, Prof. Mulville, whether she would be willing to lead a digital assessment. She consented to chair a digital assessment on 3 April 2020.



On the 18 March 2020 and again on 17 September 2020, the panel chair was briefed by Qanu on her role, the assessment framework, the working method, and the planning of the site visits and reports. Prior to the assessment, the panel members received instructions on the use of the assessment framework and the planning of the site visits (physical and online) and reports. The panel members involved also confirmed their consent to partake in a digital assessment. Their confirmations have been archived by Qanu and can be provided upon request.

A date was set for a digital visit on 11 and 12 November 2020. Before the site visit to the University of Groningen, Qanu received the self-evaluation report of the programme and sent it to the panel. After studying the existing documentation, the panel chair communicated a 'go' to the project coordinator. The project coordinator then composed a schedule for the online site visit in consultation with the Faculty. Prior to the digital site visit, the Faculty selected representative partners for the various interviews. See Appendix 3 for the final schedule.

A thesis selection was made by the panel's chair and the project coordinator. The selection consisted of 15 theses and their assessment forms for the programme, based on a provided list of graduates between 2015 and 2019. A variety of topics and tracks and a diversity of examiners were included in the selection. The project coordinator and panel chair ensured that the distribution of grades in the selection matched the distribution of grades of all available theses. The programme has no dedicated tracks, but the chair ensured that a variety of topics were included in the selection.

After studying the self-evaluation report, theses and assessment forms, the panel members formulated their preliminary findings and questions. The secretary collected all initial questions and remarks and distributed them amongst all panel members. A preparatory panel meeting was organised on 6 November 2020. In this meeting, the panel discussed its initial findings on the self-evaluation report and the theses, and decided on the division of tasks during the digital site visit.

Site visit

The assessment of the University of Groningen took place on 11 and 12 November 2020. Before the assessment, the panel studied the additional documents provided by the programme. An overview of these materials can be found in Appendix 4.

The panel conducted interviews with representatives of the programmes: students and staff members, the programme's management, alumni and representatives of the Board of Examiners. It also offered students and staff members an opportunity for a confidential discussion during a consultation hour. No requests for this private consultation were received.

The panel used the final part of the site visit to discuss its findings in an internal meeting. Afterwards, the panel chair publicly presented the panel's preliminary findings and general observations. The development dialogue was scheduled as the final part of the second day of the site visit, following the official presentation of the preliminary findings.

Consistency and calibration

In order to ensure the consistency of assessment within the cluster, various measures were taken:

- The panel composition ensured regular attendance of key panel members, including the chairs;
- The coordinator was present at the start of all site visits as well as at the panel discussion leading to the preliminary findings for all site visits within the cluster assessment;
- Calibration meetings were scheduled for September and November, later rescheduled to December 2020, in which the two chairs and key panel members discussed the approach to digital assessment and how to reach conclusions regarding the quality of the assessed programmes.



Report

After the site visit, the secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to the project coordinator for peer assessment. Subsequently, she sent the report to the panel. After processing the panel members' feedback, the project coordinator sent the draft report to the Faculty in order to have it checked for factual irregularities. She discussed the ensuing comments with the panel's chair, and changes were implemented accordingly. The report was then finalised and sent to the Faculty and University Board.

Definition of judgements standards

In accordance with the NVAO's Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (September 2018) for limited programme assessments, the panel used the following definitions for the assessment of the standards:

Generic quality

The quality that, from an international perspective, may reasonably be expected from a higher education Associate Degree, Bachelor's or Master's programme.

Meets the standard

The programme meets the generic quality standard.

Partially meets the standard

The programme meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard.

Does not meet the standard

The programme does not meet the generic quality standard.

The panel used the following definitions for the assessment of the programme as a whole:

Positive

The programme meets all the standards.

Conditionally positive

The programme meets standard 1 and partially meets a maximum of two standards, with the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel.

Negative

In the following situations:

- The programme fails to meet one or more standards;
- The programme partially meets standard 1;
- The programme partially meets one or two standards, without the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel;
- The programme partially meets three or more standards.

For research master's programmes, the aspects as listed in the Specification of Additional Criteria for Research Master's Programmes (May 2016) are considered as supplementary to the criteria in this framework and are assessed accordingly.



SUMMARY JUDGEMENT

In reaction to recommendations received in the NVAO assessment of 2014, the research master's programme in Archaeology was radically restructured in the period under assessment. In 2014, the research master's programme in Archaeology was a track in an integrated research master's programme with Art History. These two fields have been separated. In 2016, Archaeology was introduced as a disciplinary two-year research master's degree programme of 120 EC. The decision to create Archaeology as a research master's degree in its own right is fully endorsed by the current panel and considered an adequate response to the earlier recommendations. The panel acknowledges the hard work and commitment of all staff involved in this radical overhaul.

Standard 1

The panel concluded that the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of the research master's programme Archaeology tie in with the level and orientation of a research master's degree programme. It verified that they are aligned with the Dublin descriptors and pay sufficient attention to the training of research skills at the required attainment level. Attention to theory, methodological approaches and ethics are included in the ILOs, as are relevant learning skills. This sustains the programme's explicit research-oriented focus and is in line with the expectations within the discipline and, implicitly, with those of the professional field. In the coming years, the panel advises the programme to refine its profile using more distinctive characteristics. The programme's educational philosophy could provide a starting point for this. The panel also recommends clearly describing the theoretical, methodological and space/time choices made in relation to the creation of the new curriculum as part of this redefinition. Alternatively, outlining some of the underlying concepts would also clarify the programme's unique take. This polishing of the profile would offer a suitable basis to reassess the current ILOs. The panel encourages the addition of an intended learning outcome based on the programme's approach to inter- and/or multidisciplinary. In addition, it advises connecting the ILOs more explicitly to the expectations of the professional field for a research master's programme, partly through reformulation and partly through discerning additional relevant skills.

Standard 2

The programme benefits from the quality of the research conducted at the GIA, reviewed as 'very good' in the latest SEP review. The panel established that the combination of staff and facilities with the expertise available at the GIA is well-suited to a research master's programme, offering a challenging and engaging teaching-learning environment that is intrinsically linked to research. Staff members go the extra mile for their students, and the students are very positive about the ways in which they can engage with actual research in a challenging, attractive, inspiring, research-oriented teaching-learning environment. The existing selection and admittance criteria are fitting for a research master's programme, as they aim to attract very strong candidates while also allowing for diversification of the intake. The choice for English as the language of instruction, and an English programme name, is appropriate and of added value for students. The curriculum contents, the facilities and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

The new curriculum design offers students an extensive and intensive core training, while elective components allow for the creation of individual learning trajectories. The programme strikes a balance between specialisation and the training of knowledge, methodologies, research skills and the ethics of research. The panel is aware that the new curriculum is not yet fully tried and tested and needs time to mature. Nevertheless, it also concluded that many elements in the teaching-learning environment favoured delays in the period under assessment, many beyond the control of the students. The panel's concerns focus on elements related to the curriculum design and lack of formal procedures to monitor progress – in terms of a learning trajectory in the core courses in which both first- and second-year students engage, and in terms of study duration by a lack of strict enforcement of deadlines in the elective elements of the curriculum and thesis trajectory in connection with the rotation system of the core courses. As a result of this combination of elements, the teaching-learning environment is at the moment compromised in terms of its feasibility. Moreover, given the curriculum design, the students are not optimally prepared to incorporate



the structure of the discipline and the relationship between its various branches into their thesis, in the panel's view. These issues will need to be addressed.

