



Research Master Literary Studies
Utrecht University

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Project code P2110

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Summary

The research master Comparative Literary Studies aims to study literature from a theoretically informed perspective, using a cross-linguistics, intermedial and transnational approach. It mostly focuses on literature written in Western European languages in the modern period, and considers the interaction of literature with its cultural, medial and social environment in a globalised world.

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The profile and aims of the research master's programme Comparative Literary Studies are fitting for a research master's programme within the field. It has a strong outward-looking transnational and interdisciplinary profile, and core themes that are societally relevant and align well with the research focus of the staff. The goals of the programme have been well-translated into a coherent set of intended learning outcomes that are appropriate for a research master. It recommends complementing the intended learning outcomes with attention to professional and transferable skills.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The content and structure of the programme are well-designed and fitting for a research master's programme. They provide a rich and challenging overview of the theories and methodologies of comparative literature, interwoven with research skills, ethics and research integrity. The teaching methods are sufficiently varied, and focus on small-scale seminars, methodology as well as a master-apprentice relation in the thesis trajectory, in which students learn to complete the full research cycle. Students can broaden or deepen their curriculum in the electives, which includes the option for an internship or studying abroad. The panel recommends expanding the attention to professional skills in the core curriculum, for instance in a separate learning trajectory. The panel approves of the choice of English as a language of instruction in light of the international academic field.

Student admission takes place in a well-designed manner and both supervision and student support in the programme function well, in particular with regard to well-being and response to student feedback. Students consider the atmosphere in the programme as one of its biggest assets. The programme adapted well to the corona pandemic, shifting the education to an online setting and paying extra attention to student well-being. The curriculum is feasible, yet timely completion of the thesis remains a point of attention. The programme could consider including time management as a transferable skill in the thesis trajectory, and easing the transition between the course-filled first year and the individual second year of the curriculum. The rule that a cum laude can only be awarded to students that finish within two years is an effective measure to promote feasibility, but can lead to the unintended consequence that Utrecht students are less likely to obtain a cum laude compared to other universities. Furthermore, although the panel recommends paying attention to students that cannot study full-time because they need to generate income. The teaching staff is well-qualified, is part of a high-quality research environment, and is appreciated for their engagement with the students. The panel praises the attention to the high workload of the teaching staff, and recommends keeping this high on the agenda.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The programme has a valid, transparent and reliable system of assessment in place. The assessment methods are varied and fit the aims of the programme. During the corona pandemic, the programme successfully made the switch to online assessment. The Board of Examiners has a professional system of checks and balances in place, and proactively safeguards the quality of assessment. The procedures and assessment forms for the master theses are solid, with ample substantiation of the grades and feedback to

the student. The independent second examiner adds to the validity of the assessment. The panel recommends expanding attention in the assessment form to the process the student went through to write the thesis, including an indication of what elements of the project were developed in other courses or the internship.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The panel concludes that theses of the programme are of a high quality, and show that the intended learning outcomes of the programme are achieved. Students obtain a high level and most theses are of a publishable quality. Graduates of the master's programme end up in various relevant positions in academia and industry, with 25% of the students obtaining highly competitive PhD positions.

Score table

The panel assesses the programme as follows:

Research master's programme Literary Studies

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

Prof. dr. Maarten Mous, chair
Date: 10 February 2022

Peter Hilderling MSc, secretary

Introduction

Procedure

Assessment

On 27 and 28 October 2021, the research master's programme Linguistics, Literary Studies and Dutch Studies of the Utrecht University were assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment Research Master's Linguistics & Literature cluster. The assessment cluster consisted of 9 programmes, offered by the institutions University of Groningen, Leiden University, Utrecht University, University of Amsterdam, Radboud University and Tilburg University. The assessment followed the procedure and standards of the NVAO Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (September 2018), as well as the Specification of additional criteria for research master's programmes (May 2016). The site visits to Groningen, Leiden, Amsterdam, and Nijmegen/Tilburg were held online due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment upon request of the Research Master's Linguistics & Literature cluster after taking over from Qanu per August 2021, when the first two site visits to Leiden University and University of Groningen had already taken place. On behalf of Qanu, Fiona Schouten acted as coordinator and secretary during the start-up phase and the site visit to Leiden University and the University of Groningen. On behalf of Academion, Fiona Schouten acted as coordinator for the remaining process, and as secretary for the site visits at the University of Amsterdam, Radboud University and Tilburg University. Peter Hilderling was secretary for the site visit at Utrecht University. Both secretaries have been certified and registered by the NVAO.

