

Assessment report  
NVAO Limited Framework Programme Assessment

**Research Master Sociology and Social Research**

Utrecht University

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## 1. Executive summary

In this executive summary, the panel presents the main considerations which led to the assessment of the quality of the Research Master Sociology and Social Research programme of Utrecht University. The programme was assessed according to the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands. The additional NVAO requirements for research master programmes were taken into account.

The programme organisation is adequate and the programme is embedded well in the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of Utrecht University.

The profile of the programme is very clear. The programme is mono-disciplinary, being directed towards the study of analytical, quantitative sociology. Sociological theory and empirical research methods are intimately connected in the programme. Although the programme is meant to address problems from the sociological perspective, it is open to insights from other disciplines.

The programme intended learning outcomes conform to the master level and surpass this level in some respects, aiming at higher levels of knowledge production and adequately preparing students for PhD trajectories.

The comparison of this programme to similar programmes shows the programme being in line with prestigious programmes in this field abroad.

The panel endorses the English name of the programme and English as the language of instruction. The English language enables students to appropriately prepare for international research positions in this field, and to relate to the international research community.

Programme management appropriately followed up on the recommendations made by the previous assessment panel.

Although the intake of the programme is rather small, the average number of incoming students allows for appropriate class sizes and for educational viability. The panel supports the target intake figure of 20 students, set by programme management. The admission requirements and procedures are elaborate and assure admitting students, who have the capacities to complete the programme.

The curriculum meets the programme intended learning outcomes, and is consistent, coherent and cumulative, being clearly steered by the strong programme profile. The courses in the curriculum allow students to reach the high-level intended learning outcomes. The methods training in the programme enables students to achieve advanced levels of knowledge and skills in analytical, quantitative research methods. The panel appreciates the elective space in the curriculum, giving students the chance to specialise in topics or methods or to engage in research internships.

The lecturers in the programme are a cohesive group of staff members with very good credentials in terms of educational expertise, academic qualifications and research track records. The Department of Sociology, which the lecturers are involved in, showed *very good to excellent* results in the recent research assessment. The panel, therefore, finds the programme to be embedded in high-quality research activities. The panel regards the work load of the teachers as manageable.

The educational concept and study methods are appropriate for this programme. The guidance and supervision offered by the programme coordinator, lecturers, thesis supervisors and programme tutor are up to standard and are appreciated by the students. The panel proposes, nevertheless, to improve guidance and support on choosing elective courses, summer schools or internships, and to tailor arrangements to students' situations. The electives coordinator approves the students' plans for electives. The panel recommends to involve the Board of Examiners in approving electives. The panel also advises to be attentive to students' well-being, especially in the second year of the programme. The drop-out and study success figures for the programme are up to standard. Students can voice their opinions about the quality of the programme. The follow-up on their remarks is, however, not clearly documented. This can be improved.

Suitable rules, regulations and procedures have been put in place to assure the examinations' and assessments' quality. The panel, nevertheless, recommends the Board of Examiners to act more decisively in monitoring examinations and assessments by, among other, scheduling calibration sessions to review master theses.

The examination methods in the courses are satisfactorily varied and are adequate for the knowledge, insights and skills to be tested.

The panel regards the supervision and assessment processes for the master thesis generally to be appropriate. The panel does not doubt the quality of the current processes. The written comments by examiners on the thesis assessment forms are elaborate. To further improve the thesis assessment and grading processes, the panel recommends to make more transparent and to better document the conversion from the proposed grade to the final grade for the thesis, including the weighing in the final grade of the degree of students' independence in the thesis process and of the students' defence. The panel advises to consider introducing rubrics for theses' assessments, to assure the independent position of the second readers, as the number of examiners is rather small, to relate the assessment criteria for the thesis to the programme intended learning outcomes and to consider adding weights to the assessment criteria. The panel recommends to have master theses checked for plagiarism and to assign the responsibilities in this respect.

The measures programme management has taken in the Covid-crisis to provide education, organise examinations and assessments, and monitor the quality of these are appropriate. The well-being of students has been guarded adequately as well.

The panel reviewed fifteen master theses of programme graduates of the last two years. No theses were found by the panel to be unsatisfactory. Out of all the theses reviewed, five theses were graded satisfactory by the panel, eight theses were found to be good, and two theses were

considered to be excellent. The panel found the marks for ten theses to be appropriate, whereas the marks for five theses were regarded to be too high, but less than one point too high.