Standard 3

The panel verified that the programme's assessment system functions adequately. Its policies fully comply with Faculty and university-wide assessment policies. The Board of Examiners fulfils all its legal duties and keeps control through the expert teams of the quality of assessment at the programme level. The design of the programme's assessments, which are aligned with the course objectives and incorporate a wide variety of appropriate research-oriented assessment methods are considered fitting. The panel appreciates the assessment methods that train the students' abilities in critical reflection. This seems apt for a research master's programme. The panel endorses the various procedural changes that have already been partially implemented, including changes to the thesis trajectory and the introduction of new assessment forms for both thesis and tutorials. The programme adheres to the peer-review principle in the design of its examinations as well as the thesis. Although the panel would have graded the theses less leniently, it considers the assessment procedures sufficiently transparent, independent and fair. In order to increase the quality of assessment further, panel suggestions are: the inclusion of marking criteria for the process as part of the thesis assessment, the organisation of regular calibration meetings among all staff members in addition to those between supervisor and reader, fixed hand-in deadlines, reserving honours for students finishing within a set time frame, and stricter marking policies regarding the word limit. The panel acknowledges that measures have been taken but that the effects are not yet fully visible.

Standard 4

Based on the overall level of the theses and the performance of graduates after completion of the programme, the panel concluded that the graduates have achieved the programme's intended learning outcomes. It appreciated the quality of the theses examined. It also verified that the students complete the entire research cycle at a master's level in their thesis trajectory, and that their research is in line with the GIA's research focus. In this way, the theses demonstrate that the students are fully embedded within a good-quality research context. In the panel's view, the implemented changes to the curriculum will strengthen this connection even more in the near future. The fact that many students and graduates function well in archaeological research projects and that an ample number of theses result in successful research proposals for PhD positions upon graduation adds to the positive assessment of the programme. The panel noted, however, that job market preparation for career paths outside of academia or archaeology could be strengthened. Plans have been formulated to do so, which will hopefully have the desired effect.

The panel assesses the standards from the NVAO's Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands for limited programme assessments, in accordance with the aspects included in the Specification of Additional Criteria for Research Master's Programmes, in the following way:

Research master's programme Archaeology

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	partially meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard
General conclusion	conditionally positive

The panel trusts the programme to act on the above findings concerning standard 2 and considers it feasible to address these concerns within two years. For a positive assessment, the panel would like to be able to review:



- Changes to the programme in such a way that the course content can fully and equally contribute to individual student development. Irrespective of their individual learning trajectories, the programme should enable all students equally to employ key module content in their thesis preparation.
- Differentiation for first and second year students in the taught core courses acknowledging progressive learning in terms of knowledge and skills. This will ensure that all students are assessed dependent on stage and progression level;
- The introduction of submission dates and formal deadlines coupled to embedded alternative assessment, to facilitate the completion of the taught components and thesis in a timely manner;
- The impact of the planned, and any additional, improvements to the support, monitoring, structure, and progression of the thesis and tutorials to allow students to complete in a timely manner.

The chair, prof. dr. Jacqueline Mulville, and the secretary, dr. Els Schröder, of the panel hereby declare that all panel members have studied this report and that they agree with the judgements laid down in it. They confirm that the assessment has been conducted in accordance with the demands relating to independence.

Date: 22 April 2021



DESCRIPTION OF THE STANDARDS FROM THE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK FOR LIMITED FRAMEWORK ASSESSMENTS

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

Profile

The research master's programme in Archaeology is one of the research master's programmes of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen. Its teaching-learning environment and curriculum are closely associated with the research laboratories, the renowned reference collections, and the staff members of the Groningen Institute of Archaeology (GIA). The programme has a broad geographical and chronological coverage, connected to the research specialisations of the GIA: Arctic and Antarctic Studies, Bioarchaeology, Classical and Mediterranean Archaeology, Greek Archaeology, Prehistoric and Protohistoric Archaeology of Northwest Europe. During the site visit, the programme referred to its long-standing collections of reference materials as one of its distinguishing elements. The panel saw several examples of the ways in which the reference collection and associated laboratories were used by the students for their studies and agrees that these facilities are imperative for the programme's teaching-learning environment and should therefore be highlighted in the programme's profile.

According to the panel, another characteristic of the programme is its substantial curriculum of five core courses amounting to 50 EC, designed uniquely for the research master's programme. In these core courses, the students receive an extensive multidisciplinary training in the expertise available at the GIA. No other research master's programme in Archaeology in the Netherlands offers a similar structure with such a knowledge-intensive core curriculum specifically designed for research master students. In this respect, the programme stands out in the Dutch educational landscape within the discipline. According to the panel, the emphasis on archaeological research is a strong feature of its profile. During their studies, the students undertake active research in the context of ongoing archaeological projects. Hence, the programme has a clear connection to particular aspects of the professional field and its expectations. Currently, this connection is implicit rather than explicit in the programme's profile and orientation. The panel advises formulating the specific connections to the professional field in more explicit terms, to bring out the relevance of its academic approach for the expectations of the professional field.

Although the panel considers the programme to be distinctive among the Dutch research master's programmes in Archaeology, it also feels that its profile could be defined with more distinguishing features. This would clarify its position within the Dutch and international teaching landscape; comparison to other degree programmes and thorough benchmarking may be of help with this. Such a reorientation would be fruitful, particularly in terms of the marketing and communication strategy, and could attract more diverse groups of students to the programme. Instead of focussing on its academic character alone, the panel advises emphasising the methodological, theoretical and time/space choices made. An alternative approach would be to define the programme's orientation in terms of the educational vision underpinning the choices made for the new curriculum. The research lines of the GIA offer rich ground for inspiration, as would the discussion of what type of scientific, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches to archaeological research are adopted as part of the teaching philosophy.

Intended learning outcomes

The general goals of the programme have been translated into intended learning outcomes (ILOs) that closely follow the Dublin descriptors (see Appendix 1). The panel is of the opinion that the ILOs comply with international standards and the expectations of the discipline. It agrees that the ILOs demonstrably describe the level and research-oriented nature of the programme. This is evident, for example, from the attention paid to the awareness



of the ethical responsibilities associated with research (ILO 3.4). Also, attainment of knowledge, understanding and critical evaluation of methodologies (ILOs 1.3 and 3.1) and theories are included as part of the programme's learning objectives. The panel advises formulating a learning objective based on the programme's approach to inter- and multidisciplinary.

As mentioned above, less attention is paid to the programme's connection to the professional field of Archaeology in terms of research-based participation. This is also reflected in the ILOs. At the moment, the ILOs are only implicitly linked to the expectations of the professional field. The panel believes that the programme's choice for a focus on research in an academic context could be translated into learning objectives more explicitly geared towards training skills for the professional field of archaeology and for related fields such as the broader humanities and cultural heritage sector. For example, new transferable skills could be added to the current 'learning skills' (ILO 5) geared to expectations for the wider professional field; this includes the ability to think critically. Rephrasing some of the current ILOs could also be instrumental. The panel proposes redrafting words like 'awareness' in terms of 'engage with' or 'take individual position on' to define the skill acquired.

By reformulating the ILOs in terms of the specific skills acquired, the programme's learning objectives will be more transparent and more easily measurable, which is relevant for all stakeholders. The panel also advises the programme to consider incorporating the engagement with multivocality as a transferable skill, as the implied engagement with many views and perspectives is relevant for many careers beyond the archaeological sector. Also, attention paid to the way in which graduates engage with recent developments in the discipline could be a discerning feature and formulated in terms of a relevant transferable skill. In particular, interaction with emerging heritage challenges and the ethical questions of decolonisation or other major debates in society and the ability to work with, and in some cases design, digital tools might set Archaeology graduates apart from many other disciplines.

Considerations

The panel concluded that the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of the research master's programme Archaeology tie in with the level and orientation of a research master's degree programme. It verified that they are aligned with the Dublin descriptors and pay sufficient attention to the training of research skills at the required attainment level. Attention to theory, methodological approaches and ethics are included in the ILOs, as are relevant learning skills. This sustains the programme's explicit research-oriented focus and is in line with the expectations within the discipline and, implicitly, with those of the professional field.

