

Assessment report
Limited Framework Programme Assessment
Master Social and Cultural Anthropology
VU Amsterdam

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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 Master Social and Cultural Anthropology programme of VU Amsterdam, which has been assessed according to the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, as published on 20 December 2016 (Staatscourant nr. 69458).

The programme objectives are sound. The panel appreciates the programme to be strongly research-based and to be closely aligned with the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology research programme. The panel welcomes the programme's objectives to focus on the relevance of anthropological theory and methodology for addressing societal problems. The panel advises to articulate these dimensions more explicitly in the programme objectives. The programme objectives are up-to-date.

The programme objectives meet the requirements of the Reference Framework for Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology in the Netherlands. The panel welcomes the efforts by the joint programmes to draft this framework and regards this to be a sound description of this domain.

The panel welcomes students to be educated both for positions as researchers and for positions in the professional field.

The intended learning outcomes of the programme correspond to the programme objectives and conform to the master level. The panel is positive about the update of these. The panel advises to formulate the intended learning outcomes of the programme more clearly, especially in the applying knowledge and understanding section.

The entry requirements and admission procedures are adequate. The pre-master programme is seen by the panel as positive. The panel supports the plans of the programme to raise the student influx. The panel is pleased to see additional funds having been made available to accommodate rising influx numbers.

The panel is positive about the contents of the curriculum. The curriculum meets the intended learning outcomes of the programme. The courses are up to standard. The curriculum is well-organised and coherent. The panel appreciates the research orientation of the curriculum as well as the labour market orientation.

The panel regards the lecturers in the programme to be both good researchers and skilled teachers. The lecturers are strongly education-minded. The panel notes the lecturers being appreciated by students. The panel welcomes the diversity of the staff.

The panel regards the educational concept and study methods in the curriculum to be appropriate. The panel appreciates the research-based, tightly-organised and collaborative learning processes. The guidance and supervision in the curriculum are up to standard. The study load is balanced, be it quite challenging. The student success rates are favourable.

The panel approves of the examinations and assessment rules and regulations of the programme, these being in line with Faculty policies. The panel welcomes the responsibilities and tasks of the Examination Board and finds that the Board, including the sub-committee for this programme, monitor the quality of examinations and assessments appropriately.

The panel approves of the examination methods adopted in the programme. These are consistent with the goals and contents of the courses.

The supervision processes for the Master research projects are well-organised and intensive. The assessment processes for the projects are up to standard as well. The panel recommends to allow examiners to discuss their assessments of the Master research projects in case of differing grades. The panel also suggest to narrow the margin of 2.0 points between the examiners' grades of the Master research projects, before inviting the third examiner.

The panel considers the measures ensuring the validity, reliability and transparency of examinations and assessments to be up to standard.

The panel regards the Master research projects to be appropriate academic projects, covering the various stages in the research process. The panel supports the grades given by examiners of the programme.

The panel appreciates the measures taken in the programme to promote the labour market orientation of students and to foster the preparation for their future careers.

The panel regards the programme graduates to have reached the intended learning outcomes and to be qualified to find appropriate positions in a range of organisations.

The panel that conducted the assessment of the Master Social and Cultural Anthropology programme of VU Amsterdam 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 satisfactory. Therefore, the panel advises NVAO to accredit the programme.

Rotterdam, 20 February 2019

Prof. dr. T. Otto
(panel chair)

drs. W. Vercouteren
(panel secretary)

2. Assessment process

The evaluation agency Certiked VBI received the request by VU Amsterdam to manage the limited framework programme assessment process for the Master Social and Cultural Anthropology of this University. The objective of the programme assessment process was to assess 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, published on 20 December 2016 (Staatscourant nr. 69458).

