MASTER'S PROGRAMME CLASSICS AND ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS (RESEARCH)

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM

CONTENTS

This report was finalised on 25 September 2020

REPORT ON THE MASTER'S PROGRAMME CLASSICS AND ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS (RESEARCH) OF VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM

This report takes the NVAO's Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands for limited programme assessments as a starting point (September 2018).

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE PROGRAMME

Master's programme Classics and Ancient Civilizations (research)

Name of the programme:	Oudheidstudies (research)
CROHO number:	60039
Level of the programme:	master's
Orientation of the programme:	academic
Number of credits:	120 EC
Location(s):	Amsterdam
Mode(s) of study:	full time
Language of instruction:	English
Submission deadline NVAO:	1/11/2020 [1]

The visit of the assessment panel Archaeology, Classics and Ancient Civilizations and Region Studies to the Faculty of Humanities of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam took place on 9 and 10 June 2020.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE INSTITUTION

Name of the institution:	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Status of the institution:	publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	positive

COMPOSITION OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The NVAO approved the composition of the panel on 2 June 2020. The panel that assessed the master's programme Classics and Ancient civilizations consisted of:

- Prof. dr. K. (Kristoffel) Demoen, professor Ancient Greek Literature at Ghent University (Belgium) [chair];
- Prof. dr. E.M. (Eric) Moormann, professor Classical Archaeology at Radboud University;
- Prof. dr. J. (Johannes) Haubold, professor of Classics at Princeton University (United States);
- Dr. K. (Kim) Beerden, university lecturer of Ancient History at the Institute for History at Leiden University;
- Y.P. (Yannick) de Raaff BA, research master student Archaeology at the University of Groningen [student member].

The panel was supported by Dr. E. (Els) Schröder, who acted as secretary.

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[1]   Extension to submission deadline 31/10/2021 due to legislation WHW art. 5.16 lid 4

WORKING METHOD OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The site visit to the research master's programme Classics and Ancient Civilizations at the Faculty of Humanities at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (hereafter: VU) was part of the cluster assessment Archaeology, Classics and Ancient Civilizations and Region Studies. Between June 2020 and February 2021 the panel assessed 9 programmes at 4 universities. The following universities participated in this cluster assessment: University of Groningen, University of Amsterdam, Leiden University and VU.

On behalf of the participating universities, quality assurance agency QANU was responsible for logistical support, panel guidance and the production of the reports. Dr. E. (Els) Schröder was project coordinator for QANU. J. (Jaïra) Azaria MA, and V.L. (Victor) van Kleef MA, acted as secretaries in the cluster assessment.

During the site visit to VU, the panel was supported by Dr. Els Schröder, a certified NVAO secretary. She acted as secretary in the online assessment. M. (Marcella) van Schie MA, was present during the assessment to support her and the panel chair, Prof. dr. K. Demoen.

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

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

Preparation
Planning for the cluster assessment started in October 2019. On 13 March 2020, prof. dr. K. Demoen was briefed by QANU on his role as panel chair, the assessment framework, the working method, and the planning of the site visits and reports.

Before the site visit to the VU, QANU received the self-evaluation reports of the programmes and forwarded them to the panel. The panel's chair and the project coordinator prepared a thesis selection for each programme, consisting of 15 theses and their assessment forms, based on a list of graduates from 2015-2019 provided by the university. A variety of topics and a diversity of examiners were included in the selection. The programme Classics and Ancient Civilizations at the VU has no tracks. The project coordinator and panel chair ensured that the distribution of grades in the selection matched the distribution of grades of all available theses.

At the end of March 2020, it became clear that due to COVID-19, all universities would be closed until further notice. VU indicated an interest in organising a digital site visit. The project coordinator asked the panel chair, Prof. dr. K. Demoen, whether he would be willing to lead a digital assessment. He consented to chairing a digital assessment on 3 April 2020. The panel members involved also confirmed their consent in partaking in a digital assessment: Prof. dr. E. M. Moormann (on 3 April 2020), Prof. dr. J. Haubold (on 3 April 2020), Dr. K. Beerden (on 3 April 2020) and Y.P. de Raaff BA (on 6 April 2020). Their messages of consent have been archived by QANU and can be provided upon request.

On 29 April 2020, the project coordinator discussed the approach to the digital site visit with representatives of VU and Leiden University and fellow colleagues from QANU. VU and Leiden University agreed on the necessity to develop a coordinated approach. For VU, it was decided that the online assessment of the programme would take place on 9 and 10 June 2020, but only if the panel chair confirmed that no hindrances were found in the documentation that would require an actual site visit based on the study of existing documents, a so-called 'go/no go-decision'. After studying the existing documentation, the panel chair communicated a 'go' to the project coordinator on 12 May 2020, who shared this information with VU.

On 14 May, Prof. dr. K. Demoen was again briefed by QANU on his role as panel chair, the assessment framework, the working method, and the planning of site visits and reports in accordance with the changed character of the procedure, taking into account all implications of a digital site visit. After studying the self-evaluation report, theses and assessment forms, the panel members formulated their preliminary findings. The secretary collected all initial questions and remarks on the self-evaluation report and the theses and distributed them among all panel members. The initial findings were discussed during a preparatory panel meeting, which was organised on 28 May 2020. During this meeting, the panel members received instructions on the use of the assessment framework(s). The panel also discussed its working method and the planning of the site visit to VU and the preparation of the report during this meeting. Based on the panel's initial findings, a list of factual questions was drawn up by the panel secretary and sent to VU prior to the site visit. On 8 June, the panel received the answers to these questions from VU.

The project coordinator composed a schedule for the online assessment in consultation with the policy officer of VU and the panel chair. The development dialogue was scheduled to take place in a digital environment on 12 June 2020. Prior to the assessment, the programme director selected representative partners for the various interviews. See Appendix 4 for the final schedule. Also, a digital protocol was drawn up by VU with input from the project coordinator and panel chair. This protocol discussed the ways in which communication during the interviews would be organised to guarantee that all interviewees and panel members would be able to speak freely and add whatever seemed important to the conversation. VU provided the necessary software to enable a digital site visit and development dialogue, including a fall-back option in case the digital environment malfunctioned. This back-up option was never used.

Site visit
The site visit to VU took place on 9 and 10 June 2020 by digital means. Before and during the site visit, the panel studied the additional documents provided by the programme. An overview of these materials can be found in Appendix 5. The panel conducted interviews with representatives of the programme: students and staff members, the programme's management, alumni and

representatives of the Board of Examiners. It also offered students and staff members an opportunity for a confidential discussion during a consultation hour ahead of the digital site visit. QANU stipulated a digital environment for this meeting in order to guarantee privacy. No requests for a 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 presented its preliminary findings and general observations. This last digital time slot could be accessed by anyone wishing to attend.

Development dialogue
A digital development dialogue took place on 12 June 2020. For this dialogue, VU prepared an agenda. The outcomes of the development dialogue have been drawn up separately, and confirmed by the panel chair, in a separate document that is not part of the application for accreditation.

Consistency and calibration
In order to ensure the consistency of assessment within the cluster, various measures were taken:
1. The panel composition ensured regular attendance of key panel members, including the chairs;
2. The coordinator was present at the start of all site visits as well as at the panel discussion leading to the preliminary findings for all site visits within the cluster assessment;
3. Calibration meetings were scheduled for September and November 2020, in which the two chairs and a key panel member discussed the approach to digital assessment and how to reach conclusions regarding the quality of the assessed programmes.

Report
After the site visit, the secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to a colleague at QANU 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. The project coordinator discussed the ensuing comments with the panel chair and changes were implemented accordingly. The report was then finalised and sent to the Faculty and University Board.

Definition of judgement 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.

SUMMARY JUDGEMENT

Classics and Ancient Civilizations (RMA CAC) is a two-year research master's programme of 120 EC. It aims to train students to function successfully in a research-oriented position. These positions are not restricted to a scholarly career in academia, but also include professional fields in society at large, including museums, scientific institutes, libraries, scientific publishers and secondary education. Although the RMA CAC has no separate tracks, the students are encouraged to choose their electives from one of four clusters which reflect the research interests of the various members of the academic staff: Classics (1), Ancient History (2), Archaeology (3) and Languages and Cultures of the Ancient Near East (4).