In the coming years, the panel advises the programme to refine its profile using more distinctive characteristics. The programme's educational philosophy could provide a starting point for this. The panel also advises clearly describing the theoretical, methodological and space/time choices made in relation to the creation of the new curriculum as part of this redefinition. Alternatively, outlining some of the underlying concepts would also clarify the programme's unique take, for example by defining the Groningen approach to inter- and multidisciplinary and by explaining what is considered a scientific approach in the context of this particular degree. This polishing of the profile would offer a suitable basis to reassess the current ILOs. The panel encourages the addition of an intended learning outcome based on the programme's approach to inter- and/or multidisciplinary. In addition, it advises connecting the ILOs more explicitly to the expectations of the professional field for a research master's programme, partly through reformulation and partly through discerning additional relevant skills. The programme could consider adding the engagement with multivocality, wider societal debates, digital humanities and computational skills, and critical thinking amongst other options, as these abilities are transferable to diverse professional contexts and will set archaeology graduates apart from many other disciplines.

Conclusion

Research master's programme Archaeology: the panel assesses Standard 1 as 'meets the standard'.



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*Admissions, intake and programme language*

The research master's programme is selective and aims for a good fit between prospective candidates and the programme's aims. Motivation, proven English proficiency (an IELTS score of at least 7.0) and study results are all taken into account. Prospective students should have an average grade of 7.5; their thesis should be awarded at least an 8.0. Students who excel in the one-year master's programme may also be admitted based on their performance in their master courses. If candidates do not meet all of the formal criteria, admission may still be granted based on their general performance and commitment (as seen from fieldwork participation, organisational experience, volunteer positions, or performance in an individual premaster's programme). The panel approves of this practice, as it opens up the programme to a more diverse intake. It considers the selection and admittance criteria fitting for a research master's programme.

The programme has admitted 5-7 students per year for the last 3 years. Most students come to the programme through the University of Groningen's bachelor's programme Archaeology. The international intake fluctuates in number, yet is considered important by the programme and panel alike as it feeds into the diversity of the teaching-learning environment. The panel learnt that the programme is currently reassessing its promotion strategy. Research in Archaeology and many positions in the cultural heritage sector are strongly multicultural and international in focus. Students may reasonably expect to move abroad or work closely together with foreign colleagues in international collaborations, both during their studies and upon graduation. Hence, the programme adopted English as its language of instruction. This allows for the creation of an international classroom, but also prepares students in an educational setting for their future careers in research and beyond. The panel considers the choice for English as the language of instruction, and an English programme name, to be appropriate and of added value for students.

Curriculum

In reaction to recommendations received in the NVAO assessment of 2014, the research master's programme in Archaeology was radically restructured. In 2014, the research master's programme in Archaeology was a track in an integrated research master's programme with Art History. These two fields have been separated. In 2016, Archaeology was introduced as a disciplinary two-year research master's degree programme of 120 EC. The decision to create Archaeology as a research master's degree in its own right is fully endorsed by the current panel and considered an adequate response to the earlier recommendations. As the complete overhaul of the programme also resulted in an entirely different curriculum and programme schedule that were introduced in the 2017-2018 academic year, the panel decided to focus primarily on the new curriculum as this offers the relevant teaching-learning environment for all current students.

The new curriculum consists of a compulsory component (90 EC) and a flexible component (30 EC). The compulsory component includes five core courses (10 EC each), events (courses, talks, conferences) organised by one of the relevant National Research Schools (10 EC), and a thesis (30 EC). The flexible component (3 x 10 EC) enables the students to develop an individual research profile. In the curriculum, six learning elements are addressed as part of the students' learning journey: (1) period/region knowledge, (2) theory, (3) method, (4) valorisation, (5) research skills, and (6) specialisation. The first five learning elements are integrated in the compulsory courses, while the flexible components/research embedding is mostly focused on specialisation. All elements prepare for and converge in the thesis. According to the panel, the new curriculum is coherent and offers sufficient possibilities for specialisation and in-depth treatment of research questions and thus addresses the concerns of the 2014 assessment panel. For an overview of the curriculum, see Appendix 2.



The panel studied the contents of the compulsory courses and considers them to be of good quality. The programme offers students a substantive knowledge base that embeds them firmly within the research context that the GIA offers. The panel appreciated the interdisciplinary aims and the option for students to engage with the wide range of research activities at the GIA. Now that the new programme is established, the panel recommends fine-tuning the compulsory core alongside the profile in the coming years to bring out the distinctive characteristics and unique research approaches available at the GIA. It wondered whether reducing the number of EC assigned to the compulsory courses might be beneficial for students, because the interdisciplinary exchange aimed for in the courses tends to result in similar course activities and assignments. The programme explained that these activities are usually connected to the students' research interests and feed into their individual learning journeys. The students felt that they had sufficient opportunities to create a unique profile within a structured environment. The panel acknowledges that the programme made a deliberate, motivated choice in this matter, closely related to its design. It is therefore fitting.

Research skills are currently interwoven in the programme as part of the core courses and their various assignments. This is in line with the expectations for a research master's programme and fully validated by the panel. In the courses the students are sufficiently trained in doing research, in applying appropriate methods, and in the ethical issues connected to research. They also learn to write proposals and essays for various audiences, practice their oral skills, and engage in critical feedback and peer-to-peer learning. To further streamline the research training, the programme management decided to create a separate course on transferable skills to support the current integrated learning, which starts in the 2020/2021 academic year.

The panel studied the plans for this new course and endorses the initiative, which aims to ground and enrich the current training of skills. The title of the new module suggests attention is being paid to the ways in which skills feed into the students' future careers, but the panel still found the stress on a professional career outside the domain of archaeology to be underdeveloped. During the site visit, the students and alumni indicated that they would appreciate more preparation for other careers. Although the programme tries to direct students to the relevant information, the panel agrees with the students that more targeted attention may be of added value. Hence, it advises explicitly focussing on the ways in which the acquired skills may be relevant for a professional career outside of academia or archaeology, either in the new course on transferable skills or in supplementary elements to the curriculum. It encourages the programme to explicitly address critical and interdisciplinary thinking in this context also, as these transferable skills are currently only implicitly included in the core courses. Help from specialised teachers, for example from the graduate school or faculty, may be of added value in this context.

For their flexible component, the students have several options. They can follow (research) master courses at the University of Groningen or other Dutch universities, enrol in tutorials, or pursue internships at external partner institutes. These flexible components are monitored in terms of aims, standards and learning outcomes by the Director of Studies, the Board of Examiners and the Placement Office of the Faculty of Arts (in the case of internships). No additional requirements are officially required of research master students when entering courses of one-year master's programmes, yet a higher degree of theoretical and methodological reflection is expected of them, and their performance is assessed accordingly. This seems appropriate to the panel and sufficiently addresses questions posed by the previous panel regarding the research master's performance and assessment in one-year master courses. The panel encourages formalising this situation, for example by linking the learning objectives in these courses to those of tutorials for research master students.

Most students opt for tutorials (of either 5 or 10 EC) over coursework at other master's programmes or internships, the panel learnt. For tutorials, the students arrange a tutorial contract with a clearly designated output – usually a report or a written essay. Tutorials enable students to study a topic of their choice and/or acquire, broaden or deepen specific skills. Examples of tutorials include participation in research projects in the area/region/method of specialisation, by working on the GIA reference collections (e.g. zooarchaeology, archaeobotany) or on the GIA archaeological collection in the Laboratory for Conservation and Material Studies. The students are very enthusiastic



about the tutorials and the close contact with their tutor, often their mentor and prospective thesis supervisor. They feel that tutorials really give them a chance to grow in their research and chosen specialisation. The panel considers tutorials a fitting teaching form for designing an individual profile for research master students.