Having conferred with management of the VU Amsterdam programme, 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 dr. T. Otto, full professor of Anthropology and Ethnography, University of Aarhus, Denmark, full professor and tropical leader, The Cairns Institute, James Cook University, Australia (panel chair);
- Dr E.D. Rasch, associate professor, Sociology of Development and Change Group, Wageningen University (panel member);
- Dr M.E. Pelkmans, associate professor in Anthropology, London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom (panel member);
- Drs E.B. Heiman, city anthropologist, organisational anthropologist, co-owner company De Staalmeesters (panel member);
- I. Corbeek, student Bachelor Cultural Anthropology and Development Studies, Radboud University (student member).

On behalf of Certiked, drs W. Vercouteren 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 and 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 the assessment process, the process coordinator convened with management of the programme to discuss the outline of the self-assessment report, the subjects to be addressed in this report and the site visit schedule. In addition, the planning of the activities in preparation of the site visit was discussed. In the course of the process preparing for the site visit, programme management and the Certiked process coordinator regularly had contact to fine-tune the process. The activities prior to the site visit have been 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 final projects of graduates of the programme of the most recent years. Acting on behalf of the assessment panel, the process coordinator selected the final projects of 15 graduates from the last few years. The grade distribution in the selection was ensured to conform to the grade distribution in the list, sent by programme management.

The panel chair and the panel members were sent the self-assessment report of the programme, including appendices. In the self-assessment report, the student chapter was included. In addition, the expert panel members were forwarded a number of theses of the programme graduates, these theses being part of the selection made by the process coordinator.

Several weeks before the site visit date, the assessment panel chair and the process coordinator discussed the self-assessment report provided by programme management, the procedures regarding the assessment process and the site visit schedule. In this meeting, the profile of panel chairs of NVAO was discussed as well. The panel chair was informed about the competencies, listed in the profile. Documents pertaining to a number of these competencies were presented to the panel chair. The meeting between the panel chair and the process coordinator served as the briefing for panel chairs, as meant in the NVAO profile of panel chairs.

Prior to the date of the site visit, all panel members sent in their preliminary findings, based on the self-assessment report and the final projects studied, and a number of questions to be put to the programme representatives on the day of the site visit. The panel secretary summarised this information, compiling a list of questions, which served as a starting point for the discussions with the programme representatives during the site visit.

Shortly before the site visit date, the complete panel met to go over the preliminary findings concerning the quality of the programme. During this meeting, the preliminary findings of the panel members, including those about the theses were discussed. The procedures to be adopted during the site visit, including the questions to be put to the programme representatives on the basis of the list compiled, were discussed as well.

On 22 November 2018, the panel conducted the site visit on the VU Amsterdam campus. The site visit schedule was as planned. In a number of separate sessions, the panel was given the opportunity to meet with Faculty Board representatives, programme management, Examination Board members, lecturers and final projects examiners, and students and alumni. In a closed session at the end of the site visit, the panel considered every one of the findings, weighed the considerations and arrived at conclusions with regard to the quality of the programme. At the end of the site visit, the panel chair presented a broad outline of the considerations and conclusions to programme representatives.

Clearly separated from the process of the programme assessment, assessment panel members and programme representatives met to conduct the development dialogue, with the objective to discuss future developments of the programme.

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 it 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 these factual inaccuracies, the Certiked bureau sent the report to the VU Amsterdam Board, to accompany their request for re-accreditation of this programme.

3. Programme administrative information

Name programme in CROHO: M Social and Cultural Anthropology
Orientation, level programme: Academic Master
Grade: MSc
Number of credits: 60 EC
Specialisations: None
Location: Amsterdam
Mode of study: Full-time (language of instruction English)
Registration in CROHO: 60049

Name of institution: VU Amsterdam
Status of institution: Government-funded University
Institution's quality assurance: Approved

4. Findings, considerations and assessments per standard

4.1 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 Master Social and Cultural Anthropology is one of the programmes of the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology of the Faculty of Social Sciences of VU Amsterdam. The dean of the Faculty has the responsibility for all programmes of the Faculty. The programme director of the programme, being assisted by the programme coordinator, is in charge of the coordination and organisation of the programme. The programme director is advised on the quality assurance of the programme by the Programme Committee, being composed of equal numbers of lecturers and students. The Faculty Examination Board has the authority to monitor the quality of examination and assessment processes and products. The Board is assisted in their responsibilities and tasks regarding this programme by the sub-committee for this programme.

