

ONDERZOEKERIJ

Research Master  
Educational Sciences:  
Learning in Interaction  
Utrecht University

Report of the limited programme assessment

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## Executive summary

The outcome of the external assessment of the research master's programme Educational Sciences: Learning in Interaction (EdSci) of Utrecht University (UU) by an NVAO approved panel is positive.

The EdSci programme convincingly profiles itself as a research-oriented programme, dedicated to education and learning research, including research into special educational needs. The programme is embedded in the excellent academic environment of the research programme on Education & Learning (E&L). The intended learning outcomes (EdSci also uses the term academic objectives) are well described in terms of content, level, and orientation.

The panel is very positive about the curriculum. It consists of a good combination of theoretical and methodological courses, and hands-on experience in research by getting involved in projects of the research programme E&L. The master thesis, the electives, and the possibility of choosing specific topics for assignments within courses, offer students ample opportunities to personalise their curriculum to match their own interests.

EdSci also offers an optional clinical track, allowing to obtain a clinical starting qualification in special educational needs. The panel endorses the added value of clinical practitioners with a rigor scientific training. The panel established that the programme found a good way to implement the clinical route in the programme, but that the actual number of students following this track is low.

The focus of EdSci is very much aligned with the expertise of the teaching staff. The panel thinks highly of the staff members, many of whom are acknowledged scientists in their field. The panel welcomes the highly interactive learning and tutoring environment and the way the programme stimulates interaction, cooperation, and cohesion amongst students and staff. However, the panel noted that students perceive a heavy study load and stress. Especially in the first year, the teaching, learning, and assessment activities are mainly concentrated in the first fifteen weeks of the semester. The panel strongly recommends distributing the study load more evenly across the entire year.

The research master's programme has an adequate assessment system. The programme uses a wide variety of assessment methods which are consistent with the goals and contents of the courses. The panel is impressed by the thoughtful and extensive process to safeguard the quality of the master thesis. It only encourages the programme to make the process of how the different assessors come to the final decision about the grade more transparent to its students. Moreover, the panel thinks highly of the expertise and operational capacity of the Board of Examiners.

All academic objectives are assessed in an integrated way in the graduation project. The panel concludes that the master theses are of good quality, and convincingly show that the academic objectives of the programme are achieved by the students. The level and quality of the theses differ, which is reflected properly in the grades. Based on the performance of alumni the panel concludes that the programme prepares students for a research career in the field of educational and learning sciences both inside and outside academia.



The chair and the secretary of the panel hereby declare that all panel members have studied this report and that they agree with the judgements laid down in the report. They confirm that the assessment has been conducted in accordance with the demands relating to independence.

Date: 11 May 2021

Janke Cohen-Schotanus  
(chair)

Esther Poort  
(secretary)



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Administrative data

Name of the programme:	Educational Sciences: Learning in Interaction (research)
CROHO number:	60749
Level of the programme:	Master of science
Orientation of the programme:	Academic
Study load:	120 EC
Location:	Utrecht
Variant:	Full-time
Expiration of accreditation:	1 November 2021

## 1.2 Introduction

This report focuses on the assessment of the research master's programme Educational Sciences: Learning in Interaction (EdSci) of Utrecht University. This assessment forms part of a cluster assessment of thirteen research master's programmes at seven universities. In total, fifteen panel members participated in this cluster assessment. Appendix A provides an overview of the thirteen participating research masters and the composition of the total panel.

The assessment is based on the standards and criteria described in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands 2018 (limited framework). Research master's programmes must meet a number of additional criteria as described by the NVAO (specification of additional criteria for research master's programmes, 2016).

## 1.3 Panel composition

For every online visit, a (sub)panel was composed, based on the expertise and availability of panel members. Each (sub)panel consisted of five members, including the chair and the student member. The panel that assessed the research master's programme EdSci consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. Janke Cohen-Schotanus (chair) Professor emeritus of Research of Education in the Medical Sciences;
- Prof. dr. Lidia Arends, Professor of Statistics and Research Methodology, Department of Psychology, Education & Child Studies at Erasmus University Rotterdam;
- Prof. dr. Detlev Leutner, Professor of Instructional Psychology, Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Duisburg-Essen;
- Yvonne Schittenhelm BSc, (student member), Master Individual Differences and Assessment, Tilburg University;
- Prof. dr. Lieven Verschaffel, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, KU Leuven.

