



NVAO  THE NETHERLANDS

ASSESSMENT CONDITIONS

ACADEMIC MASTER
ENERGY SCIENCE
Utrecht University

REPORT
12 April 2021



1 NVAO Procedure

NVAO takes a decision on the accreditation of a programme on the basis of a panel report. If the accreditation decision is conditionally positive NVAO sets a time limit of maximum two years for the programme to meet the conditions.

At the request of the institution of higher education a panel of independent experts will assess whether the conditions are met. The institution sends the advisory report to NVAO before the end of the term. The assessment should make clear that the programme meets the NVAO quality criteria.

The NVAO decision and the panel report are published on the agency's website www.nvao.net. There you can also find more information on NVAO and the assessment of conditions.

2 Panel

Peer experts

1. Prof. dr. ir. Geert Verbong (*chair*), Emeritus professor of System Innovations & Sustainability Transitions at Eindhoven University of Technology;
2. Ir. Martin Scheepers, senior researcher of Energy Transitions Studies at TNO, Amsterdam;
3. Vera Broek (*student*), student BSc Biomedical Sciences, Leiden University Medical Centre and student BMA, Codarts University of the Arts, Rotterdam.

Assisting staff

- Yvet Blom, secretary;
- Reina Louw, NVAO policy advisor and process coordinator.

Panel discussion (online)

19 March 2021

3 Programme

3.1 General Data

Institution	: Utrecht University
Programme	: Energy Science
Mode of study	: Full-time
Degree	: Master of Science
Location	: Utrecht
Study load	: 120 EC ¹
Field of study	: Science

3.2 NVAO Conditional Accreditation Decision

Report	: 7 March 2019
Decision	: 13 May 2019
Term	: 11 March 2021

4 Assessment of Conditions

4.1 Condition 1

The programme must develop a plan of action in which it outlines how adherence of the assessment procedures for the Master Thesis is guaranteed.

Judgement

The condition is met.

Findings, analysis and considerations

After extensive review of the action plan, the panel notes that the programme has come up with a well-designed blueprint. It addresses the points of concern the panel expressed during the initial accreditation procedure. The action plan describes six changes aimed to improve the programme's assessment procedures.

Firstly, the programme introduces a new feedback procedure. Supervisors must send each Master Thesis assessment form to the Energy Science Programme Leader and the Head of the Energy and Resources group (E&R group). They will check the rubrics and notify the supervisor of their findings. Secondly, every six months meetings will be organised where lecturers get the opportunity to discuss marking criteria. During these meetings, lecturers who mark Master's theses, share their best practices on filling out rubrics. The third change is creating a training for new supervisors and second readers. Fourthly, the Director of Education and the Board of Examiners will raise awareness about assessment policies regarding the Master's Thesis. In the fifth place, an internal audit will be set up, to help reflect on the activities derived from the action plan. The sixth and final proposed change is improving the thesis supervision instructions to ensure everyone involved understands what is expected of them.

¹ European Credits

The panel acknowledges the improvements to the assessment procedure put in place by the organisation. The organisation has implemented proper safeguards to assure compliance with the programme's thesis assessment procedures. Based on the above, the panel concludes this condition to be fulfilled satisfactory.

4.2 Condition 2

Give account of the execution of this plan of action.

Judgement

The condition is met.

Findings, analysis and considerations

The panel is impressed with the procedures put in place to implement the changes to the assessment process. The improvements have been well executed and the changes to the assessment process are undeniable. The organisation has introduced a new type of meeting session where the lecturer staff discusses best practices. These sessions will take place four times per year. The organisation has also created a comprehensive training programme aimed to provide supervisors and second readers with all the necessary information needed to ensure consistency in the assessment of theses. New staff members collectively follow the training before commencing any thesis assessment work. The panel is pleased with the introduction of the new training course and the regular team meetings. Both these implementations will help to identify and solve different documenting styles between lectures and ensures a more consistent marking system.

Another very valuable change has been the internal audit which is conducted by the assessment committee. The committee consisted of lecturers from within the Faculty of Geosciences who have assessed the action plan. They have thoroughly reviewed the organisation's new assessment procedure and identified some inconsistencies. An example is to make it possible to provide a detailed description on how the student can improve. The inconsistencies were reported to the master's management. The panel appreciates the assessment committee's critical observations. The audit has resulted in a number of recommendations of which the majority has been embraced by the organisation. An example is the instruction to include extensive qualitative feedback in the free text space of the assessment form. The panel notes that the organisation has given valid reasons where recommendations were rejected. An example of such recommendation was introducing a third reader when a Master Thesis scored an 8.5 or higher. Management is of the opinion that the supervisor and the second reader are more than capable to score a thesis together. Besides, there are already sufficient methods in place in case the supervisor and the second reader cannot come to an agreement on the final score. When a situation like that occurs either the programme leader or a member of the Examination Board is engaged as third reader.

The panel welcomes the clear Master's Thesis manual instructions. The introduction of the manual has had several positive effects. For example, the proper, intended use of rubrics, providing qualitative feedback, and a better description of the role of the second reader.

The panel believes that after the implementation of several new procedures there is a sound assessment process in place. The panel therefore determines that the action plan has been suitably executed.

4.1 Condition 3

Provide the panel with theses from the 2019-2020 academic year (including their assessments) to be evaluated.

Judgement

The condition is met.

Findings, analysis and considerations

The panel received 15 random master theses to be evaluated and concludes that the assessment of the theses is more consistent now than during the initial accreditation process. The rubrics, the feedback, and the final scores are better aligned. Putting clear procedures in place prevents inconsistencies. The panel has not come across any major abnormalities. Some minor differences in the way the Master Theses were assessed were noticed by the panel, but this is to be expected.

The final theses scores are in line with the scores the panel would have given the theses. In some cases, the panel would have scored a thesis slightly higher or lower, but the overall scores were always close to the ones given by the lecturers. The lecturers have made proper use of the text box on the assessment form to provide feedback including explaining how they got to a certain score.

The panel did find some inconsistencies the way second readers filled out the assessment form. Some forms include the second reader's opinion (in the provided text boxes) while others don't. The panel advises to include the second reader's view on all forms. And believes an extra explanation is justified when scoring a thesis with either a very high or a very low score. That way students know exactly the reasoning behind their (maybe unexpected) score.

The overall conclusion is that the theses, thanks to the new requirements, are assessed adequately. The changes to the overall assessment procedure ensure that the scoring and the reasoning behind the scores are consistent. The panel has therefore come to the conclusion that the organisation meets this condition.

4.3 Final judgement

The panel concludes that the programme meets the conditions. The programme has properly addressed the shortcomings which were identified in the previous peer review. Therefore, the panel reaches a positive conclusion regarding the quality of the programme.

