



Research Master Linguistics  
Utrecht University

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Project code P2110

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## Summary

The research master Linguistics combines theoretical linguistics with data-oriented approaches, and aims to equip students for a career as researcher in academia or in private/public organizations in which advanced academic skills are needed.

### Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The profile and aims of the research master's programme Linguistics are fitting for a research master's programme within the field. It has a diverse, innovative and attractive profile, combining theoretical, experimental and computational aspects of linguistics. The goals of the programme have been well-translated into a coherent set of intended learning outcomes that are appropriate for a research master. The panel 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 combine theoretical and experimental aspects, interwoven with research skills, ethics and research integrity. The teaching methods are sufficiently varied, and focus on small-scale seminars 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, and pursue their own interests in the internship and thesis. The panel recommends making the attention to professional skills in the curriculum more explicit, for instance in a separate learning trajectory, and ensuring that students are sufficiently encouraged to broaden their view outside the field of linguistics in the electives. It also recommends adding ethics and societal consequences of AI and data science to the curriculum. 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. 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 and appreciated for their engagement with the students. The panel praises the attention to the high workload of the teaching staff, and recommends the programme management keeping this high on the agenda. The programme is offered in a high-quality research environment, with attractive facilities for experimental work.

### 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 the 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 positions in academia and industry, with a half of the students obtaining highly competitive PhD positions.

#### Score table

The panel assesses the programme as follows:

##### *Research master's programme Linguistics*

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 Hildering 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 committee 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 14 December 2020 and 12 April 2021 on their role in the site visit.

The contact persons for Utrecht University composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the Academion 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 frameworks, 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:	Linguistics
CROHO number:	60817
Level:	Master
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	120 EC
Specialisations or tracks:	Linguistics
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 Linguistics 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 (UU). It is one of three research masters offered by TLC, the others being Neerlandistiek and Comparative Literary Studies. The programme combines theoretical linguistics with data-oriented approaches, and aims to equip students for a career as researcher in academia or in private/public organizations in which advanced academic skills are needed. The programme is selective and aims to attract excellent students with a high academic achievement and an inquisitive and ambitious research mind. The panel studied the aims and profile of the programme. It concludes that the programme has a diverse and attractive profile, combining theoretical and experimental approaches, and has embraced computational aspects of linguistics, such as AI and big data. This results in a challenging, innovative and rich programme.

The panel learnt during the site visit that the programme would welcome more students than the current average of 15-20 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 (see Appendix 1). The ILOs have been designed by the programme to meet the entrance criteria of several high-ranking PhD programmes in linguistics. The panel 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. In comparison with the ILOs of the other research masters at TLC, the panel noted that the ILOs do not explicitly list a critical attitude with regard to theory and literature. It is convinced based on the course content that this is sufficiently addressed in the curriculum, and suggests adding this element to the ILOs. Furthermore, considering that the programme aims to prepare students for careers in academic as well as private and public organizations, attention to 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 Linguistics are fitting for a research master's programme within the field. It has a diverse, innovative and attractive profile, combining theoretical, experimental and computational aspects of linguistics. The goals of the programme have been well-translated into a coherent set of intended learning outcomes that are appropriate for a research master. The 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 Linguistics consists of compulsory courses, including research seminars (45 EC), electives (30 EC), an internship (15 EC) and the thesis (30 EC). The full curriculum is included in Appendix 2. The *compulsory courses* offer the foundational knowledge and skills of the curriculum. Alongside the compulsory courses, students are required to participate in research seminars. These can be any local, national or international workshops and conferences within the field. Students should at least attend the Winter and Summer Schools of the national research school in linguistics (LOT). These activities culminate in the course Research Seminar, in which students write a reflection report, practice academic and transferable skills, reflect on ethical aspects of research and prepare for the organization of their internship and thesis, as well as their further career. In the *electives*, students choose 6 out of 10 optional courses offered by the programme, allowing them to obtain in-depth knowledge and advanced methodology in a number of subfields. Students can also opt for more multidisciplinary courses offered by other research master's programmes. In the *internship*, students participate in an on-going research project, in academia (within the Faculty or elsewhere), governmental organizations/NGO's or industry. 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 LTC.

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 contain experimental as well as theoretical aspects, and are exclusively designed for the programme to guarantee a high research master's level. Research skills are provided in the Research Seminar, as well as interwoven with the courses. These skills are further developed in the individual components, where students develop their professional and/or research skills in the internship, and experience the full research cycle during the thesis in a master-apprentice relationship with an experienced researcher. The panel was particularly positive on the compulsory character of the internship, which gives each student the opportunity to participate in ongoing research before embarking on their individual thesis, and to explore career opportunities outside academia. There is sufficient attention in the curriculum to research integrity and ethics of experimental research with human participants. The panel suggests that,

considering the increasing role of data-oriented approaches, the programme could consider expanding this to awareness of ethical and societal consequences of AI and data science.

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 noted that most students choose electives within the field of linguistics. It recommends ensuring that the study program clearly mentions this option and that students are sufficiently encouraged to broaden their view, exploring the many connections of linguistics with other fields.

