

Assessment report  
NVAO Limited Framework Programme Assessment

**Research Master Human Geography and Planning**

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 Human Geography and Planning 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 well-embedded in the Faculty of Geosciences of Utrecht University.

The profile of the programme is sound and clearly corresponds to the requirements for master programmes in the human geography and urban and regional planning domain. The plans of programme management to include spatial planning and development perspectives in the profile are welcomed by the panel. The panel advises, however, to take these steps cautiously, to avoid the risk of losing depth in studying themes and methods.

The intended learning outcomes of the programme conform to the master level and surpass this level in a number of respects, adequately preparing students for PhD trajectories. The panel recommends to add research ethics behaviour components as well as the preparation for non-academic research careers to the intended learning outcomes.

The panel endorses the English name of the programme and English as the language of instruction. English allows students to prepare for international research in this domain and allows international students to enter the programme.

Programme management appropriately followed up on the conditions imposed, following the advice of the previous assessment panel.

The average number of incoming students allows for appropriate class sizes and for educational viability. The panel supports the plans of programme management to raise the intake of students. The admission requirements and procedures of the programme are elaborate and assure admitting students, who have the capacities to complete the programme.

The panel considers the curriculum to be consistent, coherent and cumulative and to meet the programme intended learning outcomes. The intended learning outcomes are evenly distributed over the courses. The panel advises to rename the course *Key Thinkers in Urban and Economic Geography* to reflect the contents of the course, and to schedule the course at the beginning of the first year. Although the methods training in the programme is adequate, the panel recommends to add courses on specific skills, allowing students to become versed in these skills. The panel recommends to offer preparatory courses in empirical, quantitative research methods to students who have deficiencies in this respect or feel otherwise less comfortable with quantitative methods.

The lecturers have very good credentials in terms of educational expertise, academic qualifications and research track records. The research programme groups which the lecturers are involved in, all show very good to excellent results in recent research assessments. Although the workload of staff is manageable, the panel suggests to stay attentive in this respect.

The educational concept and study methods are appropriate for this programme. Both the master coordinator and the lecturers offer adequate assistance and guidance to students and are responsive to students' needs. More systematic and institutionalised guidance in finding and organising the study abroad is, however, recommended. The study load is doable. The drop-out and study success figures for the programme are up to standard.

The rules and regulations for examinations and assessments for the programme are adequate. Programme management and the Board of Examiners have put elaborate procedures in place to assure the quality of examinations and assessments.

The Board of Examiners take up their tasks very responsibly and effectively. The Board could, however, review more theses than the current numbers. Programme management follows up very well on the Board of Examiners' recommendations.

The examination methods in the courses are adequate for the knowledge, insights and skills to be tested and are satisfactorily varied. The panel is positive about the fraud and plagiarism rules.

The supervision and assessment processes for the master thesis are generally adequate. The thesis assessment form in use is appropriate, with weighted criteria for the assessment criteria. In some cases, written comments by examiners are somewhat concise and in some other cases, written comments seem not to be in line with thesis marks given. From the assessment forms, it is unclear what the independent judgements of each of the examiners are, as only the joint assessment is presented. The panel advises to have the separate assessment forms filled out and documented. The panel also advises to make the conversion of the qualitative assessments of the master theses to the numerical final grade more transparent.

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 three years. No theses were found to be unsatisfactory. Out of the theses reviewed, seven theses were graded satisfactory by the panel, six theses were found to be good, and two theses were found to be excellent. The marks for seven theses were found to be appropriate, whereas the marks for eight theses were found to be too high, but less than one point too high. The panel recommends to monitor the thesis grades, as these are relatively high.

The panel sees the proportion of students graduating cum laude as being rather substantial. The panel, therefore, recommends to monitor cum laude requirements.

Although the career preparation activities in the programme are appreciated, the panel advises to further strengthen career preparation activities, especially for non-academic careers.

Programme management keeps adequately track of the number of graduates finding research positions as PhD students or in non-academic research. The panel welcomes the results of the programme, 43 % of the graduates securing PhD positions or non-academic research positions.

The panel which conducted the assessment of the Research Master Human Geography and Planning 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, 9 July, 2021,

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

W. Vercouteren MSc  
(panel secretary)

## 2. Programme administrative information

Name programme in CROHO: Master Human Geography and Planning (Research)

Orientation, level programme: Academic Master

Grade: MSc

Number of credits: 120 EC

Specialisations: Economic Geography  
Urban Geography

Location: Utrecht

Mode of study: Full-time

Language of instruction: English

Registration in CROHO: 21PD-60166

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 Human Geography and Planning programme is one of the programmes of the Faculty of Geosciences of Utrecht University. The programme carries 120 EC of study load and takes two years to complete. The programme is offered by the Department of Human Geography and Spatial Planning, being one of the four departments within the Faculty. All master programmes of the Faculty, including this one, are part of the Graduate School of Geosciences. The dean of the Faculty is the chair of the Graduate School. On behalf of the dean, the director of education of this department has the responsibility for managing this programme. The master coordinator coordinates the programme on the day-to-day basis. The Master Education Committee, being composed of four lecturers and four students, advises the Education Coordination Team on the quality of the programme at the level of the Department and on the quality of the master programmes of the Department. The Faculty-wide Board of Examiners, in particular the chamber of the Board for this and the other programmes of the department, monitors the quality of examinations and assessments of the programme.

The profile of the programme is to teach students to address urban challenges arising out of, among other, climate change, migration and technological changes and to contribute to scientific research in this field. The objectives of the programme are to provide students with an interdisciplinary approach, by giving them different perspectives on these urban challenges, and to offer students empirical, both qualitative and quantitative, research methods training to study and research these challenges. The programme objectives meet the domain-specific framework for master graduates in the human geography and urban and regional planning domain, as drafted by the management of master programmes in this field in the Netherlands.

