

Assessment report
Limited Framework Programme Assessment
Master Culture, Organization and Management
VU Amsterdam

Contents of the report

1. Executive summary	2
2. Assessment process	4
3. Programme administrative information.....	7
4. Findings, considerations and assessments per standard	8
4.1 Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	8
4.2 Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	10
4.3 Standard 3: Student assessment.....	13
4.4 Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	15
5. Overview of assessments.....	16
6. Recommendations	17

1. Executive summary

In this executive summary, the panel presents the main considerations which led to the assessment of the quality of the Master Culture, Organization and Management 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.

The panel regards the programme objectives to be sound and relevant, addressing cultural processes within and between organizations and studying organizational culture as a process of sense-making and sense-giving. The panel appreciates the research-orientation of the programme and welcomes students being educated to become critical researchers or professionals, and being taught to address problems in the professional practice. The panel regards the objectives to have been formulated very clearly and in very ambitious terms, emphasising the unique character of the programme.

The panel welcomes the domain-specific reference framework, which has been drafted by the joint Dutch programmes in this field of study. The objectives of the programme meet this reference framework. The programme's unique and distinct profile comes out clearly within the reference framework.

The panel appreciates students to be trained for positions in the professional field as well as to be trained to go on in their studies in PhD trajectories.

The panel regards the intended learning outcomes to be comprehensive and well-articulated and to meet the programme objectives. The intended learning outcomes correspond to the master level.

The panel supports programme management intentions to raise the student influx numbers. Students make well-deliberated choices to enter the programme.

The panel observed the curriculum to correspond to the intended learning outcomes and the contents of the curriculum to be up to standard. Students are taught concepts, theories and methodologies in this domain and are trained to apply these theories and methodologies. The curriculum is well-organized and coherent. The panel advises, however, to address professional skills more explicitly.

The panel considers the lecturers to be both good researchers in their fields and effective as teachers. The generous proportions of lecturers being PhDs and being BKO-certified testify to their research and educational capabilities. The panel noted the staff to be very dedicated and the staff coherence to be strong. The lecturers meet very regularly to discuss the programme. Although the gender diversity is adequate, the panel proposes to balance the ethnic diversity among the staff. As the workload of the lecturers is quite demanding, the panel advises to adjust this workload.

The panel considers the admission criteria and the admission procedures to be relevant and effective.

The programme educational concept and study methods are effective and allow students to gain the knowledge and skills required and to apply their knowledge. Programme management succeeds in offering small-scale education. The panel is positive about the fieldwork components in the courses. The number of hours of face-to-face education and the students-to-staff ratio are satisfactory. The panel noted the study load being challenging in the first months, but considers the study load for the programme as a whole to be manageable for students. As students are given the responsibility for their learning processes, the panel proposes to monitor the effects of this policy. The student success rates are satisfactory.

Although the programme examination and assessment rules and regulations are appropriate, the panel proposes to formulate a clearer vision on assessment. The position and the responsibilities of the Examination Board, including the position of the Examination Board sub-committee, are up to standard.

The examination methods adopted for the courses are adequate. The panel proposes to assess the professional skills more explicitly and to provide more formal feedback on the professional skills development of students.

The panel considers the supervision and assessment processes of the Master thesis to be adequate. The panel suggests, however, to limit the differences in the levels of supervision among supervisors.

The measures taken to assure the validity, reliability and transparency of the examinations and the assessments are up to standard. The panel is especially pleased about the Examination Board's commitment to assessment quality assurance, among others inspecting examinations and Master theses.

The panel regards the course examinations to be adequate and to meet the course goals. The Master theses are considered by the panel to be up to standard and the grades given by the programme examiners are supported by the panel. Only one of the theses would have been assessed as unsatisfactory by the panel.

The panel regards the results of the alumni survey to be favourable, noting the programme graduates to have succeeded in finding positions in the professional field quite easily. The panel considers students completing the programme to have reached the intended learning outcomes and regards the programme to offer a suitable preparation for the labour market in this domain. The panel advises to provide students with more information about the professional field.

