

Assessment report
NVAO Limited Framework Programme Assessment

Research Master European Studies

Maastricht University

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1. Executive summary

In this executive summary, the panel presents the main considerations which led to the assessment of the quality of the Research Master European Studies programme of Maastricht University. The programme was assessed according to the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands. The additional NVAO requirements for research master programmes were taken into account.

The programme organisation is adequate and the programme is well-embedded in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of Maastricht University.

The programme profile is clear, resting upon the study and research of historical, political and international relations' aspects of European integration using historical, qualitative or quantitative research methods. The programme offers students solid disciplinary and methodological grounding in one of the disciplines and one of the methods, but they are exposed to the other disciplines and methods as well. The panel welcomes the thematic and methodological specialisations open to students, at the same time assuring students to be trained multi-disciplinary and multi-method. The programme clearly distinguishes from one-year or two-year programmes in the field of European studies through offering integrated research-based education in this field.

The programme intended learning outcomes conform to the master level and surpass this level in some respects, aiming at higher levels of knowledge production and adequately preparing students for PhD trajectories. The panel recommends to use third cycle Dublin descriptors to bring the intended learning outcomes' formulations more in line with research master requirements.

The panel endorses the English name of the programme and English as the language of instruction, as English matches the international character of the programme and enables students to prepare for careers in this international field.

Programme management adequately implemented measures, requested by the previous panel.

Although the intake is limited, the number of incoming students allows for adequate class sizes and for educational viability of the programme. The entry requirements and admission procedures are elaborate and assure students who enrol, have the capacities to complete the programme.

The curriculum meets the programme intended learning outcomes, and is consistent, coherent and cumulative, being clearly steered by the programme profile. The courses in the curriculum allow students to reach the high-level intended learning outcomes. The disciplines history, political science and international relations are adequately covered in the curriculum. The methods courses are robust and reach research master level, allowing students to obtain solid grounding in historical, qualitative or quantitative methods. Students are also acquainted with the other methods taught in the programme. The quantitative methods addressed may give access to big data analyses. The panel recommends to consider including big data in the curriculum. The panel welcomes the choice

of graduation packages offered to students in the second year. Programme management and the Board of Examiners assure the study activities in either of the graduation packages to meet the programme intended learning outcomes. The panel advises to allow students, taking the double degree programme in Cologne, to attend the *Academic Publishing and Grant Acquisition* course by offering this course online.

The staff members involved in the programme have very good credentials in terms of educational expertise and academic qualifications. The teaching team of the programme is cohesive and works together effectively. The research group the lecturers take part in as researchers obtained *very good* results in the recent research assessment. The programme is, therefore, embedded in high-quality research activities. The panel regards the work load of the lecturers as manageable, but advises to stay attentive in this respect.

The educational concept and study methods are appropriate for this programme. The guidance offered by the programme director and lecturers is up to standard and is appreciated by students. The panel feels the study load to be high, but not too high for this research master programme. Programme management and the Educational Programme Committee are receptive to students' feedback. The drop-out rates and the student success rates are up to standard.

The rules and regulations for the programme examinations and assessments are adequate. Suitable procedures have been put in place to assure the quality of examinations and assessments. The Board of Examiners of the Faculty actively monitors the quality of examinations and assessments. Programme management adequately follows up on the recommendations made by this Board. The panel is very positive about the auditing system and calibration sessions for master theses.

The examination methods in the courses are well-adjusted to the knowledge, insights and skills to be tested in these courses and are satisfactorily varied. The panel finds the feedback by examiners on students' work to be adequate, only minor differences existing between staff members.

The supervision processes for the master thesis are appropriate. The assessment procedures involving two examiners and elaborate thesis evaluation forms are up to standard. The written comments by examiners on the thesis evaluation forms are elaborate and instructive. The process of conversion from qualitative judgements by examiners to thesis grades is well-thought-through. The panel has three recommendations for the thesis assessment procedures: to relate the assessments more explicitly to the detailed programme intended learning outcomes; to clarify and formalise procedures with respect to examiners giving their separate judgements, examiners discussing their judgements and examiners arriving at the joint final grade; and to set up procedures to check the fulfilment of ethical standards before students embark upon collecting data for their theses.