Standard 1
Over the period under assessment, the programme revised its profile. The panel applauds the new focus on disciplinarity in an interdisciplinary context, which it considers distinctive and attractive in both a national and international perspective. It encourages the programme to continue developing this new profile. It established that the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of the RMA CAC are aligned with the Dublin descriptors for the master's degree level, including the attainment of relevant skills and knowledge at the required degree level. The ILOs focus on the achievement of the relevant research skills and the conduct of research and are regularly revised. Hence, the panel concluded that the ILOs are also in line with the character of this research-oriented programme. It advises redrafting the programme-specific learning outcomes in such a way that the dual aim of catering to students who pursue an academic career and those who pursue careers outside academia is communicated more clearly. It also welcomes further attention being paid to the place of reception studies within both the profile of the programme and the learning outcomes.

Standard 2
The panel established that the RMA CAC offers students an abundance of choice of good-quality courses within the broad field of Classical and Ancient Studies. Module descriptions as submitted to the panel demonstrate the use of up-to-date literature, approaches and methods and clearly show that the programme is strongly embedded in research. Students also receive relevant skills training suited to their wish to pursue a research career. Research skills and ethics could be more explicitly communicated in the relevant module information, however. The panel highly appreciates the tutorials, which allow the students to design an individual tailor-made study trajectory preparing them for a career in research. The guidance given by creating individual learning paths is appropriate, culminating in a fully independently exercised research cycle in the thesis trajectory. The panel advises highlighting the accumulative character of these individual learning trajectories more prominently. In addition, it recommends introducing a thesis defence. The preparation for non-academic careers could be strengthened further.

The admission procedures to the programme are considered sound, resulting in a good match between students and staff. The panel wants to compliment the programme on its continuous efforts to increase and diversify its intake. Teaching at the RMA CAC is research-led and student-centred and pays attention to the students' personal growth and development. The panel 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. Of the programme's facilities, the Classics Research Room in particular is considered an asset that holds great potential for further exchange between disciplines in an interdisciplinary context. Due to the international character of the degree programme, intercultural exchange is also guaranteed. Intercultural and international exchanges also fit the programme's aims and graduates' career perspectives, and the panel therefore fully endorses the programme's opting for an English-language teaching environment. It noted that the programme acted promptly and prudently upon the recommendations given in the last KNAW assessment and the mid-term review. It concluded that the curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Standard 3

The panel considers the institutional arrangements in place for safeguarding quality assurance in assessment to be satisfactory. The quality awareness culture at the programme could benefit from a more proactive role of the Examination Board in offering training, organising calibration sessions amongst staff members, and facilitating the exchange of best practices across programmes within the Faculty. When standardising additional requirements for electives that research master students follow alongside regular one-year master students, the panel advises the programme to introduce research-focused elements. It verified that the students are well-informed and satisfied with the quality of the assessment and feedback received.

The panel ascertained that the assessment methods used within the RMA CAC are varied and appropriate for a research master's degree; they pay attention to the testing of research skills and drive the exchange of ideas and discussion. In particular, the core courses benefit from inventive and diverse assessment methods in line with the programme's aims. The panel was impressed by the level of reflection on the assessment methods used. Also, the involvement of the teaching team in the review and reformulation of the assessment plan is considered a strong indication of the peer review approach adopted by the programme, which enhances the quality of assessment and promotes a shared concern for safeguarding it. The panel advises making the attainment of programme-specific ILO 7 more explicit in the assessment plan. The thesis assessment is of the appropriate quality, guaranteeing an independent and fair assessment. In some cases, the panel would have been inclined to grade more leniently. It advises making the independence of the second assessors more visible and opening up the ways in which assessment pairs are selected. In addition, it formulated some recommendations designed to increase the transparency of the thesis assessment procedures. These suggestions do not hamper the overall level of assessment of the reviewed theses or the independence of the assessments.

Standard 4

Based on the overall level of the theses and the performance of the alumni, the panel concludes that graduates achieve the intended learning outcomes of the programme. In its view, the high proportion of graduates proceeding to careers in academia, the fact that graduates also function well in other professional contexts and education, the quality of the theses reviewed, and the fact that some of them result in publications after graduation and in successful research proposals are all evidence of the research qualities and relevant professional skills of graduates of the programme. Based on the evidence gathered from the theses, the panel also concluded that RMA students are fully embedded within the local research environment.

The panel assesses the standards from the *Assessment framework for limited programme assessments* in the following way:

Master's programme Classics and Ancient Civilizations

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. K. (Kristofffel) Demoen, and the secretary, Dr. E. (Els) Schröder, of the panel hereby declare that all panel members have studied this report and that they agree with the judgements laid down in it. They confirm that the assessment has been conducted in accordance with the demands relating to independence.

Date: 25 September 2020

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

Institutional context

The research master's programme Classics and Ancient Civilizations (RMA CAC) is one of the two research master's programmes of the Faculty of Humanities of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). The responsibility for the organization of education, quality assurance and student guidance of the RMA CAC is in the hands of an RMA programme director who is directly accountable to the Dean of Education at the VU Faculty of Humanities. In managing the RMA programme, this director is assisted by two coordinators, one at VU and one at UvA. The Faculty of Humanities at VU has a faculty-wide Examination Board, which is responsible for ensuring the quality of the examinations within the Research Master's programme. The Teaching and Examination Regulations (TER) of the programme are the responsibility of the Faculty Board, which establishes these regulations after consulting the relevant student and employee participation bodies.

While the RMA CAC is accredited at VU only, it also benefits from its close association with the Amsterdam Centre for Ancient Studies and Archaeology (ACASA) through its staff. ACASA is a collaboration between VU and the University of Amsterdam (UvA), which offers three joint bachelor's programmes in Classics, Ancient Studies and Archaeology and two one-year master's programmes in Classics and Ancient Civilizations (MA CAC) and in Archaeology. In addition, the two universities offer specialisations in Ancient History within their own separate bachelor's degrees in History. ACASA has its own executive board (ACASA Board) to handle management on a day-to-day basis. The cooperation allows students to follow classes at both universities, resulting in a much greater diversity of courses offered. Research master students of the RMA CAC may also choose electives from among the courses offered by ACASA in the one-year MA CAC. The staff participating in ACASA consists of lecturers working at the Humanities faculties at VU and UvA. Regular staff meetings and consultations, both within VU and between VU and UvA, ensure that all agreements and regulations are known to everyone concerned and are implemented and complied with in a consistent way. A CANVAS Community site called 'Information for ACASA lecturers', accessible to the staff of both institutions, is used and managed by the programme directors.

The participation of staff and students in the management of the RMA CAC programme is ensured by the Programme Committee for the ACASA master's programmes at VU. The committee approves and advises on the educational programme and the TER. The Examination Board appoints course examiners, who may include members of UvA staff. It also independently determines whether a student meets the conditions set by the TER for obtaining the degree.

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes
The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

Findings

Profile
The research master's programme Classics and Ancient Civilizations (RMA CAC) aims to train students to function successfully in a research-oriented position. These positions are not restricted to a scholarly career in academia, but also include professional fields in society at large, such as museums, scientific institutes, libraries, scientific publishers and secondary education. These objectives are considered appropriate by the panel, and it also acknowledges the advantages of a research-oriented training for both a professional and academic career. It considers the RMA CAC to be unique in the Netherlands. Internationally, the programme considers the programmes offered at the Universities of Durham and Innsbruck as its benchmarks. The University of Durham essentially offers Classics with some added programme elements in Ancient History, while the University of

Innsbruck is more focused on the full intermarriage of Classics and Ancient Studies. In the panel's opinion, the RMA CAC programme steers a course between these approaches, and its profile is also considered distinctive in this respect.