In the student chapter and during the site visit, the students mentioned some issues with respect to the flexible components in the programme, which resulted in delays. They feel that the flexible components are led by student initiative rather than by the staff member involved, which made it hard to set a concrete project or planning. Some had better guidance than others. Unforeseen circumstances (for example, laboratories or equipment not being available) impeded their progress in rare cases, with no alternative options discussed. The students told us that recently these circumstances were sometimes due to the current pandemic, but not always. One complaint commonly shared amongst the students was that the deadlines for the flexible component shift and are not strictly monitored and imposed. Although time-keeping and planning are skills that the students should learn, the panel agrees with them that close monitoring of deadlines is important and that they should feel supported in similar ways by their various tutors. The programme management explained that through the Director of Studies' personal involvement, it tries to keep track of the students' individual progress. The management has made study progression in the flexible component one of its priorities. It verified that the programme committee had also been involved in the feedback loop and that its suggestions were taken seriously and acted upon. The panel advises formalising the procedures, introducing strict and set deadlines, and discussing expectations regarding the commitment of both students and tutors as part of the tutorial contract to create a level playing field for all students.

Thesis trajectory

The thesis is an individual research project, the topic of which has to fall under the expertise of one of the GIA teaching staff members. The students sign a thesis contract. In the thesis, they realise a full research cycle, from the formulation of a solid research question to the output of a written report. They are encouraged to include a PhD proposal in their thesis, following the Netherlands Organisation of Scientific Research format in order to be in a position to apply for a PhD position as soon as they submit their thesis. They present their work as a proposal, draft and then finished product in the master dissertation class. In this class, they receive feedback from the lecturer and their fellow students. The master dissertation class is held monthly in cooperation with the one-year master's programme in Archaeology. Attendance is optional for first-year students and compulsory for second-year students.

During the site visit, the students were critical of the dissertation class. Although they appreciated hearing about the interests and research objectives of their fellow students, they felt that the class fell short in supporting them in their progress. They would prefer more attention being paid to the process, design and presentation of research. These remarks corresponded with the panel's findings in the thesis selection, when it encountered differences in presentation and style (see Standard 4). The programme management acknowledged these observations. It indicated that the new course in transferable skills would pay attention to the communication of research, partly to address this student wish. It was also open to the panel's suggestion to restructure the dissertation class in such a way that it would support students better in their progress, in the hope of avoiding delays during the thesis trajectory. The programme management indicated that the current cohort of students was already better prepared to finish the thesis project within the set time frame than earlier students. In its view, the new curriculum has helped the students to develop their research ideas at an earlier stage within a more structured environment. The panel shares this hope, but due to the current circumstances as a result of the pandemic, it is not really capable of verifying this statement.

Progressive student learning and study progression

The compulsory courses alternate over two years and are taken by both first- and second-year students, envisaged as a rotating system (see Appendix 2). The courses are programmed in such a way that the students should be able to complete all compulsory courses prior to starting on their thesis project in the second semester of Year 2. The programme management explained that this rotation system results in enrolment of both first- and second-year



students in the same course, allowing for peer-to-peer learning. The panel considers the rotating system inventive yet also has concerns regarding progressive student learning and study progression.

First, the panel wonders whether the rotation system is completely fair in its expectations and outcomes. In principle, it has no objection to students of year 1 and year 2 coming together within one course; it is in favour of peer-to-peer learning and also acknowledges that the classroom is more interactive and diverse in this way. The management indicated that the core curriculum offers basic training at the master's level and that all students, either first- or second-year, enter with differences in background due to different training at bachelor's level and interests. For this reason, it decided to play down the differentiation between first and second year as the other differences already impact on students' engagement and interaction in the classroom. The panel disagrees with playing down the differentiation between first- and second-year students, in particular with respect to the assignments and assessments in which students often bring their interests as part of the interdisciplinary exchange. In its view, the second-year students' input will be of a more advanced level that should be recognised in both the core courses' learning objectives and the final assessments. In other words, the rotation system and exchange between first- and second-year students could function well in terms of progressive student learning, diversifying perspectives and individual learning trajectories, but only if differentiation between the two learning levels is acknowledged and reflected in the assessment procedures and learning objectives.

Second, the rotation system also impacts another aspect of progressive student learning: the relation between the compulsory courses and the thesis is unclear in terms of progressive learning, while the thesis should be the piece of work in which all learning elements converge. The students start with the orientation on their thesis projects in semester 1 of year 2 and start contacting their proposed supervisors. At that moment, they have not yet completed the core courses. The programme ensures that the theses are not graded unless all core courses are successfully completed, yet the panel worries that the perspectives offered in the last two core courses cannot truly be incorporated in the thesis unless the students take longer to complete their projects. The system may work very well for students who know exactly what they want to research at the start of their studies, but does not allow them sufficient flexibility within the two-year time frame to diverge into new directions based on insights gained in the core curriculum. As a result, the rotation system may favour loyalty to earlier choices over advancement and creativity, unless the students are willing to defer and take the additional time to change their research direction or stance.

Third, when students drop out of a core course and/or postpone enrolment due to personal circumstances, or when they fail a core course after a resit, they need to wait for two years to retake it. This would seriously impede study progress. The programme management and staff indicated that this eventuality has not happened so far and that if it did, a tailor-made solution would be sought. It also added that the personalised system of guidance is geared precisely to those in need and that inequality between students for that matter is not the case as equal cases will receive equal treatments. The panel accepts that a tailor-made solution might work due to the low student numbers, but is still concerned that it also may result in an unequal treatment of the students; those with special needs, ones who find themselves in unforeseen circumstances or ones who are new to the Groningen Archaeology Department are vulnerable with such a personalised system. It thus asks for more formalised procedures. During the site visit, the students mentioned another consequence of the rotation system: as they considered postponing or dropping out of mandatory courses problematic due to the rotation system, they would opt for doing so with flexible components of the curriculum instead. They give priority to deadlines in the compulsory courses over deadlines in the flexible components. And as deadlines in the flexible component were not strictly imposed, they easily fell behind. These statements imply that the questions of whether the rotation system functions successfully and whether it impedes study progress are answered by the overall study progression in the programme rather than by the successful completion of the core courses in due time.

The panel acknowledges that the programme management is aware of these delays. It is also aware that the circumstances due to the Covid-19 pandemic are partly to blame for the observed impact on the progress of



currently studying students and, due to the sudden impact on an existing situation, beyond the programme's full control. It noted that the management had sought to implement measures to address delays before the arrival of the global pandemic. These measures included closer monitoring of individual students' progress rates and the introduction of tutorial and thesis contracts. Another measure was the discontinuation of the Research Assistant Programme (RAP) in 2019.

The RAP allowed students to join research projects in the position of research assistants while completing an extra-curricular research internship. As an alternative to the RAP, students can now work as a research assistant as part of a tutorial in certain cases. According to the documentation received, the workload within this new system is reduced. The students indicated, however, that they continued to experience delays due to their work as research assistants within tutorials, partly because they went beyond what was expected and partly because the projects themselves encountered delays due to unforeseen circumstances or as the result of scheduling issues. They were not particularly worried by these delays. They highly value the opportunity to work within these live research projects and would be very much saddened to see these opportunities stripped away. It worried the panel, however, that first-year students already seemed to plan on delays in their studies as they expected to be unable to combine tutorials in the form of research assistantships with the core courses.

The panel appreciates the opportunity that the tutorials offer for students to function as research assistants in funded research projects. It is also aware that the students may choose to prolong their studies to strengthen their profile and/or skills. But it wants assurance that the students are adequately protected against unnecessary delays. The management indicated to the panel that individual students are monitored by the Director of Studies, their mentors and/or tutors and supervisors, and that these staff members do advise weaker and/or delayed students against projects prone to delays. In theory, this approach should be appropriate. In practice, it seems not to function well. In the panel's view, this may be the result of the strong personal ties and connections between staff and students. These personal ties are, naturally, a credit to the programme and highly valued by all. But without strict formal guidelines, deadlines and procedures, they also easily result in study extensions due to enthusiasm, raised expectations by staff and students (too high) and the resulting overachievement. For the students, no real incentive currently exists to finish in time apart from their financial situation; this implicitly results in a situation of inequality between students who can afford to take additional time and those who cannot. For this reason, the panel suggests below (standard 3) to consider reserving the highest awards for those with good-timekeeping skills.

