



**MODERN HISTORY AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

FACULTY OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN

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This report was finalised on 31 May 2021



REPORT ON THE MASTER'S PROGRAMME INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (RESEARCH) OF 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

Master's programme International Relations

Name of the programme:	International Relations (Research)
CROHO number:	60820
Level of the programme:	master's
Orientation of the programme:	academic
Number of credits:	120 EC
Specializations or tracks:	Modern History and International Relations
Location(s):	Groningen
Mode(s) 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 visit of the assessment panel History and International Relations to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen took place on the 23 and 24 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 has approved the composition of the panel on [insert date]. The panel that assessed the master's programme International Relations consisted of:

- Prof. dr. W.P. (Wim) van Meurs, Professor and chair of the Political History section at Radboud University [chair];
- Prof. dr. G.D. (Greg) Woolf, Professor of Classics and Director of the Institute of Classical Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London (Great Britain);
- Prof. dr. A. (Anne-Laure) Van Bruaene, professor in Early Modern Cultural History at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Dr. J. (Jorg) Kustermans, associate professor of International Relations at the Department of Political Science at the University of Antwerp (Belgium).
- J.E. (Caroline) Schep, BA, research master's student at Leiden University [student member];

The panel was supported by A.P. (Anke) van Wier MA, who acted as secretary.

WORKING METHOD OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The visit to the master's programme International Relations at the Faculty of Arts of University of Groningen was part of the cluster assessment History/International Relations Research Masters 2020. Between September 2020 and July 2021 the panel assessed 5 programmes at 4 universities. The following universities participated in this cluster assessment: Leiden University, University of Amsterdam, University of Groningen and University of Utrecht.

On behalf of the participating universities, quality assurance agency Qanu was responsible for logistical support, panel guidance and the production of the reports. A.P. (Anke) van Wier MA was project coordinator for Qanu. A.P. (Anke) van Wier MA and Jaïra Azaria MA, acted as secretary in the cluster assessment. During the visit at the University of Groningen, the panel was supported by A.P. (Anke) van Wier MA, a certified NVAO secretary.

The 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 were rescheduled for more suitable dates in the fall and winter of 2020 and spring 2021. The project coordinator and the representatives of the programmes agreed to schedule digital assessments, unless a site visit became possible at that time.

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. W.P. (Wim) van Meurs, professor and chair of the Political History section at Radboud University [chair];
- Prof. dr. B. (Benjamin) Kaplan, professor of Dutch History at University College London (Great Britain);
- Prof. dr. C.G. (Catrien) Santing, professor in Medieval History at the University of Groningen;
- Prof. dr. A. (Anne-Laure) Van Bruaene, professor in Early Modern Cultural History at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. M.F. (Mark) Gilbert, professor of History & International Studies at the John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (Italy);
- Prof. dr. G.D. (Greg) Woolf, professor of Classics and Director of the Institute of Classical Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London (Great Britain);
- Prof. dr. J. (Jan) Ziolkowski, professor in Medieval Latin at Harvard University (United States);
- Prof. dr. V. (Violet) Soen, associate professor in Early Modern Religious History at KU Leuven (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. M. (Marjolein) 't Hart, professor of the History of State Formation in Global Perspective at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Senior Researcher at the Huygens Institute for the History of the Netherlands in The Hague;
- Prof. Dr. J. (Johannes) Hahn, professor of Ancient History at the University of Münster (Germany).
- Dr. J. (Jorg) Kustermans, associate professor of International Relations at the Department of Political Science at the University of Antwerp (Belgium).
- S.G.J. (Siebren) Teule, MA, graduated research master's student at Utrecht University and junior lecturer at the Faculty of Humanities of Utrecht University [student member];
- J.E. (Caroline) Schep, BA, research master's student at Leiden University [student member];
- Prof. dr. M. (Máire) Ní Mhaonaigh, professor of Celtic and Medieval Studies at the University of Cambridge (Great Britain) [referee].

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 organizing 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. van Meurs, whether he would be willing to lead a digital assessment. He consented to chair a digital assessment on 26 August 2020.



On the 24th of January 2020, the panel chair was briefed by Qanu on his role, the assessment framework, the working method, and the planning of site visits and reports. A preparatory panel meeting was organised on the 7th of February. During this meeting, the panel members received instruction on the use of the assessment framework(s). The panel also discussed their working method and the planning of the site visits (physical and online) and reports. When it became clear that a physical site visit could not take place, the panel members involved also confirmed their consent to partake in a digital assessment in October 2020. Their confirmations have been archived by Qanu and can be provided upon request.

A date was set for a digital visit on 23 and 24 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 2016 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 organized on 18 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.

Online Site visit

The online site visit to University of Groningen took place on 23 and 24 November 2020. Before and during the site visit, the panel studied the additional documents provided by the programmes. 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 confidential discussion during a consultation hour. No requests for 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. During the visit, the panel decided to ask for additional clarification on standard 3, Student Assessment, and to await further information from the programme before finalising its conclusions. After reviewing the additional material, the panel completed the final draft of the report in April 2021.

The panel agreed with the programme to hold the Development Dialogue after the finalisation of the report. This session is scheduled later in 2021; its outcomes will be reported in a separate document and have no influence on the findings from the site visit or the considerations and conclusions in this report.

Consistency and calibration

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

1. The panel composition ensured regular attendance of (key) panel members, including the chair;
2. The coordinator was present at the panel discussion leading to the preliminary findings at all site visits.