The panel was supported by drs. Esther Poort, who acted as secretary.



All panel members and the secretary have signed a declaration of independence and confidentiality. In this declaration they affirm not to have had any business or personal ties with the programme in question for at least five years prior to the review.

The NVAO approved the composition of panel on 26 November 2020.

## 1.4 Working method

### *Preparation*

On 14 January 2021, the panel of the entire cluster held a general online kick off meeting. In this meeting, the panel received an introduction to the assessment framework and discussed the working methods in preparation to and during the online visits.

The programme drew up a self-evaluation describing the programme's strengths and weaknesses. This self-evaluation included a chapter in which the students reflected on the programme. The panel members prepared the assessment by analysing the self-evaluation report and the appendices provided by the institution. The panel also studied a selection of fifteen master theses and the accompanying assessment forms from the programme. The theses selection was made by the panel's secretary based on a provided list of at least fifty theses of the most recent years. In the selection, consideration was given to a variation in assessments (grades) and topics.

The panel members individually formulated their preliminary findings and a number of questions they want to raise during the online visit. The secretary made an overview of these preliminary findings and questions and sent it to the panel members as a starting point for the preparation of the panel during the online visit.

To further ensure that the different panels used the same working method and approach for all thirteen programmes in the cluster, the two chairs and the two secretaries had two additional meetings: one prior to the first visit and one halfway through all the visits.

### *Online visit*

The online visit took place on 10 March 2021 (see Appendix B). During the preparatory meeting, the panel discussed the preliminary findings and decided which questions to raise in their meetings with the programme representatives. During the visit, the panel spoke with representatives of the management, students, lecturers, alumni, and the board of examiners. Everybody involved in the programme had the opportunity to inform the panel in confidence about matters they consider important to the assessment. No one made use of this opportunity. The panel used the last part of the online visit to evaluate the interviews and had a second meeting with the programme's management to receive answers to any remaining questions. At the end of the visit, the chair presented the panel's general findings and first impressions of the programme.

### *Report*

The secretary drew up a draft report based on the panel's findings. This draft report was presented to the members of the panel and adjusted on the basis of their feedback. After adoption, the draft report was sent to the institution for verification of factual inaccuracies. The secretary discussed the



programme's comments with the chair, after which the secretary drew up the final report and circulated it to the panel for a final round of comments.

The report follows the four standards such as set of in the NVAO's Assessment Framework 2018 (limited framework): 1) the intended learning outcomes, 2) the teaching-learning environment, 3) assessment, and 4) achieved learning outcomes. Regarding each of the standards, the assessment panel gave a substantiated judgement on a three-point scale: meets, does not meet, or partially meets the standard. The panel subsequently gave a substantiated final conclusion regarding the quality of the programme, also on a three-point scale: positive, conditionally positive, or negative.

#### *Development dialogue*

Although clearly separated from the process of the programme assessment, assessment panel members and programme representatives met to conduct the development dialogue, with the objective to discuss future developments of the programme in light of the outcomes of the assessment report.





## 2. Review

### 2.1 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, analysis, and considerations*

The EdSci programme is one of the seven research master's programmes of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences (FSBS) of Utrecht University (UU), which are organised within the Graduate School of Social and Behavioural Sciences (GSSBS). GSSBS is chaired by the vice-dean, who is advised by the Board of Studies (BoS), comprised of the programme coordinators of the seven research master's programmes. Within FSBS, the programme is embedded in Department of Education and Pedagogy. It is a joint effort of two sections from that department: the section Education and the section Special Educational Needs. These two sections have a joint research programme on Education & Learning (E&L).

EdSci trains students to become qualified researchers in the field of educational and learning sciences. The programme prepares for a PhD training, while also enabling students to pursue their future career in a research setting outside the university. In addition, EdSci aims to prepare students for high-level academic positions in educational consultancy or training/curriculum/policy development, as graduates are well equipped to contribute to enhancing evidence-based educational practice and policy.