The measures programme management has taken in the Covid-crisis to provide education, organise examinations and assessments, and monitor the quality of these are appropriate. The well-being of students has been guarded adequately as well.

The panel reviewed fifteen master theses of graduates of the programme of the last five years. No theses were found by the panel to be unsatisfactory. Five of the theses were graded satisfactory by the panel, five theses were regarded to be good, and five theses were found excellent. The marks for eight theses were regarded by the panel to be appropriate. The marks for seven theses were seen as too high, but only one point or less too high.

The Board of Examiners guards against grade inflation of the thesis marks through regular reviews by audit-examiners and through calibration sessions of examiners. The panel, therefore, considers the average grade for the master theses, ranging from 7.6 to 8.0 over the last three years, to be appropriate. The proportion of students graduating cum laude, ranging from 20 % to 50 % for the last few years, is regarded by the panel to be appropriate also. The students in the programme reach research master level in the programme field.

Career orientation and preparation activities are offered to students both within the programme and at the end of the study. The panel, nevertheless, recommends to intensify the labour market orientation by, for instance, scheduling events specifically for students of this programme and reinforcing connections to programme alumni.

The programme prepares well for both academic or non-academic research positions. The panel applauds the results of the programme, 30 % of the graduates having secured PhD positions, and another 30 % of them having found non-academic research positions.

The panel which conducted the assessment of the Research Master European Studies programme of Maastricht University assesses this programme to meet the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, judging the programme to be positive. Therefore, the panel recommends NVAO to continue the accreditation of this programme.

Rotterdam, 21 September 2021,

Prof. L.J. de Haan PhD
(panel chair)

W. Vercouteren MSc
(panel secretary)

2. Programme administrative information

Name programme in CROHO:	Master European Studies (Research)
Orientation, level programme:	Academic Master
Grade:	MSc
Number of credits:	120 EC
Specialisations (five):	Histories of European Integration: Historical/Qualitative Approach Democracy and Representation in Europe: Qualitative Approach Democracy and Representation in Europe: Quantitative Approach Europe and the World: Qualitative Approach Europe and the World: Quantitative Approach
Location:	Maastricht
Mode of study:	Full-time
Language of instruction:	English
Registration in CROHO:	21PJ-60377
Name of institution:	Maastricht University
Status of institution:	Government-funded University
Institution's quality assurance:	Approved

3. Findings, considerations and assessments per standard

3.1 Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

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

Findings

The Research Master European Studies programme is one of the programmes of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of Maastricht University. The programme carries 120 EC of study load and takes two years to complete. The programme is coordinated on a day-to-day basis by the programme director. In the Education Management Team chaired by the associate dean of Education, the programme directors of the master programmes of the Faculty discuss education policies and education logistics of these programmes. For the bachelor programmes, the organisational set-up is the same. The lecturers in this or the other programmes of the Faculty are members of one of the five Departments of the Faculty (Philosophy, History, Literature and Art, Society Studies, and Political Science). In all Faculty programmes, lecturers of various Departments tend to be involved. The Educational Programme Committee, being composed of lecturers and students, advises the programme director on the programme quality. The Faculty Board of Examiners monitors the quality of examinations and assessments of the programme and verifies programme graduates meeting the intended learning outcomes. For this as for the other programmes of the Faculty, the Education Plan cycle is the annual procedure for maintaining and improving the programme quality. The constructive alignment of the intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities and examinations and assessments is part of the Education Plan.