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 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

The Research Master's programme in International Relations at the University of Groningen has one track: Modern History and International Relations (MHIR). The panel found that the programme's profile is a beneficial combination of the disciplines of history and IR. It aspires to train interdisciplinary researchers with high levels of skills and knowledge, and strikes an excellent balance between disciplinary specialisation and interdisciplinary exchange. Its aims build on the Faculty of Art's research strengths in the fields of modern history and IR, and align with the expectations in these fields. It is attuned to students who want to continue in academia, but also to those who want to pursue societal careers, which the panel considers a strong point of the programme. The strong international profile is furthermore enhanced by the collaboration with the University of Osaka, a partnership that the panel encourages the programme to reproduce with other institutes in the future. It verified that the ILOs are aligned with the Dublin Descriptors for the research master level and pay sufficient attention to the training of research skills at the required attainment level.

The curriculum and the teaching-learning environment of the research master's programme are designed and implemented in such a way that the students are enabled to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The programme manages to strike a good balance between flexibility and coherence, and the students are very positive about it; they appreciate the intellectual freedom they are offered and consider the interdisciplinary learning environment an asset. Teaching in the programme is research-based, takes place in an international classroom and is student-centred. This approach fits the programme's aims and the graduates' career perspectives, and the panel considers the choice for an English-language teaching environment and programme name appropriate and states that the international classroom is an asset for the programme. It concluded that the curriculum is fitting to the RMA level in terms of level and orientation.

The panel is pleased with the way the programme has implemented the previous assessment panel's recommendation to strengthen its common core. This ensures that it is now possible to speak of a single, coherent programme. The students receive training in relevant skills and state-of-the-art methodologies. The skills trained in the programme not only prepare them properly for academic careers, but are also useful for careers outside of this context, though the visibility of the career services could be improved. Research skills, including ethics, are taught throughout the entire programme, both in special skills courses and in courses that focus on knowledge in a particular field. The panel is impressed by the thorough attention the programme pays to theoretical and methodological reflection, and how the benefits of the interdisciplinary environment are used here. During the two-year programme, the students are gradually and thoroughly prepared to undergo a full cycle of research, including a research internship, resulting in a final thesis of substantial size. The panel considers the margin for the thesis word count too large, and advises fixing this on the upper limit of 30,000.

The Groningen Research Institute for the study of Culture was graded as very good by the latest research reviews, and this ensures that the programme is embedded in a high-quality research environment. The panel is impressed by the quality of the teachers and praises the staff members' commitment to the students and the constant development of the programme. It verified that the staff's didactic skills, command of English and research credentials contribute to an engaged classroom interaction, with a strong focus on research. It is positive about plans to integrate the PhD and RMA communities at the Faculty of Art further, and thinks this will strengthen the MHIR research community. It supports the programme's plans to change the name to Global History and International Relations, and agrees that this will align the programme even closer to the staff's current research.

The programme is intensive but inspiring and feasible, and the students are well-supported and supervised. The issues of completion rates have been addressed by the programme in the period under review. The first signs show that the completion rates are improving. The panel does advise the programme to keep this issue on the agenda and monitor the impact of the interventions that have been carried out. The selection procedure and requirements are sound and suitable for the high level of a research master.



Student assessment in the RMA is embedded in the policy and regulations of the university and the faculty. The assessment methods are varied and suitable to assess the students' development towards achieving the learning outcomes. While RMA students receive some kind of differentiated treatment when they take – and are assessed on – courses together with regular MA students, the panel thinks these arrangements can be stipulated more precisely and in a uniform way across all courses.

While the panel overall agreed to the scores on the respective theses, it did judge the assessment procedure could be improved with regard to transparency and reliability. In particular, the panel found that the thesis evaluation form could be improved by offering the second examiner a fully separate 'voice' in the thesis assessment. Following the panel's comments, the programme developed a new and harmonised approach, which will be effective as of September 2021. The panel considers that the new evaluation approach takes away its initial concerns and allows for more independence and transparency in thesis assessment.

The assurance of assessment quality in the MHIR programme rests with the Faculty-wide Board of Examiners, whose structure was recently adjusted. The new structure is a positive development, according to the panel, as it allows for further harmonisation across programmes. Moreover, the Board of Examiners has elaborated a relevant work plan for the future, for which it has the explicit support of the Faculty Board. The recent initiatives regarding thesis evaluation align with the work plan of the Board of Examiners. The panel considers that these developments will further strengthen the Board's position within the Faculty and among the programmes.

Based on the overall level of the theses and the performance of graduates, the panel concluded that they achieve the programme's intended learning outcomes. It deems the outcomes of the final projects to be of publishable quality, and judges the theses to be substantive pieces of work that confirm that the students attained the desired achievement level for a RMA. A large number of students continue on to research positions, both within and outside of academia. The panel considers this further evidence of the high level of the programme. Based on the evidence gathered from the theses, it also concluded that RMA students are fully embedded within the local research environment.

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:

Master's programme International Relations (research):

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

The chair, prof. dr. W.P. (Wim) van Meurs, and the secretary, A.P. (Anke) van Wier MA, of the panel hereby declare that all panel members have studied this report and that they agree with the judgements laid down in the report. They confirm that the assessment has been conducted in accordance with the demands relating to independence.