According to the panel, the RMA CAC differentiates itself from similar programmes through its attention to disciplinarity in an interdisciplinary context, by offering courses on reception studies, neo-Latin, and Byzantium, and through the inclusion of some rare specialities and languages, for example Akkadian and Syriac. The programme's double orientation on disciplinary specialisation as well as a broader interdisciplinary setting was recently articulated. This broad scope is linked to the aim to attract students from more varied backgrounds. Both initiatives are considered beneficial by the panel, which considers the reformulated profile attractive. It finds the attention devoted to reception studies an asset, and advises the programme to involve other departments of the Faculty (Faculteit Geesteswetenschappen; FGW) to bolster this aspect, for example by inviting contributions from colleagues from Philosophy and Theology. These scholars are well-placed to connect the reception of the Classical and Ancient world firmly to modern day society, avoiding an interpretation of reception studies as a merely historical concept. This would further enrich and diversify the programme. The panel also recommends clearly defining which geographical and linguistic areas of the Ancient world are key for the programme's profile in order to present potential cross-over points with Classics and reception studies more attractively for prospective students.

The dual emphasis on disciplinary specialisation and interdisciplinarity is a rich breeding ground for new research, in the panel's view, and therefore fitting for a research master's programme aiming to train the researchers of the future. Simultaneously, the panel recognises the programme's concern that too much attention to this dual dimension may scare away talented students who are looking for specialisation within a specific field or discipline. It advises presenting the advantages of the adopted approach more confidently. Graduates of the programme could hereby serve as ambassadors; alumni proved to be well versed in explaining the benefits of the chosen approach for their academic and professional careers. These advantages could be summarised as 'breaking down boundaries' and 'creating new research opportunities'.

Intended learning outcomes
The programme has six general (G1-6) and seven programme-specific (P1-7) intended learning outcomes (ILOs). For an overview of these ILOs, see Appendix 1. The general ILOs serve all regular and research master's programmes in the Humanities at the FGW. These learning outcomes reflect the Dublin descriptors for master's programmes and are of an appropriate academic attainment level. This is apparent from indicators referring to the complexity levels students attain (for example, G1 and G4) and from a focus on analytical skills and the importance of delivering an original contribution to the field (G1 and G2). The panel appreciates the attention paid to transferable skills in these general outcomes. It feels, however, that the aim for originality, while praiseworthy, may be rather ambitious if demanded of every single master's student within the FGW. While it does not wish to dampen the ambition of the FGW, it advises reformulating this aim and moving it to the programme-specific aims for research master programmes.

The RMA CAC communicated its focus on research capacities within its specific research fields in seven programme-specific (P1-7) ILOs. These also follow the Dublin descriptors. The focus on the attainment of integrated research skills is particularly reflected in P5, which demonstrates the high level and research-oriented ambitions of the programme. The programme-specific ILOs have recently been revised and modified. The panel noticed some positive changes. For example, the ability to work with primary sources (P2) has been reformulated more concisely and clearly. The panel advises returning to these outcomes alongside sharpening the programme's profile, paying attention to the objectives focused on reception studies. It noted that the ability to perform a comparative study of antiquity and modern studies is less prominently represented in the new set of ILOs, although it considers this objective valuable. It learnt that the programme already has plans to redraft the programme-specific ILOs to bring out the notion of disciplinarity in an interdisciplinary context more clearly and explicitly. This initiative is applauded. In addition, the panel thinks that there is scope for

spelling out in further detail how the ILOs serve the programme's dual aim of catering to students who pursue an academic career and those who pursue careers outside academia.

Considerations
Over the period under assessment, the programme revised its profile. The panel applauds the new focus on disciplinarity in an interdisciplinary context, which it considers distinctive and attractive in both a national and international perspective. It encourages the programme to continue developing this new profile. Avenues to explore could include, amongst others, collaboration with other departments within the FGW, firmly identifying reception studies as an asset and distinctive feature, and placing the unique linguistic and geographic research fields available in the context of its more traditional focus on the Classics. A more active involvement of alumni may help to define a profile that expresses the advantages of the new identity for talented students in a more attractive manner.

The panel established that the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of the RMA CAC are aligned with the Dublin descriptors for the master's degree level, including the attainment of relevant skills and knowledge at the required degree level. The ILOs focus on the achievement of relevant research skills and the conduct of research and are regularly revised. Hence, the panel concluded that the ILOs are also in line with the character of the programme as a research-oriented programme. It advises redrafting the programme-specific learning outcomes in such a way that the dual aim of catering to students who pursue an academic career and those who pursue careers outside academia is communicated more clearly. It also welcomes paying more attention to the place of reception studies within both the profile of the programme and the learning outcomes.

Conclusion
Research master's programme Classics and Ancient Civilizations: 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

Programme language and name
All modules offered in the RMA CAC are taught in English, which is considered appropriate by the panel given its ambitions to train the researchers of the future in Classics and Ancient Studies. English has become the lingua franca of research in Classics and Ancient Studies; research in these fields has been highly international in its outlook and orientation since its coming of age as a discipline. Research is often multidisciplinary and based on international collaboration, just as the source material and reference texts are often multilingual. The panel verified that staff members are qualified to teach in English; they receive sufficient training, if necessary, and their languages skills are tested accordingly. Since 2014, international admissions accounted for 24% of the total student intake; students came from Greece, Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom. As part of the admission procedure, the students provide proof of a sufficient command of English. If necessary, they can follow extra-curricular language courses to further improve their academic writing skills in English. The panel considers the name of the programme appropriate and in line with its profile and orientation.

Curriculum
The RMA CAC is a two-year degree of 120 EC. The study programme comprises four main elements: mandatory, interdisciplinary core modules (18 EC), modules on research design and communication offered by the VU Graduate School of Humanities (12 EC), specialisations or tutorials (60 EC) and a thesis (30 EC). Although the RMA CAC has no separate tracks, the students are encouraged to choose their electives from one of four clusters which reflect the research interests of the various members

of the academic staff: Classics (1), Ancient History (2), Archaeology (3) and Languages and Cultures of the Ancient Near East (4). One additional stipulation regarding electives is in place: the students have to follow 10 EC in courses at one of the associated National Research Schools (ARCHON or OIKOS). For an overview, see Appendix 2.

Currently, two core courses exist: 'Text and Matter' (12 EC) and 'Interdisciplinary Theme – Ethnicity' (6 EC). The core modules are scheduled biannually and alternate, to bring together two cohorts of the RMA CAC at the start of each year. The topics studied in these courses may vary over the years, allowing for the introduction of new themes and research. 'Text and Matter' is also followed by research master students of the Archaeology master of the University of Amsterdam, further diversifying the classroom. The panel studied the content and structure of the two core courses and considered them excellent in design. Knowledge acquisition and research skills are offered in a well-integrated manner, and both modules benefit from a good interdisciplinary approach in line with the programme's profile and aims. Research ethics are also included. The modules use up-to-date literature and connect to current ideas and new research in the relevant fields and disciplines. The panel considers a compliment for the programme in order; students and alumni told the panel that the core courses had been essential for them in identifying the benefits of interdisciplinary approaches for disciplinary research. The panel learnt that the programme will reduce 'Text and Matter' in the coming year to 6 EC to allow the introduction of a third core course on reception studies ('Receptions: Transformations of Classical and Near Eastern Literature and Culture') in line with the programme's profile and the research interests of staff members. This initiative is welcomed by the panel; it advises also including the reception of the Ancient and Classical world in modern times in this course.

About half of the specialisation modules taken by most students are specifically designed for the RMA CAC. Students choose relevant courses in close collaboration with their tutors that add to their integrated knowledge and research skills attainment. They may also use part or all of their elective space for an internship. In these cases, the programme works closely with the student, Examination Board and prospective internship provider to guarantee an internship of sufficient level that includes elements of research. Tutorials are also tailored towards a student's individual needs for research, for example by introducing the basics of a certain language or methodology. This individual tailoring also allows the programme to bring skills usually learnt in the bachelor's programme (for example: Latin) up to the required level in a short period of time; in this way, tutorials can function as 'pressure cookers of learning', integrating skills learning with knowledge acquisition within a specific field relevant to the student's research objectives. The panel considers this use of tutorials appropriate and an essential part of RMA students' research training.