The profile of the programme is to train students to study and research Europe and processes of European integration as historical, political or socio-cultural phenomena. The programme aims to educate students to approach these phenomena from a multi-disciplinary perspective, in particular from the perspectives of the disciplines history, political science and international relations. Students are taught to study these phenomena by using various methods, being historical, qualitative and quantitative methods. Although students are offered opportunities to specialise within the programme, all students acquire knowledge of and skills in each of these disciplines and each of these methods. All students, irrespective of their specialisation, are taught and discuss all themes and all methods in common courses. The five specialisations offered allow students to combine themes *Histories of European Integration*, *Democracy and Representation in Europe* or *Europe and the World* with either qualitative or quantitative methods. The first theme may only be combined with historical/qualitative methods.

The programme intended learning outcomes are detailed. They may be summarised as students being educated to use knowledge and understanding in the field of European studies to do independent and ethically responsible research, drawing on advanced historical, qualitative or quantitative research methods; to critically appraise and weigh arguments, formulate opinions and position themselves in debates in this field; to identify topics and questions for research in this field

and to compare, select, integrate and apply theories, concepts and methods in this field to analyse research puzzles.

The programme has been compared to one-year and two-year programmes in the European studies field. One-year programmes are mostly offered jointly with one of the European languages. The two-year programmes tend to offer substantive and methods courses separately. This programme may be said to distinguish itself by integrating substantive and methods education and by offering integrated research-based training.

Programme management showed the intended learning outcomes to correspond to the Dublin descriptors for the second cycle, as indicators of the master level. The intended learning outcomes partly reach the Dublin descriptors for the third cycle, as this research master programme clearly aims higher and has a much stronger research orientation than regular master programmes in this field and aims to prepare students for PhD positions.

The programme name is in English, and the programme is taught in English. The English language has been chosen, because of the international character of the programme, labour market requirements for graduates of this programme and the location of Maastricht University in the Euroregion. Both the student body and the programme staff are very international. The choice for English for this programme is in line with the Maastricht University language policy.

The 2014 assessment panel advised a recovery period, requesting to provide students with more thematic focus and to better integrate methods and substantive courses. Programme management took improvement measures, offering three thematic specialisations, connected to methods tracks. At the end of the recovery period in 2016, the assessment panel judged the improvements to have been successfully designed and implemented. The programme was then assessed positively.

Considerations

The panel sees the programme organisation as adequate and considers the programme to be well-embedded in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of Maastricht University.

The programme profile is clear, resting upon the study and research of historical, political and international relations' aspects of European integration using historical, qualitative or quantitative research methods. The panel sees the programme as offering students solid disciplinary and methodological grounding in one of the disciplines and one of the methods, but being exposed to the other disciplines and methods as well. The panel welcomes the thematic and methodological specialisations open to students, at the same time assuring students to be trained multi-disciplinary and multi-method.

The programme intended learning outcomes definitely meet the research master requirements. The intended learning outcomes, so the panel established, conform to the master level and surpass this level in some respects, aiming at higher levels of knowledge production and adequately preparing students for PhD trajectories. The panel recommends to use third cycle Dublin descriptors to bring the intended learning outcomes' formulations more in line with research master requirements.

The panel welcomes the distinguishing features of the programme, compared to one-year or two-year programmes in the field of European studies, this programme offering integrated research-based education.

The panel endorses the English name of the programme and English as the language of instruction. The English language matches the international character of the programme, and enables students to appropriately prepare for careers in this international field.

The panel notes programme management adequately implemented measures, requested by the previous panel.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess the programme to meet Standard 1, Intended learning outcomes.

3.2 Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment

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

Findings

The number of students enrolling in the programme rose gradually over the last five years from 10 students in 2015 to 15 students in 2019. The vast majority of the students come from countries in Europe. There are only some students from the Netherlands. Only one or two students come from outside of Europe. From the applications received, a third is accepted. The target intake numbers for this programme are 15 to 17 incoming students per year and not more.

The admission requirements for the programme are bachelor degrees in European studies, political science, international relations or related fields. Applicants need to have knowledge of research methods, acquired in their prior education. They also have to be proficient in English. Applicants are required to submit a letter showing their motivation to enrol in this programme. Two samples of their writing skills are required as well. Interviews may be conducted in case of doubt. The Board of Admissions, being composed of the programme director and one of the course coordinators, decides on admissions. The number of scholarships available is very limited.