Date: 31 May 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 two-year Research Master (RMA) Modern History and International Relations is formally a track of the Research Master International Relations. However, since this is the only track under this label, the programme is generally known as MHIR. The programme brings together students from both disciplines to 'form an interdisciplinary learning environment geared towards the theoretically informed, methodologically reflexive and historically nuanced study of modern politics and society'. It integrates subfields such as political history, international political theory, international political sociology, and global, cultural, social and economic history. By doing so, it is responding to developments in both fields, by historicising International Relations (IR) and by internationalising the study of Modern History. While allowing students to formally specialise in one of the constituent disciplines, it aims to familiarise them with the theoretical and methodological toolkits and approaches of both IR and the study of modern history.

The panel is impressed by the programme's strong profile. It is the only two-year programme of its kind in the Netherlands, and internationally noteworthy as well. It is unique in the way it allows students to specialise in either modern history or IR, and combines this with interdisciplinary training in the other topic. It makes a strong case for the integration of these two topics, as related to the major debates in both research fields. The students the panel spoke to indicated that they appreciate the programme's profile, and consider the combination of history and IR enriching. The panel is also positive about the way the programme management acknowledged the challenges posed by the union of these disciplines, and feels that they manage to deal with them efficiently. The programme has clearly responded to the previous assessment panel's recommendation to clarify its profile. The panel is satisfied with the extent to which the programme prepares students for their future careers, within the academic world and beyond. The programme management aims to train researchers, not necessarily PhD students. This means that the research skills and knowledge that the students learn here can be used in other professional areas as well, such as think-tanks, journalism, political positions and the private sector.

The programme builds on strong research in the Faculty of Arts, and it benefits from collaborations with national research schools and institutes in the field. Its international orientation is further exemplified by the option the programme has for a double degree with the University of Osaka, Japan. The panel is positive about this option, and suggests the programme could consider adding more international partners in the future. The programme is considering changing its name from Modern History and International Relations to Global History and International Relations. This name would align the programme more closely with the research of the core staff, and allow it to move beyond the fixed periodisation and Eurocentric connotations of the name Modern History. The programme believes this name would also make it more attractive to prospective students. The panel supports this change.

Intended learning outcomes

The panel studied the programme's intended learning outcomes (ILOs). In its opinion, the ILOs are at a level that suits a research master: they offer a very solid preparation for a research career through their focus on interdisciplinary theory formation, methodology and the current knowledge in both fields. It is especially positive about their focus on the development of a scholarly attitude and research skills. The ILOs are of the appropriate



level for a RMA, as shown through their formulation according to the Dublin Descriptors. They are academic in their orientation and tie into the general expectations in both History and IR. The panel is satisfied with the way the programme more prominently tailored the ILOs to skills that are useful outside of academia in response to recommendations made by the previous assessment panel, and finds both career paths are now fittingly represented in the ILOs.

Considerations

The panel found that the programme's profile is a beneficial combination of the disciplines of history and IR. It aspires to train interdisciplinary researchers with high levels of skills and knowledge, and strikes an excellent balance between disciplinary specialisation and interdisciplinary exchange. Its aims build on the Faculty of Art's research strengths in the fields of modern history and IR, and align with the expectations in these fields. It is attuned to students who want to continue in academia, but also to those who want to pursue societal careers, which the panel considers a strong point of the programme. The strong international profile is furthermore enhanced by the collaboration with the University of Osaka, a partnership that the panel encourages the programme to reproduce with other institutes in the future. It verified that the ILOs are aligned with the Dublin Descriptors for the research master level and pay sufficient attention to the training of research skills at the required attainment level.

Conclusion

Master's programme International Relations (research): 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

Didactic approach

The panel observed that the teaching in the RMA Modern History and International Relations is research-oriented and student-centred. One of the key aims is to create a research community within the programme, and to treat the students as novice researchers in the field. The programme furthermore aims to allow the students to learn within an interdisciplinary research environment, while still allowing them to specialise, if they choose, within one of the programme's two founding disciplines: Modern History or International Relations. All core courses are co-developed and taught by at least two staff members with different disciplinary backgrounds. This ensures that all common courses are multi- or interdisciplinary.

Cohorts in the RMA varied in size between 8 and 11 students in the period under review, with the target being between 10 and 15 students. The panel ascertained that even in a small cohort of 8 students, the students experience the in-class debates as fruitful and stimulating. They appreciate the individual attention they receive, and say the teaching is activating and challenges them to reconsider their perspectives. In the interviews and the student chapter, the students indicated that they like the non-hierarchical teaching atmosphere, though they would sometimes prefer more guidance from their tutors. The panel is positive about the programme's teaching approach, considering it fitting for a RMA, and successful in its aim of forming a true research community.

Curriculum contents and structure

The RMA MHIR is a two-year, 120 EC programme. It comprises four elements: the core curriculum (40 EC), individually chosen research modules (30 EC), the specialisation phase (20 EC) and the thesis (30 EC). The core courses in the first year form the basis for the specialisation, individual components and thesis that the students follow later on. In response to the previous assessment panel's recommendation to strengthen the core curriculum, 15 EC have been transferred from the individual modules to the core curriculum. See appendix 2 for a full overview of the programme's curriculum.



The core curriculum is located in the first three semesters and consists of six courses. The students start with the Theory of Modern History and International Relations course (10 EC), Methodology of Modern History and International Relations course (5 EC) and choose between Advanced methodology of Modern History or Advanced methodology of International Relations courses (both 5 EC) in the first semester. They continue with the Themes, Trends and Topics course (10 EC), which deals with some current debates in both disciplines in the second semester. Semester three includes two new courses: Bridging Horizons (5 EC), which aims to make the students more aware of their skills and how they could relate to both academic and professional career opportunities, and the Thesis preparation class (5 EC), in which the students work on their thesis portfolio that feeds into their thesis proposal.