The panel regards the average grade for the master theses of 7.7 to be appropriate. The proportion of students graduating cum laude, being 32 %, is adequate as well. The panel is impressed with the proportion of students having had their thesis published in peer-reviewed journals.

Although career preparation activities are organised in the programme, the panel recommends to step up the efforts in this respect by, among other, scheduling career services focused on the particular group of students from the programme and intensifying connections to the alumni network.

The panel appreciates the programme preparing well for both academic or non-academic research positions. Programme management adequately keeps track of the number of graduates finding research positions as PhD students or in non-academic research. The panel applauds the results of the programme, 78 % of the graduates having secured PhD positions or non-academic research positions.

The panel which conducted the assessment of the Research Master Sociology and Social Research programme of Utrecht University assesses this programme to meet the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, judging the programme to be positive. Therefore, the panel recommends NVAO to continue the accreditation of this programme.

Rotterdam, 2 September 2021,

Prof. L.J. de Haan PhD  
(panel chair)

W. Vercouteren MSc  
(panel secretary)

## 2. Programme administrative information

Name programme in CROHO: Master Sociology and Social Research (Research)  
Orientation, level programme: Academic Master  
Grade: MSc  
Number of credits: 120 EC  
Specialisations: N.A.  
Location: Utrecht  
Mode of study: Full-time  
Language of instruction: English  
Registration in CROHO: 21PD-60748

Name of institution: Utrecht University  
Status of institution: Government-funded University  
Institution's quality assurance: Approved

### 3. Findings, considerations and assessments per standard

#### 3.1 Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

##### *Findings*

The Research Master Sociology and Social Research programme is one of the seven research master programmes of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of Utrecht University. The programme carries 120 EC of study load and takes two years to complete. The organisation of this as well as the other research master programmes is in the hands of the Graduate School of Social and Behavioural Sciences. The Board of Studies of the Graduate School, on which sit the programme coordinators of all seven research master programmes, is responsible for the coordination and quality assurance of these programmes. The programme coordinator manages the programme on the day-to-day basis. The Programme Advisory Committee, being composed of lecturers and students, advises the programme coordinator on the quality of the programme. The Board of Examiners for this and the other research master programmes of the Faculty monitors the quality of examinations and assessments of the programme and verifies programme graduates meeting the intended learning outcomes.

The programme is offered by the Department of Sociology of Utrecht University and has close relations with the Interuniversity Centre for Social Science Theory and Methodology (ICS). The Utrecht branch of ICS largely overlaps with the Department of Sociology. The programme is, therefore, embedded in research done in the Department and in the ICS. Social science research is seen as theory-driven rather than as data-driven. The programme profile is to train students in becoming qualified researchers with the capacities to independently design and carry out social science research. Students are educated in sociological theory and in advanced quantitative research methods to address scientific and societal relevant research questions in the social sciences field. The programme is mono-disciplinary, being directed towards the discipline of sociology, but at the same time open to insights from other disciplines. In terms of methodology, the programme is geared towards analytical, quantitative research methods.

The intended learning outcomes of the programme include knowledge and understanding of issues in contemporary sociology, theoretical models of social behaviour and advanced statistics, applying theoretical and statistical knowledge to study research problems in the social sciences, carrying out sociological research independently, evaluating empirical research in this field, communicating to other researchers and to non-specialists about research in the field, and keeping track of trends in this field.

The programme has been compared to other programmes in this field. The programme is unique in the Netherlands, being the only mono-disciplinary, two-year master programme. Other two-year

programmes in this field are multi-disciplinary. The Utrecht programme is very comparable to two-year, research-oriented master programmes in this field in Oxford and Mannheim.

Programme management showed the intended learning outcomes to correspond to the Dublin descriptors for the second cycle, as indicators of the master level. The intended learning outcomes partly reach the Dublin descriptors for the third cycle, as this research master programme clearly aims higher and has a much stronger research orientation than regular master programmes in this field and aims to prepare students for PhD positions.

The programme name is in English, and the programme is taught in English as well. The English name and English as language of instruction are chosen to prepare students for the international labour market for research positions in this field, and to acquire international and intercultural skills beneficial to act in international research contexts. English is also the *lingua franca* of international research in this field. Finally, the English language allows international students to enrol.