About 40 % to 50 % of the students choose the *Europe and the World* specialisation, while about 30 % to 40 % of them select *Democracy and Representation in Europe*. *Histories of European Integration* is the smallest specialisation. About one third of the students opt for quantitative methods as their specialisation, while about two-thirds of them choose qualitative methods.

Programme management demonstrated the curriculum to meet the intended learning outcomes of the programme. In the programme education plan, constructive alignment procedures have been adopted to match the intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities and examinations and assessments of the programme. The curriculum consists of courses, specifically designed for this research master programme. Students do not take regular master courses. In the first year, all students together start with three courses, introducing them to the substantive knowledge, theory and methods of European studies. After this first period, students take two substantive courses and three methods courses as part of their thematic and methodological specialisations. The knowledge, theory and methods taught are integrated in courses, as *Integrated Research Paper and Workshop*, *Research Design*, *Research Project*, and *Thesis Proposal*. In some of these courses, all students in the programme participate. All students are required in these courses to explain to staff members and fellow students the methods they apply in their research projects. In the first year, students may take part in study trips to European and Dutch organisations to be informed about European integration in practice and to learn about career opportunities. In the first semester of the second year, students have three graduation packages (24 EC to 26 EC) to choose from. The first option is the research internship either in the Maastricht Faculty or in partner organisations. Supervisors and students complete research internship forms, specifying the internship goals and the relation of these to the intended learning outcomes of the programme. External internships are supervised by

external supervisors in collaboration with programme staff. The second option is the study abroad in partner universities in Germany, France, the United Kingdom or Japan. The programme director approves the courses to be taken in these universities, verifying that they meet the programme intended learning outcomes. The third option is the double degree with University of Cologne. Students deepen their knowledge and understanding of political science theory and methods by taking courses in Cologne. In line with the Double Degree Agreement with University of Cologne, the Maastricht supervisor assures students meet the programme intended learning outcomes. In the second semester of the second year, students complete the master thesis (34 EC). Students selecting one of the first two graduation packages, also take the course *Academic Publishing and Grant Acquisition*, teaching them to write PhD proposals or policy briefs to apply for academic or non-academic research positions. Due to logistic bottlenecks, students taking the double degree programme in Cologne, cannot take this course. At the end of the curriculum, students are invited to present their master thesis findings at several selected conferences in the Netherlands.

The staff teaching in the programme comprises 19 lecturers, among whom are four full professors and three associate professors. All of the lecturers involved in the programme have PhDs and are University Teaching Qualification certified. Lecturers are internationally qualified researchers in their field of study and publish in peer-reviewed journals. They participate as researchers in the *Politics and Culture in Europe* research group. In the most recent research assessment in 2017, the research group was evaluated *very good* on all three assessment criteria. Programme management and course coordinators meet regularly to discuss curriculum improvement and teaching practices. Lecturers experience their work load as high but manageable.

The programme rests upon the educational concept of *Problem-Based Learning*, which has been adopted for all programmes of Maastricht University. This educational concept is meant to foster students actively participating in class and taking the learning processes into their own hands. The concept has been adapted for the research master character of the programme. Students work in small groups of 3 to 15 students, learn from each other (collaborative learning) and learn in building upon knowledge acquired earlier (constructive learning). The study methods are interactive lectures, tutorials, peer-feedback sessions, presentations, and integrated workshops. In the peer-feedback sessions, students comment on each others' work or projects. In the integrated workshops, students have discussions about research findings. In tutorials and other meetings, students may take the lead and chair discussions and exchanges. Class sizes are small. The students-to-staff ratio in the programme was on average 17/1 for the last three years. Students are guided by the programme director, who is the mentor for students and meets with them regularly. The course coordinators act as the tutors of the small student groups in the courses. Students see lecturers as being easily approachable and as being helpful. Generally, students experience the curriculum as challenging. For students not having backgrounds in European studies the first period is demanding. Most students find the second period challenging, when they have to write their first research paper. Only one or two students per cohort drop out of the programme. Calculated on the basis of the results of the last three to four years, the student success rates for the programme are about 79 % of the students completing the programme within two years and about 85 % of them graduating within three years.