The programme has compared itself to other research master's programmes in the field of educational and learning sciences in the Netherlands and abroad. As stated in the self-evaluation report, EdSci is unique because it is the only research-oriented programme specifically dedicated to education and learning research, including research into special educational needs. Furthermore, EdSci is characterised by a strong focus on micro-level 'primary' processes in education and learning and the meso-level structures of education and learning in which the micro-level processes are embedded. The panel acknowledges these unique features. It established that the programme clearly benefits from the strong embeddedness in the E&L research programme.

The programme distinguishes theoretical skills, analytical skills, judgment skills, communication skills, and learning skills. These five skills correspond to the formulated intended learning outcomes (EdSci also uses the term academic objectives) in line with the Dublin descriptors. The panel studied the academic objectives and established that they are of the right level and depth, and clearly are in line with the research orientation of the programme. The panel acknowledges that the programme goes far beyond regular master's programmes in educational sciences in terms of theoretical and methodological depth. It values the attention for ethics and integrity in the academic objectives.

EdSci also offers an optional clinical track in special educational needs. Students completing this clinical track obtain a clinical starting qualification in special educational needs (in Dutch: Basis Orthopedagoog). The previous accreditation panel recommended reconsidering the added value of this clinical track. As stated in the self-evaluation report, the management clearly sees the added value of educating scientist-practitioners with a start qualification for the applied/research field of special needs education. During the interviews, the management further substantiated this view by



stressing the need for a new generation of highly qualified academic professionals who can foster the improvement of special needs education in practice by doing research in clinical settings. The panel endorses this stance.

### *Conclusion*

The panel concludes that EdSci is a unique and ambitious research master's programme dedicated to education and learning research, including research into special educational needs. The panel concludes that the academic objectives of the programme are of the right level and depth. The programme therefore meets standard 1.

## **2.2 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, analysis, and considerations*

#### *Curriculum*

EdSci is a full-time, two-year programme of 120 EC that consists of two semesters per year. Within a semester, there is a period of fifteen weeks of intensive teaching, learning and assessment. In the first year, each semester consists of four courses (each of 7.5 EC). This entails four theory courses, two methodology courses, and two integrative practicals. In the second year of the curriculum, the emphasis is on applying theoretical and methodological skills in internships and the master thesis research project. The second year includes a theory course (7.5 EC), two elective courses (each of 7.5 EC), two research seminars (each of 3.75 EC) and the master thesis (30 EC).

In the first-year theory courses, students acquire in-depth knowledge of 1) theories and concepts of learning; 2) educational neuroscience; 3) teachers and teaching, and 4) individual differences in learning. The second-year theory course focuses on interaction in online and blended learning environments. The panel noticed that the theory courses provide a solid theoretical foundation. It also appreciates the hands-on research experience students gain during the theory courses on educational neuroscience and individual differences. During these courses, students design and conduct a full (quasi-)experimental eye tracking study on individual differences in cognition and learning, using theoretical concepts, measures, and procedures from educational neuroscience. For students following the clinical track, the research assignment during these courses consists of diagnosing a clinical case under supervision of a licensed clinical teacher.

The two methodology courses offer advanced training in 1) multivariate statistics, and 2) multilevel analysis and structural equation modelling. The two integrative practicals focus on applying and reporting on these statistical techniques in the context of an educational research question, using a real data set. The panel noticed that the methodology courses and integrative practicals have a strong focus on quantitative research skills, rather than qualitative research skills. The management explained that this is in line with the expertise of the research group and teaching staff. The panel was pleased to learn that the programme clearly values the increasing insights of mixed methods, and provides all students with basic knowledge on qualitative research as well.



As electives, students can choose for a research internship that may include data collection for the thesis, a consultancy- or policy-oriented internship, a clinical research internship, or a course from another (research) master's programme. The two research seminars focus on academic skills relevant for the master's thesis research and future career. In the master thesis, students apply their acquired theoretical and methodological knowledge in a study based on an existing (large) data set or on own data collected during a research internship.