Programme management addressed the recommendations of the previous assessment panel. The diversity of topics in the first year was increased and less emphasis was put on the master thesis by shifting 7.5 EC from the thesis to the electives and by covering more topics of general relevance (such as causal inference) in the thesis literature review course. The master thesis assessment form was improved to include specific, concrete assessment criteria.

#### *Considerations*

The panel sees the programme organisation as adequate and considers the programme to be well-embedded in the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of Utrecht University.

The panel appreciates the profile of the programme as being very clear. The programme is mono-disciplinary, being directed towards the study of analytical, quantitative sociology. Sociological theory and empirical research methods are intimately connected in the programme. Although the programme is meant to address problems from the sociological perspective, it is open to insights from other disciplines.

The programme intended learning outcomes meet the research master requirements. The intended learning outcomes, so the panel established, conform to the master level and surpass this level in some respects, aiming at higher levels of knowledge production and adequately preparing students for PhD trajectories.

The panel welcomes the comparison of this programme to similar programmes, observing the programme being in line with prestigious programmes in this field abroad.

The panel endorses the English name of the programme and English as the language of instruction. The English language enables students to appropriately prepare for international research positions in this field, and to relate to the international research community.

Programme management appropriately followed up on the recommendations made by the previous assessment panel.

*Assessment of this standard*

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess the programme to meet Standard 1, Intended learning outcomes.



### 3.2 Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment

The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

#### *Findings*

The number of applications for the programme is on average 45 per year for the last six years. On average 28 students are admitted. About 50 % of them do not come on account of having other options or because of financial restrictions. The number of students enrolling in the programme is 13 to 14 students per year for the last six years, ranging from 9 to 17 students per year. Programme management has set the target intake figure at 20 students. Intake in 2021 will be around that number. The proportion of international students is stable, being 40 % of total intake. International students come from around the globe. The gender balance is quite even.

The programme admission requirements are bachelor degrees in social or behavioural sciences and adequate knowledge of and skills in methods and statistics. The grade point average of candidates in the previous education must be at least be 7.5 (Dutch grading system). Applicants have to be proficient in English. The Board of Studies of the Graduate School decides on admissions. Motivation of applicants is taken into account. Applicants lacking sufficient methods and statistics knowledge and skills may take courses to remedy their deficiencies before the start of the programme.

Programme management demonstrated the curriculum to meet the intended learning outcomes of the programme. The curriculum consists of courses, specifically designed for this programme. Students do not take regular master courses. The curriculum is composed of ten compulsory courses (each 7.5 EC), elective courses (22.5 EC) and the master thesis (22.5 EC). In the first year, four of the courses offered are substantive courses, addressing various subjects in the programme field. One of these courses is meant as the literature review for the master theses. Recently in this course, sample design, questionnaires, causality issues and survey design were introduced. The four other courses in the first year are methods courses, two *Methods and Statistics* courses and two *Research Practicum* courses. The *Methods and Statistics* courses are taken together with students of the Research Master Migration, Ethnic Relations, and Multiculturalism. In these courses, quantitative methods are addressed. Data collection strategies and techniques are included. In the *Research Practicum* courses, students integrate theory and methods of the preceding courses, complete the research cycle and draft research papers. In the second year, students are offered the opportunities to take elective courses, research internships or summer schools. About 50 % of the students take master courses at Dutch universities, about 25 % do research internships in the Netherlands or abroad and another 25 % attend summer schools offered by universities or institutes in the Netherlands or abroad. Students may take courses on qualitative methods, but not many of them do so. In the two *Research Seminars* scheduled in parallel to the master thesis in the second year, students come together in supervised weekly meetings to report on and discuss the design and carrying out of the theoretical part as well as the methods and empirical parts of their master theses.

In the *Research Seminars*, research ethics are addressed. Every year, renowned scholars present their research in one-week master classes.

The staff teaching in the programme comprises 16 lecturers, among whom are five full professors, three associate professors, and five assistant professors. All of them have PhDs and are University Teaching Qualification certified, whereas eight of them obtained the Senior University Teaching Qualification. One PhD student is involved in advising students on practical issues of assignments in the first *Research Practicum* course. The lecturers are internationally qualified researchers in their field of study and publish in peer-reviewed journals. The research programme of the Department of Sociology, which lecturers are involved in as researchers, obtained for each of the assessment criteria the scores *very good* or *excellent* in the research assessment in 2020. The lecturers participate in national research networks in the Netherlands. Staff members experience high but manageable workload. The coming years, the Department of Sociology will recruit four extra lecturers.