Programme management has taken measures to organise education in the Covid crisis and to monitor the quality of the education. On-campus education often proved not to be feasible, due to government regulations. Therefore, teaching was converted to online teaching. Lecturers scheduled online lectures and tutorials and one-to-one feedback sessions. The Faculty provided assistance in this respect. To guard students' well-being, the programme staff intensified mentoring activities and met with students monthly in groups and also individually. Among each other, students scheduled meetings also. Students appreciate the assistance offered by programme management and lecturers in the Covid crisis.

Considerations

Although the intake is limited, the number of incoming students allows for adequate class sizes and for educational viability of the programme. The entry requirements and admission procedures are elaborate and assure students who enrol, have the capacities to complete the programme.

The curriculum meets, so the panel established, the intended learning outcomes of the programme, enabling students to reach these high-level learning outcomes. The panel considers the curriculum to be consistent, coherent and cumulative, being steered by the programme profile. The panel sees the disciplines history, political science and international relations adequately covered in the curriculum. The methods courses are robust and reach research master level. The introductory course on methods rightly addresses philosophical and methodological aspects in the programme field. The methods courses allow students to gain solid grounding in either historical or qualitative or quantitative methods. Through the common courses in the first period of the first year and through the courses in which all students take part, students are acquainted with various methods taught in the programme. The quantitative methods addressed may give access to big data analyses. The panel recommends to consider including big data in the curriculum. The panel welcomes the choice of graduation packages offered to students in the first semester of the second year. As the panel established, programme management and the Board of Examiners assure the study activities in either of the graduation packages to meet the intended learning outcomes of the programme. The panel recommends to allow students, taking the double degree programme in Cologne, to attend the *Academic Publishing and Grant Acquisition* course by offering this course online.

The panel considers staff members involved in the programme as well-qualified lecturers, and sees the teaching team of the programme as cohesive and working together effectively. The lecturers have very good credentials in terms of educational expertise and academic qualifications. The research group the lecturers take part in as researchers obtained *very good* results in the recent research assessment. The panel finds the programme to be embedded in high-quality research activities. The panel regards the work load of the lecturers as manageable, but advises staying attentive in this respect and to monitor the work load.

The panel regards the educational concept and study methods as appropriate for this programme. The guidance offered by the programme director and lecturers is up to standard and is appreciated by students. The panel feels the study load to be high, but not too high for this research master programme. Programme management and the Educational Programme Committee are considered

by the panel to be receptive to students' feedback. The drop-out rates and the student success rates are up to standard.

In the panel's view, programme management took measures to provide adequate education during the Covid crisis, to assure the quality of this education, and to monitor the well-being of students.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess the programme to meet Standard 2, Teaching-learning environment.

3.3 Standard 3: Student assessment

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

The examination and assessment rules and regulations for the programme are specified in the Faculty Assessment Policy Education and in position paper of the Board of Examiners. In the programme education plan, course examinations and assessments are aligned with teaching and learning activities and with the intended learning outcomes. The Faculty Assessment Committee designs the assessment policy of the Faculty and assists management of this and other programmes in the implementation of this policy. Measures have been taken to assure the validity, reliability and transparency of the programme examinations and assessments.

The Board of Examiners of the Faculty ensures the quality of examinations and assessments of the programme. The Board regularly reviews course examinations. The Board also on a regular basis organises reviews of master theses by especially appointed audit-examiners. Calibration sessions of examiners are scheduled by programme management to discuss assessments and grading of master theses. The Board is present at these sessions. For the examinations and assessments of the courses of University of Cologne and the study abroad courses of partner universities, examiners are screened by the Board of Examiners before being permitted to act as examiners for the students of this programme.