The panel which conducted the assessment of the Master Culture, Organization and Management 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 recommends NVAO to accredit this programme.

Rotterdam, 21 September 2018

Prof. dr. J.C. Looise
(panel chair)

drs. W. Vercouteren
(panel secretary)

2. Assessment process

The evaluation agency Certiked VBI received the request by VU Amsterdam to coordinate the limited framework programme assessment process for the Master Culture, Organization and Management programme of this University. This 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).

Management of the programmes in the assessment cluster Organization Studies convened to discuss the composition of the assessment panel and to draft the list of candidates.

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. J.C. Looise, professor emeritus Human Resource Management, University of Twente (panel chair).
- Prof. dr. S.M. Nkomo, professor, Department of Human Resource Management, University of Pretoria (panel member).
- Dr. M. Govaerts, associate professor, Department of Educational Development and Research, Maastricht University (panel member).
- Prof. dr. D. Faems, professor Innovation and Organisation, University of Groningen (panel member).
- E. de Rover MSc, student Master Business Administration, 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 were discussed. In the course of the process preparing for the site visit, programme management and the 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 fifteen final projects. 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 final projects of the programme graduates, these final projects being part of the selection made by the process coordinator.

A number of weeks before the site visit date, the assessment panel chair and the process coordinator met to discuss 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 preliminary meeting, the preliminary findings of the panel members, including those about the final projects 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 21 June 2018, the panel conducted a site visit on the VU Amsterdam campus. The site visit schedule was in accordance with the schedule as planned. In a number of separate sessions, panel members were given the opportunity to meet with Faculty of Social Sciences representatives, programme management, Examination Board representatives, 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, the 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 University Board to accompany their request for re-accreditation of this programme.

3. Programme administrative information

Name programme in CROHO: M Culture, Organization and Management>
Orientation, level programme: Academic Master
Grade: MSc
Number of credits: 60 EC
Specialisations: N.A.
Location: Amsterdam
Mode of study: Full-time (instruction language is English)
Registration in CROHO: 60050

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 Culture, Organization and Management programme is a research-based, multi-disciplinary, social sciences master programme of VU Amsterdam. The programme is English-taught.

The Master Culture, Organization and Management programme is one of the programmes of the Faculty of Social Sciences of VU Amsterdam and is offered by the Department of Organization Sciences of this Faculty. The Faculty offers a broad range of bachelor and master programmes in the social sciences. The Faculty Board, being chaired by the Dean, is responsible for research and education, including the quality of the programmes offered. The programme director and the programme coordinator manage the programme on the day-to-day basis. The programme committee for the programme, being composed of both lecturers and students, advises programme management on the quality of the programme. The Faculty Examination Board has the responsibility to ensure the quality of examinations and assessments of this and the other Faculty programmes. The sub-committee of the Board oversees the examination and assessment procedures for this programme in particular. The External Advisory Board, with senior academics and professional field representatives sitting on this Board, regularly discusses with programme management the research and labour market requirements for programme graduates.

The objectives of the programme are to educate students to study cultural processes within and between organizations, perceiving organizations as social constructs of meaning and addressing organizational culture as a process of sense-making and sense-giving. The programme aims to introduce students to the concepts of culture, organizations and management. Culture is to be understood as the critical concept for studying the social, symbolic and political dimensions of sense-making processes in organizational settings. Organizations are to be seen not as predefined and static social units, but as dynamic forms of organizing. Management is to be perceived as managers' sense-giving efforts and the intended and unintended consequences of these efforts. The programme is research-oriented. The methodology adopted rests primarily on the ethnographic and interpretive research tradition. Students are taught to address themes, such as cross-boundary collaboration, inclusion, exclusion, diversity, transnationalism, organizational change and entrepreneurship. Students are educated to acquire critical attitudes towards both the research in this domain and practices and practitioners in this field. Students are trained to apply their knowledge and skills to problems in the practice of organizations, such as business companies, public organizations, non-governmental organizations and social movements.