The educational concept of the programme rests on teaching by qualified researchers who act as examples for students, students practising all aspects of the research process, students learning from each other by collaborating and critically reviewing each others' work, and students taking the responsibility for their learning processes. The study methods in the courses are lectures, tutorials, research seminars, and computer lab sessions. Class sizes are small. The students-to-staff ratio in the programme is on average 16/1 for the last five years. Students experience teachers as being easily approachable and as being very helpful. Students are guided in the programme by the tutor, who meets with students and may be contacted by students for assistance. Students find in particular the first semester of the curriculum challenging. Interaction among students is intensive in the first year but much less in the rather individualistic second year, in which contact hours are three hours per week in the *Research Seminars*. The number of students dropping out of the programme is only one or two students per cohort, mostly dropping out in the first semester. The other students complete the programme within the nominal study time of two years. Only one student in the last six cohorts took longer.

Programme management has taken measures to organise education in the Covid crisis and to monitor the quality of the education. On-campus education often proved not to be feasible, mainly due to government regulations. Therefore, teaching has been converted to online teaching. Lecturers are supported by educational experts and the ICT-support office to transfer their lectures and tutorials to online teaching. To guard the well-being of students, teachers and students as well as students among each other met informally. Programme management took initiatives for community building for international students. Students experience the learning processes during the Covid crisis as being challenging, but they appreciate the education and assistance offered by programme management and lecturers.

### *Considerations*

Although the intake for the programme is rather small, the average number of incoming students allows for appropriate class sizes and for the educational viability of the programme. The panel supports the target intake figure of 20 students, as set by programme management. The entry

requirements and admission procedures are elaborate and assure admitting students, who have the capacities to complete the programme.

The curriculum meets, so the panel established, the programme intended learning outcomes. The panel considers the curriculum to be consistent, coherent and cumulative, being clearly steered by the strong programme profile. The courses in the curriculum allow students to reach the high-level intended learning outcomes. The methods training in the programme enables students to achieve advanced levels of knowledge and skills in analytical, quantitative research methods. The panel appreciates the elective space in the curriculum, giving students the chance to specialise in topics or methods or to engage in research internships. Students informed the panel there being a mismatch in the scheduling of the statistics taught in the third course of the curriculum and the assignment to be completed in the second course. The panel proposes to remedy this.

The panel sees the lecturers in the programme as being a cohesive group of staff members. The lecturers have very good credentials in terms of educational expertise, academic qualifications and research track records. The Department of Sociology, which the lecturers are involved in, showed *very good* to *excellent* results in the recent research assessment. The panel, therefore, finds the programme to be embedded in high-quality research activities. The panel regards the work load of the teachers as manageable.

The panel regards the educational concept and study methods as appropriate for this programme. The guidance and supervision offered by the programme coordinator, lecturers, thesis supervisors and programme tutor are up to standard and are appreciated by the students. The panel proposes, nevertheless, to improve guidance and support, especially for international students, on choosing elective courses, summer schools or internships, and to tailor arrangements to students' situations. The electives coordinator approves the students' plans for electives. The panel recommends to involve the Board of Examiners in approving electives. The panel also advises to be attentive to students' well-being, especially in the second year of the programme, which is rather individualistic and in which hours of face-to-face education are limited. The drop-out and study success figures for the programme are up to standard. Students can voice their opinions about the quality of the programme. The follow-up on their remarks is, however, not clearly documented. This can be improved.

In the panel's view, programme management took measures to provide adequate education during the Covid crisis, to assure the quality of this education, and to monitor the well-being of students.

#### *Assessment of this standard*

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess the programme to meet Standard 2, Teaching-learning environment.

### 3.3 Standard 3: Student assessment

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

The examination and assessment rules for the programme are specified in the Education and Examination Regulations of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences. The assessment plan for the programme specifies the relations between the programme intended learning outcomes and the course objectives, offers the overview of assessments at course level, meant to test the course objectives, and clarifies how students reach the intended learning outcomes in the programme. Course examinations are mostly drafted and assessed by teams of examiners. To assess course examinations, answer keys and assessment criteria are made available. Students are informed about the set up of course assessments.