Preparation

Qanu composed the peer review panel in cooperation with the institutions and taking into account the expertise and independence of the members as well as consistency within the cluster. On 25 May 2021, the NVAO approved the composition of the panel. The coordinator instructed the panel chairs on their role in the site visit.

The contact persons for Utrecht University composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the Qanu coordinator (see appendix 3). They selected representative partners for the various interviews. It was determined that the development dialogue would take place at the end of the site visit. A separate development report was made based on this dialogue.

The programmes provided the coordinator with a list of graduates over the period 2018-2020. In consultation with the coordinator, the panel chair selected 15 theses per programme. He took the diversity of final grades and examiners into account, as well as the various specializations. Prior to the site visit, the programmes provided the panel with the theses and the accompanying assessment forms. They also provided the panel with the self-evaluation reports and additional materials (see appendix 4).

The panel members studied the information and sent their findings to the secretary. The secretary collected the panel's questions and remarks in a document and shared this with the panel members. In a preliminary meeting, the panel discussed the initial findings on the self-evaluation reports and the theses, as well as the division of tasks during the site visit. The panel was also informed on the assessment framework, the working method and the planning of the site visits and reports.

Site visit

During the site visit, the panel interviewed various programme representatives (see appendix 3). The panel also offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour. No consultation was requested. The panel used the final part of the site visit to discuss its findings in an internal meeting. Afterwards, the panel chair publicly presented the preliminary findings.

Report

The secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to the coordinator for peer assessment. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel for feedback. After processing this feedback, the secretary sent the draft report to the Faculty of Humanities of Utrecht University in order to have it checked for factual irregularities. The secretary discussed the ensuing comments with the panel chair and changes were implemented accordingly. The panel then finalised the report, and the coordinator sent it to the Faculty of Humanities and Utrecht University.

Panel

The following panel members were involved in the cluster assessment:

- Prof. dr. M.P.G.M. (Maarten) Mous (panel chair)
- Prof. dr. H.E. (Henriette) de Swart (panel chair/panel member)
- S. (Sannah) Debreczeni BA (student member)
- Prof. dr. Y. (Yra) van Dijk (panel member)
- S. (Suze) Geuke BA (student member)
- Prof. dr. B. (Birgit) Hellwig (panel member)
- Dr. N.H. (Nivja) de Jong (panel member)
- Prof. dr. B.L.J. (Bettelou) Los (panel member)
- Em. prof. dr. M.J.H. (Maaïke) Meijer (panel member)
- Prof. dr. A. (Ad) Neeleman (panel member)
- J. (Julia) Neugarten MA (student member)
- Prof. dr. D.M. (Diederik) Oostdijk (panel member)
- Prof. dr. H. (Hugo) Quené (panel member)
- Prof. dr. D. (Dominiek) Sandra (panel member)

The panel assessing the programmes at Utrecht University consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. M.P.G.M. (Maarten) Mous, professor of African Linguistics at Leiden University (panel chair)
- Prof. dr. Y. (Yra) van Dijk, guest professor at Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS) (panel member)
- Em. prof. dr. M.J.H. (Maaïke) Meijer, author and emeritus professor of Gender Studies at Maastricht University (panel member)
- Prof. dr. A. (Ad) Neeleman, professor of Linguistics at University College London (panel member)
- J. (Julia) Neugarten MA, alumna (September 2021) of the research master's in Literary Studies at the University of Amsterdam (student member)

Information on the programme

Name of the institution:	Utrecht University
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Programme name:	Literary Studies
CROHO number:	60814
Level:	Master
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	120 EC
Specialisations or tracks:	Comparative Literary Studies
Location:	Utrecht
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Language of instruction:	English
Submission date NVAO:	1-5-2022, (extended due to legislation WHW art 5.31 lid 3)

Description of the assessment

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

Mission and profile

The research master Literary Studies is a two-year (120 EC) programme offered by the Graduate School of Languages, Literature and Communication (TLC) within the Faculty of Humanities of Utrecht University. It is one of three research masters offered by TLC, the others being Neerlandistiek and Linguistics. The programme previously consisted of two tracks: Comparative Literary Studies and *Literair Vertalen*. As *Literair Vertalen* was discontinued in 2016, the name Comparative Literary Studies or CLS is commonly used for the entire programme: the remainder of this report will follow this custom.