The combination of core courses, electives and tutorials prepares students for their thesis research (30 EC). During the thesis trajectory, they complete a full research cycle independently. They identify a relevant topic of research that fits the RMA CAC's research context, formulate a suitable research question and choose the best research method, and communicate their approach through a research plan. After receiving suggestions and (peer)feedback, RMA students conduct their research and write a thesis that is subsequently presented for assessment. The panel considers this trajectory sufficient proof of the students' mastery of the full research cycle. The programme may want to consider introducing an oral defence at the end of the thesis trajectory as part of its assessment; this gives students an additional experience that may prove valuable for their further career.

Students may also follow electives from the regular one-year master's programme; this is rarely more than 30 EC of an individual programme. The panel discussed this practice with the programme staff during the site visit and learnt that research master students are often given more demanding assignments for papers or additional required reading of texts in the original languages. During the site visit, it received an overview of these additional assignments and noted that they often take the form of added reading. In this way, the programme has tried to address some of the positioning concerns the KNAW committee had in the previous assessment. The panel does not share the earlier concern of the KNAW committee: the RMA CAC and one-year master's programme CAC both have a

clearly defined identity, and courses may overlap in certain aspects. It would advise looking for further standardisation of the additional assignments for RMA students, however; it formulated some suggestions regarding the assessment of these courses below, under Standard 3.

The general design of the curriculum is considered suitable and attractive by the panel. In reaction to earlier recommendations by the KNAW committee, the programme has spread its mandatory courses more evenly over the two years. The students have a great freedom to choose their own pathway, making the programme highly student-centred. They confirmed that they are given plenty of support and guidance when choosing their electives. At the start of the programme, each of them chooses a senior staff member as their tutor. The tutor and student regularly discuss the design of his/her individual curriculum, with special emphasis on the connection between his/her ideas for a master thesis and the need for tutorials. They create together an individual learning trajectory, which is accumulative where necessary. The panel considers this practice sound. It advises highlighting this accumulative character of a student's learning path to increase transparency. This could be obtained by describing modules in terms of difficulty level, for example level 400 going up to 600, and by tying these difficulty levels to the modules' objectives and the programme's ILOs.

Based on the study of some sample courses, the panel concluded that the teaching methods are generally diverse and innovative. It was also pleased with the quantity of small-scale seminars, which are good for nurturing discussion and allow for close contact between students, but also between students and staff members. The result is an engaged, interactive classroom. The panel has two more suggestions based on its study of the curriculum and the contents of courses. First, it would be good to integrate the 'Editing and Commenting Technique' course more fully into the curriculum. This course currently is for students specialising in Greek and Latin Languages and Cultures. The panel advises either redesigning the module so that it can be opened up to 'non-classicists' or, if this proves difficult, embedding it in a range of skills-oriented modules for students from different disciplinary backgrounds in which knowledge and skills acquisition are thematically integrated. This would benefit the consistency of the programme, offering another opportunity for interdisciplinary exchange between two fields of study and thus bringing 'classical' Classical Studies and Near Eastern Studies further into balance. Second, the panel advises bringing out more explicitly the ways in which research skills, including research ethics, are incorporated in the modules. The students and alumni confirmed that these skills and attitudes were generally addressed as part of their modules and thesis trajectory, but this was not apparent from the documentation provided.

Since the last assessment of the programme, many changes have been introduced in the thesis trajectory. First, the programme reconsidered the objectives of the thesis. The KNAW assessment committee had noted that the interdisciplinary nature of the programme was hardly reflected in the thesis, although it was an objective of the thesis to be an interdisciplinary study. In response, the programme reconsidered this aim in line with their chosen profile of offering 'disciplinarity in an interdisciplinary context'. It upholds its aim to deliver graduates who are motivated and trained to carry out research from an interdisciplinary perspective. It also believes that students should be taught to contribute to interdisciplinary research on the basis of a thorough disciplinary training. Yet, to support a balance, the programme decided to shift the interdisciplinarity focus to the core courses and to drop interdisciplinarity as a learning objective for the thesis. This move is considered well-conceived and suitable by the panel. Second, a thesis contract was introduced, which transparently manages obligations and expectations for the students, supervisors and assessors. Third, the thesis manual was intensively revised in 2017, and reviewed again in 2020. In the panel's view, these formal and structural changes allow for a well-organised thesis trajectory, with sufficient attention paid to guidance.

The panel learnt from the self-reflection report that theses should be of publishable standard; this objective is currently not reflected in the thesis manual. Master theses of students in the Humanities are usually not publishable as they stand, according to the panel, due to their form and size. Revisions are commonly needed to reshape a thesis into an article or book chapter, which is considered very

acceptable by the panel. The quality of a thesis should be a basis for a publication in the near future and contain solid, preferably original, research. The panel thus advises rephrasing this objective.

Teaching staff, research context and teaching-learning environment
The panel verified that the research credentials of the teaching staff are very good to excellent. The teaching staff also received sufficient training, and all have obtained their university teaching certificate (Basiskwalificatie Onderwijs, BKO). Senior staff at the RMA CAC are involved in research at the interfaculty Research Institute for Culture, Cognition, History and Heritage (CLUE+). The panel studied the policy plan 2016-2020, the annual report 2018 and the 2016 review report according to the Standard Evaluation Protocol for the interfaculty research institute. It concluded that CLUE+ offers a stimulating and engaging research environment for staff members, which creates fertile ground for the teaching environment of the RMA CAC. In addition, ACASA also offers plenty of leads for collaborative research and teaching opportunities between staff members of the VU and UvA.

Many staff members involved in CLUE+ and ACASA have been recipients of highly competitive research grants and are involved in exciting international research projects and collaborations. They integrate their high-quality research directly into their teaching, guaranteeing a research-led and stimulating teaching-learning environment for students of the RMA CAC. The panel considers the ACASA collaboration a strong point of the existing teaching-learning environment, from which the RMA CAC benefits through the involvement of the teaching staff. Senior researchers and professors are involved and often supervise thesis trajectories and tutorials, allowing students plenty of time for the exchange of ideas. The students speak highly of their teachers, calling them approachable, committed and knowledgeable. They also feel taken seriously as emerging scholars in their own right. Students and alumni praised their tutors in particular, who often went 'the extra mile' to prepare them for a career in research.

The panel is pleased with the diversity of the staff's expertise. Due to the dual construction of ACASA, which allows staff members from both universities to teach in the RMA CAC, the students have many opportunities for taking tutorials and modules in different disciplines, ranging from Classical Archaeology to linguistics and literature of rare languages and even to environmental history. During the site visit, the panel exchanged views with the programme and Faculty management regarding recent staff changes. One professor retired, and two other leading scholars within the field departed to other universities. The management pointed out that one departure had been to UvA, meaning that this particular field was still covered within ACASA. Also, the management explained that a robust hiring agreement was in place, agreed upon by VU and UvA for ACASA and its related programmes, including the research master programmes CAC and Archaeology. These statements imply that all necessary expertise will still be covered in the future for the RMA CAC. Particularly with respect to reception studies, the panel advises carefully taking stock of the available expertise in this area amongst other VU staff members at the Faculty of Humanities. It suggests also considering involving senior staff members from other teaching programmes to further strengthen the programme's profile in this specific field.

According to the panel, the teaching and research facilities for students are of good quality. The students have access to two large university libraries, plus good research facilities for Archaeology, and are also introduced to the extended research networks of ACASA staff members, including many cultural institutions in Amsterdam. There is also a physical space in which teachers and students come together: the Classics Research Room. During the site visit, the panel got a virtual tour of this room, meeting with its initiator and students, past and present, who use or have used the room. All were very enthusiastic and gave examples of how this physical space enhances direct contact between staff and students and students amongst themselves. The room is also used as a repository library and for giving papers and seminars, inviting external speakers for discussion and presentation. The panel considers the Classics Research Room very stimulating. At the moment, this room seems to target first and foremost research students of Classics. The programme management and staff emphasised that the room was open to all research master students of the programme, also students from other fields than Classics. This could be made more obvious, for example by changing the name

of the research room to be more inclusive. The panel also encourages initiatives in the programming for the research room that focus on exchange between the fields, to make the programme's aim to present disciplinary research in an interdisciplinary context more tangible and visible.