As has been said, the Board of Examiners for this and the other research master programmes of the Faculty ensures the quality of examinations and assessments of the programme. On behalf of the Board of Examiners, the Assessment Committee regularly reviews the programme assessment plan, course examinations and master theses. Theses are reviewed on the basis of thesis assessment forms in a procedural sense and not on the basis of the theses themselves. The Board communicates the findings to the Board of Studies and the programme coordinator. The coordinator in turn informs the staff. The Board of Examiners monitors the follow-up on the Board's findings.

In all courses, the final course grade is based upon multiple examinations. Examination methods are assignments, papers, presentations, class participation, and posters. Written examinations are scheduled as part of the examination in the *Methods and Statistics* courses. In some courses, examinations are partly or completely composed of group assignments.

For their master thesis, students may pick one of the topics proposed by staff members. They may also propose topics themselves. Students drafting the master thesis are individually guided in the process by the thesis supervisor. Master theses are assessed by the supervisor and the second reader independently and completing separate thesis assessment forms. Only the supervisor assesses the thesis process, which is one of the assessment criteria. When supervisor and second reader differ on the grading of the thesis with more than 0.5 points, they have to discuss their differing views and arrive at a common grade. The consensual grade of the supervisor and the second reader is the proposed grade. Students defend their master theses in front of two independent examiners, one of whom may be the second reader. After the defence, the Thesis Examination Committee, being composed of the thesis supervisor, second reader, two independent examiners and programme coordinator, decides whether the proposed grade should be lowered or raised by maximum 0.5 points. At the end, all thesis grades are discussed with all programme staff to verify the grades given. These deliberations may affect the grades. After this meeting, students are informed about the grade for their thesis. They are also provided with supervisor's and second reader's written feedback.

Programme management has taken measures to organise examinations and assessments in the Covid crisis and to monitor their quality. On-campus examinations, in person presentations and assignments by student groups were no longer feasible. The examinations mentioned are adapted to other formats, such as take-home examinations, online presentations, and digital work on joint assignments. No closed-book examinations are scheduled in the programme. Therefore, the effects of the lockdown on examinations and assessments were relatively small. Students are allowed to use secondary data instead of having to collect data themselves. Proposed changes in examinations and assessments are submitted to the Board of Examiners for approval. This Board monitors the quality of examinations and assessments and assures these to meet the programme intended learning outcomes.

#### *Considerations*

The panel considers the rules and regulations for the programme examinations and assessments to be adequate. Suitable procedures have been put in place to assure the quality of examinations and assessments. The panel, nevertheless, recommends the Board of Examiners to act more decisively in monitoring examinations and assessments by, among other, scheduling calibration sessions to review master theses.

The examination methods in the courses are adequate for the knowledge, insights and skills to be tested in these courses. The examination methods are satisfactorily varied.

The panel regards the supervision and assessment processes for the master thesis generally to be appropriate. The panel does not doubt the quality of the current processes. The written comments by examiners on the thesis assessment forms are elaborate. To further improve the thesis assessment and grading processes, the panel recommends to make more transparent and to better document the conversion from the proposed grade to the final grade for the thesis, including the weighing in the final grade of the degree of students' independence in the thesis process and of the students' defence. The panel advises to consider introducing rubrics for theses' assessments, to assure the independent position of the second readers, as the number of examiners is rather small, to relate the assessment criteria for the thesis to the programme intended learning outcomes and to consider adding weights to the assessment criteria. The panel recommends to have master theses checked for plagiarism and to assign the responsibilities in this respect.

The panel considers the measures programme management has taken to organise examinations and assessments in the Covid-crisis and to monitor the quality of these examinations and assessments to be appropriate.

#### *Assessment of this standard*

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess the programme to meet Standard 3, Student assessment.

### 3.4 Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

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

Students are to demonstrate the knowledge and skills, they have acquired in the programme, in the master thesis. The average grade for the master theses is 7.7 for the last four cohorts. The Board of Examiners for the programme finds the marks of the thesis examiners not too high and to reflect appropriately the quality of the theses.

Master theses are written in the format of international journal articles, to allow students to have their thesis published in peer-reviewed journals. About 34 % of the programme graduates in the years 2015 to 2020 succeeded in having their thesis published in peer-reviewed journals. Another 36 % of the graduates in these years have their thesis article under review or are in the process of preparing their thesis for publication.

The proportion of students graduating cum laude, was 32 % in the years 2015 to 2020.

The programme primarily aims to prepare students for both PhD positions or for positions in non-academic research. Every year, students of all seven research master programme organise the annual career event to inform students about career prospects outside of academia and to bring them into contact with graduates from these programmes. This year, an event was specifically organised for students of this programme. The alumni network of the programme has students and graduates as participants.

