



Research masters History and International Relations
University of Groningen

Additional assessment standard 3

© 2022 Academion

www.academion.nl
info@academion.nl

Project code P2214

Inhoud

Summary	4
Score table.....	4
Introduction	5
Procedure	5
Information on the programmes.....	6
Description of the assessment	7
Standard 3. Student assessment.....	7
General conclusion.....	8

Summary

In 2020, the assessment panel of the research masters History and International Relations assessed the research masters History and International Relations at the University of Groningen. The panel found that transparency and reliability of the thesis assessment in the programmes could be improved. The thesis evaluation form could be improved by offering the second examiner a fully separate ‘voice’ in the thesis assessment. Furthermore, the process of appointing examiners by the Board of Examiners should be adapted in order to prevent the emergence of ‘grading pairs’ of supervisors that often assessed theses together. After the site visit, the programmes adapted the thesis assessment based on the panel recommendations.

After studying the new assessment policy, as well as a selection of theses that were assessed using the new assessment forms and procedures, the panel concludes that the new assessment procedure has resulted in transparent and reliable assessment of the theses of both programmes. Both examiners demonstrably provide an independent and thorough assessment of the thesis, and use this as the basis to form a joint final assessment of the work. The panel verified from a list of first and second examiners of recent theses of both programmes that there are no more ‘grading pairs’ visible, and that there is sufficient variation between the pairs of assessors. The panel approves of these new procedures and changes. It concludes that they succeed in improving the independence and transparency of the thesis assessment.

Score table

The panel assesses standard 3 as ‘meets the standard’. The full assessment of the research masters History and International Relations therefore is as follows:

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Realized learning outcomes	meets the standard
General assessment	positive

Prof. dr. W. P. van Meurs, chair

Peter Hildering MSc, secretary

Date: 10 November 2022

Introduction

Procedure

Background

This report is a supplement to the panel report of the research masters History and International Relations of the University of Groningen, completed on 31 May 2021 and received by the NVAO on 10 June 2021 under dossier numbers 010564 and 010565.

The NVAO concluded in a letter sent on 1 February 2022 that the reports of both programmes were incomplete regarding the assessment of Standard 3 (Student assessment). During the site visit in November 2020, the panel found that transparency and reliability of the thesis assessment in the programmes could be improved. In particular the thesis evaluation form and the process of appointing examiners by the Board of Examiners should be adapted according to the panel. After the site visit, the programmes adapted the thesis assessment based on the panel recommendations. In May 2021, the panel judged positively on these plans and subsequently assessed Standard 3 as 'meets the standard' in the final version of both reports.

Upon receiving these reports, the NVAO concluded that this assessment was not sufficiently transparent, as it was based on plans rather than their realization. The NVAO therefore requested the panel to complete its report with an additional assessment of the implementation of the improvements described under Standard 3. The NVAO decided to adjourn its decision for accreditation of the programmes until 31 January 2023 to give the programmes and the panel the time to complete the assessment report.

Original assessment

The original assessment of the research masters History and International Relations of the University of Groningen took place on 23 and 24 November 2020. The assessment was supported by evaluation bureau Qanu, and was conducted according to the procedures and standards described in 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).

The panel 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.

Additional assessment

As evaluation bureau Qanu closed its doors in 2021, the University of Groningen approached evaluation bureau Academion to support the additional assessment. Peter Hildering MSc acted as coordinator and

secretary to the panel. The panel and Academion ensured that there had been no developments in the past two years that affected the independence of the panel members regarding the programmes.

In preparation of the additional assessment, the programmes sent the panel all theses and accompanying assessment forms that were assessed in 2021/2022 under the new assessment policy: eight from the research master History, and nine from the research master International Relations. The programmes also sent the panel an overview of first and second examiners for these theses, as well as a memorandum describing the new thesis assessment policy. The panel members studied these documents and sent their findings to the secretary, who collected them and distributed them amongst the panel members.

The secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to a colleague at Academion for peer assessment, and to the panel for feedback. In an online meeting on 28 October 2022, the panel reported its findings to the management of the Faculty of Arts and both programmes, as well as the chair of the Board of Examiners. After this meeting, the secretary sent the draft report to the programmes in order to have it checked for factual irregularities. The secretary discussed the ensuing comments with the panel chair and changes were implemented accordingly. The panel then finalised the report, and the secretary sent it to the University of Groningen.

Information on the programmes

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

Master's programme History

Name of the programme:	History (Research)
CROHO number:	60139
Level of the programme:	master
Orientation of the programme:	academic
Number of credits:	120 EC
Specializations or tracks:	Classical, Medieval and Early Modern Studies (CMEMS)
Location(s):	Groningen
Mode(s) of study:	full time
Language of instruction:	English
Submission deadline NVAO:	31-01-2023

Master's programme International Relations

Name of the programme:	International Relations (Research)
CROHO number:	60820
Level of the programme:	master
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:	31-01-2023

Description of the assessment

Standard 3. Student assessment

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

Findings

Thesis assessment

In 2020, the panel judged that the assessment procedures of the research master History and the research master International Relations 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 previous version of the form, the second examiner was asked whether s/he agrees with the assessment by the first examiner, who is also the supervisor. According to the panel, this impeded an independent assessment by the second examiner.

After discussing this with the panel during the site visit, the programme and the Board of Examiners developed a new assessment procedure for the thesis. This was presented to the panel in the Spring of 2021 and implemented in the programmes per 2021/2022. In this new procedure, the supervisor assesses and scores the thesis on one evaluation form, followed by the second examiner, who independently assesses the thesis on a second evaluation form. Only after both examiners have completed their assessment, they are informed on the opinion of the other examiner. They then jointly agree on the final assessment, written down on a third evaluation form. This final assessment form is signed by both examiners, provided to the student and archived in the assessment file. If the two assessors do not come to an agreement, the Board of Examiners will appoint a third assessor to break the tie.

As part of its preparation of the additional assessment, the panel studied a selection of theses that were assessed using the new assessment forms and procedures. It concludes that the new assessment procedure has resulted in transparent and reliable assessment of the theses of both programmes. Both examiners demonstrably provide an independent and thorough assessment of the thesis, and use this as the basis to form a joint final assessment of the work.

Appointment of examiners

In the original assessment of 2020, the panel found that the way in which the second thesis examiner was 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. A result of this informal procedure was the emergence of 'grading pairs' of supervisors that often assessed theses together. The panel found this undesirable and recommended more variation in first and second examiners to promote the independence of the assessment.

Based on the panel recommendations, the Board of Examiners adapted its procedures for appointing examiners. All thesis examiners are now appointed by the Board or by its delegated expert representing the research master's programmes, independent of the first examiner. This policy is now being formalized throughout the entire faculty. The panel verified from a list of first and second examiners of recent theses of both programmes that there are no more 'grading pairs' visible, and that there is sufficient variation between the pairs of assessors. The panel approves of these new procedures and changes. It concludes that they succeed in improving the independence and transparency of the thesis assessment.

Considerations

The panel concludes that the programmes have successfully implemented the plans they presented to the panel in May 2021. The changes to the thesis assessment procedure have demonstrably improved the independence and transparency of the thesis assessment. The assessment forms that the panel studied show that the first and second examiner both complete an independent thesis review before consulting each other about the final assessment. The second examiner is appointed by the Board of Examiners, which ensures that the formation of grading pairs is prevented.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that that both programmes meet standard 3.

General conclusion

Based on the additional assessment, as well as the original assessment in 2020, the panel's assessment of the research masters History and International Relations is positive.