As discussed under Standard 1, the panel considers that attention towards professional and transferable skills could be expanded. Even though there are elements of this present, for instance in the Research Seminar and the internship, they could be made more explicit throughout the curriculum to make students more aware of opportunities to prepare for a career outside academia. The panel recommends including professional skills as a separate learning trajectory in the programme, and ensuring that students develop their skills such as teamwork, interviewing, presenting and awareness of the societal relevance of their research.

#### *Teaching methods and facilities*

Due to the small-scale nature of the programme, it predominantly uses interactive small-scale seminars as a teaching method. In these seminars, students discuss the course material directly and in an interactive way with their teachers. Topics usually build upon the research focus of the teaching staff, providing students with a state-of-the-art insight into the field. In addition, students receive practical training to develop their experimental skills, with courses on programming in R and digital methods, and more advanced experimental skills related to psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic research. The programme has several labs, including a lab for phonetics research, a baby lab for experiments on infant language acquisition, an eye-tracking lab and a biosignals lab.

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 and the absence of lab research. 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 majority of students working on experiments for their internship or thesis could adapt their thesis to other methods, such as web experiments, corpus research or data analysis. A small number of students, for instance those working on the baby lab, could not adapt their thesis and suffered a delay of less than one semester.

The panel is positive on the teaching methods as well as the programme-specific facilities. The panel had the opportunity to visit some of the labs during the site visit, and was impressed by the facilities and the opportunities these offers to students. 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 on the flexibility of the programme to adjust to the exceptional corona circumstances, providing students with alternatives as much as possible.

#### *Language of instruction*

The research master is offered in English to align with the international character of the field. 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 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. 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 selects students based on their previous education, as well as their motivation and match with the programme. The programme selects on a qualitative rather than a quantitative basis. Prospective students write a motivation letter, and provide two letters of recommendation if they come from outside the UU. If they have a matching bachelor's degree in linguistics or a related field, they are invited to an online interview in which the programme coordinator discusses motivation and interest in linguistics with the student. The letter and interview also serve to get an impression of the English language proficiency of the students. Typically, 30-40% of students are rejected based on the letter and interview. During the interview, prospective students are pointed towards the summer school that the university organizes annually. In this summer school, students can get an in-depth impression of studying at the UU, and remedy smaller deficiencies before entering the programme. In response to the increasing role of data science and AI in the curriculum, the programme recently added sufficient training in statistics to the admission requirements. Students with deficiencies in this area have the opportunity to take an extra online statistics course on Coursera before the start of the programme. The panel got a positive impression of the admission process. It praises the attention towards qualitative considerations, and thinks that the letter and interview are very good instruments to form an opinion about a student's capabilities. The success rates show that the process is sufficiently selective. The summer school and the extra statistics course are effective tools to remedy smaller deficiencies to prepare students for the research master's programme.

#### *Feasibility and student support*

The programme coordinator, core team members and the study advisor carefully monitor student well-being and progression. There are several group meetings with the student cohorts aimed at well-being and progress, as well as individual sessions where well-being and curriculum choices are discussed with students. During the internship and thesis, students participate in the Research Seminar and Thesis Seminar, which provide group support in addition to the supervision process. The Linguistics students have a common room in the basement where the research labs are located and where they can meet and work together. The quality of the programme as well as the individual courses are discussed in the Curriculum Committee (*opleidingscommissie*), which is specific to the programme. 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 invested in activities to strengthen social ties and community-forming, as well as additional support to students. The programme has recently hired a student mentor and organized several online social events. The Faculty has appointed two well-being coaches, who organize targeted trainings for the students of this master.

The panel was impressed by the student support and reply to student feedback in 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 reports of the educational meetings it learnt that nearly all of the issues addressed by students in the student chapter were already solved by the programme before the site visit, such as overlapping deadlines for courses and communication of internship opportunities. The panel is satisfied by how the programme handled the pandemic restrictions, and praises the research master for its attention to group cohesion and well-being, especially in the light of the already high workload of the teaching staff. Students were very positive on 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 30% 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, for instance by requiring students to develop a research proposal at the end of the first year.

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 (*flexstuderen*), which the panel supports. An additional benefit of *flexstuderen* 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 UiL OTS institute for linguistics. The core staff consists of 12 full professors, 3 associate professors and 5 assistant professors, who are all active researchers in the field. The research of UiL OTS was reviewed in 2018, resulting in ‘very good’ for the research quality and ‘excellent’ for relevance to society and viability. Furthermore, all staff members hold a University Teaching Qualification (BKO) or are in the process of obtaining one, and some 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 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 mostly 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. One issue mentioned by the teaching staff during the site visit is the amount of time allocated for thesis supervision. Some teachers felt an imbalance in the fact that supervision of master's students and research master's students was rewarded with an equal amount of time, even though the thesis trajectory of a research master's student is twice as long. The panel recommends investigating this and determining whether an adaptation is necessary.