The research electives can be taken in the first and second semesters. Together with the Director of Studies (DoS), the students select courses from those on offer at the University of Groningen (20 EC) and at national research schools (10 EC). The courses they take in Groningen are offered by regular master's programmes, but with special approval of the DoS and the Board of Examiners (BoE), they can also follow courses at other faculties or universities. The DoS checks the alignment between the courses selected and the programme's overall ILOs.

The specialisation phase takes place in the first semester of the second year. This can take a number of forms. The students may follow individual tutorials for research projects, take specialised substantive or methods courses within the University of Groningen or the national research schools, or pursue a research internship at a university, think tank or research centre.

The final phase consists of the thesis. In the thesis, the students realise a full research cycle, from the formulation of a solid research question to the output of a written report. They select a topic that fits the programme's research context, formulate a suitable research question, choose the best research method, and communicate their approach through a research plan. Though the programme stimulates them to adopt a multi- or interdisciplinary approach, they are also free to focus on one of the programme's disciplines. After receiving suggestions and (peer)feedback, RMA students conduct their research and write a 20,000-30,000 word thesis that is subsequently presented for assessment. The quality of the research presented in a thesis should be such that it can be reworked into an article for an academic journal. The panel considers this trajectory sufficient proof of the students' mastery of the full research cycle.

The students are very positive about the programme. They said they appreciate the freedom of choice it offers, and feel accommodated to follow their own research interests, while still benefiting from the exposure to the interdisciplinary environment. They also appreciate the intellectual freedom the programme offers, and said that it strikes the right balance by not imposing a framework on them, but rather suggesting that they keep writing for interdisciplinary audiences. The panel is overall very positive about the programme. It reviewed a number of the courses and spoke to both staff and students, who indicated that the programme offers a stimulating teaching and learning environment. The programme has adequately dealt with the previous assessment panel's recommendation to improve the coherence and interdisciplinarity of the programme, and the 40 EC of common courses ensure that it is now possible to speak of a single programme. The students appreciate the progressive specialisation it allows them, and consider the programme well-structured. The panel furthermore appreciates the emphasis the programme places on theoretical and methodological reflection, and sees the added value of the integration of the two disciplines in the programme in this regard. In the courses it studied, it established that the students become acquainted with current debates and state-of-the-art literature from both fields. It concluded that the curriculum is fitting to the RMA level in terms of level and orientation.

Skills and methods are offered in a manner that is fitting for a RMA programme. They are integrated in content courses throughout the programme, and the panel is pleased with the attention paid to research ethics. The programme pays sufficient attention to the accepted research skills and methodologies in the fields, and transferable skills receive plenty of attention, for example by having students present their work at the summer and winter seminars the programme organises. Alumni are positive about how the programme trained their analytical, writing and critical-thinking skills. The panel is positive about the new courses, Bridging Horizons and the thesis preparation class, which it believes to be valuable additions to the curriculum as they help in preparing the students for both their thesis and the academic or professional job markets they will enter after graduation by making them



aware of their skills and how they can highlight them when applying for jobs. The students did indicate that they would like more help in finding internships, have more RMA-specific career services, and that the visibility of the services that are available could be improved. The panel learnt that this issue is on the programme management's agenda, and that they are working with the new RMA study association to improve this situation.

Teaching staff and research context

The MHIR programme is embedded in the Groningen Research Institute for the study of Culture (ICOG) and mostly draws on the ICOG's Centre for Historical Studies and the Centre for International Relations Research. The ICOG has been awarded the judgement very good for its research quality in its Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP) research evaluation in 2017. The programme is therefore embedded in a very high-quality research environment. The programme management indicated that the programme is designed to mirror current research going on at the faculty by young (PhD) researchers and by more senior staff, something the panel clearly recognised as a component that has been adequately addressed since the previous accreditation. While students have access to senior researchers, for example in their research electives and specialisation phase and the supervision of their thesis, the panel noted that the core teaching team only includes one professor. It asks the programme to ensure that there is enough involvement of senior researchers in the programme. During the site visit, it learnt about plans the faculty has to bring together students from all the faculty's RMA programmes and doctoral students by creating buddy systems between PhD and RMA students, and by making a special room where these groups can meet. It supports this idea and considers it a good way to expand the programme's research environment further.

The students greatly appreciate their teachers. They say the teaching staff makes them feel part of a true research community, and that their teachers are approachable, committed and knowledgeable. The panel witnessed that the staff works hard to create an inclusive learning environment, for example by paying attention to the students' preferred pronouns, or by offering physical spaces for students to follow digital teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is highly valued by the students, and the panel wishes to compliment the teaching team for these efforts. It verified that the research credentials of the teaching staff are very good to excellent, and many staff members are engaged in cutting-edge research in their field. It appreciates the balanced nature of the team, in terms of both nationality and gender. It verified that the programme ensures coherence by working with a small team for the core courses, while bringing in broader expertise when desired for thesis supervision, for example. The teaching staff also receive sufficient training, and all have obtained their university teaching certificate (Basiskwalificatie Onderwijs, BKO). The panel verified that the staff members are qualified to teach in English; they receive sufficient training, if necessary, and their language skills are tested accordingly. The programme has set the requirements for English-language proficiency at B2/C1-level. The panel would prefer fixing this at the C1 level.