Career preparation
The panel verified whether students of the programme were satisfied with the general courses provided by the Graduate School of Humanities and with the courses offered at the National Research Schools. The students follow two courses, 'Essentials of Humanities Research' (6 EC) and 'Humanities Research Career Preparation' (6 EC). In general, all agreed that these courses were of an adequate level. They indicated that they would welcome additional information on non-academic careers. The current module on career preparation is considered good, but mostly focused on preparing for an academic career. The panel was pleased to see proposal writing and interview preparation as part of this course. It acknowledges that striking a balance between preparing for an academic career and a non-academic career is always hard, yet necessary considering the programme's dual aim. It encourages the programme to rethink how it prepares students for non-academic careers together with the Graduate School. The students really enjoyed their courses at the National Research Schools, valuing the interaction and exchange with their fellow students from other Dutch research master's programmes. The panel considers this interchange an asset and sees the dynamics created within the National Research Schools as a valuable part of the students' academic career preparation.

Admission and intake
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. This may also help in attracting international students. In the period of assessment, prospective students needed to have obtained a bachelor's degree in Greek and Latin Language and Culture, Ancient Studies, Archaeology, or History with Ancient Studies as a specialisation from a university in the Netherlands or abroad. The panel advises paying additional attention to explaining these requirements to an international audience, for example with regards to the grade requirements. It noted that the programme secured additional money for communication, which should be used to improve the programme's visibility (national and international).

At the moment, the majority of the student intake obtained their bachelor degree at the universities of ACASA, VU and UvA (72%). The panel was pleased, nevertheless, to note that the intake is becoming more diverse, bringing in new perspectives from outside of Amsterdam. It also considered the actions that were taken since the last assessment, with the aim to diversify the intake, to be reasonable. For example, the lowering of the minimum BA average and BA thesis marks from 8.0 to 7.5 seems sensible to the panel and should not depress the quality of the intake. As of 2020, bachelor's degrees in Assyriology, Religious Studies, and Philosophy with a specialisation in Ancient Philosophy are also considered admissible. The panel welcomes this opening up of the programme; it considers the added degree programmes in line with the newly formulated profile. It hopes that the chosen reorientation will result in further diversification of the intake, allowing for increasing interdisciplinary exchange and cross-over in research interests. It concluded that the programme acted prudently upon the recommendations of the previous assessment and mid-term review.

Feasibility
The KNAW committee was worried in the last assessment about the low completion rates of the programme. Since then, the programme has taken several measures to address these concerns. It introduced a thesis contract to manage the students' expectations and intensified its tutoring programme. It also introduced new and more varied assessment methods, which seems to have taken away some impediments in course work. Earlier, some students lost themselves in paper writing, which resulted in delays. Together with the staff, the programme looked at the tendency of some students to extend their studies in the hope of being in a better position for finding an academic position. This tendency required a shift in the attitudes of both lecturers and students. Graduating

on time is increasingly seen as an important criterion for success within the programme, supported by university-wide *cum laude* regulations which no longer allow major delays.

Students and alumni indicated that they felt sufficiently guided. They had not encountered major difficulties within the programme's design or scheduling. In the occasional case in which the time scheduling of courses clashed, the programme acted directly upon the students' feedback in an appropriate manner. All in all, students felt that the programme was feasible within the time allowed. The panel wants to commend the programme for the way in which it addressed this earlier concern. It considers the measures taken appropriate and notes that completion rates have also slightly improved in the period under consideration. Based on these measures and the students' statements during the site visit, it trusts the programme to improve its completion rates further in the coming years.

Considerations
The panel established that the RMA CAC offers students an abundance of choice of good quality courses within the broad field of Classical and Ancient Studies, Archaeology and Ancient History. The design and structure of the curriculum allow them to achieve the intended learning outcomes at an appropriate level for a research master's programme. The panel considered the interdisciplinary modules it studied to be of excellent quality and also highly appreciates the tutorials, which allow the students to design a tailor-made individual study trajectory preparing them for a career in research. It considers the guidance given by creating individual learning paths appropriate, culminating in a fully independently exercised research cycle in the thesis trajectory. It advises highlighting the accumulative character of these individual learning trajectories, perhaps by describing the modules in terms of difficulty level. In addition, it heartily recommends the introduction of a thesis defence. The current module on career preparation is also considered of good quality; the panel was pleased to see proposal writing and interview preparation are part of this course. The preparation for non-academic careers could nevertheless be strengthened further in the coming years.

Module descriptions as submitted to the panel demonstrated the use of up-to-date literature, approaches and methods and clearly show that the programme is strongly embedded in research. The students also receive relevant skills training suited to their wish to pursue a research career. Research skills and ethics could be more explicitly communicated in the relevant module information. The panel welcomes the introduction of a third core course on reception studies and suggests including the reception of the Ancient and Classical world in modern times in this module, potentially involving VU staff members who are not yet part of the teaching staff for RMA CAC. In addition, it advises redesigning the 'Editing and Commenting Technique' course, and/or embedding it in a range of skills-oriented modules for students from different disciplinary backgrounds. This would benefit the consistency of the programme's curriculum, bringing Classical Studies and Near Eastern Studies further in balance through additional interdisciplinary exchange.

The teaching-learning environment at RMA CAC strongly benefits from being embedded in the research of staff members at the interfaculty research institute CLUE+ and the collaborative teaching available in ACASA. The students also benefit from good teaching and research facilities. The Classics Research Room in particular is considered an asset that holds great potential for further exchange between disciplines in an interdisciplinary context. Teaching at the RMA CAC is research-led, student-centred and pays attention to the students' personal growth and development. The teaching staff are experts in the field with a strong research record. The panel is pleased with the excellent support offered by tutors and praises staff members' commitment to the students and their further careers. 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. Due to the international character of the degree programme, intercultural exchange is also guaranteed. This also fits the programme's aims and graduates' career perspectives, and the panel therefore fully endorses the programme's opting for an English-language teaching environment. The admission procedures are considered sound. The panel wants to compliment the programme on its continuous efforts to increase and diversify its intake, which also seems to have had some positive results.

The panel concluded that the programme acted promptly and prudently upon the recommendations given in the last KNAW assessment and the mid-term review. It considers this development-oriented attitude highly advantageous and trusts the programme to use its suggestions to their advantage. It concluded that the curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Conclusion
Research Master's programme Classics and Ancient Civilizations: the panel assesses Standard 2 as 'meets the standard'.

Standard 3: Student assessment
The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

Findings
Assessment within RMA CAC follows the faculty-wide assessment policy, which was recently revised in response to the new framework that was adopted by the university in 2018. Central to this assessment policy is the idea that the quality of assessment depends on the quality of the teaching staff. As a result, peer feedback among staff members is deemed essential for the design of tests and assessment methods. The panel considers the institutional arrangements in place for safeguarding quality assurance in assessment to be robust. Based on these institutional policies, the RMA CAC has its own assessment plan outlining the ways in which the general aims translate into practice within the programme. This assessment plan was completely redrafted in 2019-2020, and all teaching staff members were involved in the revision. According to the panel, this peer review approach enhances the quality of assessment and promotes a shared concern for safeguarding it. It studied the draft version of the new assessment plan that will be in place by September 2020, and considered it satisfactory.