The Master Social and Cultural Anthropology programme of VU Amsterdam is a one-year, research-based, academic master programme in this field. The programme objectives are to offer students advanced knowledge, understanding and skills in the field of anthropology. The programme focuses on cultural, political and social-economic processes on local, national or global levels and on the interaction between these levels. The programme allows for thematic specialisations, and is not directed towards regional specialisations. The thematic specialisations are anthropology of religion, diversity, ethnicity, identity and belonging and anthropology of development and globalisation, both themes studied from the perspective of mobility. The specialisations are derived from the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology research programme *Mobilities, Beliefs and Belonging: Confronting Global Inequalities and Insecurities*. This research programme studies the effects of the mobility of people, information, capital and goods. Mobility is, therefore, an essential part of the programme.

The objectives of the programme conform to the Reference Framework for Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology in the Netherlands, which has been drafted by the joint programmes of this assessment cluster in the Netherlands.

Students are educated to enter the labour market, being prepared to obtain positions as researchers or as advisors in government or in the private sector. To this end, students are taught to do anthropological research, but also are trained to apply anthropological theory and methodology to complex societal issues, especially in the fields of mobility, diversity and development. Programme management is counselled by the External Advisory Board on the alignment to academic and professional field requirements. The Board, being composed of senior academics and professionals, meets with programme management once a year.

The programme objectives have been translated into intended learning outcomes. The intended learning outcomes address, as the main points, critical and advanced knowledge and understanding of theory, concepts and current debates in anthropology, especially pertaining to mobility, diversity and development; knowledge of and skills in social science methodology and especially ethnographic research methods and techniques; knowing how to critically examine, analyse, summarise and synthesise complex societal issues on the basis of anthropological theory; and learning, collaboration and communication skills in this field and in intercultural contexts. Recently, the intended learning outcomes as well as the curriculum of the programme were updated in line with the research programme of the Department.

Programme management presented the comparison of the intended learning outcomes to the Dublin descriptors for the master level.

Consideration

The panel considers the programme objectives to be sound. The panel appreciates the programme to be strongly research-based and to be closely aligned with the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology research programme. The panel welcomes the programme objectives to focus on the relevance of anthropological theory and methodology for addressing societal problems. The panel advises to articulate these dimensions more explicitly in the programme objectives. The programme objectives are up-to-date.

The programme objectives meet the requirements of the Reference Framework for Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology in the Netherlands. The panel welcomes the efforts by the joint programmes to draft this framework and regards this to be a sound description of this domain.

The panel welcomes students to be educated both for positions as researchers and for positions in the professional field.

The intended learning outcomes of the programme correspond to the programme objectives and conform to the master level. The panel is positive about the update of these. The panel advises to formulate the intended learning outcomes of the programme more clearly, especially in the applying knowledge and understanding section.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 1, Intended learning outcomes, to be satisfactory.

4.2 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 student influx numbers remained rather stable during the last five years, being on average 30 to 40 incoming students per year. The programme has the intention to raise the influx. To this end, the pre-master programme has been renewed and talented students from Amsterdam University of Applied Science are accommodated to enrol. The recently introduced English-taught specialisation attracted substantially more students to the Bachelor programme, probably affecting influx numbers in this programme. Additional funds have been made available to accommodate rising student numbers. Students with bachelor in Anthropology degrees or having taken the minor Anthropology are admitted unconditionally. Other students have to meet the entry requirements set. Students having bachelor degrees from higher professional education institutes (hbo) have to pass the University pre-master assessment and are then admitted to the pre-master programme (30 EC). About 30 % to 40 % of the incoming students have taken the pre-master programme first. About 20 % of the incoming students are from abroad. These students have to meet specific requirements. Applications are reviewed by the Admission Board. The programme promotes student diversity.