The panel is very impressed by the programme's teaching staff. They are very dedicated, and it appreciates that the staff members make time for one-on-one teaching in the tutorials, despite the high work pressure they face. It found the staff's commitment to the constant improvement of the programme inspiring and confirmed that the team has worked hard in the period under review to strengthen the programme's coherence, profile and interdisciplinary elements. The system of co-teaching works well, and the panel appreciates the staff's extra efforts to make this work.

Admissions, study guidance and feasibility

The panel studied the programme's admission procedure and entry requirements, and found them to be robust and fitting for a research master's programme. Due attention is paid to the candidate's academic track record, prior training at the content level, research skills and research interests to guarantee a good match between the prospective student and the programme. The panel confirmed that the students have clear expectations going into the programme, and that they specifically selected the programme because of the integration of Modern History and International Relations. The programme has both a September and a February intake, which combined averaged around 10 students per year over the 2015-2020 period.



Study guidance is managed by the Director of Studies, the Programme Coordinator and the study advisors. The students meet regularly with the DoS to discuss their progress and choices for electives and specialisation. These choices are checked and formally approved by the Board of Examiners. The students and alumni the panel spoke to during the site visit appreciated the intensive system of study guidance and the support they received. They furthermore indicated that while the work pressure is high, the programme is feasible. This is aided by the committed support from the teaching staff and the good atmosphere among the students themselves.

The programme has been working very hard to reduce delays in graduation. To that end, the Thesis preparation class has been introduced, and the system of guidance and involvement of the DoS has been intensified. The students indicated that they appreciate the increased guidance, and there are signs that the number of delayed students has been reduced. All in all, the panel is positive about the programme's response to the previous assessment panel's worries about completion rates, and it applauds the recent steps taken. The issues of completion, work pressure and feasibility will require continuous monitoring, however, and should remain on the agenda. The students are generally positive about the programme's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and how the shift to online education has been managed.

Language and programme name

All modules offered in the programme are taught in English. Students may be granted permission to write their thesis and other research papers in Dutch if that language is more appropriate (for example, in the case of Dutch archival sources, or if the historiographical debate is predominantly in Dutch). The panel understands and accepts this reasoning. The choice for English is considered appropriate in its opinion given the programme's ambitions to train students for the academic and professional job market of the future. English is the lingua franca of research in the programme's constituent disciplines; research in these fields has become highly international in its outlook and orientation. It is often based on international collaboration, just as the source material and reference texts are often multilingual. Teaching the programme in English furthermore allows the programme to build an international classroom and to draw on the expertise of non-Dutch staff members, and allows exchanges such as the double degree programme with Osaka, all of which the panel considers assets for the programme. The panel therefore considers the choice for English as the language of instruction, and an English programme name, appropriate and of added value for students.

Considerations

The curriculum and the teaching-learning environment of the research master's programme are designed and implemented in such a way that the students are enabled to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The programme manages to strike a good balance between flexibility and coherence, and the students are very positive about it; they appreciate the intellectual freedom they are offered and consider the interdisciplinary learning environment an asset. Teaching in the programme is research-based, takes place in an international classroom and is student-centred. This approach fits the programme's aims and the graduates' career perspectives, and the panel considers the choice for an English-language teaching environment and programme name appropriate and states that the international classroom is an asset for the programme. It concluded that the curriculum is fitting to the RMA level in terms of level and orientation.

The panel is pleased with the way the programme has implemented the previous assessment panel's recommendation to strengthen its common core. This ensures that it is now possible to speak of a single, coherent programme. The students receive training in relevant skills and state-of-the-art methodologies. The skills trained in the programme not only prepare them properly for academic careers, but are also useful for careers outside of this context, though the visibility of the career services could be improved. Research skills, including ethics, are taught throughout the entire programme, both in special skills courses and in courses that focus on knowledge in a particular field. The panel is impressed by the thorough attention the programme pays to theoretical and methodological reflection, and how the benefits of the interdisciplinary environment are used here. During the two-year programme, the students are gradually and thoroughly prepared to undergo a full cycle of research, including



a research internship, resulting in a final thesis of substantial size. The panel considers the margin for the thesis word count too large, and advises fixing this on the upper limit of 30,000.

The Groningen Research Institute for the study of Culture was graded as very good by the latest research reviews, and this ensures that the programme is embedded in a high-quality research environment. The panel is impressed by the quality of the teachers and praises the staff members' commitment to the students and the constant development of the programme. It verified that the staff's didactic skills, command of English and research credentials contribute to an engaged classroom interaction, with a strong focus on research. It is positive about plans to integrate the PhD and RMA communities at the Faculty of Art further, and thinks this will strengthen the MHIR research community. It supports the programme's plans to change the name to Global History and International Relations, and agrees that this will align the programme even closer to the staff's current research.

The programme is intensive but inspiring and feasible, and the students are well-supported and supervised. The issues of completion rates have been addressed by the programme in the period under review. The first signs show that the completion rates are improving. The panel does advice the programme to keep this issue on the agenda and monitor the impact of the interventions that have been carried out. The selection procedure and requirements are sound and suitable for the high level of a research master.

Conclusion

Master's programme International Relations (research): the panel assesses Standard 2 as 'meets the standard/partially meets the standard'.