The assessment plan of the RMA CAC describes the educational vision of the degree programme. Its general point of departure is the didactic principle of 'constructive alignment', according to which the teaching methods and methods of assessment of a course are attuned to the course objectives and the programme's final objectives. The programme uses an assessment file for every course, containing a course description as well as test matrices, model answers and/or written instructions and rubrics. The use of standard assessment forms further ensures comparability across the methods used in all of the modules. The panel appreciated the detailed assessment plan; it considered the complete system of assessment well thought-out, using clearly formulated assessment criteria. It deemed the system of assessment transparent in the alignment between types of assessment and learning objectives. It advises making the attainment of programme-specific ILO 7 (classics in modern society) more explicit in the assessment plan and module guide. It learnt during the site visit that this particular ILO is extensively covered in the assessment of one of the core courses in weekly assignments, but this was not clear from its study of the documentation. As a result, the attainment of this ILO is currently implicit rather than explicit.

The panel encountered a healthy mix of assessment methods in the assessment plan and course descriptions for RMA CAC, which are also clearly directed towards the testing of the acquired research skills and attitudes. For example, it noted oral presentations, scientific written texts and proposal and abstract writing. These testing methods are thus a fair reflection of the character of the programme as a research master's programme; the assessment methods reflect an environment focusing on discussion, exchange of ideas, the development of research skills and the pursuit of new research lines. The panel considered the assessment methods in one of the courses ('Text and matter') to be exemplary: a good variation of inventive and student-centred testing methods of high quality that were transparently aligned to the aims of a research master's programme. It noticed that one of the other courses ('Editing and commenting') was now tested by means of an oral examination, although a written test might be more in line with a module introducing essential

techniques, skills and knowledge. It leaves it up to programme to take this suggestion into consideration. In addition, it was impressed by the level of reflection on the assessment methods encountered in the studied documentation; it considered the attention paid to the way in which each assessment type may be employed to the greatest effect to be an example of good practice.

In the panel's view, the students are given clear and sufficient instruction on what is expected from them regarding learning objectives and assessment methods through the electronic learning environment CANVAS, syllabi and course catalogues. The students confirmed during the site visit that they felt well-informed regarding expectations and the way in which assessment was organised. They were also satisfied with the amount of feedback received, both formally and informally from their assessors, and considered the assessment of their work fair and reliable. The feedback policies seem fit for purpose.

Thesis assessment
The panel looked at a selection of theses and the accompanying assessment forms. It considered the assessments of satisfactory quality. In most cases, it agreed with the marks awarded. In some cases, it would have been inclined to more lenient grading, in particular when two assessors of the same area of expertise were paired as examiners. It was told during the site visit that the programme director tries to avoid fixed assessment pairs when approving the nomination of assessors, a practice of which the panel approves. In practice, the first assessor suggests a second assessor. This often seems to result in pairings within the same research field. This pairing within the same specialism is often related to the fact that the second assessor is also involved in a go/no-go decision regarding the thesis plan, approving the topic and thesis design along with the student's writing schedule. The programme assured the panel that the second assessor as a rule is not involved in the actual supervision, so s/he can provide an independent assessment. These practices were confirmed by alumni of the programme. The details of the assessment procedure are set out in the faculty's thesis regulations; the panel thinks that they could be reformulated for the benefit of the students to state the impartiality of the second assessor even more clearly. It would also suggest opening up the nomination of the second assessor, for example by consultation at a staff meeting or a decision made by programme directors after a call for volunteers.

One thesis was considered barely worth a pass grade by the panel. It learnt from the documentation and interviews that this was a special case: a resit of a weak student who had engaged in plagiarism. Although it could agree with a pass based on the information conveyed, it considered the feedback on the form too limited to support this decision. Also in some other cases, it noted a lack of in-depth motivation for the grade decision, in particular given the importance of the thesis within the programme and the limited number of students. These cases of limited feedback were balanced by some forms offering transparent, detailed and robust feedback. They demonstrated the need for an exchange of good feedback practices amongst staff. The students told the panel during the site visit that they always received substantive oral feedback in addition to the formal feedback on the forms. Hence, the panel concluded that sufficient feedback is guaranteed in practice. Nevertheless, it asks the Examination Board to strictly monitor the provision of formal feedback and advises continuous instruction of the faculty regarding feedback practices, for example by organising calibration sessions in which staff can compare notes and learn from each other.

The panel encountered a variety of assessment forms, which it learnt was due to faculty-wide and ACASA-wide revisions of the form. The programme was also transparent regarding the fact that these changes could not cover all of the variations encountered. In rare cases, the wrong assessment form had been used. These instances had been picked up by the Examination Board, and in response, a CANVAS Community was created for ACASA teachers to facilitate access to forms and general tools such as plagiarism software. Staff members confirmed that since the creation of this community, access to assessment forms was no longer an issue. The panel considers these measures appropriate.

The Examination Board also pointed out that by involving multiple assessors in the assessment, the fairness and reliability of assessment were strengthened. The panel agreed that the involvement of

the second assessor in the period under consideration had assured the quality and reliability of assessment. It fully supports the Examination Board's emphasis on trust in the assessors' individual professionalism, which is backed up by due attention paid to the staff member's professional qualifications, such as a BKO. It also approves of the procedure in which assessors individually grade a thesis, but would advise communicating and substantiating the final grade decision in a more transparent way, for example by always supplying a substantiation for the final grade.

Examination Board
Within the VU FGW, the Examination Board operates as an internal supervisor for all programmes in the Faculty, including the RMA CAC. It officially appoints the programme's examiners. Staff members employed by the University of Amsterdam and partaking in ACASA are also officially appointed as examiners at VU. ACASA guarantees that the rules of assessment and the way in which they are implemented and instructed are in line at both universities. There is a dedicated assessment chamber within the Examination Board. A staff member of RMA CAC is part of this chamber, and represents the programme. The assessment chamber monitors tests and theses and, where necessary, provides the relevant lecturer with recommendations for improvements, including the Faculty-wide Humanities training component in the RMA CAC programme. Lecturers are expected to provide feedback on the chamber's findings. The assessment chamber also draws up an annual plan stating which assessment dossiers will be analysed, distributed between the different programmes at the Faculty. Around twenty assessment dossiers and theses are analysed every year. For RMA CAC, this amounts to an average of two assessment dossiers and two theses. In addition, the assessment chamber sets the agenda regarding which matters with regard to assessment will receive attention that year. This seems appropriate to the panel.

During the site visit, the panel interviewed members of the Examination Board, including the programme representative who sits in the assessment chamber. Based on this interview, it concluded that the Board works according to the relevant procedures. For example, the Board came into action when the first case of plagiarism had been detected within the Faculty at RMA CAC and handled this case in an appropriate manner. Plagiarism software is now readily available for teachers in their CANVAS Community, and students are intensively instructed regarding fraud and plagiarism (including accidental) and how to avoid it. Theses are structurally tested after submission using plagiarism software, and assessment files are checked by the responsible secretary for completeness, including a plagiarism check prior to awarding a degree. According to the panel, these measures and checks indicate that sufficient attention is paid to avoiding cases of plagiarism in the programme.

The panel appreciates the Examination Board's efforts and encourages it to take a more proactive attitude. The Board sees its role first and foremost as a control mechanism at the end of assessment procedures, which is in line with its legal obligations. A more proactive role, however, could add significantly to the quality awareness culture that the Board aims to create at the various programmes – for example, by taking the lead in the active exchange of assessment practices between staff members, within individual programmes but also across programmes, through offering dedicated training to introduce new assessment methods, and by organising calibration sessions. Initiatives such as these would be welcomed and encouraged by the panel.

The panel also discussed to what extent the Examination Board and assessment chamber were involved in setting additional requirements for electives that students of the RMA CAC could follow together with students of the one-year MA CAC. In some cases, additional assignments were offered for RMA students, but these assignments were not standardised. The members of the Board indicated that additional requirements for research master students are not obligatory by law, but agreed with the panel that further standardisation is beneficial as the current set-up may confuse students. The panel advises searching for a solution that introduces an additional research element into the assessment of these electives for RMA CAC students. It stresses the importance of looking for research-focused elements connected to the intended learning outcomes and programme, for example, by asking for a comparative element in the final paper in line with the programme's aim

for interdisciplinarity or by assessing students on their ability to chair a meeting or formulate relevant discussion questions. Peer-to-peer assessment could also play a role.