CLS aims to study literature from a theoretically informed perspective, using a cross-linguistics, intermedial and transnational approach. It mostly focuses on literature written in Western European languages in the modern period, and considers the interaction of literature with its cultural, medial and social environment in a globalised world. It focuses on four themes:

- *Transculturality*: How literature reflects and negotiates cultural differences and operates across national borders
- *Interdiscursivity*: The knowledge about the world that literature generates, and how it compares with other forms of knowledge
- *Mediality*: How literature works as a medium and relates to other forms of cultural and knowledge production
- *Cultural memory*: How stories and cultural forms survive over generations and transform over time

The programme aims to equip students for a career as researcher in the field of literature and culture, within or outside academia. The programme is selective and aims to attract excellent students with a high academic achievement and an inquisitive and ambitious research mind. It typically attracts 15 students annually, but has the ambition to raise this to 20 students per year. The panel studied the aims and profile of the programme, and concludes that CLS is a strong programme with unique aspects. The panel commends the core themes of the programme. They are well-aligned with the research focus of TLC and provide a very outward-looking, transnational and interdisciplinary approach towards literary studies.

The panel learnt during the site visit that the programme would welcome more students than the current average of 15 students per cohort. Excellent international students that are admitted to the programme often cannot afford to live and study in Utrecht and ultimately do not enrol. The panel regrets this, as the programme is of high quality and has a lot to offer to students. It was therefore glad to learn that the Faculty Board strongly supports the programme, for instance by providing scholarships for excellent international students. The panel applauds this, and encourages the Faculty and the UU to continue investigating solutions to the practical challenges that hinder students to enrol in the programme, such as fee waivers for certain groups of students or the option to study parttime (see Standard 2). The panel believes that with sufficient support and opportunities for students has potential for growth.

Intended learning outcomes

The programme has translated its aims and goals into six intended learning outcomes (ILOs) that describe the knowledge, skills and attitudes required of its graduates. The panel has studied the ILOs and concludes that they are appropriate for a research master. They clearly reflect the Dublin Descriptors for master's programmes and are sufficiently ambitious for a research master. Considering that the programme aims to prepare students for careers in academic as well as private and public organization, attention towards professional and transferable skills could be expanded. The panel recommends addressing this more explicitly in the ILOs, and increasing awareness for this in the curriculum (see Standard 2).

Considerations

The profile and aims of the research master's programme Comparative Literary Studies are fitting for a research master's programme within the field. It has a strong outward-looking transnational and interdisciplinary profile, and core themes that are societally relevant and align well with the research focus of the staff. The goals of the programme have been well-translated into a coherent set of intended learning outcomes that are appropriate for a research master. It recommends complementing the intended learning outcomes with attention to professional and transferable skills.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets Standard 1.

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

Curriculum

The curriculum of the research master CLS consists of compulsory courses (50 EC), participation in the research school of literary studies OSL (5-10 EC), specialization (30-35 EC), and the thesis (30 EC). The full curriculum is included in Appendix 2. The *compulsory courses* introduce students to contemporary research in comparative literature, including theoretical and methodological debates in the field, and introduce them to the four thematic foci of the programme. Interwoven through the courses is the acquisition of research skills, which are most prominent in the two masterclasses where groups of students carry out a small collaborative research project directly related to the ongoing research of the supervisor. Research skills include close reading, discourse analysis, reception analysis, digital humanities and archival research, as well as general academic skills such as academic writing, research ethics and communication skills. In addition, students participate in the *national research school for literary studies OSL*, where they follow seminars, conferences and other training events for a total of 10 EC.

In the *specialization courses* of the curriculum, students choose up to 35 EC of electives aimed at deepening or broadening their knowledge and skills. The programme offers one programme-specific elective, as well as the option of individual tutorials where students study a theme individually with a staff member. Students can also choose courses from other (research) master's programmes or additional courses from a national research school. Optional elements during the specialization phase of the curriculum are following electives abroad (30 EC) or pursuing an internship (15 EC) in a research institute or outside academia, for instance at

publishing houses or in teaching. The *thesis* is the capstone of the curriculum, and requires students to develop and execute their own research project within one of the research groups in TLC.