Standard 3: Student assessment

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

Findings

Assessment policy and system of assessment

Assessment for the RMA follows the assessment regulations as specified in the Teaching and Examination Regulations, which include the programme's ILOs, the assessment plan and the matrix that contains the learning outcomes of course units. The procedures for all assessments are specified in the assessment protocol and in the syllabi of the individual courses. Thesis assessment is explained in a special thesis manual. In terms of approach, the assessment in the programme builds on the didactic philosophy of student-centred and research-oriented teaching. This means that the assessment is aimed at gradually increasing the students' independence as researchers.

The assessment methods are sufficiently varied and suitable for the learning outcomes they are meant to assess in the panel's view. Research skills and ethics are tested in an appropriate manner, and the students go through the full research cycle in their thesis projects. The assessments can be formative or summative and clearly reflect the level of the programme. The programme uses a large variety of forms of assessment, such as class participation, presentations, small assignments (such as book reviews, etc.) and term papers. All courses use at least two separate forms of assessment. The panel considers this appropriate, but also heard some concerns from the students about workload in courses with three or more different tests. It asks the programme to keep the students' workload in mind when developing these courses and their assessment. All tests are checked by at least two staff members, while the DoS and BoE also keep an eye on the assessment quality. For courses outside of the programme's core, the students are required to submit the syllabus and a work report stating what they did for this course. In this way, the BoE and DoS keep an eye on a student's progress towards the programme's ILOs. The panel considers this a satisfactory solution.

The panel understood that the programme aims at some form of differentiation for RMA students when they take courses with regular MA students, but was unable to pin down what the exact system was. It learnt that this is mostly approached on a case-by-case basis, which seems to work to the satisfaction of the students and staff. It would



recommend that the programme formalise this system a bit more, and ensure alignment between its ILOs and the students' individual trajectories. It heard about a proposal in which the students are asked to write short reflections on their learning in the individual courses, and to relate this to the programme's overall aims. It considers this a valuable approach, and asks the programme to consider a uniform approach to these types of courses.

Thesis assessment

The panel reviewed 15 theses before the site visit. A number of these significantly exceeded the 20,000-30,000 word limit. In speaking with the BoE and the programme management, the panel learnt that students are, in principle, not to exceed this limit. It heard from the BoE that there are grounds for an exemption of this limit, but it remains unclear what these grounds are. It recommends that the programme and the Board of Examiners set clear standards for the grounds on which such exemptions may be granted. It does think the 10,000-word range in the word count is very large, and recommends that the programme fix this limit on the upper margin at 30,000 words.

While the panel overall agreed to the scores on the respective theses, it did judge the assessment procedure could be improved with regard to transparency and reliability. In particular, the panel found that the thesis evaluation form could be improved by offering the second examiner a fully separate 'voice' in the thesis assessment. In the form, the second examiner is asked whether s/he agrees with the assessment by the first examiner, who is also the supervisor. Such form, according to the panel, impedes an independent assessment by the second examiner. Moreover, the panel found that the way in which the second examiner is appointed could be more formalized. Although this is a legal task of the Board of Examiners, the panel heard about cases in which the supervisor and student together suggested or proposed a second examiner.

After discussion with the panel, the programme and the Board of Examiners refined its assessment procedure for the thesis, which was presented to the panel in spring 2021. The panel understood from the document that these changes will be implemented across all bachelor and master programme theses in the Faculty of Art. According to the new procedure, the supervisor will assess and score the thesis on one evaluation form, followed by the second examiner who will independently assess the thesis on a second evaluation form and this without knowing the assessment or the score of the first examiner. Then, both examiners together agree on a final assessment, which will be written down on a third evaluation form, signed by both examiners and provided to the student. All forms will be archived in the assessment dossier. Furthermore, the panel welcomes the programme plans to avoid fixed 'grading pairs' of examiners. The panel acknowledges the proposed changes and thinks they indeed improve the independence and transparency for the thesis assessment.

Board of Examiners

The assurance of assessment quality within MHIR 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 panel learnt that the BoE wants to work on the standardisation of policy, procedures and assessment forms across the faculty.

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 BoE 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 BoE: 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.



The panel is positive about the new structure with the faculty-wide Board of Examiners. It commends the Board's intention to work on standardisation and formalisation, and verified that it has the support of the Faculty Board in this regard. In some regards, for example regarding the appointment for second examiners, it considers the BoE too timid. It would like to encourage the Board to be more proactive and to implement common procedures and rules where this makes sense in their view, while of course keeping an eye on the principle of subsidiarity.

The panel understands from the clarifications provided by the programme on the thesis assessment process that these plans have been discussed with the Faculty Board and were validated by the Board of Examiners. According to the Board of Examiners, the announced procedures concur with its ongoing work regarding standardisation and formalisation. As of the academic year 2020-2021, all thesis examiners will be appointed by the Board of Examiners or by its delegated expert representing the research master's programmes. The panel welcomes the proposed changes and their alignment with the work of the Board of Examiners as independent 'watchdog'.

Considerations

Student assessment in the RMA is embedded in the policy and regulations of the university and the faculty. The assessment methods are varied and suitable to assess the students' development towards achieving the learning outcomes. While RMA students receive some kind of differentiated treatment when they take – and are assessed on – courses together with regular MA students, the panel thinks these arrangements can be stipulated more precisely and in a uniform way across all courses.