### Considerations

The content and structure of the programme are well-designed and fitting for a research master's programme. They combine theoretical and experimental aspects, interwoven with research skills, ethics and research integrity. The teaching methods are sufficiently varied, and focus on small-scale seminars 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, and pursue their own interests in the internship and thesis. The panel recommends making the attention to professional skills in the curriculum more explicit, for instance in a separate learning trajectory, and ensuring that students are sufficiently encouraged to broaden their view outside the field of linguistics in the electives. It also recommends adding ethics and societal consequences of AI and data science to the curriculum. 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. 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. The teaching staff is well-qualified and appreciated for their engagement with the students. The panel praises the attention to the high workload of the teaching staff, and recommends the programme management keeping this high on the agenda. The programme is offered in a high-quality research environment, with attractive facilities for experimental work.

### 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 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 corona pandemic left assessment in the programme untouched for a large part: take-home exams and papers could continue as planned, and the presentations were shifted to an online setting. The limited number of written tests in the foundational courses were either changed into individual assignments or taken at a distance with a strict time limit.

The research master Linguistics 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 studied the assessment system and discussed it 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 and 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 between 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 it 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. Upon request, the student receives 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 Linguistics. 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 well-written and had a variety of societally relevant topics (although not always underlined explicitly), ranging from theoretical to experimental work. The high quality is reflected in the high scores: the average thesis grade is around 8.0. The panel considers these high scores to be generally justified, and praises the programmes for 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, LingUU, in which many students publish an article related to their thesis.

### *Alumni*

Approximately 50% of the graduates of the programme pursue a PhD position. Some find a position in industry or a societal organization, such as data scientist or business intelligence at ICT companies, or perform applied research in communication, education, clinical linguistics or language technology. The programme keeps in touch with its alumni through an annual alumni event and an alumni LinkedIn group. The panel is impressed by the careers of the programme's graduates, in particular the high number of PhD students, considering the competitiveness of such positions. The panel also praises the programme for its clear view of where the alumni end up, and the efforts put into keeping in touch with them.

### Considerations

The panel concludes that the 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 positions in academia and industry, with a half 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 Linguistics 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. Add ethics and societal consequences of AI and data science to the curriculum
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. Keep reducing workload for teaching staff high on the agenda.
7. 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 graduate:*

1. has profound knowledge of and insight into the field of Linguistics;
2. has thorough knowledge of a specialization within the programme, or thorough knowledge at the interface of the programme and another field;
3. has the academic skills to independently identify, formulate, and analyse a problem and suggest possible solutions to problems in the field of Linguistics;
4. has the academic skills to conduct language-related research and to report on it in a manner that meets the general standards of the discipline;
5. is able to apply knowledge and understanding in a way that demonstrates a professional approach to academic and non-academic activities a graduate may be involved in upon completion of the programme;
6. is able to communicate conclusions, as well as the underlying knowledge, grounds and considerations, to an audience composed of specialists or non-specialists.

## Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

Each academic year is organised in 4 study periods ('blocks'), during which students earn 15 EC. Below is a schematic overview of the curriculum. Mandatory components - with core curriculum (45 EC), Internship (15 EC), and Thesis (30 EC) are given in yellow and electives (30 EC) in lilac.

### Year 1:

Blok 1	Blok 2	Blok 3	Blok 4
<i>Foundations of Sound Patterns</i> (5 EC)	<i>Foundations of Meaning</i> (5 EC) <i>LOT Winter School</i> (RM1 courses) (5 EC)		<i>Research Seminar I &amp; LOT Summer School</i> (5 EC)
<i>Language and its Structure: Syntax</i> (5 EC)	<i>Foundations of Language, Brain &amp; Cognition</i> (5 EC)	<i>Discourse, Cognition, and Communication</i> (5 EC)	<i>Cognitive and Computational Aspects of Word Meaning</i> (5 EC)
<i>Digital Methods in Linguistics</i> (5 EC)	<i>Foundations of Language Acquisition</i> (5 EC)	<i>Language Contact, Variation, and Change</i> (5 EC)	<i>L2 Acquisition and Education</i> (5 EC)
<i>Master Rotation</i>	<i>Master Rotation</i>	<i>Prosodic Learning: Linking Sound to Meaning</i> (5 EC) <i>Experimental Design and Data Analysis</i> (5 EC)	<i>Language and Speech Pathology</i> (5 EC)
Participation in UiL OTS colloquium	Participation in UiL OTS colloquium	Participation in EMLAR Participation in UiL OTS colloquium	Participation in UiL OTS colloquium

### Year 2:

Blok 1	Blok 2	Blok 3	Blok 4
<i>Research Seminar II</i> (5 EC)	Internship (15 EC)	<i>Thesis Seminar</i>	
<i>Psycholinguistics: Information and Emotion</i> (5 EC)		Thesis (30 EC)	
<i>Syntax and Cognition: Grammar-Internal and Grammar-External Interfaces</i> (5 EC)			
<i>Reasoning about Meaning in Linguistic Communication</i> (5 EC)			

## Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

<b>Woensdag 27 oktober 2021</b>	
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)

<b>Donderdag 28 oktober 2021</b>	
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 Linguistics. 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 Panel
- Reports Educational meeting