Research context

The programme is embedded within the infrastructure of the GIA. In 2017, a review committee assessed the quality of research conducted at the GIA as 'very good' according to the criteria of the Standard Evaluation Protocol 2014-2020. Hence, the panel concludes that the GIA offers a suitable research-oriented learning environment for a research master's programme. This connection to the GIA is also directly reflected in the curriculum: the core courses cut across periods and regions of specialisation and represent the research chairs of the GIA: Arctic and Antarctic Studies, Bioarchaeology, Classical and Mediterranean Archaeology, Greek Archaeology, Prehistoric and Protohistoric Archaeology of NW Europe. Each compulsory course is designed and given by staff members belonging to two different research chairs. This enables the students to make connections between different sub-disciplines. The programme and its students also strongly benefit from the reference collections and laboratories of the GIA. During the site visit, the panel was presented with engaging examples of the ways in which the students had access to these facilities and materials for their research and coursework. It was impressed by the demonstrated quality of the research conducted by the students and by the support they received from staff members at the GIA when using these facilities.

Permanent staff teaching in the programme have all obtained a PhD and at least a University Teaching Qualification. One staff member has obtained a Senior Teaching Qualification. The staff's qualifications and abilities for teaching in English are also monitored and at an appropriate level. The panel verified that the staff's combined expertise covers all subjects treated within the curriculum. Staff members are all active researchers at the GIA, and many are



leading scholars within their field, which is also reflected in their seniority level: the programme is headed by four professors, five associate professors and six (senior) lecturers. They are all involved in all components of the programme and allow students many opportunities for one-to-one teaching. In this way, the research expertise of staff members is fully embedded within the teaching-learning environment and is an adequate reaction to suggestions by the previous assessment panel, which suggested in 2014 that better use of the staff's expertise was wanted. The teaching staff are further reinforced by professors by special appointment whose position is co-financed by other institutions. They either teach part of a compulsory course or supervise students in the flexible components.

The students are very positive about their teachers; they praise the staff's commitment, enthusiasm and research skills, and they feel well-taught and respected as developing researchers in their own right. They are also generally positive about the programme's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and how the shift to hybrid teaching forms and online education has been managed. Both the students and the programme indicated, in their addendum to the self-evaluation report, that they have experienced challenges as a result of the current circumstances. These challenges mainly involve retaining focus and scheduling time slots for the teaching of tutorials and the core courses. In addition, many resources (the library, some laboratories) were not always readily accessible, impacting on tutorials and thesis trajectories. The panel noted that the programme tried to sustain the interactive and debate-focused teaching-learning environment as much as possible during the pandemic; classes have mostly been offered in hybrid forms. The panel also noted that the programme aptly tried to address some of the issues encountered by seeking solutions for inaccessible resources and through stricter monitoring of and pastoral care for students. It wants to compliment the staff, students and programme management for their dedication in this matter.

To further enhance their research skills, the students may choose to attend events organised by the National Research School of Archaeology (Archon), Classical Studies (Oikos) or Medieval Studies. These National Research Schools provide training in specific skills (e.g. digital reconstructions) or allow students to explore specific research questions and themes. The students appreciated these opportunities, but would welcome additional help from the programme to reimburse travel costs to the events. This student wish is endorsed by the panel, as it considers unimpeded access to these events valuable. During the pandemic, this observation has been less of a concern. Originally cancelled or deferred, these national meetings are currently offered online and therefore easily accessible to all.

In addition to these national events, it is mandatory for students to attend at least sixteen GIA Research Seminars at which research in progress is presented by members of staff, PhD students and guest speakers. The students write short reports on eight of these seminars. These seminars are now also offered online due to the pandemic. The students feel that while the seminars are interesting, the seminar report does not seem to provide any useful outcome as it is uncredited and unrelated to any of teaching or research activities within the programme. The panel advises the programme management to investigate whether an alternative reporting method or outcome might not be desirable, for example with reflection – on the knowledge obtained compared to their own individual learning trajectory – being incorporated into a portfolio of work where students reflect on their personal learning trajectory.

Considerations

The panel verified that since the NVAO assessment of 2014, the research master's programme in Archaeology has been radically restructured in line with the recommendations received. It fully endorses the decision to create Archaeology as a research master's degree in its own right and also acknowledges the hard work and commitment of staff and programme management involved in this radical overhaul. It considers the existing selection and admittance criteria fitting for a research master's programme, as they aim to attract very strong candidates while also allowing for diversification of the intake. Research in Archaeology is strongly multicultural and international in focus. The panel considers the choice for English as the language of instruction, and an English programme name, to be appropriate and of added value for students.



The programme benefits from the quality of the research conducted at the GIA, reviewed as 'very good' in the latest SEP review. This strong research record of the GIA is transmitted through the close involvement of its (senior) staff members to students. The staff members are highly qualified, hard-working and very committed; they often go the extra mile for their students to support them in their individual learning journeys. The good facilities available to the students, in particular the materials and collections, also add to the research context. The panel concluded that the combination of staff and facilities with the expertise available at the GIA is well-suited to a research master's programme, offering a challenging and engaging teaching-learning environment that is intrinsically linked to research. It is also appreciative of the commitment and dedication of the staff to the programme, which was notable during the site visit and in the work in finding solutions to continue offering teaching and guidance during the current pandemic.

The new curriculum design offers students an extensive and intensive core training, while elective components allow for the creation of individual learning trajectories. The programme strikes a balance between specialisation and the training of knowledge, methodologies, research skills and the ethics of research. The introduced rotating system of the core courses over two years is inventive and allows peer-to-peer learning between first- and second-year students in an interactive and more diverse classroom. However, this requires differentiating between first- and second-year students within the core courses in light of the advanced level and knowledge of the latter group. Also, the progression of learning is currently not fully realised, as the link between the thesis and core courses is not clear, including the ability to incorporate new insights. For the newly developed course on transferable skills, the panel advises paying special attention to the way in which the acquired skills may also be relevant for a career beyond academia or archaeology.

The panel is aware that the new curriculum is not yet fully tried and tested and needs time to mature. Nevertheless, it also concluded that many elements in the teaching-learning environment favoured delays in the period under assessment, many beyond the control of the students. These delays are linked to the design of the curriculum and have been discussed within the programme as worrying, but have not yet been fully addressed as problematic, in the panel's view. At the moment, delays are still very likely to occur, as the students' testimonies also suggested. Hence, the panel concludes that the teaching-learning environment has been and still is compromised in terms of its feasibility in the period of assessment. Therefore, the programme only partially meets the criteria for standard 2.

The panel is aware of the circumstances due to the Covid-19 pandemic, under which the programme had to operate in the last six months. It wants to stress that it believes the staff and programme management have been committed, dedicated and highly professional, and the programme content is of good quality. It therefore trusts the programme to act on the above findings and suggestions and considers it feasible to address these concerns within two years.

For a positive assessment of standard 2, the panel would like to be able to review:

- Changes to the programme in such a way that the course content can fully and equally contribute to individual student development. Irrespective of their individual learning trajectories, the programme should enable all students equally to employ key module content in their thesis preparation.
- Differentiation for first and second year students in the taught core courses acknowledging progressive learning in terms of knowledge and skills. This will ensure that all students are assessed dependent on stage and progression level;
- The introduction of submission dates and formal deadlines coupled to embedded alternative assessment, to facilitate the completion of the taught components and thesis in a timely manner;
- The impact of the planned, and any additional, improvements to the support, monitoring, structure, and progression of the thesis and tutorials to allow students to complete in a timely manner.

Conclusion

Research master's programme Archaeology: the panel assesses Standard 2 as 'partially meets the standard'.