Considerations
The panel verified that the assessment methods used within the RMA CAC are varied and appropriate for a research master's degree, pay attention to the testing of research skills and drive the exchange of ideas and discussion. In particular, the core courses benefit from inventive and diverse assessment methods in line with the programme's aims. The panel advises making the attainment of programme-specific ILO 7 more explicit in the assessment plan, but verified that the attainment of all ILOs is guaranteed. It was impressed by the level of reflection on the assessment methods used. Also, the involvement of the teaching team in the review and reformulation of the assessment plan was considered a strong indication of the peer review approach adopted by the programme, which enhances the quality of assessment and promotes a shared concern for safeguarding it. The panel verified that students are well-informed and satisfied with the quality of the assessment and feedback received.

The panel considers the institutional arrangements in place for safeguarding quality assurance in assessment to be robust. It concluded that the Examination Board fulfils its formal tasks and responsibilities and that it works according to clear procedures. The quality awareness culture at the programme could benefit from a more proactive role by the Examination Board in offering training and the organisation of calibration sessions amongst staff members and facilitating the exchange of best practices across programmes within the Faculty. When standardising additional requirements for electives that research master students follow alongside regular one-year master students, the panel advises the programme to introduce additional research-focused elements. Options could include the assessment of the research master students' ability to identify relevant topics for discussion or the introduction of an interdisciplinary element into their module assignments. The panel trusts the programme to take these suggestions to heart, based on the clear awareness of the need for continuous development.

The panel looked at a selection of theses and the accompanying assessment forms. In most cases, it agreed with the marks awarded. In some cases, it would have been inclined to grade more leniently, particularly when two assessors from the same area of expertise were paired. It advises making the independence of the second assessor more visible. In addition, it formulated some recommendations designed to increase the transparency of the thesis assessment procedures. These suggestions do not hamper the overall level of the assessment of the reviewed theses or the independence of the assessments; the panel concluded that the assessments were by and large appropriate and of satisfactory quality. Taking all of the above into consideration, the panel concluded that the programme addressed all concerns raised by the KNAW committee in the previous assessment regarding the independence of the thesis assessment. The programme now has a robust system of assessment in place, based on trust in the professionalism of staff, which also solidly guarantees the independence of assessment.

Conclusion
Research master's programme Classics and Ancient Civilizations: the panel assesses Standard 3 as 'meets the standard'.

Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes
The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings
The panel studied the master theses of 15 students who graduated between 2015 and 2019. Although it did not fully agree with the marks given in certain cases (see Standard 3), it was pleased with their overall level. In general, the theses were well-constructed and demonstrated in-depth knowledge of the respective topics. In most cases, the research topics were directly connected to the specific

expertise of the VU staff members and their research at CLUE+, demonstrating that RMA students are embedded within the local research environment. Sometimes these collaborations also resulted in shared projects and/or articles upon graduation.

The theses ranged significantly in quality: some were of outstanding quality, some of a fair level, and others barely passed. To the panel, this seems to be as expected and in line with the dual aim of the programme to prepare students both for doctoral research and for relevant careers outside academia. The theses demonstrated to the panel that graduates of the research master's programme are capable of performing academic research on a level suitable for students aiming to pursue a career in research and that they achieve the programme's intended learning outcomes. In its opinion, the excellent theses revealed a good basis for future academic publications, after reworking the content into a suitable form. It also verified that some theses resulted in publications in article collections and/or peer-reviewed journals. In many cases, the master theses identified avenues for further research that often inspired research proposals that were successfully pitched to secure PhD positions.

Another sign of the programme's quality is the employment record of graduates in research. The panel found that this record is relatively high: almost half of the graduates find a PhD position, both in the Netherlands and abroad. In its view, this is a good success rate for a programme that operates in a relatively small research field in which the competition for positions is fierce. The alumni indicated that they felt well-supported and prepared by the programme to pursue these research positions, and commented on the additional value of their training at VU. Other graduates find employment in secondary education or in areas that do not necessarily require knowledge of ancient societies, for example governmental functions. This suggests to the panel that 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.

Considerations
Based on the overall level of the theses and the performance of graduates, the panel concluded that graduates achieve the programme's intended learning outcomes. In its view, the high proportion of graduates proceeding to careers in academia, the fact that graduates also function well in other professional contexts and education, the quality of the theses examined, and the fact that some theses result in publications after graduation and in successful research proposals are all evidence of their research qualities and relevant professional skills. Based on the evidence gathered from the theses, the panel also concluded that RMA students are fully embedded within the local research environment.

Conclusion
Research master's programme Classics and Ancient Civilizations: 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 Classics and Ancient Civilizations as 'meets the standard'. Based on the NVAO decision rules regarding limited programme assessments, it therefore assesses the programme as 'positive'.

Conclusion
The panel assesses the *research master's programme Classics and Ancient Civilizations* as 'positive'.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Intended learning outcomes 2019-2020:

General:
- G1: The student is able systematically and expediently to collect and interpret information. He/she is able to read, understand and analyse academic and other complex texts. In this way, the student acquires demonstrable knowledge and understanding that go further and deeper than the level of the Bachelor's programme, demonstrating that the student is capable of making an original contribution to the development and/or application of ideas (knowledge and understanding);
- G2: the student is able to apply knowledge, understanding and problem-solving skills in new or unfamiliar environments within a broader context that relates to his/her field of study. He/she is able to integrate knowledge and to work with complex material (application of knowledge and understanding);
- G3: the student is able to discern general themes and make connections which are meaningfully supported by a wide variety of primary and secondary literature and primary sources where relevant. He/she is able to formulate and defend a position independently, critically and honestly (making judgements);
- G4: the student is able to present a complex problem clearly and concisely in written or spoken form to an audience of specialists and non-specialists (communication);
- G5: the student is able to write a scientific paper in clear, effective and academic language and to deliver it within an agreed period (combination of knowledge and understanding, application of knowledge and understanding, making judgments and communication);
- G6: the student possesses learning skills that offer him/her the prospect of a PhD degree and/or an academic career (learning skills).

Programme-specific:
The Research Master's student:
- (P1) has knowledge of and insight into Ancient Studies that can be categorized within broad frameworks; this includes the linguistic, literary, historical and archaeological aspects of antiquity (knowledge and understanding);
- (P2) has a good understanding of the theoretical framework of Ancient Studies in general and is able to analyse academic literature concerning his or her in-depth specialization in the context of its theoretical background (knowledge and understanding; making judgments; learning skills);
- (P3) has thorough and specialist knowledge in one of the subfields of Ancient Studies (knowledge and understanding);
- (P4) is able to problematize and analyse in depth a problem of considerable complexity from the field of Ancient Studies (application of knowledge and understanding; making judgments; learning skills);
- (P5) is able to conduct academic research in the field of Ancient Studies in a critical, creative and inventive manner and to propose solutions to the problems identified (application of knowledge and understanding, making judgments, learning skills);
- (P6) is able to explain and justify the choices he or she makes in his or her research with clarity, both in writing and orally (making judgments, communication);
- (P7) has a thorough understanding of the relationship between Ancient Studies and society and is able to articulate with clarity the role and significance of antiquity for the present day as well as to assess this in a critical manner (application of knowledge and understanding, making judgments, communication).

APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

Research master Classics and Ancient Civilizations (120 EC), 2019-2020

	period 1	period 2	period 3	period 4	period 5	period 6
Year 1	Core Course * Text and Matter *or* Core Course * + Interdisciplinary Theme-Ethnicity (6 ec)	(12 ec) Specialization * module or tutorial (6 ec)		Essentials of Humanities (6 ec)	Specialization module or tutorial (6 ec)	Tutorial (6 ec)
	Specialization module or tutorial (6 ec)	Specialization** + module or tutorial (6 ec) *or* Editing and Commenting Technique 1 (6 ec)**	Tutorial** (6 ec) Editing and Commenting Technique 2 (6 ec)**	Specialization module or tutorial (6 ec)	Specialization module or tutorial (6 ec)	
Year 2	Core Course * Text and Matter *or* Core Course * + Interdisciplinary Theme-Ethnicity (6 ec)	(12 ec) Specialization * module or tutorial (6 ec)	Tutorial (6 ec)			
	Specialization modules or tutorial (6 ec)	Humanities Research Career Preparation (6 ec)		Thesis		(30 ec)

all students have to follow courses for at least 10 ec at one of the National Research Schools
 * subjects of Core Courses yearly alternate, for both 1st and 2nd year students
(*Interdisciplinary Theme-Ethnicity* (6 ec) and one Specialization module or tutorial (6 ec) in 2019-2020;
Text and Matter (12 ec) in 2020-2021).
** Only Classicists can choose *Editing and Commenting Technique 1* and *2* (6+6 ec); these courses are taught in 2019-2020.