Examination methods are mainly written assignments, research papers, research designs/research proposals or presentations. Traditional written examinations are relatively rare. Examinations are predominantly individual examinations, though in some courses group assessments have been adopted. Formative assessments are scheduled to give students feedback on their progress. Written assignments are checked for plagiarism. The Board of Examiners rules on cases.

At the end of the first year, students take steps to start their master thesis in courses, such as the Research Project and Thesis Proposal. Students may select their own topic for the thesis, as long as this lies within the boundaries of the European studies field. Students are individually guided in the thesis process by the thesis supervisor. Master theses are assessed by the supervisor and second reader. The second reader is the responsible examiner. Both examiners complete thesis evaluation forms. This form consists of a range of qualitative criteria. Examiners are required to give their judgements and to convert these judgements to marks. Calibration sessions are instrumental to guide this process. The final thesis mark is the result of discussion between the examiners. If their marks diverge strongly, a third examiner is appointed. Differences of opinion may be discussed and documented, though not on the form itself. For the double degree programme with University of Cologne, the procedures are the same. Theses are checked for plagiarism. The Board of Examiners handles cases.

Programme management has taken measures to organise examinations and assessments in the Covid crisis and to monitor their quality. Since most of the examinations in the programme are written assignments or papers, the effect of the Covid crisis was relatively limited. Presentations

were changed to the online format. The Board of Examiners monitored examinations and assessments and assured these to meet the programme intended learning outcomes.

Considerations

The panel considers the rules and regulations for the programme examinations and assessments to be adequate. Suitable procedures have been put in place to assure the quality of examinations and assessments.

The panel welcomes the activities of the Board of Examiners, the Board actively monitoring the quality of examinations and assessments. Programme management adequately follows up on the recommendations made by the Board of Examiners. The panel is very positive about the auditing system and calibration sessions for master theses.

The examination methods in the courses are well-adjusted to the knowledge, insights and skills to be tested in these courses. The examination methods are satisfactorily varied. The panel finds the feedback by examiners on students' work to be adequate, only minor differences existing between staff members.

The panel regards the supervision processes for the master thesis to be appropriate. The assessment procedures involving two examiners and elaborate thesis evaluation forms are up to standard. The panel appreciates the written comments by examiners on the thesis evaluation forms, as these are elaborate and instructive. The process of conversion from qualitative judgements by examiners to thesis grades is well-thought-through. The panel recommends to relate master thesis assessments more explicitly to the detailed intended learning outcomes of the programme. The panel advises to clarify and formalise procedures with respect to examiners giving their separate judgements, both examiners discussing their judgements and both of them arriving at the joint final grade. The panel recommends also to set up procedures to check the fulfilment of ethical standards before students embark upon collecting data for their theses.

The panel considers the measures programme management has taken to organise examinations and assessments in the Covid-crisis and to monitor the quality of these examinations and assessments to be appropriate.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess the programme to meet Standard 3, Student assessment.

3.4 Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

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

Students are to demonstrate the knowledge and skills, they have acquired in the programme, in the master thesis. The average grades for the master theses were 7.6 for the year 2017/2018 and 8.0 for the years 2018/2019 and 2019/2020. The Board of Examiners for the programme finds the marks of the thesis examiners to reflect appropriately the quality of the theses and not too high. The Board bases this judgement on the results of reviews by audit-examiners. They confirmed the thesis marks given. Some students of the programme won prestigious prizes for their master thesis. Students also published in peer-review journals.

The proportion of students graduating cum laude, varied from 20 % to 50 % in the years 2017/2018 to 2019/2020.

The programme primarily aims to prepare students for both PhD positions or for positions in non-academic research. In the programme, study trips are scheduled to inform students about career opportunities. Students may also do research internships at external organisations, preparing them for the labour market. In addition, students are taught to write PhD proposals or policy briefs to apply for academic or non-academic research positions. Students also are given the chance to present their master thesis findings at several selected conferences in the Netherlands. Programme management maintains the network of alumni. On the Faculty level, career services are offered. The Faculty also annually schedules career days, involving alumni from Faculty programmes.