The panel studied the curriculum as well as the content of a number of courses. It concludes that the programme has adequately translated its ILOs into a coherent, well-structured and challenging curriculum. The compulsory courses tie in with the thematic foci of the programme, and provide a rich and challenging overview of the theories and methodologies of comparative literature. The courses are exclusively designed for the programme to guarantee a high research master's level. Research skills are provided in the Masterclasses, as well as interwoven in the courses, and include sufficient attention to research integrity and ethics. Skills are further developed in the individual components, where students experience the full research cycle during the thesis in a master-apprentice relationship with an experienced researcher. The electives as well as the individual components provide students with sufficient room to broaden or deepen their curriculum depending on their own research interests. Students can choose a maximum of 15 EC of electives from non-research master's programmes. Exceptions have to be approved by the Board of Examiners, and are only given when there are no equivalent alternative courses available. The panel valued the broad selection of activities that students can pursue, ranging from an individual research project with a staff member to an internship at an academic press or studying at a university abroad.

The panel is very positive about the possibilities for students interested in a career outside academia, particularly with the internship that is well-integrated in the curriculum. It noted however that professional skills are primarily offered in optional components of the curriculum, such as the electives and the internships. The panel considers these skills to be relevant for all students (see Standard 1), both as general skills and as an opportunity to get acquainted with a career outside academia. It recommends investigating whether attention to professional skills can be more integrated in the compulsory courses, for instance in a separate learning trajectory, ensuring that all students develop their skills such as teamwork, interviewing, presenting and awareness of the societal relevance of their research.

Teaching methods

Due to the small-scale nature of the programme, it predominantly uses interactive small-scale seminars as teaching method. In these seminars, students discuss course material and literature directly and in an interactive way with their teachers. Topics usually build upon the research focus of the lecturer, providing students with a state-of-the-art insight into the field. In addition, students receive practical training in research methodologies, such as close reading, techniques from the digital humanities ('distant reading') or archival research. During corona times, the small-scale seminars could relatively easily be shifted to an online environment, although both teaching staff and students regretted the reduced dynamics and immersion in the online settings. To counter this, the teaching staff adapted several courses to include more interactive elements, such as breakout rooms for small-group discussions and flipped classrooms. The panel is positive on the teaching methods. Students that the panel interviewed were very satisfied with the teaching methods and appreciated the opportunities for interaction and discussion with their teachers and fellow students. The panel also praises the flexibility of the programme to adjust to the exceptional corona circumstances.

Language of instruction

The research master is offered in English to align with the international character of the field. In addition, students have the opportunity to read international literature in the original language, and in some cases follow electives in other languages when studying the literature of a particular language area. This includes courses, for instance, in German, Italian or Spanish. The programme pursues an international classroom, with approximately one third of the students coming from bachelor's programmes abroad. The teaching

staff is internationally oriented and trained, and all are either native speakers, trained in an English-speaking country or hold a University Qualification in English (*Basiskwalificatie Engelstaligheid*). The panel agrees with the choice to offer the programme in English, and concludes from the documents and interviews that the teaching staff is well-equipped for English-language education. It also values the opportunity that students have to follow courses and read literature in other languages. During the site visit, the panel learnt that non-Dutch students sometimes have difficulties finding professional internships, as these are often in Dutch-speaking sectors. The panel suggests that the programme could compile a list of preferred partners that can offer English-language internships to international students.

Admission

The programme admits students with a BA degree in literature and culture (or a related field) who show motivation and a match with the programme. Furthermore, the programme aims for diversity in terms of academic as well as international backgrounds, and takes this into consideration in the selection process. The programme selects on a qualitative rather than a quantitative basis. Prospective students provide a portfolio with academic activities, write a motivation letter, a proof of English language proficiency (TOEFL or Cambridge Certificate) and provide two letters of recommendation if they come from outside the UU. , In cases of uncertainty regarding an applicant's suitability for the programme, they are invited to an online interview. In this interview, the admission committee, consisting of the programme coordinator and the core teachers, discusses motivation and interest in literary research with the student. The letter and interview also serve to get an impression of the English language proficiency of the students. During the interview the committee gives advice on how to read up on certain basic aspects and elements before entering the programme. The panel got a positive impression of the admission process. It praises the attention towards qualitative considerations as well as diversity, and thinks that the letter and interview are very good instruments to form an opinion about a student's capabilities.

Feasibility and student support

The programme coordinator, the core team members and the study advisor carefully monitor student well-being and progression. Each student is assigned an academic mentor, who is one of the core teachers of the programme. The mentor organizes several group meetings with the student aimed at well-being and progress, as well as individual sessions where curriculum choices and intellectual development are discussed. Furthermore, the programme coordinator regularly meets with students individually and monitors the consistency of the students' programme and their study progress. Students also have many options for peer support, such as study groups. This is not limited to the own cohort: the programme invests in the relation between cohorts. Students are assigned a student buddy at the start of their programme: a current student that can help with getting acquainted with the programme, the university and the city. Students can also mingle in social events and seminars organized by and for students in coordination with the programme.