The programme objectives correspond to the requirements of the *Domain-specific frame of reference Organization Studies 2018*, which has been drafted by the Bachelor and Master Organization Studies and Bachelor and Master Human Resource Studies programmes of Tilburg University and the Master Beleid, Communicatie en Organisatie and the Master Culture, Organization and Management programmes of VU Amsterdam. The programme may be regarded to be unique and, within this domain-specific framework, to distinguish itself by concentrating on the social, symbolic and political dimensions of organizational sense-making processes, primarily using the interpretive methodology, having the critical orientation towards organizations and management and being distinctly international.

Students are prepared to enter the labour market. Students are also educated to continue their studies as PhD students.

The programme objectives have been translated into the programme intended learning outcomes. These specify, among others, knowledge of theories of organizational change, culture change, cultural processes, identity and diversity and transnationalism and globalization, knowledge of and skills in methods and techniques of qualitative research, skills to analyse scientific problems in this domain and to communicate the findings and reflective attitudes towards research, practice and the own role in these. Programme management compared the intended learning outcomes to the Dublin descriptors for master programmes, to show these to meet the master level requirements.

Considerations

The panel regards the programme objectives to be sound and relevant, specifically addressing cultural processes within and between organizations and studying organizational culture as a process of sense-making and sense-giving. The panel appreciates the research-orientation of the programme, noting the methodology to rest primarily on the ethnographic and interpretive research tradition. The panel also welcomes students being educated to become critical researchers or professionals, and being taught to address problems in the practice of organizations. The panel regards the programme objectives to have been formulated very clearly and in very ambitious terms, emphasising the unique character of the programme.

The panel welcomes the domain-specific reference framework, which has been drafted by the joint Dutch programmes in this field of study. The objectives of the programme meet this reference framework. The programme's unique and distinct profile comes out clearly within the reference framework.

The panel appreciates students to be trained for positions in the professional field as well as to be trained to go on in their studies in PhD trajectories.

The panel regards the intended learning outcomes to be comprehensive and well-articulated and to meet the programme objectives. The intended learning outcomes correspond to the master level.

Assessment of this standard

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

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 number of incoming students rose gradually over the last ten years. For the period 2012 to 2015, the influx was about 80 students per year. About 40 % to 50 % of these students completed their bachelor programme at VU Amsterdam. About 20 % to 30 % of them come from other Dutch universities. Another 20 % to 30 % come from abroad. The influx of students with bachelor degrees from higher vocational institutes (hbo) is very limited. This may partly be explained by the fact that students coming from higher vocational institutes and taking the pre-master programme, are registered as students of VU Amsterdam bachelor programmes. Programme management has the intention to raise the influx as well as the proportion of foreign students.

The regular programme takes one year to complete and has 60 EC of study load. Programme management drafted a table with the relations of the intended learning outcomes to the curriculum components to demonstrate the curriculum meeting the programme intended learning outcomes. The curriculum starts with the compulsory courses *Organization Science* (6 EC) and *Sense-making in Organizations* (6 EC), introducing students to the fundamentals of the programme. Subsequently, students select two out of three courses (2 x 6 EC), addressing subjects of organizational culture and identity, organizational cultural change or globalization. Thereupon, students write the *Research Proposal* (6 EC) for the Master thesis, in this course being taught the theoretical and methodological foundations for researching organizational culture. Upon completion of this course, students conduct the Master thesis project (24 EC). In the *Research Lab course* (6 EC), which is scheduled in parallel with the Master thesis, students are taught interpretive research methods and techniques. All courses in the curriculum are rated in terms of levels of complexity. Students draft the Master thesis at the highest level, which means being able to do this research-driven project in a largely self-directed way.