Standard 3: Student assessment

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

Findings*Board of Examiners*

The assurance of assessment quality within the research master's programme Archaeology rests with the Board of Examiners that is responsible for the assessment of all programmes in the Faculty of Arts. As of January 2019, the Board of Examiners oversees six expert teams for different disciplines within the Faculty, merging the former separate boards. The chairs of the constituent expertise teams sit on the new central Board, along with a professional assessment expert. The research master's programme falls under the remit of the expert team for the research masters, consisting of four staff members. The programme considers the changes a chance to learn from the best practices and approaches to assessments from other programmes. This has resulted, for example, in standardisation of policy, procedures and assessment forms.

The Board of Examiners appoints examiners for the programme, monitors the programme's compliance with its Teaching and Examination Regulations and assures the quality of the assessment in individual courses and theses. The relevant expert team of the Board of Examiners regularly selects courses and theses for evaluation, trying to give as many courses as possible an evaluation once every three years. For these assessments, the expert team follows the protocol drawn up by the Board of Examiners: ensuring that the learning objectives stated in the assessment plan are assessed for each course and that the assessment is valid, reliable and transparent. The evaluations take place on the basis of the assessment portfolios supplied by the course co-ordinators and lecturers. These contain study instructions, papers/exams and assessment forms, possible resits, answer models, and result lists with partial and final grades. In a discussion with the panel, the expert team member for the research master's programmes confirmed that these checks also took place prior to the merge, but that the process was now further standardised. The panel verified during the site visit that the Board of Examiners fulfils all its legal duties. Also, it noted that appropriate measures were taken to assure the quality of assessment and of the awarded degrees during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Assessment policy and system of assessment

The research master's programme Archaeology has an assessment plan that provides a detailed survey of the various modes and moments of assessment and their relative weight. An assessment matrix links the courses directly to the intended learning outcomes. The students are informed about the course assessment (including criteria, weighting of the various components, resit possibilities) in the course descriptions and syllabi, which also state how the assessment methods are linked to the course objectives and programme learning outcomes. They confirmed to the panel that they are informed regarding the assessment methods and criteria. There is an active quality-control protocol in place to ensure the fairness and accountability of grading practices (peer review of exam and essay scripts, calibration amongst the teaching team of the compulsory courses). Standardised forms are used for the assessment of the thesis and tutorials. Both forms are being revised at the moment, in order to clarify and standardise assessment criteria by means of rubrics. The Board of Examiners regularly checks the quality of the assessments within the programme by performing spot-checks and the review of assessment files of entire courses. The programme indicated that the pandemic did not have a large impact on the assessment methods, as all final assignments could easily be arranged online. The assessment methods were explicitly evaluated by the Programme Committee, and discussed with the Director of Studies. No problems were reported, and the students were satisfied. According to the panel, the assessment plan and system of assessment are transparently organised and seem to function adequately.

Assessment takes a variety of forms. Methods include critical summaries of pre-circulated reading, participation in discussions, written exams and essays, oral presentations, a mock article in a scientific peer-reviewed journal, a mock grant proposal (plus rebuttal to reviewers' comments), and the organisation of an international workshop – from



the scientific programme, the promotion and fundraising to the practical arrangements. The panel considers the range of assessment methods suitable for a research programme, which is also clearly adapted to testing research skills in both formative and summative ways. All students receive individualised feedback, either in written form or orally, to facilitate their active learning process. In some of the compulsory courses, the students assess each other's work and performance via peer reviews. In this way, they receive feedback from people at different stages in their career – ranging from fellow first- or second-year students to highly experienced academic teachers/researchers – and they consider the assessment methods effective and a good fit for the programme's structure and aims. The panel appreciates the assessment methods that train the students' critical reflection on their own work and that of their fellow students. This seems apt for a research master's programme.

Thesis assessment

The thesis is independently assessed by two examiners, who both provide the student with written feedback. The final grade is then discussed and substantiated in the form provided to the student. The first assessor is also the student's supervisor and therefore also assesses the process of supervision. The second assessor comes from a different research chair. The thesis class coordinator monitors the pairing of supervisors, to avoid fixed pairings. These practices guarantee independence of the assessment, the panel concluded.

The panel looked at 15 theses and the accompanying assessment forms from a list of the 23 theses completed in the period between 2015-2019. All 23 theses were given a final grade between 7.0 – 9.0, with a tendency to the higher end. The panel accepts that this skewed distribution of grades is partly the result of the selective nature of the programme. Nevertheless, such a distribution of grades also hints towards underuse at both ends of the grading scale; an assumption also substantiated by the panel's own assessment. Although it considered all of the theses to be of acceptable quality, it would grade them less leniently. Generally, it agreed with the grade ranges indicated by the second assessor, who seemed to have had a tempering effect on the final grades. This is a positive development, in its opinion, but more could be done. In some cases, it also noted a lack of in-depth motivation for a grade decision by the assessor. These cases of limited feedback were balanced by some forms offering transparent, detailed and robust feedback. The panel learnt from the self-evaluation report that the strict separation between supervisor and reader, as well as the calibration of the final grades between the supervisor and reader, were developments introduced in reaction to the observation of the 2014 assessment panel that the grades were rather high. It concludes that the problem has been addressed, but room for further improvement still exists.

The panel shared its findings with the Board of Examiners, and was satisfied to hear that the Board corroborated them. In response to internal checks, the research master's programme designed a new assessment form over the last year, advised by the Board of Examiners. This form was presented to the panel prior to the site visit. According to the Board of Examiners, the new form will enhance transparency of the assessment. In combination with rubrics, which are currently being discussed, it may help assessors to make better use of the full grading scale. To the panel, all of the instruments referred to seem helpful. Based on its findings and a study of the new form, it suggests adding transparent marking criteria for the thesis process (as part of the supervision). Along with these formal instruments that should lead to further standardisation, the panel strongly encourages the organisation of calibration meetings between all staff members complementary to the existing meetings between supervisor and reader involved in the grading of individual theses. Regular calibration meetings could further align marking, feedback and supervision practices amongst all staff members.

The panel noted that many theses exceeded the word limit, resulting in very substantive documents that would benefit from further editing. It endorses the attention paid to thesis design as part of the new course in transferable skills, which will have its first run in the next academic year. The programme management was also receptive to the panel's suggestion to rethink the current preparatory thesis class in this light, which would ideally include group instruction to streamline the thesis process for the students and may also communicate expectations regarding form and delivery. Fixed deadlines for submission could also be helpful in this regard, as would a strict marking policy regarding the word limit. The panel also favours the suggestion to reserve graduation with honours ('cum



laude') for students finishing within a restricted time frame, a suggestion already proposed in the assessment of 2014. These last two suggestions were contemplated, according to the Board of Examiners. The panel thinks it is now time to act.

Considerations

The panel verified that the programme's assessment system functions adequately. Its policies fully comply with Faculty and university-wide assessment policies. The change to the new structure, under which expert teams fall under the umbrella of a central Board of Examiners, has resulted in the creation of new protocols and formats to streamline assessment procedures in the programme. The panel verified during the site visit that the Board of Examiners fulfils all its legal duties and keeps control through the expert teams of the quality of assessment at the programme level. The response of the Board of Examiners and the programme management to the circumstances due to the Covid-19 pandemic is considered adequate. The panel approves of the design of the programme's assessments, which are aligned with the course objectives and incorporate a wide variety of appropriate research-oriented assessment methods. It appreciates the assessment methods that train the students' abilities in critical reflection. This seems apt for a research master's programme.