The quality of the programme as well as the individual courses are discussed in the Curriculum Committee (*opleidingscommissie*), which is shared with the RMA's Media Studies and Neerlandistiek. The Curriculum Committee is in regular contact with students as well as the programme staff. An important element in the quality cycle is the yearly educational meeting (*onderwijsgesprek*) that the Curriculum Committee organizes together with the programme coordinator. During the educational meeting, all students, staff of the research master and the Director of Graduate Studies discusses experiences, challenges and new developments. During corona times, the programme increased the frequency of meetings between mentors and programme coordinators with students to monitor their well-being, and organized several online social events.

The panel was impressed by the student support and reply to student feedback in the programme. The programme invests heavily in peer support and community building, which is very much appreciated by the students as a core asset of the programme. It concluded from the interviews that the programme cares about the well-being of the students and supports them wherever possible. The programme is also quick to make adaptations based on student feedback. From the student chapter and the interviews, the panel learnt that student feedback from the educational meetings is usually swiftly addressed and issues are quickly solved. The panel is satisfied by how the programme handled the pandemic restrictions, and praises the programme for their attention to well-being, especially in the light of the already high workload of the teaching staff. Students were very positive about the support they received from the programme.

During the site visit, the panel spoke with several programme representatives about the study success of the programme. Approximately 20-25% of the students take more than 3 years to graduate. The programme management explained to the panel that this delay can often be explained by a prolonged thesis process or personal circumstances. The panel learnt that some students experience the transition from the courses in the first year to the individual components in the second year as intense. Even with ample help of their supervisor, students are still sometimes overwhelmed by the thesis and all possibilities, and find it difficult to finish on time. The panel suggests that the programme could introduce the individual components earlier to ease this transition.

During the site visit, the panel spoke with the programme about the issues of the conditions attached to the cum laude and – connected with this – of time management to stimulate students to finish in time. The panel understands that Utrecht University has reserved the cum laude distinction for students that graduate with high grades within two years. Yet, the panel is also aware that Utrecht thereby confers fewer cum laudes on its graduates than other comparable programs do in the Netherlands. The panel thinks this might be an unintended disadvantage for Utrecht students. In general, the panel thinks that there should be a national reflection on this issue, to the effect that the Dutch universities adopt the same cum laude policies, combined with a wider discussion on international policies in different fields. This being said, the panel thinks that time management could be more prominent in the thesis supervision and assessment. Time management could become an assessable skill, thereby creating the incentive for both students and supervisors to work towards timely completion of the thesis.

Other reasons for delay are often related to personal circumstances. Some students have to combine their studies with a part-time job to earn their living, or cope with health problems and/or stress, resulting in a slower study progress. The panel understands that the programme cannot always prevent such circumstances. A solution that might be beneficial to some students is an option to study part-time. It understood that the programme is considering to offer a flexible curriculum (*flexstuden*), which the panel supports. An additional benefit of *flexstuden* could be the opportunity to give students an individual target for timely graduation, creating a level playing field for students that aim for a cum laude but also need to generate income.

Teaching staff

The programme is taught by the research staff, mainly associated with the Modern and Contemporary Literature group of ICON. Other staff members are affiliated with the sections for language and culture of English, Spanish, Dutch and Italian. All teaching staff members are active researchers in the field of language and culture. The research of the Modern and Contemporary Literature group was described in very positive terms in the previous research evaluation, which particularly mentioned the notable international profile and impressive level of performance and visibility. All staff members hold a University Teaching Qualification (BKO), and several members of the teaching staff also hold a Senior Teaching Qualification (SKO).

The panel is positive on the quality of the teaching staff. They are respected researchers in the field, active in many ongoing national and international research projects and conferences, and cover a broad range of subfields and expertises. The teaching staff is a good mix of talented junior staff and senior researchers. The panel notes that the programme often relies on its senior researchers for teaching, as required by the research master's assessment framework. It nevertheless hopes that the programme does not feel hindered by the framework to use the expertise of the junior staff, many of whom are involved in frontier research, in teaching.

During the site visit, the panel learnt that students are very happy with the small-scale character of the programme and the close involvement of the teaching staff with students. The teaching staff on the other hand appreciates being involved and working with the motivated and excellent students in the programme. The panel also learnt that the teaching staff experiences a high workload, which is not programme-specific, but a sum of all their responsibilities as an academic, including research and teaching in other programmes. It noted that the programme management is very aware of this issue, and that it considers staff workload as an important element in its decisions. The panel appreciates this, and encourages the programme to keep this issue on the agenda..