A total number of nine staff are involved in the programme, most of them having permanent positions. Two full professors are involved in the programme. Junior staff are involved as well. All but one lecturer in the programme are researchers of the Department of Organization Studies. The lecturers are experts in the fields they lecture in and are well-published in these fields. All but one of the lecturers have PhDs. About 78 % of the staff or seven lecturers are BKO-certified, testifying to their educational qualities. One lecturer is SKO-certified. Staff meet twice per semester to discuss the programme contents and quality and the curriculum being up-to-date. In case of unfavourable results in student surveys, the lecturer involved and the programme director meet to discuss improvements. The lecturers' workload is rather challenging. The Faculty is taking measures to balance the workload.

Applications are examined by the programme Admissions Board. Students with Bachelor Organization Studies, Public Administration, Cultural Anthropology, Sociology or Political Science of any Dutch university are admitted unconditionally to the programme. For other students, specific admission requirements are set. Foreign students' applications are screened by the VU Amsterdam International Office and the programme Admissions Board, on the basis of academic background, knowledge of the domain and qualitative research, motivation and academic writing skills. Students having bachelor degrees from higher vocational institutes (hbo) ought to take the pre-master programme (30 EC), which includes both introductory methodological and theoretical courses on organization sciences and the pre-master thesis.

The programme educational principles are to promote interactive teaching and learning, to foster the ongoing academic dialogue between lecturers and students and among students and to stimulate students becoming critical thinkers in this domain. Lecturers introduce their research findings in class. The study methods are lectures, working groups, simulation games and fieldwork. Students are invited to co-create courses, to be critical and to engage in discussions. Groups of students are 20 students, being divided into smaller groups. In the fieldwork, students in effect study processes in organizations. The number of hours of face-to-face education are about 12 hours per week in the cursory part of the curriculum. The students-to-staff ratio is 15.1 : 1. The study load is experienced by students to be rather demanding, especially in the first periods. Students feel being well-guided by lecturers. The panel noted them being given the responsibility for their learning processes. The average student success rates of the programme are 45 % after one year and about 77 % after two years (figures for the last four to five years).

Considerations

The panel supports programme management intentions to raise the student influx numbers. Students make well-deliberated choices to enter the programme.

The panel observed the curriculum to correspond to the intended learning outcomes and the contents of the curriculum to be up to standard. The curriculum contents allow students to gain both the knowledge and skills required. Students are taught concepts, theories and methodologies in this domain and are trained to apply these theories and methodologies. The curriculum is well-organized and coherent. The panel advises, however, to address professional skills more explicitly.

The panel considers the lecturers to be both good researchers in their fields and effective as teachers. The generous proportions of lecturers being PhDs and being BKO-certified testify to their research and educational capabilities. The panel noted the staff to be very dedicated and the staff coherence to be strong. The lecturers meet very regularly to discuss the programme, to adjust the courses to each other and to update the courses. Although the gender diversity is adequate, the panel proposes to balance the ethnic diversity among the staff. As the workload of the lecturers is quite demanding, the panel advises to adjust the lecturers' workload.

The panel considers the admission criteria and the admission procedures to be relevant and effective.

The programme educational concept and study methods are effective and allow students to gain the knowledge and skills required and to apply their knowledge. Programme management succeeds in offering small-scale education in the working groups. The panel is positive about the fieldwork components in the courses, allowing students to gain first-hand experiences in practice. The number of hours of face-to-face education and the students-to-staff ratio are satisfactory. The panel noted the study load being challenging in the first months, but considers the study load for the programme as a whole to be manageable for students. As students are given the responsibility for their learning processes, the panel proposes to monitor the effects of this policy. The student success rates are satisfactory.

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.

In all of the courses, multiple examination methods are adopted. The examination methods in the courses include written examinations with open-ended questions, individual written or fieldwork assignments, group assignments and group presentations. In one course, open-ended questions are complemented by multiple-choice questions. The programme ensures individual performances of students to be assessed at the completion of courses, group assignments not surpassing 50 % of the course grade. The examination methods are selected in line with the course goals to be assessed.