The panel is of the opinion that the curriculum is well structured, offering a good balance between theoretical and methodological courses, obligatory parts and electives, and with ample opportunities getting hands-on research experience. It values the gradual build-up in complexity and independency over the semesters. It also appreciates the continuity provided over the curriculum, for example starting with an assignment on eye tracking data in the neuroscience course, which is then continued by integrating knowledge about individual differences in a later course.

The panel highly values the opportunity for students to personalise their curriculum to match their own interests, not only within the electives and thesis but also by choosing specific topics for assignments within courses. It also appreciates the opportunity to do a consultancy- or policy-oriented internship, which opens the path for those not aiming for a PhD.

The panel welcomes the attention paid to ethics and integrity in the programme. Students are familiarised with the FSBS Protocol on research data handling and storage and need to adhere to that protocol when conducting the first-year research project and their master's thesis research. In addition, students are obliged to submit their research protocol for approval to the Ethics Review Board of the FSBS prior to collecting or (in case of existing data sets) analysing data. The programme also devotes attention to open science, such as the principles of FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable) data.

As mentioned before, the EdSci programme offers the possibility of obtaining a clinical starting qualification in special educational needs. Due to the training in diagnostic practice, this is open only to Dutch(-speaking) students with a suitable bachelor programme. In the first year, these students follow one extra course module (Juveniles & the Law). In the second year, they follow a clinical internship during the 15 EC electives space. The management explained during the interviews that this clinical internship is not only aimed at completing the required diagnostic case studies, but also has a clear research focus. The panel is of the opinion that the programme found a good way to implement the clinical track in the programme. However, the actual number of students following this clinical track is very low, especially in the three most recent years (0 in 2018, 1 in 2019, and 1 in 2020). Despite this low numbers, the programme management is of the opinion that it is worth the additional effort to organise this track. The management substantiates this choice by stating that these motivated students have a unique profile (given the extensive research training they receive) from which they can add value to the field. The panel endorses this added value of clinical practitioners who have a rigor scientific training.

The language of instruction for the EdSci programme is English. In accordance with the Executive Board of UU, the FSBS considers it important that, especially at a research master's level, students have skills to function in a globalised labour market. Given that English is the current lingua franca of scientific research, the renowned research is carried out in an international context and the research master's programme is open to international students and involve international staff members, all research master's programmes are taught in English. The panel endorses this choice.

As stated in the self-evaluation report, the didactical concept of the programme is in line with the title of the programme: Learning in Interaction. The emphasis during meetings is on discussion to help students to process and apply the literature or methods and place it in broader context. Feedback is



seen as an essential part of effective learning, hence students receive feedback from teachers as well as peers. Feedback comprises both more formalised formative assessments provided in writing or verbally, as well as more implicit feedback during class discussions. The panel observed the enthusiasm of both students and staff for the highly interactive approach. All interviewees confirmed that this didactical concept not only exists on paper, but is a reality within the research master's programme. The small-scale character of the programme entails that it is very easy to contact lecturers in an informal way, be it for personal feedback, career advice or the discussion of papers. Overall, the panel is convinced that this didactical concept is supportive for the learning process of the students. However, the panel has two points of attention. First, the panel feels that the didactical concept is working because of the current low numbers of the programme. If student numbers were to increase to 20 students, this interaction will not happen 'automatically' anymore but has to be structured. The panel advises to make more explicit to students and staff how this concept evolves through the two years. Second, the panel noted that in the perception of the students this feedback contains mostly negative criticism. The panel advises the lecturers to be aware of this and, for example, start with giving positive feedback.

The panel appreciates the way the programme stimulates interaction, cooperation, and cohesion amongst students and staff. Students follow each of the eight courses of the first year and the two research seminars of the second year together. Several courses also include group assignments that stimulate cooperation between the students and help to shape the perception of research as a team effort. In addition, students and staff regularly meet together. For example, students are regularly invited to join activities of the department's research community. In the student's chapter, students stated feeling part of a community.