Research master Classics and Ancient Civilizations (120 EC), 2020 – 2021

	period 1	period 2	period 3	period 4	period 5	period 6
Year 1 2020–2021	Core Course Receptions: Transformations of Classical and Near Eastern Literature and Culture (6 EC)	Core Course Text and Matter (6 EC)	Tutorial (6 EC)	Methodologies (6 EC)	Specialization module or tutorial (6 EC)	Tutorial (6 EC)
	Specialization module or tutorial (6 EC)	Specialization module or tutorial (6 EC)		Specialization module or tutorial (6 EC)	Specialization module or tutorial (6 EC)	
Year 2 2021–2022	Core Course Interdisciplinary Theme* (6 EC)	Specialization module Editing and Commenting Technique** (6 EC) *or* Specialization module or tutorial (6 EC)	Tutorial (6 EC)	ReMA Thesis (30 EC)		
	Specialization module or tutorial (6 EC)	Humanities Research Career Preparation (6 EC)				

* Theme for 2021-22 Ethnicity in the ancient world
** Only Classicists choose Editing and Commenting Technique

Research master Classics and Ancient Civilizations (120 EC)
For students starting September 2021

	period 1	period 2	period 3	period 4	period 5	period 6
Year 1 2021–2022	Core Course Interdisciplinary Theme* (6 EC)	Core Course Editing and Commenting Technique** (6 EC) *or* Specialization module or tutorial (6 EC)	Tutorial (6 EC)	Methodologies (6 EC)	Specialization module or tutorial (6 EC)	Tutorial (6 EC)
	Specialization module or tutorial (6 EC)	Specialization module or tutorial (6 EC)		Specialization module or tutorial (6 EC)	Specialization module or tutorial (6 EC)	
Year 2 2022–2023	Core Course Receptions: Transformations of Classical and Near Eastern Literature and Culture (6 EC)	Core Course Text and Matter (6 EC)	Tutorial (6 EC)	ReMA Thesis (30 EC)		
	Specialization module or tutorial (6 EC)	Humanities Research Career Preparation (6 EC)				

* Theme for 2021-22 Ethnicity in the ancient world
** Only Classicists choose Editing and Commenting Technique

Obligatory (RMA students only):
- Three CAC Core modules (attended by students of both years 1 and 2) (6 + 6 + 6 = 18 EC)
- Two Humanities Core modules: Methodologies and Humanities Research Career Preparation (6 + 6 = 12 EC)
- Courses at a national Research School (at least 10 EC)

Specialization Modules (at least 30 EC)
Specialization courses can be taken from the graduate courses in Archaeology and/or Classics and Ancient Civilizations.

Tutorials (no more than 24 EC)
Tutorials are individual courses to be discussed with the tutor (study of literature, primary sources, research tasks).

The entire program is to be discussed with the tutor and needs to be accepted by the Examination Board.

APPENDIX 3: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

Preparation (28 May, 14-16 CET // 8-10 EDT)

14:00	15:00	Preparation site visit	60 minutes	60 minutes
15:00	15:15	*Break*	15 minutes	
15.15	15.45	Preparation site visit	30 minutes	45 minutes
15.45	16:00	Do's and Don'ts digital assessment + questions NVAO framework	15 minutes	

Actual site visit (9-10 June)

9 June 2020

14.00	14.15	Digital arrival panel	15 minutes	90 minutes
14.15	14.45	Open consultation hour	30 minutes	
14.45	15.30	Interview programme management	45 minutes	
15.30	16.00	*Break*	30 minutes	
16.00	16.15	Classics and Ancient Civilization in the showcase	15 minutes	15 minutes
16.15	16.30	*Break*	15 minutes	
16.30	17.00	Interview lecturers	30 minutes	30 minutes
17.00	17.30	*Break*	30 minutes	
17.30	18.00	Interview students	30 minutes	30 minutes
18.00	18.15	*Break*	15 minutes	
18.15	18.45	Interview alumni	30 minutes	30 minutes

10 June 2020

14.30	15.00	Internal deliberation panel	30 minutes	60 minutes
15.00	15.30	Interview Examination Board	30 minuten	
15.30	15.45	*Break*	15 minuten	
15.45	16.15	Interview programme management and member(s) Faculty Board	30 minutes	30 minutes
16.15	16.45	*Break*	30 minutes	
16.45	18.00	Internal deliberation	75 minutes	90 minutes
18.00	18.15	Feedback session	15 minutes	

Development dialogue (12 June 2020, 15.00-16.00 CET // 9.00-10.00 EDT)

15.00	15.15	Digital arrival panel	15 minutes	60 minutes
15.15	16.00	Development Dialogue	45 minutes	

APPENDIX 4: THESES AND DOCUMENTS STUDIED BY THE PANEL

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 theses of the master's programme Classics and Ancient Civilizations, based on a list of graduates from 2015-2019 provided by the university. A variety of topics and a diversity of examiners were included in the selection. The programme Classics and Ancient Civilizations at the VU has no tracks; the chair included a variety of topics 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. 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 via the institute's electronic learning environment):

Selfevaluation Report and appendices:

- Selfevaluation report
- Teaching and Examination Regulations
- Overview of RMa Programma CAC 2019-2020
- Overview of RMa Programma CAC 2020-2022
- Table teaching staff (R)Ma CAC
- CVs Teaching Staff core programme RMa CAC
- Factsheet RMa CAC October 2019
- Assessment plan RMa CAC
- Thesis Manual RMa programmes Humanities 2020
- Thesis agreement model and Thesis assessment form

Digital reading table:

a) Policy documents
- Educational vision of Faculty of Humanities (Dutch)
- Assessment Policy Faculty of Humanities
- Rules and Guidelines Examination Board FGW 2019-2020
- Assessment plan MA CAC (Dutch)
- CLUE+ Annual Report 2018
- CLUE+ Policy Plan 2016-2020
- Annual reports Examination Board (2018-2019; 2017-2018) (Dutch)
- Annual reports Programme Committee (2018-2019; 2017-2018) (Dutch)

b) Assessments
- Assessment dossiers
- Core Course Interdisciplinary Theme-Ethnicity
- Core Course Text and Matter
- Humanities Research Career Preparation
- Tutorials
- Classics
- Ancient Studies
- Examples of thesis agreements

c) Learning environment
- Instruction for access to CANVAS (digital learning environment)
- Video clip about Classics Research Room

d) Student publications
- Diemen, D. van/D. van Dokkum/A. van Leuken/A.M. Nijenhuis/F. van der Sande (eds), 2018: Conflicts in Antiquity: Textual and Material Perspectives (derived from Core Course Text and Matter)
- M. Kruijer/E. la Roi, 2018: Paradigmatic Possibilities as Perspective for Absolute Constructions. Exploring Linguistic Differences and Similarities of the Greek Genitive and Latin Ablative Absolute, Mnemosyne 71 (5), 799-822 (derived from Tutorial Greek and Latin Linguistics)
- la Roi, E. 2019. Epistemic modality, particles and the potential optative in Classical Greek, Journal of Greek Linguistics 19 (1), 58-89 (based on RMA thesis)

e) Assessment research institute CLUE
- Assessment report CLUE 2008-2013

Additional documentation:

- Additional requirements for RMa students in electives from the one-year master's programme
- Answers to the factual questions asked 1 week prior to the site visit