The programme adheres to the peer-review principle in the design of its examinations as well as the thesis. Although the panel would have graded the theses less leniently, it considers the assessment procedures sufficiently transparent, independent and fair. The input of the second assessors, who are fully independent, has acted as the required check on thesis grading in this respect. The panel appreciates the various procedural changes that have already been partially implemented, including changes to the thesis trajectory and the introduction of new assessment forms for both thesis and tutorials. In order to increase the quality of assessment further, the panel suggests: the inclusion of marking criteria for the process as part of the thesis assessment, the organisation of regular calibration meetings among all staff members in addition to those between supervisor and reader, fixed hand-in deadlines, reserving honours for students finishing within a set time frame, and stricter marking policies regarding the word limit. The panel acknowledges that measures have been taken but that the effects are not yet fully visible.

Conclusion

Research master's programme Archaeology: the panel assesses Standard 3 as 'meets the standard'.

Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

The panel studied the master theses of 15 students who graduated between 2015 and 2019. It was satisfied with their level of academic research. As with all programmes, there are considerable differences between the theses, in their design, structure and approach to archaeological research. Some reflected high-quality research, others were of a fair level. The majority of the theses was considered solid. The theses covered a wide range of topics and demonstrated a detailed engagement with archaeological materials, relevant theory and the academic literature. They were in line with the research focus of the GIA and closely connected to the expertise of GIA staff members. In this way, they bore witness to the completion of the entire research cycle at the master's level. The panel concluded that the theses were mature in their application of the rules of scientific research.

The panel found the studied topics of research to be fairly traditional, considering the programme's ambition to bring together students of various disciplines within the field of archaeology. The theses rarely seemed to fully profit from the GIA's strong interdisciplinary traditions that lay at the basis of these programme aims. The panel acknowledges, however, that the studied theses were mostly the end products of the former curriculum. It suggests that an increased focus on interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches will result in theses that will better



reflect the programme's and GIA's interdisciplinary ambitions. It concluded that the combination of the core curriculum and thesis sufficiently demonstrate that all ILOs are achieved.

As discussed above (see standard 3), the panel noted that many theses exceeded the word limit. To be of publishable format, these very substantive documents would need further revision. Notwithstanding these observations, the panel concluded that the quality of the thesis research revealed a good basis for future academic publications. It noted that some theses identified avenues for further research that have inspired successful pitches to secure PhD positions. In addition to the theses, the panel received a list of publications by students and alumni of the programme. Some of these publications were based on their thesis work, others were informed by the course work, and many derived from paid research assistantships within the department. Technically, these latter publications do not necessarily reflect upon the quality of the research training within the programme. Nevertheless, the panel considers the presented evidence proof of the ability of the students and alumni to function well in research-based positions and to convey their research in publications, during and upon completion of the programme.

Another sign of a programme's quality is the employment record of its graduates. The panel found that this record is by and large in line with the expectations for a competitive field: seven out of seventeen graduates have secured a PhD position, many within the GIA. The panel hopes that diversification of the student intake will result in a wider dispersion of the programme's alumni over international faculties of archaeology in the near future. Alumni indicated in conversation with the panel that they felt well-supported and prepared by the programme to pursue research positions in Groningen and beyond. Other graduates find employment in commercial archaeology and cultural heritage positions. This suggests to the panel that the skills taught by the programme are valued in a range of different environments. Nevertheless, the alumni and students also mentioned that they would welcome further support and information on careers outside of academia. Based on the current initiatives, the panel agrees that the job market preparation for career paths outside of academia or archaeology could be strengthened. A focus on the advantages of the research training received and on transferable skills could be a vantage point for this.

Considerations

Based on the overall level of the theses and the performance of graduates after completion of the programme, the panel concludes that the graduates have achieved the programme's intended learning outcomes. It appreciates the quality of the theses examined. It also verified that the students complete the entire research cycle at a master's level in their thesis trajectory, and that their research is in line with the GIA's research focus. In this way, the theses demonstrate that the students are fully embedded within a good-quality research context. In the panel's view, the implemented changes to the curriculum will strengthen this connection even more in the near future. The fact that many students and graduates function well in archaeological research projects and that an ample number of theses result in successful research proposals for PhD positions upon graduation adds to this positive assessment. The panel noted, however, that job market preparation for career paths outside of academia or archaeology could be strengthened. Plans have been formulated to do so, which will hopefully have the desired effect.

Conclusion

Research master's programme Archaeology: the panel assesses Standard 4 as 'meets the standard'.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The panel assessed standards 1, 3, and 4 of the research master's programme Archaeology as 'meets the standard'. The panel assessed standard 2 of the research master's programme Archaeology as 'partially meets the standard'. It hereby took the additional aspects for research master's programmes as included in the Specification of Additional Criteria for Research Master's Programmes into account. Based on the NVAO decision rules for limited programme assessments, it therefore assesses the programme as 'conditionally positive'.



For standard 2, the teaching staff and many elements in the research embedment and available facilities are a credit to the programme. Staff members go the extra mile for their students, and the students are very positive about the ways in which they can engage with actual research in a challenging, attractive, inspiring, research-oriented teaching-learning environment. The panel also concluded that the teaching-learning environment and curriculum are of good quality in terms of content. It praises the programme for their hard work over the last couple of years and endorses the investment in a new, dedicated curriculum for the research master's degree.

The panel's concerns focus on elements related to the curriculum design and lack of formal procedures to monitor progress – in terms of a learning trajectory in the core courses in which both first- and second-year students engage, and in terms of study duration by a lack of strict enforcement of deadlines in the elective elements of the curriculum and thesis trajectory in connection with the rotation system of the core courses. The students too easily fall behind, and certain groups of students (with an impairment, of an alternative background to a bachelor's degree in Archaeology from the University of Groningen, or unforeseen personal circumstances) are doubly at risk as they may be less embedded within the very personalised system of guidance in place. The panel was told by the programme that these cases did not occur as the personalised system of guidance is geared precisely to those in need. It stated that inequality between students for that matter is not the case as equal cases will receive equal treatments. Nevertheless, the panel asks for a more systematised and formal system to avoid the suggestion. In the panel's view, the teaching-learning environment is currently compromised in terms of its feasibility due to the combination of above elements.

Moreover, given the curriculum design, the students are not optimally prepared to incorporate the structure of the discipline and the relationship between its various branches into their thesis. The panel is aware that the circumstances due to the Covid-19 pandemic, under which the programme has had to operate in the last six months, complicate a fair assessment of the portrayed situation. The pandemic has had an unwanted interference in all respects for a teaching degree, but also in terms of this assessment: the timing is unfortunate. The panel feels, however, that they managed to obtain a good insight into the programme based on the studied materials, and in particular into the curriculum design and its associated problems. The programme's staff and students readily and openly discussed their approaches to challenges and gave their views freely during the site visit, even though this was restricted by the digital setting. Although the digital setting offers a less personal setting than a physical site visit would have been, the panel believes that the assessment is of sufficient quality to reach the above conclusions.

The panel wants to stress that it believes the staff and programme management committed, dedicated and highly professional, and it considers the programme's contents to be of good quality. It therefore trusts the programme to act on the above findings and suggestions and considers it feasible to address these concerns within two years.

For a positive assessment of standard 2, the panel would like to be able to review:

- Changes to the programme in such a way that the course content can fully and equally contribute to individual student development. Irrespective of their individual learning trajectories, the programme should enable all students equally to employ key module content in their thesis preparation.
- Differentiation for first and second year students in the taught core courses acknowledging progressive learning in terms of knowledge and skills. This will ensure that all students are assessed dependent on stage and progression level;
- The introduction of submission dates and formal deadlines coupled to embedded alternative assessment, to facilitate the completion of the taught components and thesis in a timely manner;
- The impact of the planned, and any additional, improvements to the support, monitoring, structure, and progression of the thesis and tutorials to allow students to complete in a timely manner.

Conclusion

The panel assesses the *research master's programme Archaeology* as 'conditionally positive'.