#### *Admission and student numbers*

The EdSci programme is open for excellent students with a strong motivation for and interest in educational research. Candidates are selected based on academic achievements, requirements regarding methods and statistics, English language proficiency, and motivation. Applicants are asked to write a motivation letter.

The panel is of the opinion that the admission criteria are formulated clearly and adequately reflect the research-oriented nature and high demands of the programme. In particular, the panel welcomes the strict criteria regarding methods and statistics. In total, applicants must have followed courses for about 20 EC. If one of those requirements is not met, this can be remedied by requiring students to follow the Summer School in Methods and Statistics offered by the FSBS.

The programme aims at enrolling between fifteen and twenty new students per academic year. The panel noticed that the intake in the previous three years was rather low, varying between seven and twelve students. Although the panel realises that the low intake in 2020 is also related with the COVID-19 situation, the panel is of the opinion that these small cohort size provides challenges for the viability of the programme. According to the panel, attracting more students is desired. The panel was pleased to learn that the programme already started attracting a broader range of students by making more explicit that the programme is not only aimed to prepare for a PhD position, but also aims to prepare for research jobs outside academia.



### *Staff*

The panel thinks highly of the teaching staff, many of whom are prominent researchers and internationally recognised experts within the field of educational research. During the online visit, the panel confirmed the extensive involvement and enthusiasm of the staff.

All teachers and supervisors (with the exception of teachers of the Methods and Statistics courses) are involved in the E&L research programme. In 2018, FSBS research in Educational Sciences and Pedagogical Sciences of which the E&L research programme is part, was assessed in the external national research review. The department was evaluated as 'excellent' on all three criteria (quality/societal relevance/viability). This reputation of the research programme is endorsed by the panel.

It is clear to the panel that students are part of a high-quality and committed research environment. The content of the EdSci courses (and especially the research projects) is closely connected to the research conducted by teachers and supervisors within the E&L programme, so that students are up to date on recent developments and findings and participate in current research.

The panel is not only impressed with the scientific quality of the teaching staff, but also with their involvement in the programme and with the students. The ambitious and small-scale character of the programme adds to the commitment of the teaching staff to work with EdSci students. The panel was pleased to learn that the vast majority of staff members possess their University Teaching Qualification (UTQ). In addition, a substantial proportion of the staff members possesses their Senior University Teaching Qualification (STQ).

### *Study load and study guidance/mentoring*

During the online visit, the panel asked about the feasibility of the programme. Students reported to the panel that they feel that especially the first year is challenging. In their contribution to the self-evaluation report, students indicated having to juggle four courses simultaneously contributes to stress levels. The panel has the impression that this is related to the high concentration of teaching, learning, and assessment in a relative short period of time. The panel strongly recommends distributing the study load more evenly across the entire year. It is of the opinion that the programme has ample room to extend the programme over more weeks during the year.

Throughout the programme, students receive extensive supervision and tutoring. Besides supervision of research, students also get a tutor who monitors the study progress of students throughout the entire two years, advises students on programme-related issues, discusses with them possible causes of problems or delays, and helps them improve their planning and results. In 2019-2020, the mentoring ('buddy') programme was introduced, in which second year students are (voluntarily) paired with one or two first-year students to offer informal contact, companionship and advice. The panel highly appreciates the support and guidance offered to the students.

The large majority of students graduated on time. Delays are usually due to personal circumstances or because of the students' choice of completing a double master.

### *COVID-19*

Due to COVID-19 almost all education switched to online teaching and assessment in the past year. The panel asked students and teachers about their experience with online teaching. Whilst COVID-19 evidently had an impact on the interaction between student and teachers, they both mentioned that



there was still a lot of interaction and discussion possible. Given the nature of the assessments in the research master's programme, the impact in terms of required changes in the form of the assessments was relatively small. In each research master's programme, only two or three (aspects) of assessment were modified. The Board of Examiners (BoE) checked each request for adjustments carefully to judge whether the proposed modifications would still enable students to attain the course objectives. The panel concluded that the programme adequately adapted to the COVID-19 situation and still allows students to achieve the academic objectives.