In terms of thesis assessment, the panel overall agreed to the scores on the sample of theses it reviewed. It did judge the assessment procedure could be improved with regard to transparency and reliability. In particular, the panel found that the thesis evaluation form could be improved by offering the second examiner a fully separate 'voice' in the thesis assessment. Following the panel's comments, the programme developed a new and harmonised approach, which will be effective as of September 2021. The panel considers that the new evaluation approach takes away its initial concerns and allows for more independence and transparency in thesis assessment.

The assurance of assessment quality in the MHIR programme rests with the Faculty-wide Board of Examiners, whose structure was recently adjusted. The new structure is a positive development, according to the panel, as it allows for further harmonisation across programmes. Moreover, the Board of Examiners has elaborated a relevant work plan for the future, for which it has the explicit support of the Faculty Board. The recent initiatives regarding thesis evaluation align with the work plan of the Board of Examiners. The panel considers that these developments will further strengthen the Board's position within the Faculty and among the programmes.

Conclusion

Master's programme International Relations (research): 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

Theses

The panel read a representative sample of 15 final theses before the site visit. It was generally pleased with their high level. Most of them were of good to excellent quality, and all of the theses met the expected degree level for a RMA. Their research topics fell well within the scope and ambitions of this research master; they were clearly structured and well-written and included relevant discussions.

Most of the theses the panel read were strong pieces of disciplinary research, but not many integrated the programme's two constituent disciplines to produce methodologically innovating or interdisciplinary pieces of



research such as might be expected by looking at the programme's aims. This observation mirrors that of the previous assessment panel. The panel does not consider this to be overly problematic since the disciplinary theses, as a result of the exposure to the interdisciplinary environment of the programme, still displayed a broad awareness of larger trends in both history and IR as a whole. The students appreciated that they are not pressured into interdisciplinary work, but rather have the freedom to specialise in the discipline of their choice. It is also clear from the studied theses that the students work alongside the excellent research conducted at the Faculty of Arts in these fields. Many theses have served as the basis for publications, a track record that the panel is quite impressed by.

Alumni

The programme's alumni do well on the labour market. Around 25% continue on to do a PhD, many at international universities. Many other alumni end up in relevant positions in education, policy positions, as journalists or in the private sector. The panel is impressed with the employment record of the programme's alumni, and noted that they do well on both labour markets. The skills taught by the programme are valued in a range of different environments. This was confirmed in the interview with alumni, who conveyed the advantages of their research background in a clear manner for their career paths outside of academia. The panel is pleased with the programme's efforts to improve awareness of the various options for societal careers to the students. It learnt that some of the alumni in professional careers are now asked to speak to current students, which is a good initiative. It encourages the programme to continue these efforts, and is positive about plans the programme has to collaborate on this issue with the new student association for RMAs at the Faculty in the future.

Considerations

Based on the overall level of the theses and the performance of graduates, the panel concluded that they achieve the programme's intended learning outcomes. It deems the outcomes of the final projects to be of publishable quality, and judges the theses to be substantive pieces of work that confirm that the students attained the desired achievement level for a RMA. A large number of students continue on to research positions, both within and outside of academia. The panel considers this further evidence of the high level of the programme. Based on the evidence gathered from the theses, it also concluded that RMA students are fully embedded within the local research environment.

Conclusion

Master's programme International Relations (research): the panel assesses Standard 4 as 'meets the standard'.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The panel assessed standards 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the research master's programme International Relations as '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 regarding limited programme assessments, it therefore assesses the programme as positive.

Conclusion

The panel assesses the *master's programme International Relations (research)* as 'positive'.



APPENDICES





APPENDIX 1: INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Master's programme International Relations (research)

Learning outcomes of the Research Master's Programme in Modern History and International Relations

Knowledge and Understanding

Have demonstrated advanced knowledge and understanding of:

1. current developments in the historiography and literature of modern history and international relations as well as knowledge and understanding of the historical development of the fields
2. the theoretical and methodological approaches within the disciplines and subdisciplines

Applying knowledge and understanding

Have demonstrated the comprehensive ability to:

3. formulate an academic problem definition
4. apply combinations of theoretical and methodological approaches within the disciplines and subdisciplines
5. to integrate conflicting disciplinary insights and viewpoints
6. apply an academic problem definition in the form of academic research

Making judgements

Have demonstrated the ability to:

7. understand and critically assess intellectual arguments
8. conduct academically responsible selections, analyses and interpretations of research data with the aim of arriving at syntheses concerning the collected material related to the research question or questions
9. interpret developments in the discipline and extend and deepen their own knowledge and understanding
10. deal creatively and systematically with complex issues and reach well-reasoned conclusions
11. demonstrate initiative, sensitivity to context and a general sense of responsibility
12. make informed decisions in complex and unpredictable situations
13. justify the selection of source material and literature
14. evaluate the scientific and societal relevance and effects of the results of their research

Communication

Have demonstrated the ability to:

15. make an original contribution to knowledge in at least one branch of the discipline, at the level of an academic publication
16. present the results of research in Dutch and/or English, using various media, to an audience of specialists and non-specialists, in written and spoken form, audiovisually and digitally
17. participate effectively in the academic debate in the own specialist field within and outside the framework of a research group

Learning skills

Have demonstrated the ability to:

18. independently formulate a research proposal
19. methodically reflect upon their own actions and academic attitude

APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

Master's programme International Relations (research)