APPENDICES



APPENDIX 1: INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Graduates are expected to have achieved the following:

Description of Master's level according to the descriptors of the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (Dublin descriptors)	Intended learning outcomes of the Research Master's Programme in Archaeology Graduates are expected to have achieved the following:
<p>1. Knowledge and Understanding Students have demonstrable knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with Bachelor's level, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context</p>	<p>1.1 have a thorough and up-to-date knowledge of at least one branch of the discipline. 1.2 be able to grasp the development and structure of the discipline and the relationship between its various branches. 1.3 have knowledge and understanding of the research methods and theories currently used in archaeology. 1.4 show awareness of current contextual, ecological, quantitative, spatial and scientific methods of analysis in archaeology. 1.5 have knowledge and understanding of the meaning and function of artefacts, including the built environment, ecofacts and landscapes in their historical and contemporary context. 1.6. have knowledge and understanding of the role and relevance of archaeology in present-day society.</p>
<p>2. Applying knowledge and understanding Students can apply their knowledge, understanding and problem-solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study</p>	<p>2.1 have the skills to apply contextual, ecological, quantitative, spatial and scientific methods of analysis when conducting independent research. 2.2 have the skills to apply research results in order to develop advanced ideas and practical applications. 2.3 successfully, and in collaboration with others, perform a responsible task relating to the organization and administration of research seminars and/or a workshop.</p>
<p>3. Making judgements Students have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements</p>	<p>3.1 are able to critically evaluate the methodologies and theories currently used in their specialization. 3.2 show originality and creativity when dealing with at least one branch of the chosen discipline. 3.3 are able to make connections between their own specialist knowledge of the branch chosen and related disciplines in the humanities and / or the social and natural sciences. 3.4 be aware of social and ethical responsibilities of research and publication in the chosen discipline and act accordingly.</p>
<p>4. Communication</p>	<p>4.1 be able to participate actively in a research group working on an academic project.</p>



<p>Students can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously</p>	<p>4.2 be able to participate in academic debate in the chosen area of specialization and to present an academic problem convincingly, both orally and in writing.</p> <p>4.3 be able to present the results of academic research to both an academic audience and interested lay people, both orally and in writing, while making appropriate use of visual material, including digital aids.</p>
<p>5. Learning skills Students have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous</p>	<p>5.1 be able to formulate a research proposal independently.</p> <p>5.2 be able to write a publishable article independently in accordance with current academic norms.</p> <p>5.3 be able to independently conduct material research into artefacts and ecofacts in accordance with the latest insights, thereby making use of appropriate equipment, and be able to produce clear reports on this research in accordance with current academic norms.</p> <p>5.4 be able to reflect critically on one's own papers, presentations and general functioning in groups, and be able to accept and use to advantage the criticism of others.</p>



APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

The curriculum:

The programme (cohort 2019-2020)

Year	Semester	Course Title	ECTS
Year 1	1a	ANTHROPOCENE	10
		CURRENT APPROACHES TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL THEORY	10
		FLEXIBLE COMPONENT 1	10
	1b	DEATH AS A MIRROR OF LIFE	10
		FLEXIBLE COMPONENT 2	10
1a-2b	RESEARCH EMBEDDING	10	
Year 2	2a	ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE SETTLED LANDSCAPE	10
		MATERIAL CULTURE AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SCIENCE	10
		FLEXIBLE COMPONENT 3	10
	2b	Thesis	30
Total			120

The rotation system:

2019-2020		2020-2021	
Semester I	Semester II	Semester III	Semester IV
ANTHROPOCENE	DEATH AS MIRROR OF LIFE	SETTLED LANDSCAPE	Thesis
ARCHAEOLOGICAL THEORY	Flexible Component 2	MATERIAL CULTURE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SCIENCE	
Flexible Component 1	Research embedding	Flexible Component 3	
		2020-2021	
		Semester I	Semester II
		SETTLED LANDSCAPE	DEATH AS MIRROR OF LIFE
		MATERIAL CULTURE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SCIENCE	Flexible Component 2
		Flexible Component 1	Research embedding
		2021-2022	
		Semester I	Semester II
		ANTHROPOCENE	DEATH AS MIRROR OF LIFE
		ARCHAEOLOGICAL THEORY	Flexible Component 2
		Flexible Component 1	Research embedding
		2022-2023	
		Semester I	Semester II
		ANTHROPOCENE	DEATH AS MIRROR OF LIFE
		ARCHAEOLOGICAL THEORY	Flexible Component 2
		Flexible Component 1	Research embedding
		Semester III	Semester IV
		SETTLED LANDSCAPE	Thesis
		MATERIAL CULTURE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SCIENCE	
		Flexible Component 3	
2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023

Figure 2. The research master Archaeology: rotation of compulsory courses



APPENDIX 3: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

Friday 6 November 2020 (online, MS Teams and BlueJeans)

10.30 – 12.30	Preliminary panel meeting

Wednesday 11 November 2020 (online, BlueJeans)

09.30 – 10.00	Panel deliberation
10.00 – 10.30	Open office
10.30 – 11.00	Panel deliberation
11.00 – 11.15	Welcome by programme management
11.15 – 12.00	Interview programme management
12.00 – 12.15	<i>Break</i>
12.15 – 13.00	Interview Examination Board
13.00 – 14.00	<i>Lunch</i>
14.00 – 14.45	Showcase (videos containing information on the available research facilities, followed by an allowance for panel questions)
14.45 – 6.30	Panel deliberation
16.30 – 17.15	Interview alumni

Thursday 12 November 2020 (online, BlueJeans)

09.30 – 10.00	Panel deliberation
10.00 – 10.45	Interview students
10.45 – 11.00	<i>Break</i>
11.00 – 11.45	Interview teaching staff
11.45 – 12.30	Panel deliberation
12.30 – 13.30	<i>Lunch</i>
13.30 – 14.00	Interview programme management and Faculty representatives
14.00 – 15.30	Formulation preliminary findings
15.30 – 16.00	<i>Break</i>
16.00 – 16.15	Preparation presentation preliminary findings
16.15 – 16.30	Presentation preliminary findings
16.30 – 17.00	<i>Break</i>
17.00 – 17.45	Programme development dialogue





APPENDIX 4: THESES AND DOCUMENTS STUDIED BY THE PANEL

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 theses of the research master's programme Archaeology. Information on the selected theses is available from Qanu upon request.

During the site visit, the panel studied, among other things, (via the institute's electronic learning environment):

With the self-assessment report:

- Research context:
 - Review report Groningen Institute of Archaeology, according to the Standard Evaluation Protocol (2017)

- General strategy and policy
 - Education policy University of Groningen
 - Strategic plan University of Groningen 2015-2020
 - Strategic Plan Faculty of Arts 2016-2020
 - Vision for Education Faculty of Arts 2018

- Education
 - Institute of Education
 - Teaching and Examination Regulations
 - Faculty Committees
 - Network of Arts
 - Teaching materials, including assessment models, for a selection of courses

- Cluster organisation Faculty of Arts
 - Organisation Faculty of Arts
 - Memo Towards a flexible Faculty of Arts

- Work pressure
 - Kwaliteitsafspraken Faculteit der Letteren

- NVAO assessment and accreditation 2015
 - Accreditation degree programmes

- Employability
 - Advisory boards at the Faculty of Arts
 - Voortgangsrapportage Raden van Advies 2018

- Minors at the Faculty of Arts
 - Minors manual Faculty of Arts

- Internal quality assurance
 - Examination Board
 - Programme Committee
 - Educational quality in the Faculty (general)

- Assessment
 - Assessment policy University of Groningen (pdf)
 - Regels en verantwoordelijkheden toetsing Faculteit der Letteren



- Assessment plan Faculty of Arts

- Internationalisation
- Internationalisation
- Language policy
- International classroom

Prior to the site visit:

- Covid-19:
 - An update on the situation at the programme partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic (November 2020)
- In reaction to the panel's questions, some additional materials were made available prior to the site visit:
 - Information on benchmarking
 - Mission of Groningen Institute of Archaeology, Research Groups
 - Powerpoint slides with information on what the different Research Groups offer to the programme
 - List of publications of research master students.