The programme curriculum takes one year, the study load being in total 60 EC. In the assessment plan for the programme, the intended learning outcomes have been mapped to the goals of the courses. In the first part of the curriculum, two theory courses are scheduled, being *Theoretical Orientation on Mobility* courses (6 EC each). These courses introduce students to the anthropological concepts of mobility, diversity and development. In parallel, students take the course Field Research Design (12 EC), allowing them to select their research topic, draft their research plan and make practical arrangements for the Field Research. In the second theory course, students may select one of the specialisations offered to align the theory learnt to the research topic of their final project. During Field Research (18 EC), students conduct ethnographic research. Students may take part in one of the ongoing research projects of staff members, but may also select their own project. In the Master Thesis (18 EC), students analyse the data gathered during fieldwork, relate the data to the theory and formulate findings and conclusions. Students may take part in Thesis writing seminars, guiding them through the writing process. At the completion of the Field Research Design course and near the finalisation of the Master Thesis, students present their results to audiences of lecturers, fellow students and stakeholders in conference-like settings. Students may take professional skills courses as part of a European project and/or link their Master research projects to professional organisations to shorten the distance between this academic programme and the professional field. As has been indicated, the curriculum was recently revised. The lecturing team is composed of core staff members. All these staff members are employed at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology and the majority of them are engaged in both research and education. Practically all staff members have PhDs, most of them are BKO-certified and one of them has obtained the SKO-certificate. Temporary staff members are to be recruited for four years and will be offered opportunities to obtain BKO-certificates. Diversity among lecturers is promoted. Lecturers regularly meet to discuss the programme. Lecturers regard their work load to be manageable. Students appreciate the lecturers.

The programme educational concept is research-based and collaborative learning. Students are actively encouraged to take part in intellectual exchange and feedback processes in small groups of students and lecturers. The organisation of the curriculum is strict, as this, in the programme's view, contributes to study pace and study success. The number of hours of face-to-face education is about 12 hours per week during the courses. Study methods adopted in the programme include lectures, tutorials, working groups, workshops, peer groups and individual supervision. These study methods allow for engagement and interaction on the part of students and lecturers. From the start of the curriculum onwards, students are guided by their individual supervisor. Meetings with supervisors are quite frequent. The student-to-staff ratio is 7.5, not counting junior lecturers. The study load is experienced by students to be challenging but manageable. The student success rates are on average about 80 % after one year and about 90 % after two years (last four to five cohorts).

Considerations

The entry requirements and admission procedures are adequate. The pre-master programme is seen by the panel as positive. The panel supports the plans of the programme to raise the student influx. The panel is pleased to see additional funds having been made available to accommodate rising influx numbers.

The panel is positive about the contents of the curriculum. The curriculum meets the intended learning outcomes of the programme. The courses are up to standard. The curriculum is well-organised and coherent. The panel appreciates both the research orientation of the curriculum as well as the labour market orientation.

The panel regards the lecturers in the programme to be both good researchers and skilled teachers. The lecturers are strongly education-minded. The panel notes the lecturers being appreciated by students. The panel welcomes the diversity of the staff.

The panel regards the educational concept and study methods in the curriculum to be appropriate. The panel appreciates the research-based, tightly-organised and collaborative learning processes. The guidance and supervision in the curriculum are up to standard. The study load is balanced, be it quite challenging. The student success rates are favourable.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 2, Teaching-learning environment, to be satisfactory.