Year 1

Semester I		Semester II	
Block I	Block II	Block III	Block IV
Theory of Modern History and International Relations (10 ECTS)		Themes Trends and Topics (10 ECTS)	
Research Elective (10 ECTS)		Research Elective (10 ECTS)	
Methodology of Modern History and International Relations (5 ECTS)	Advanced Methodology of Modern History or Advanced Methodology of International Relations (5 ECTS)	Research Elective (10 ECTS)	

Year 2

Semester III		Semester IV	
Block I	Block II	Block III	Block IV
Specialisation tutorial (10 ECTS)		MA Thesis (30 ECTS)	
Specialisation tutorial or Research Internship (10 ECTS)	Thesis Preparation Class (5 ECTS)		
	Bridging Horizons (5 ECTS)		



APPENDIX 3: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

DAY 1		MHIR
08.30	9.15	Internal meeting
09.15	09.30	Welcome by Faculty Board
09.30	10.15	Meeting management MHIR
10.15	10.30	Break
10.30	11.15	Meeting students MHIR (including PC members)
11.15	11.30	Break
11.30	11.45	Internal Meeting
11.45	12.30	Meeting staff MHIR (including PC members)
12.30	13.15	Lunch
13.15	13.30	Internal meeting
13.30	14.15	Meeting Board of Examiners (both MHIR and CMEMS)
14.15	14.30	Break
14.30	14.45	Internal meeting
14.45	15.30	Final interview management
15.30	15.45	Break
15.45	16.45	Deliberations panel, formulating preliminary findings and conclusions

DAY 2		CMEMS
09.00	10.00	Preparation panel
10.00	10.45	Meeting management CMEMS
10.45	11.00	Break
11.00	11.45	Meeting students CMEMS (including PC members)
11.45	12.00	Break
12.00	12.45	Meeting staff CMEMS (including PC members)
12.45	13.30	Lunch
13.30	13.45	Internal meeting
13.45	14.30	Meeting alumni (both MHIR and CMEMS)
14.30	14.45	Break
14.45	15.00	Internal meeting
15.00	15.45	Final interview management
15.45	16.45	Deliberations panel, formulating preliminary findings and conclusions
16.45	17.00	Preparation preliminary report chair
17.00	17.30	Presentation preliminary findings by chair (open to all interested parties)

APPENDIX 4: THESES AND DOCUMENTS STUDIED BY THE PANEL

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

During the site visit, the panel studied, among other things, the following documents (partly as hard copies, partly via the institute's electronic learning environment):

Course syllabi:

- MHIR
 - o Thesis preparation class Syllabus 19-20
 - o Theory of Modern History and IR Syllabus 19-20
 - o Themes Trends and Topics Syllabus 19-20
 - o Specialisation phase Syllabus 20-21
 - o Methodology research practice Syllabus 20-21
 - o Master thesis Syllabus 20-21
 - o Advanced methodology IR Syllabus 20-21
 - o Advanced methodology IR Syllabus 19-20
 - o
- CMEMS
 - o Seminar Syllabus 19-20
 - o Passion of the Soul Syllabus 19-20
 - o Digital Approaches Syllabus 19-20
 - o Careers in Research and Society Syllabus 18-19
 - o Approaches Syllabus 20-21
 - o Approaches Syllabus 19-20

Annual reports

- Programme committee
 - o ReMa MHIR 19-20
 - o ReMa MHIR 18-19
 - o ReMa CMEMS 19-20
 - o ReMa CMEMS 18-19
 - o ReMa CMEMS 17-18
 - o PC MHIR minutes 28.11.2019
 - o PC MHIR minutes 23.06.2020
 - o PC MHIR minutes 20.02.2020
 - o PC MHIR minutes 09.11.2020
- Board of Examiners
 - o Expertise Team ReMa's 17-18
 - o Expertise Team ReMa's 16-17
 - o Expertise Team ReMa's 15-16
 - o Board of Examiners 18-19

Impact COVID-19 on (online) teaching and examination:

- Update ReMa CMEMS (as an addition to the self-evaluation report)
- Update ReMa MHIR (as an addition to the self-evaluation report)
- Thesis Regulations Research Master Track CMEMS 2020-21
- Memo on assessment and social distancing (October 2020 update)
- Code of Conduct for students for online teaching and student examinations



- ReMa International Relations – Reform Proposal
- MHIR colloquium plan
- MHIR assessment form for specialization tutorials

General information:

- General strategy and policy
 - o Education policy University of Groningen
 - o Strategic plan University of Groningen 2015-2021
 - o Strategic Plan Faculty of Arts 2016-2020
 - o Vision for Education Faculty of Arts 2018
- Education (information on:)
 - o Information Institute of Education
 - o Teaching and Examination Regulations
 - o Faculty Committees
 - o Network of Arts
- Cluster organization Faculty of Arts
 - o Organization Faculty of Arts
 - o Memo Towards a flexible Faculty of Arts
- Pressure of work
 - o Memo Kwaliteitsafspraken Faculteit der Letteren
- NVAO assessment and accreditation 2012-2016
 - o Reports and decisions accreditation degree programmes
- Employability
 - o Memo Advisory Boards at the Faculty of Arts
- Minors at the Faculty of Arts
 - o Minors manual Faculty of Arts
- Internal quality assurance
 - o Board of Examiners
 - o Programme Committees
 - o Educational quality in the Faculty
- Assessment
 - o Assessment policy University of Groningen
 - o Regels en verantwoordelijkheden toetsing Faculteit der Letteren
 - o Assessment plan Faculty of Arts
- Internationalization
 - o Internationalization
 - o Language policy
 - o International classroom