Considerations

The content and structure of the programme are well-designed and fitting for a research master's programme. They provide a rich and challenging overview of the theories and methodologies of comparative literature, interwoven with research skills, ethics and research integrity. The teaching methods are sufficiently varied, and focus on small-scale seminars, methodology as well as a master-apprentice relation in the thesis trajectory, in which students learn to complete the full research cycle. Students can broaden or deepen their curriculum in the electives, which includes the option for an internship or studying abroad. The panel recommends expanding the attention to professional skills in the core curriculum, for instance in a separate learning trajectory. The panel approves of the choice of English as a language of instruction in light of the international academic field.

Student admission takes place in a well-designed manner and both supervision and student support in the programme function well, in particular with regard to well-being and response to student feedback. Students consider the atmosphere in the programme as one of its biggest assets. The programme adapted well to the corona pandemic, shifting the education to an online setting and paying extra attention to student well-being. The curriculum is feasible, yet timely completion of the thesis remains a point of attention. The programme could consider including time management as a transferable skill in the thesis trajectory, and easing the transition between the course-filled first year and the individual second year of the curriculum. The rule that a *cum laude* can only be awarded to students that finish within two years is an effective measure to promote feasibility, but can lead to the unintended consequence that Utrecht students are less likely to obtain a *cum laude* compared to other universities. Furthermore, the panel recommends paying attention to students that cannot study full-time because they need to generate income. The teaching staff is well-qualified, is part of a high-quality research environment, and is appreciated for their engagement with the students. The panel praises the attention to the high workload of the teaching staff, and recommends keeping this high on the agenda.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets Standard 2.

Standard 3. Student assessment

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

Findings

System of assessment

The programme aims for a system of assessment where assessment methods follow the learning outcomes and goals of the programme, and students can use the result of assessment in their learning process. The assessment policy is described in an assessment plan that details the relation between assessment and the programme's ILOs, as well as procedures for promoting a valid, reliable and transparent system of assessment. This includes multiple assessments per course, the four-eyes principle applied to the construction of assessment material, and thesis interventions in which teachers compare and discuss thesis assessments. The programme mainly relies on assessment in the form of essays and research papers. The internship is assessed through a reflection report, where the student reflects on his or her own learning process, and (in the case of a research internship) a research report. The academic internship supervisor is responsible for the grading, and uses the input of the internship supervisor of the internship organization in his or her assessment. The panel was happy to learn that students increasingly choose other media for their assignments and sometimes even parts of the thesis and internship reports, such as comics or video, and that the programme fully supports this. The corona pandemic left the assessment in the programme generally untouched, as the assessment methods could continue as planned.

The research master CLS shares a Board of Examiners with the other research master's programmes within the Faculty. The Board of Examiners monitors the quality of assessment within the programme by annually checking that all assessments are in line with the learning objectives and ILOs of the programme, and that they are well-implemented in the programmes. The Board monitors the distribution of grades for all courses and launches an investigation in case of anomalies. Furthermore, the Board regularly checks internships and theses, as well as the accompanying assessment forms. The Board reports its findings to the responsible coordinators as well as the programme management.

The panel has studied the assessment system and spoke with the Board of Examiners. It concludes that the assessment system is valid, reliable and transparent. The assessment methods in the courses are sufficiently varied, and were adequately adapted for an online setting during the corona pandemic. The Board of Examiners is professional has a system of checks and balances in place to monitor the quality of the assessment in the courses. The panel particularly praises the quantitative checks on assessment results, as well as the regular checks of theses and courses. It is also positive on the thesis intervention among teachers, which it considers a good instrument to benchmark thesis grades.

Thesis assessment

The thesis is assessed by two examiners: the thesis supervisor and a second examiner not involved in the project. After completion of the thesis, the first and second examiner independently evaluate the thesis and propose a grade. Only after completing this can they view each other's assessment. Both examiners have to reach consensus on a grade, and fill in a combined assessment form for the student. When the first and second examiner continue to disagree after joint consultation a third evaluator must be consulted as an arbitrator. If the first and second examiner arrive at a passing final grade of 6.5 or lower after joint consultation, a third evaluator may be requested, but this is not obligatory.