4.3 Standard 3: Student assessment

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

Findings

The programme examination and assessment rules are in line with the VU Amsterdam assessment policy and the Faculty of Social Sciences policies and guidelines. As has been said, the Faculty Examination Board has the responsibility to ensure the quality of examinations and assessments of the programmes of the Faculty, while the sub-committee of the Board oversees the examination and assessment procedures for this programme in particular. The examination methods for the courses are selected in line with the courses' goals and contents. The examination methods are predominantly individual written assignments. In some courses, these are complemented by either individual or group presentations. Plagiarism and fraud regulations have been implemented. The Examination Board handles cases.

The final project of the programme is the Master research project. As has been mentioned, projects cover the empirical cycle and include designing research, doing fieldwork and drafting the thesis. As has been indicated, regular meetings are scheduled between students and their supervisors to discuss the research done and the progress made. Master research projects are assessed by the supervisor and the second examiner independently. For their assessments, both examiners use rubrics scoring forms with weighted assessment criteria. Examiners do not discuss their assessments. In case of differences in judgments of 2.0 points or more or in case of unsatisfactory grades, a third examiner will review the thesis as well. The final grade will be the result of this process. Programme management and the Examination Board have taken measures to promote the validity, reliability and transparency of examinations and assessments, most measures being carried out by the Examination Board sub-committee. For the programme, the assessment plan has been drafted, specifying the intended learning outcomes, the course goals and the examination methods adopted as well as the relations of these. The Examination Board reviews the assessment plan. Examiners are appointed by the Board, being required to be PhDs and BKO-certified. Course dossiers have been compiled, documenting the courses, examinations and assessments. The course dossiers are inspected by the Examination Board. Examinations including answer models are drafted by examiners and are peer-reviewed by fellow-examiners. Students are offered trial examinations and may inspect their work. The Examination Board reviews on a regular basis samples of course examinations and theses. The Examination Board handles individual requests of students as well as cases of fraud and plagiarism.

Considerations

The panel approves of the examinations and assessment rules and regulations of the programme, these being in line with Faculty policies. The panel welcomes the responsibilities and tasks of the Examination Board and regards the Board, including the sub-committee for this programme, to monitor the quality of examinations and assessments appropriately.

The panel approves of the examination methods adopted in the programme. These are consistent with the goals and contents of the courses.

The supervision processes for the Master research projects are well-organised and intensive. The assessment processes for the projects are up to standard as well. The panel recommends to allow examiners to discuss their assessments of the Master research projects in case of differing grades. The panel also suggest to narrow the margin of 2.0 points between the examiners' grades for the Master research projects, before inviting the third examiner.

The panel considers the measures ensuring the validity, reliability and transparency of examinations and assessments to be up to standard.

Assessment of this standard

The considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 3, Student assessment, to be satisfactory.

4.4 Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

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

The panel reviewed 15 Master research projects of programme graduates of the last two years. The thesis requires students to demonstrate being able to do academic research independently, to analyse the research data and to report on the results.

To prepare students for the labour market, the programme organises events with external experts to inform students about trends in the professional field. In addition, guest lectures by alumni are scheduled within the courses. As has been mentioned above, students may take part in study activities, linked to the professional field.

Programme graduates may find positions in government institutions, non-governmental organisations or the private sector, finding employment there as independent researchers or advisors.

Considerations

The panel regards the Master research projects to be appropriate academic projects, covering the various stages in the research process. The panel supports the grades given by examiners of the programme.

The panel appreciates the measures taken in the programme to promote the labour market orientation of students and to foster the preparation for their future careers.

The panel regards the programme graduates to have reached the intended learning outcomes and to be qualified to find appropriate positions in a range of organisations.

Assessment of this standard

The considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 4, Achieved learning outcomes, to be satisfactory.

5. Overview of assessments

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

6. 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. These panel recommendations are the following.

- To articulate anthropological knowledge and skills more explicitly in the programme objectives.
- To formulate the intended learning outcomes of the programme more clearly, especially in the applying knowledge and understanding section.
- To allow examiners to discuss their assessments of the Master research projects in case of differing grades.
- To narrow the margin of 2.0 points between the examiners' grades for the Master research projects, before inviting the third examiner.