Calculated on the basis of figures for 40 alumni of the last few years, 30 % of the programme graduates secured positions in academic research and another 30 % of them acquired positions in non-academic research.

Considerations

The panel reviewed fifteen master theses of graduates of programme. The theses were selected from all of the theses of graduates of the last five years. The theses were selected on the basis of grades, lower, average and higher marks being evenly represented. The programme specialisations were also covered in the selection. No theses were found by the panel to be unsatisfactory. Five of the theses were graded satisfactory by the panel. Five theses were regarded to be good. Five theses were found to be excellent. The marks for eight theses were found by the panel to be appropriate. The marks for seven theses were considered to be too high, but only one point or less too high.

The panel appreciates the Board of Examiners guarding against grade inflation of the thesis marks through regular reviews by audit-examiners and through calibration sessions of examiners. The panel, therefore, considers the average grade for the master theses, ranging from 7.6 to 8.0 over the last three years, to be appropriate. The proportion of students graduating cum laude, ranging from

20 % to 50 % for the last few years, is regarded by the panel to be appropriate as well. The panel considers the students in the programme to reach research master level in the programme field.

Career orientation and preparation activities are offered to students both within the programme and at the end of the study. The panel, nevertheless, recommends to intensify the labour market orientation by, for instance, scheduling events specifically for students of this programme and reinforcing connections to programme alumni.

The panel appreciates the programme preparing well for both academic or non-academic research positions. The panel applauds the results of the programme, 30 % of the graduates having secured PhD positions and 30 % of them having found non-academic research positions.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess the programme to meet Standard 4, Achieved learning outcomes.

4. Overview of assessments

Standard	Assessment
Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes	Programme meets Standard 1
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	Programme meets Standard 2
Standard 3: Student assessment	Programme meets Standard 3
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	Programme meets Standard 4
Programme	Positive

5. Recommendations

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

- To use third cycle Dublin descriptors for the formulations of the intended learning outcomes to bring these formulations more in line with research master requirements.
- To consider including big data in the curriculum.
- To enable students, taking the double degree programme in Cologne, to attend the *Academic Publishing and Grant Acquisition* course by offering this course online.
- To stay attentive to and to monitor the work load of the lecturers.
- To relate master thesis assessments more explicitly to the detailed intended learning outcomes of the programme.
- To clarify and formalise procedures with respect to examiners giving their separate judgements, both examiners discussing their judgements and both of them arriving at the joint final grade.
- To set up procedures to check the fulfilment of ethical standards before students embark upon collecting data for their theses.
- To intensify the labour market orientation for students by, for instance, scheduling events specifically for students of this programme and reinforcing connections to programme alumni.

Appendix: Assessment process

Certiked VBI evaluation agency was requested by Maastricht University to support the limited framework programme assessment process for the Research Master European Studies programme of this University. The objective of the programme assessment of this research master programme was to establish whether the programme would conform to the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, September, 2018 (officially published in Stcrt. 2019 no. 3198, 29 January 2019) as well as to the criteria listed in the NVAO Specification of additional criteria for research master's programmes, 30 May, 2016.

This programme is one of the programmes in the assessment cluster of Social Sciences Research Master programmes (in Dutch: WO OZM Maatschappij). Management of the programmes in this assessment cluster discussed the composition of the assessment panel and drafted the list of panel candidates.

Having conferred with the Research Master European Studies of Maastricht University programme management, Certiked invited candidate panel members to sit on the assessment panel. The panel members agreed to do so.

The panel composition was as follows:

- Prof. L.J. de Haan PhD, Professor Emeritus of Development Studies, International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands (panel chair);
- Prof. A. Need PhD, Professor of Sociology and Public Policy; Dean Twente Graduate School, University of Twente, the Netherlands (panel member)
- Prof. J.Y. Nazroo PhD, Professor of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, United Kingdom (panel member);
- Prof. C. Kaunert PhD, Professor of Policing and Security, University of South Wales, United Kingdom (panel member);
- M. Ferreira Torres MSc, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, the Netherlands (student member).