On the basis of the figures for students having graduated between 2015 and 2020, the proportion of programme graduates proceeding to PhD trajectories is 47 %, whereas 31 % of the graduates found positions in non-academic research.

#### *Considerations*

The panel reviewed fifteen master theses of programme graduates. The theses were selected from all of the theses of graduates of the last two years. In the selection, theses with lower, average and higher marks were represented. No theses were found by the panel to be unsatisfactory. Out of all the theses reviewed, five theses were graded satisfactory by the panel, eight theses were found to be good, and two theses were considered to be excellent. The marks for ten theses were regarded by the panel to be appropriate. The panel found the marks for five theses to be too high, but less than one point too high.

The panel regards the average grade for the master theses of 7.7 to be appropriate. The proportion of students graduating cum laude, being 32 %, is considered by the panel to be adequate as well. The panel is impressed with the proportion of students having had their master thesis published in peer-reviewed journals.

Although career preparation activities are organised in the programme, the panel recommends to step up the efforts in this respect by, among other, scheduling career services focused on the particular group of students from the programme (and not only the faculty-wide student population) and intensifying the connections to the alumni network.

The panel appreciates the programme preparing well for both academic or non-academic research positions. Programme management adequately keeps track of the number of graduates finding research positions as PhD students or in non-academic research. The panel applauds the results of the programme, 78 % of the graduates having secured PhD positions or non-academic research positions.

*Assessment of this standard*

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess the programme to meet Standard 4, Achieved learning outcomes.

#### 4. Overview of assessments

Standard	Assessment
Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes	Programme meets Standard 1
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	Programme meets Standard 2
Standard 3: Student assessment	Programme meets Standard 3
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	Programme meets Standard 4
Programme	Positive



## 5. Recommendations

In this report, a number of recommendations by the panel have been listed. For the sake of clarity, these have been brought together below.

- To improve the guidance and support for students, especially for international students, on choosing elective courses, summer schools or internships, and to tailor arrangements to students' situations.
- To involve the Board of Examiners more actively in approving elective courses, summer schools or internships.
- To be attentive to students' well-being, especially in the second year of the programme, which is rather individualistic and in which hours of face-to-face education are limited.
- For the Board of Examiners to act more decisively in monitoring examinations and assessments by, among other, scheduling calibration sessions to review master theses.
- To make more transparent and to better document the conversion from the proposed grade to the final grade for the master thesis, including the weighing in the final grade of the degree of students' independence in the thesis process and of the students' defence.
- To consider introducing rubrics for theses' assessments, to assure the independent position of second readers, as the number of examiners is rather small, to relate the assessment criteria for the thesis to the programme intended learning outcomes and to consider adding weights to the assessment criteria.
- To have master theses checked for plagiarism and to assign the responsibilities in this respect.
- To step up the career preparation activities by, among other, scheduling career services for the particular group of students from the programme and intensifying the connections to the alumni network.

## Appendix: Assessment process

Certiked VBI evaluation agency was requested by Utrecht University to support the limited framework programme assessment process for the Research Master Sociology and Social Research programme of this University. The objective of the programme assessment of this research master programme was to establish whether the programme would conform to the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, September, 2018 (officially published in Stert. 2019 no. 3198, 29 January 2019) as well as to the criteria listed in the NVAO Specification of additional criteria for research master's programmes, 30 May, 2016.

This programme is one of the programmes in the assessment cluster of Social Sciences Research Master programmes (in Dutch: WO OZM Maatschappij). Management of the programmes in this assessment cluster discussed the composition of the assessment panel and drafted the list of panel candidates.

Having conferred with the Research Master Sociology and Social Research of Utrecht University programme management, Certiked invited candidate panel members to sit on the assessment panel. The panel members agreed to do so.

The panel composition was as follows:

- Prof. L.J. de Haan PhD, Professor Emeritus of Development Studies, International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands (panel chair);
- Prof. A. Need PhD, Professor of Sociology and Public Policy; Dean Twente Graduate School, University of Twente, the Netherlands (panel member)
- Prof. J.Y. Nazroo PhD, Professor of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, United Kingdom (panel member);
- Prof. C. Kroneberg PhD, Professor of Sociology, Faculty of Management, Economics and Social Sciences, University of Cologne, Germany (panel member);
- M. Ferreira Torres MSc, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, the Netherlands (student member).