The panel was pleased to learn that the programme foresees some permanent changes in the education as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The experiences with new digital tools may allow for more blended learning and flexibility in courses. This can have benefits for the research master's programmes, for instance, in terms of including international students and students who are on (international) internships.

### *Conclusion*

The panel is positive about the coherent curriculum, the interactive learning environment, and the dedicated staff who are experts in their domain. Students are able to achieve the academic objectives. The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 2.

## **2.3 Student assessment**

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

### *Findings, analysis, and considerations*

#### *Assessment policy and methods*

As described in the self-evaluation report, the assessment policy of EdSci is aimed at fair, valid, and reliable assessment with an emphasis on assignments with high authenticity in alignment with the intended learning goals.

The programme uses a variety of assessment methods including essays, reports, papers, research proposals, exams, exercises, oral presentations, and reviewing a manuscript and writing a rebuttal to an actual review. In the student chapter, students indicated that the assessments across the programme are well designed and feel worthwhile and challenging. They highly value the in-depth training in academic writing across courses and especially with respect to the thesis. Furthermore, students appreciate the balance between group projects and individual assessments. The panel shares this appreciation and is enthusiastic about the explicit use of group assignments as a means of getting students used to teamwork and becoming open to colleagues' perspectives.

The programme has the necessary tools to ensure the alignment between the overall learning outcomes (academic objectives), the learning goals of the courses and the assessments that establish to what extent students are achieving the intended learning outcomes. Assessment at curriculum and course level is monitored regularly by several quality assurance bodies including the Board of Examiners (BoE) and the BoS. Moreover, there are meetings with the vice-dean and with all teachers on an annual basis. The panel confirmed that the variation of assessments is suitable to assess the intended learning outcomes.



*Grading of the theses*

The panel is impressed by the extensive process to safeguard the quality of the thesis. This starts with the proposal for the thesis, which must be approved by the BoS and the Ethical Review Panel of the FSBS. Two members of the BoS evaluate each thesis proposal. This guarantees the quality of research and uniformity of quality standards across all research master's programmes.

The thesis is graded by the supervisor and an independent second grader (another EdSci teacher who was not involved in the supervision). The thesis is graded on scientific contribution, theoretical embeddedness, appropriateness of methodology, appropriate reporting of the results, depth of discussion and written presentation. In addition, the supervisor (but not the second grader) grades the student's work independency. Thus, the supervisor assesses the product and the process separately. In the case of a large discrepancy between the grade of the supervisor and the second grader, the EdSci coordinator acts as a moderator to achieve more agreement. The thesis is publicly defended in a meeting of a Thesis Examination Committee. Students present their thesis and respond to questions raised by two examiners, one being the second grader from the programme, the other a teacher from another research master's programme of the GSSBS. The final decision on the grade is made after the defence by the Thesis Examination Committee. This decision is based on the proposed grade by the supervisor, the two examiners and the programme coordinator.

The panel is very positive about this thoughtful and extensive procedure. However, the panel suggests including a third assessor when the second reader assesses the thesis as a fail (see also standard 4). In addition, it encourages the programme to make more transparent for students how the different assessors come to the final decision about the grade, in particular when provisional grades of the two assessors differ by more than 1 point on a 10-point scale.

*Board of Examiners*

There is one BoE for all seven research master programmes of FSBS. Each research master's programme has one person in the BoE that is responsible for that specific programme.

The panel reviewed the activities of the BoE in monitoring the quality of examinations. Once a year, the vice-dean, each research master coordinator, the chair of the BoE and the EdSci member of the BoE, have a meeting in which they discuss the assessment plan and theses. Yearly, the BoE checks the level of theses by reading the best and worst theses. In addition, the BoE yearly prepares the Education and Examination Regulations (EER) and communicates this in a meeting with the programme coordinators. The BoE reports to the vice-dean who may use this information in the annual quality assurance meetings with the programme coordinators. The panel is of the opinion that the BoE is very well organised and safeguards the quality of the assessments in a structured and accurate manner. The panel would only like suggesting including a specific question about the assessment in the standardised course evaluations.

*Conclusion*

The panel concludes that the programme has a sound and thorough system of assessment in place and the BoE takes its responsibilities seriously. The programme therefore meets standard 3.