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

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

To prepare for the assessment process, the process coordinator convened with programme management to discuss the documents to be presented to the assessment panel, the site visit schedule, and the planning of the preparatory activities. In the course of this process, programme

management and the process coordinator regularly had contact to fine-tune the process. The activities prior to the site visit were performed as planned. Programme management approved of the site visit schedule.

Well in advance of the site visit date, programme management sent the list of theses of programme graduates of the five most recent years. Acting on behalf of the assessment panel, the process coordinator selected fifteen theses from this list. In the selection, theses with lower, average and higher grades were evenly represented. The specialisations of the programme were also represented evenly in the selection.

The panel members were forwarded in time the documents, prepared by programme management. These documents consisted of the critical reflection report, the annexes to the critical reflection report and additional information. The student chapter was part of the documentation. Measures in response to the Covid-19 crisis were included as well. The annexes to the critical reflection report included the follow-up actions on recommendations by assessment panels in last six years; profile of programme; intended learning outcomes with relations to second cycle qualifications, professional competencies and programme curriculum; publications by students; linkage of intended learning outcomes to learning activities; teaching and learning activities per specialisation; competence training in programme; credits and workload per course; staff overview; staff research activities and research output; research group Politics and Culture in Europe research assessment score; examination methods; linkage of intended learning outcomes to examination methods; master thesis titles; master theses grading matrix/guide; prizes/awards of students; careers programme alumni; and programme key figures. The additional information consisted, among other, of Faculty strategic plan, programme education plan, course dossiers, course examinations, and Educational Programme Committee and Board of Examiners minutes and annual reports.

To assist panel members in assessing the programme, they were sent the Trained Eye Research Masters Limited Framework document of Certiked evaluation agency, this document being the elaboration of the NVAO Assessment framework and the NVAO Specification for research master programmes.

Prior to the site visit date, the assessment panel chair and the process coordinator met to discuss the assessment process procedures. In this meeting, the panel chair was informed about the profile of panel chairs of NVAO. The panel chair agreed to work in line with the profile of panel chairs.

Seeing the continuing spread of Covid infections in the Netherlands and the measures taken by Dutch government to counter the spread of infections, programme management proposed the site visit to be organised online. All panel members agreed to the online visit.

Prior to the date of the online visit, panel members sent in their preliminary findings, based upon their studying the programme documents, and sent in questions to be put to the programme representatives on the day of the visit. The panel secretary summarised this information, and compiled a list of questions to serve as the starting point for the discussions with the programme representatives during the visit.

Shortly before the visit date, panel members met to prepare for the site visit. Panel members discussed the procedures to be adopted during the visit, the preliminary findings about the programme, the panel reviews of the final projects studied, and the questions to be put to the programme representatives.

On 10 June, 2021, the panel conducted the online visit. The visit schedule was in accordance with the schedule as planned. The visit schedule included the following meetings.

09.00 – 09.45 Dean of education, programme director
10.00 – 11.00 Programme director, core lecturers, chair Educational Programme Committee
11.15 – 12.00 Board of Examiners, student advisor
12.00 – 13.00 Panel lunch (closed session), with 12.00 – 12.30 Open office hours
13.00 – 13.45 Lecturers/final project examiners
14.00 – 14.45 Students, Educational Programme Committee student member, and alumni
14.45 – 16.15 Deliberations panel (closed session)
16.15 – 16.30 Main findings presentation by panel chair to programme representatives
16.30 – 17.00 Development dialogue

Open office hours were communicated timely by programme management to staff and students. No persons called on the panel for an interview.

In a closed session at the end of the visit, the assessment panel considered the findings, weighed the considerations and arrived at conclusions with regard to the quality of the programme. After these internal deliberations, the panel chair presented in broad outline the panel findings, considerations, conclusions and recommendations to programme representatives.

At the end of the site visit, panel members and programme management met to discuss further improvements in the programme during the development dialogue.

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