Students may suggest their own topics for the Master thesis, but they may also choose one of the subjects, presented by lecturers. Nearly all of the thesis processes are conducted at organisations in the professional field. About 50 % of the students go abroad. Supervision may be individual or may be organised in small groups. In case of these projects abroad, supervisors and students conduct online skype meetings. Supervision may differ across supervisors, but is monitored by the programme thesis coordinator. The number of hours of supervision is fixed. The research proposal is individual and must be approved, before students can start the thesis process. Students are to submit their thesis at one of the two fixed deadlines. The supervisor and the second reader, both being university examiners, assess the thesis separately and together come to the final grade of the thesis. They use the thesis assessment form, with a number of assessment criteria.

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 how the intended learning outcomes are achieved and measured throughout the curriculum. The Examination Board regularly reviews the assessment plan. Examiners are appointed by the Examination Board, being required to be PhDs and BKO-certified. Each of the course examinations are drafted by examiners and are peer-reviewed by fellow-examiners. The course files are inspected by the Examination Board. The Examination Board reviews yearly samples of course examinations and Master theses. The Examination Board handles individual requests of students as well as cases of fraud and plagiarism.

Considerations

Although the programme examination and assessment rules and regulations are appropriate, the panel proposes to formulate a clearer vision on assessment. The position and the responsibilities of the Examination Board, including the position of the Examination Board sub-committee, are up to standard.

The examination methods adopted for the courses are adequate, as these are aligned with the course goals and course contents. The panel proposes to assess the professional skills more explicitly and to provide more formal feedback on the professional skills development of students.

The panel considers the supervision and assessment processes of the Master thesis to be adequate. The panel suggests, however, to limit the differences in the levels of supervision among supervisors. The assessment of the theses is well-organised, involving two university examiners and being based upon an assessment form with relevant assessment criteria.

The measures taken to assure the validity, reliability and transparency of the examinations and the assessments are up to standard. The panel is especially pleased about the Examination Board's commitment to assessment quality assurance, among others inspecting examinations and Master theses.

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.

Findings

The panel studied the examinations of a number of courses of the programme.

In addition, the panel reviewed fifteen Master theses of the most recent years. The average grade of the theses was 7.4 (figure calculated over last two years).

In the programme, an event is scheduled to inform students about career opportunities. In addition, the programme maintains an alumni network. Results of the most recent Dutch National Alumni Survey show graduates on average to have found employment within 2.8 months after graduation. The vast majority of the alumni were satisfied to very satisfied about the programme. The graduates the panel met, felt well-prepared for positions in the professional field. About 23 % of programme graduates have found employment in academic master level positions in this field. About 14 % of the graduates are employed in governmental institutions, about 14 % in industry, trade or transport and 29 % in other business services.

Considerations

The panel considers the course examinations, which the panel reviewed to be adequate and to meet the course goals.

The Master theses the panel studied, match the intended learning outcomes. The theses are considered by the panel to be up to standard and the grades given by the programme examiners are supported by the panel. Only one of the theses would have been assessed as unsatisfactory by the panel.

The panel regards the results of the alumni survey to be favourable, noting the programme graduates to have succeeded in finding positions in the professional field quite easily. The panel considers students completing the programme to have reached the intended learning outcomes and regards the programme to offer a suitable preparation for the labour market in this domain. Appreciating programme management's efforts, the panel advises, however, to provide students with more information about the professional field.

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	Good
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 address professional skills more explicitly in the curriculum.
- To balance the ethnic diversity among the staff.
- To adjust the workload of the lecturers, as this is quite demanding.
- To monitor the effects of the programme policy to give students the responsibility for their learning processes.
- To formulate a clearer vision on assessment for the programme.
- To assess the professional skills more explicitly and to provide more formal feedback on the professional skills development of students.
- To limit the differences in the levels of supervision among supervisors.
- To provide students with more information about the professional field.