On behalf of Certiked, W. Vercouteren MSc served as the process coordinator and secretary in the assessment process.

All panel members and the secretary confirmed in writing being impartial with regard to the programme to be assessed as well as observing the rules of confidentiality. Having obtained the authorisation by the University, Certiked requested the approval of NVAO of the proposed panel to conduct the assessment. NVAO have given their approval.

To prepare for the assessment process, the process coordinator convened with programme management to discuss the documents to be presented to the assessment panel, the site visit schedule, and the planning of the preparatory activities. In the course of this process, programme

management and the process coordinator regularly had contact to fine-tune the process. The activities prior to the site visit were performed as planned. Programme management approved of the site visit schedule.

Well in advance of the site visit date, programme management sent the list of theses of programme graduates of the two most recent years. Acting on behalf of the assessment panel, the process coordinator selected fifteen theses from this list. In the selection, theses with lower, average and higher grades were evenly represented.

The panel members were forwarded in time the documents, prepared by programme management. These documents consisted of the self-evaluation report, the appendices to the self-evaluation report and additional information. The student chapter was part of the self-evaluation report. The appendices to the self-evaluation report included overview of relations of intended learning outcomes to Dublin descriptors, overview of relations of curriculum to intended learning outcomes, course descriptions including lecturers and literature, overview of electives, overview of staff with main research activities and key publications, student-to-staff ratio, examination methods in courses, overview of master theses published in 2015 – 2020, Education and Examination Regulations and impact of Covid pandemic on education. The additional information consisted of course dossiers, course examinations, Programme Advisory Committee minutes, and Board of Examiners annual reports.

To assist panel members in assessing the programme, they were sent the Trained Eye Research Masters Limited Framework document of Certiked evaluation agency, this document being the elaboration of the NVAO Assessment framework and the NVAO Specification for research master programmes.

Prior to the site visit date, the assessment panel chair and the process coordinator met to discuss the assessment process procedures. In this meeting, the panel chair was informed about the profile of panel chairs of NVAO. The panel chair agreed to work in line with the profile of panel chairs.

Seeing the continuing spread of Covid infections in the Netherlands and the measures taken by Dutch government to counter the spread of infections, programme management proposed the site visit to be organised online. All panel members agreed to the online visit.

Prior to the date of the online visit, panel members sent in their preliminary findings, based upon their studying the programme documents, and sent in questions to be put to the programme representatives on the day of the visit. The panel secretary summarised this information, and compiled a list of questions to serve as the starting point for the discussions with the programme representatives during the visit.

Shortly before the visit date, panel members met to prepare for the site visit. Panel members discussed the procedures to be adopted during the visit, the preliminary findings about the programme, the panel reviews of the final projects studied, and the questions to be put to the programme representatives.

On 21 April, 2021, the panel conducted the online visit. The visit schedule was in accordance with the schedule as planned. The visit schedule included the following meetings.

- 09.00 – 09.45 Faculty representatives, master coordinator
- 10.00 – 11.00 Programme management and core lecturers
- 11.15 – 12.00 Board of Examiners
- 12.00 – 13.00 Panel lunch (closed session), with 12.00 – 12.30 Open office hours
- 13.00 – 13.45 Lecturers/final project examiners
- 14.00 – 14.45 Students, Programme Advisory Committee student member, and alumni
- 14.45 – 16.15 Deliberations panel (closed session)
- 16.15 – 16.30 Main findings presentation by panel chair to programme representatives
- 16.30 – 17.00 Development dialogue

Open office hours were communicated timely by programme management to staff and students. No persons presented themselves during these open office hours.

In a closed session at the end of the visit, the assessment panel considered the findings, weighed the considerations and arrived at conclusions with regard to the quality of the programme. After these internal deliberations, the panel chair presented in broad outline the panel findings, considerations, conclusions and recommendations to programme representatives.

At the end of the site visit, panel members and programme management met to discuss further improvements in the programme during the development dialogue.

The assessment draft report was finalised by the secretary, having taken into account the findings and considerations of the panel. The draft report was sent to the panel members, who studied this draft and made a number of changes. Thereupon, the secretary edited the final report. This report was presented to programme management to be corrected for factual inaccuracies. Programme management were given time to respond. Having been corrected for the factual inaccuracies, the Certiked bureau sent the report to the University Board to accompany their request to continue the accreditation of this programme.