As part of its preparation of the site visits, the panel studied 15 master's theses with the accompanying assessment forms. It concludes that the form has useful subcriteria to evaluate the thesis, and the grades are substantiated with ample feedback, detailing the strong points and points of improvement. The panel values this and thinks that this is very helpful for the student as well as for quality assurance purposes. The panel noted that the forms mostly focus on the content of the thesis, and less on the process, which is discussed in a single subcriterion. It recommends expanding this into multiple subcriteria, encouraging examiners to also consider for instance time management and planning (see Standard 2). Furthermore, the panel noted that students often build upon projects from courses or the internship during the thesis. The panel learnt during the site visit that the programme takes care to prevent overlap, and ensures that students add at least 30 EC of extra work. The panel agrees with this, and recommends including this element in the assessment form of the thesis, so that it is clear what work is part of the thesis project and what is not.

The panel also concludes that the thesis assessment process is sufficiently independent and transparent. The second examiner provides an external view to the assessment, with a third examiner as a safeguard for specific circumstances. The supervisor is responsible for giving the student feedback on behalf of both assessors. Students always receive both assessment forms. The separate forms of the assessors and the final assessment form are archived for internal purposes. The panel considers this an elegant solution that is transparent for quality assurance purposes, without automatically bothering students with the internal discussions that took place.

Considerations

The programme has a valid, transparent and reliable system of assessment in place. The assessment methods are varied and fit the aims of the programme. During the corona pandemic, the programme successfully made the switch to online assessment. The Board of Examiners has a professional system of checks and balances in place, and proactively safeguards the quality of assessment. The procedures and assessment forms for the master theses are solid, with ample substantiation of the grades and feedback to the student. The independent second examiner adds to the validity of the assessment. The panel recommends expanding attention in the assessment form to the process the student went through to write the thesis, including an indication of what elements of the project were developed in other courses or the internship.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets Standard 3.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

Thesis quality

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 master's theses for the research master CLS. The panel concludes that the theses are generally of high quality and show that the students realize the learning outcomes of the programme. The theses were in-depth and well-written and had a variety of original and very relevant topics. The panel applauds the global and diverse approach of literature demonstrated in these theses. The high quality is reflected in the high scores: the average thesis grade in recent years is between 7.7 and 8.2. The panel considers these high scores to be generally justified, and praises the programmes with the high level of its graduates. Many of the theses would be publishable. The panel understood that several students present

their work at conferences or publish a journal article after graduation. Students from the programme have set up their own peer-reviewed student journal, *Frame: Journal of Literary Studies*, in which many students publish an article related to their thesis.

The panel did note that many theses were very long. It learnt that the maximum number of words for a thesis is 40.000, which the panel considers to be substantive. It recommends investigating whether this maximum length can be lowered, also in the light of the study delays that often arise in the thesis process.

Alumni

Approximately 25% of the graduates of the programme obtain a PhD position. Many find a position in industry or a societal organization, for instance as publisher, journalist, teacher, cultural programmer, communications officer or editor. The programme keeps in touch with its alumni through an annual alumni event, including a career orientation day for students where alumni present themselves. The panel is impressed by the careers of the programme's graduates, and considers the number of graduates in PhD positions relatively high considering the competitiveness of such positions. According to the panel, graduates in non-academic careers find relevant jobs related to the skills obtained during the programme. The panel also praises the programme for their clear view of where their alumni end up, and the efforts put into keeping in touch with them.

Considerations

The panel concludes that theses of the programme are of a high quality, and show that the intended learning outcomes of the programme are achieved. Students obtain a high level and most theses are of a publishable quality. Graduates of the master's programme end up in various relevant positions in academia and industry, with 25% of the students obtaining highly competitive PhD positions.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets Standard 4.

General conclusion

The panel's assessment of the research master Literary Studies is positive.

Development points

1. Complement the intended learning outcomes with attention to professional and transferable skills.
2. Make the attention to professional skills in the curriculum more explicit, for instance in a separate learning trajectory
3. Keep working on timely completion of the thesis, for instance by including time management as a transferable skill in the thesis trajectory, and easing the transition between the course-filled first year and the individual second year of the curriculum.
4. Reflect on the unintended consequences of the cum laude regulations, for instance the lower chance for Utrecht students to obtain cum laude compared to students in similar programmes, and the lower chance for students that cannot study fulltime due to circumstances.
5. Keep reducing workload for teaching staff high on the agenda.
6. Expand the assessment of the thesis process on the assessment form, and include any elements that students used from previous course or internship work.

Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

The Research Master's degree Literary Studies aims to:

- Provide specialised knowledge, insight and skills in the field of study;
- Prepare students for a career as a researcher in the field of literature and culture, both within academic and non-academic contexts;
- Prepare students for a PhD programme.

A graduate with this degree:

- has advanced knowledge of and insight into the field of comparative literary studies with specific reference to literary cultures of the modern period showing due regard for its position within the broader field of the Humanities;
- has thorough knowledge of a specialism within that field or at the intersection with a cognate field;
- has the academic independence and the necessary skills to engage critically with theoretical debates in the field and to formulate new research questions;
- has the academic skills to conduct original research in the field using appropriate methods and respecting professional codes;
- is able to report on findings in a professional manner;
- is able to communicate conclusions, as well as the underlying knowledge, grounds and considerations, to both specialists and non-specialists.

Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

Programme outline

	■ Becoming a RESEARCHER	■ Becoming a SPECIALIST	■ Becoming a PROFESSIONAL		
Year 1	1	Core Theories and Current Debates	Thinking Literature	Humanities Today	Lecture Series
	2	Literature Across Cultures	Media Materialities	Cultural Memory	Lecture Series
	3	Research Lab and Distant Reading	Masterclasses		Lecture Series
	4		Elective	Research School	Lecture Series
Year 2	1	Semester abroad (30 EC) OR Research School (5 EC) + Electives (25 EC) or Electives (15 EC) and Internship (15 EC)			
	2				
	3	Thesis (30 EC)			Thesis Lab + Final Conference
	4				

The programme comprises two years, with a total of 120 EC. In order to reach its aims and objectives, *Comparative Literary Studies* offers a programme that consists of four components:

1. core curriculum (50 EC, year 1), entailing 10 compulsory courses;
2. specialisation (30 or 35 EC; end of year 1 and semester 1 of year 2); students make personalised choices to deepen or broaden their research in the form of electives, an internship, or study abroad;
3. research school (10 or 5 EC): students are required to obtain 10 EC through the Research School of Literary Studies (<https://www.oslit.nl/>) or through another National Research School if this is more relevant to their specialisation. Those students who opt to go abroad may reduce the number of ECs to 5;
4. thesis (30 EC; semester 2 of year 2); the final phase of the programme is reserved entirely for the independent research project (Master's thesis) and the accompanying Thesis Lab and Graduation Conference.

Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

Woensdag 27 oktober 2021	
10.00 – 10.30	Ontvangst incl. pitch (5 – 10 minuten) (LT)
10.30 – 12.00	Voorbereidend overleg panel en inzien documenten
12.00 – 12.30	Inloopspreekuur (LT)
12.30 – 13.15	Lunch
13.15 – 14.00	Gesprek met inhoudelijk verantwoordelijken alle opleidingen (LT)
14.00 – 14.30	Intern overleg panel
14.30 – 15.00	Gesprek met studenten en alumni Taalwetenschappen (EN)
15.00 – 15.30	Gesprek met studenten en alumni Neerlandistiek (NL)
15.30 – 16.00	Gesprek met studenten en alumni Letterkunde (EN)
16.00 – 16.30	Pauze
16.30 – 17.00	Gesprek met examencommissie (NL)
17.00 – 18.00	Rondleiding Uil OTS lab (NL)

Donderdag 28 oktober 2021	
09.00 – 10.00	Aankomst, intern overleg panel en inzien documenten
10.00 – 10.30	Gesprek met docenten Taalwetenschappen (EN)
10.30 – 11.00	Gesprek met docenten Neerlandistiek (NL)
11.00 – 11.30	Gesprek met docenten Letterkunde (EN)
11.30 – 12.00	Intern overleg panel
12.00 – 12.45	Eindgesprek management (formeel verantwoordelijken) (LT)
12.45 – 13.45	Lunch
13.45 – 16.30	Opstellen voorlopige bevindingen en voorbereiden mondelinge rapportage (panel intern)
16.30 – 17.00	Mondelinge rapportage voorlopig oordeel
17.00 – 17.45	Ontwikkelgesprek (LT)

Appendix 4. Materials

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 theses of the research master's programme Literary Studies. Information on the theses is available from Academion upon request. The panel also studied other materials, which included:

- Study guide
- Education and Examination Regulations
- Teaching staff overview
- Content and assessment of selected courses
- Assessment plan
- Admission requirements
- Annual reports Board of Examiners
- Annual reports Curriculum Committee
- Reports Educational meeting