## 2.4 Achieved learning outcomes

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

### *Findings, analysis, and considerations*

In preparation for the site visit, the panel studied a selection of fifteen theses and the accompanying assessment forms. It was generally pleased with their high level. According to the panel, most theses were well-structured in terms of both theory and methodology and to be well-written. The panel generally agrees with the given grades with the exception of one case, where some sections lacked sufficient depth. This thesis was awarded a 6 by the supervisor and a 5 by the second reader. The panel was pleased to find that the programme management and the BoE were aware of the problems with this thesis and agrees that this can be considered an exceptional case. However, it recommends including a third grader when one of the graders assesses the thesis as unsatisfactory. Generally speaking, the panel is convinced that the students show that they have achieved the intended learning outcomes and thus the research master's level.

The panel established that a substantial part of the theses led to a publication, which underlines the quality of graduates of the programme. Of the 91 theses studies completed within the evaluation period, nineteen have been published (some in top journals) and eleven manuscripts are currently under review.

The panel noticed that the alumni of the programme generally appear to find appropriate positions: 52% entered a PhD programme at different universities in the Netherlands and internationally, 11% work in other research positions, 11% as a teacher, 10% in the field of educational consultancy, training, curriculum/test development, and 8% in the field of educational policy. Two of the ten clinical track graduates work in special needs education (the others entered PhD programmes).

During the site visit, the panel met with a number of alumni. All of them were very enthusiastic about the programme and its practical use in their profession. This confirms the results of a recent survey among alumni (completed by 45 of the 91 alumni) indicating that the programme provided the alumni a solid base for their job, and that the skills they learned were useful for their job.

### *Conclusion*

The panel concludes that students of the programme achieve an adequate final level and find suitable jobs. The programme therefore meets standard 4.





## 3. Strengths and recommendations

### 3.1 Strengths of the programme

- Curriculum – The well-structured curriculum offers a good balance of theoretical and methodological courses, obligatory parts and electives, and gives students extensive hands-on research experience;
- Interactive learning environment – The didactic concept is characterised by teaching in small classes and individual guidance with an emphasis on interaction, cooperation, and cohesion amongst students and staff;
- Teaching team – Lecturers are prominent researchers and internationally recognised experts and bring in the latest developments in their field;
- Assessment system – The programme has a sound and thorough system of assessment in place, characterised by a wide variety of assessment methods aligned to the aims of the programme;
- Master thesis procedure – The programme has a thoughtful and extensive procedure to safeguard the quality of the master thesis.

### 3.2 Recommendations

- Didactical concept – Develop a more explicit structure of the didactical concept and communicate to students and staff how this concept evolves through the two years;
- Viability of the programme – Ensure a sufficient inflow of students in the programme. In order to attract a broader range of students, make more explicit that the programme also aims to prepare for research jobs outside academia;
- Study load – Pay more attention to the perceived study load of students, especially in the first year, by spreading the study load more evenly over the year;
- Final grade – Include a third assessor when the second reader assesses the thesis as a fail. Make more transparent for students how the different assessors involved come to the final decision about the grade.



## 4. Conclusion

In the opinion of the panel EdSci is a unique programme. The intended learning outcomes are a good indication of the programme's dedication to education and learning research, including research into special educational needs. The panel is of the opinion that the content and structure of the curriculum and the well-qualified staff constitute an attractive teaching-learning environment for the students. The programme has an adequate system of student assessment and sufficient mechanisms to safeguard its quality. The theses and careers of the graduates show that they have achieved the intended learning outcomes.

Standard	Judgement
Standard 1	Meets the standard
Standard 2	Meets the standard
Standard 3	Meets the standard
Standard 4	Meets the standard
Final conclusion	<b>Positive</b>



# Appendix A – Panel composition and programmes of the cluster

Panel composition of the cluster:

- Prof. dr. Janke Cohen-Schotanus (chair) Professor emeritus of Research of Education in the Medical Sciences;
- Prof. dr. Rob Ruiter (chair), Professor of Health and Social Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience at Maastricht University;
- Prof. dr. Lidia Arends, Professor of Statistics and Research Methodology, Department of Psychology, Education & Child Studies at Erasmus University Rotterdam;
- Prof. dr. Caroline Braet, Professor of Developmental Psychopathology, Department of Developmental, Personality and Social Psychology at Ghent University;
- Prof. dr. Rachel Gibson, Professor of Politics, Department of Politics, University of Manchester;
- Prof. dr. Harm Hospers, Professor emeritus of Applied Health Psychology;
- Prof. dr. Detlev Leutner, Professor of Instructional Psychology, Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Duisburg-Essen;
- Prof. dr. Maike Luhmann, Professor of Psychological Methods, Department of psychology, Ruhr University Bochum;
- Hanne Oberman Msc (student member). Methodology and Statistics for the Behavioural, Biomedical, and Social Sciences, Utrecht University (graduated in 2020);
- Prof dr. Arne Roets, Professor of Social Psychology, Faculty of psychology and educational sciences, Department of Developmental, Personality, and Social Psychology, Ghent University;
- Prof. dr. Guus Smeets, Professor of Education in Psychology, Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences at Erasmus University Rotterdam;
- Yvonne Schittenhelm BSc, (student member), Master Individual Differences and Assessment, Tilburg University;
- Marie Stadel MSc (student member), Behavioural and Social Sciences Research Master, University of Groningen (graduated in 2020);
- Prof. dr. Lieven Verschaffel, Professor of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, KU Leuven;
- Prof. dr. Karine Verschueren, Professor of School and Developmental Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, KU Leuven.

The cluster consist of thirteen programmes:

- M Individual Differences and Assessment (research), Tilburg University;
- M Behavioural Science (research), Radboud University;
- M Clinical and Developmental Psychopathology (research), Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam;
- M Social Psychology: Regulation of Social Behaviour (research), Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam;
- M Psychology (research), University of Amsterdam;
- M Communication Science (research), University of Amsterdam;
- M Educational Sciences: Learning in Interaction (research), Utrecht University;



- M Methodology and Statistics for the Behavioural, Biomedical and Social Sciences (research), Utrecht University;
- M Development and Socialisation in Childhood and Adolescence (research), Utrecht University;
- M Social & Health Psychology (research), Utrecht University;
- M Behavioural and Social Sciences (research), University of Groningen;
- M Psychology (research), Leiden University;
- M Developmental Psychopathology in Education and Child Studies (research), Leiden University.



## Appendix B – Schedule of the visit

10 March 2021

Time	Session
08.30 – 10.00	Preparation panel
10.00 – 10.45	Management
10.45 – 11.00	Evaluation
11.00 – 11.45	Students
11.45 – 12.00	Evaluation
12.45 – 13.30	Lecturers
13.30 – 13.45	Evaluation
13.45 – 14.15	Alumni
14.15 – 14.30	Evaluation
14.30 – 15.00	Examination board
15.00 – 15.30	evaluation and preparing questions for management
15.30 -16.00	Second meeting management
16.00 – 17.30	Evaluation
17.30 – 17.45	Presentation of first findings



## Appendix C – Documents studied

- Self-evaluation report with appendices
  - Appendix 1 Assessment report of the previous accreditation
  - Appendix 2 Response to recommendations from the previous accreditation
  - Appendix 3 Overview of current EdSci curriculum with short course descriptions
  - Appendix 4 Inflow and outflow of students
  - Appendix 5 Overview of EdSci staff 2019–2020 and 2020–2021
  - Appendix 6 Education and Examination Regulations
  - Appendix 7 Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on FSBS and EdSci education
- Fifteen theses with assessment forms



## Appendix D – Abbreviations

BoE	Board of Examiners
BoS	Board of Studies
EC	European Credit
EdSci	Educational Sciences: Learning in Interaction
EER	Education and Examination Regulations
E&L	Education & Learning
FAIR	Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable
FSBS	Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences
GSSBS	Graduate School of Social and Behavioural Sciences
NVAO	<i>Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie</i>
STQ	Senior university Teaching Qualification
UU	Utrecht University
UTQ	University Teaching Qualification