The programme is closely connected to the Urban Futures Research Programme of the Department of Human Geography and Spatial Planning. In the external research assessment in 2015, two research groups of this research programme, being *Urban Geography* and *Economic Geography*, were assessed to be excellent. Therefore, the programme rested on these two research groups. In 2020, the Urban Futures Research Programme as a whole was assessed to be *excellent* on research quality and *very good* on relevance to society and viability. These results have been the reason for programme management to involve the other two research groups, being *Spatial Planning* and *International Development Studies*, in the programme. This step is meant to expand the range of perspectives offered to students to address urban challenges.

The intended learning outcomes of the programme include the following: to present scholarly analyses of issues, controversies or theories in the field of urban and economic geography, to

translate theories in this field into empirical research, to test explanations and interpretations using advanced methods and techniques, to present research results in English orally or in writing, to judge research critically, and to be aware of academic ethics.

Programme management made the comparison to other programmes in this field in the Netherlands. Notwithstanding similarities to these programmes, the Utrecht programme distinguishes itself through the strong theoretical and methodological foundation.

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 English, and the programme is taught in English as well. The English name and English as language of instruction are chosen to allow international students to enrol, and to enable students to acquire international and intercultural skills beneficial to act in international research contexts. In addition, the English language enables to attract international lecturers and is in line with the international research activities of the programme staff.

Programme management worked to fulfil in 2015 the conditions imposed on them, as formulated by the external assessment panel in 2013. As the main adjustments, the programme now is a stand-alone programme, the students in the programme no longer being allowed to take courses of regular master programmes.

#### *Considerations*

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

The profile of the programme is thematically and methodologically sound and clearly corresponds to the requirements for master programmes in the human geography and urban and regional planning domain. The panel welcomes the initiative programme management is taking to add spatial planning and development perspectives, as this offers opportunities for synergies between these and the current urban geography and economic geography perspectives. The panel advises to take the steps cautiously, avoiding the risk of losing depth in studying themes and methods.

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, adequately preparing students for PhD trajectories. The panel recommends to complement ethical awareness with ethical behaviour components, in terms of teaching students to carry out ethically sound research. The panel also recommends to include the preparation for non-academic research careers in the intended learning outcomes.

The panel appreciates the comparison of this programme to similar programmes in the Netherlands, observing the commonalities and differences of these programmes and the distinctive character of this programme.

The panel endorses the English name of the programme and English as the language of instruction. The English language allows international students to enter the programme and enables students to appropriately prepare for international research in this domain.

Programme management appropriately followed up on the conditions imposed, following the advice of 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 students enrolling in the programme is on average 15 to 16 students per year for the last five years, ranging from 9 to 19 students per year. The 9 students intake in 2020 is regarded to be exceptionally low, due to the Covid crisis. The proportion of international students is stable over the years, being about 50 % of total intake. Most international students come from Europe. About 20 % to 30 % come from Asian or Latin American countries. The other incoming students are Dutch. The gender balance changed over the last five year from about 70 % of male students in 2016 and 2017 to about 60 % female students in 2019 and 2020. As the number of incoming students is small, programme management intends to advertise the programme more strongly among Utrecht University bachelor students in this domain.

The programme entry requirements are a bachelor degree in the field of human geography or urban and regional planning, and knowledge and skills in geographic or social sciences research. 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 and should be strongly motivated to study in this programme. Applicants are to submit, among other, a motivation letter, proof of compliance with the prerequisites stated and, for international students, two letters of recommendation. Upon the advice of the master coordinator, the admissions committee admits applicants on the basis of these criteria.

Programme management demonstrated the curriculum to meet the intended learning outcomes of the programme. The curriculum is composed of ten courses of 7.5 EC each and the master thesis of 45 EC. Due to the stand-alone status of the programme, no electives are offered. Students may, however, tailor assignments or papers in the courses to their individual interests. In the first year, four thematic or substantive courses are offered. In these courses, both the urban geography and economic geography perspectives are addressed. Programme management informed the panel the economic geography bias in the course *Urban Resilience* will be corrected. In parallel to the substantive courses, courses on quantitative research methods, qualitative research methods, writing competencies, and master thesis proposal drafting are scheduled. Students experience the first course *Quantitative Urban and Economic Analytics* to be very demanding, especially for students with limited backgrounds in this field. The master thesis proposal drafting course precedes the master thesis, which covers the first part of the second year. In preparation of the master thesis, students study abroad at foreign universities or research institutes. Students may study abroad at all partner universities of Utrecht University, but the programme has made special arrangements with three universities in Italy, France and England. International students may do the study abroad part in the Netherlands. Having completed the master thesis, students take two final courses *Scientific Research Proposal* and *Communication Competencies*. The former course teaches them to draft a

PhD proposal, whereas the latter course trains them to write a policy brief to communicate their master thesis findings to wider audiences and to reflect upon the societal impact of research.

The core staff teaching in the programme comprises 13 lecturers (1.0 FTE), being composed of six full professors, two associate professors and five assistant professors. Another 0.3 FTE is available for thesis supervision by other teachers than the core staff. All core lecturers have PhDs and are University Teaching Qualification certified, whereas ten of them obtained the Senior University Teaching Qualification. The lecturers have different disciplinary backgrounds. They are internationally qualified researchers in their field of study and publish in peer-reviewed journals. The research groups of the Urban Futures Research Programme in which lecturers participate as researchers, obtained for each of the assessment criteria the scores *very good* or *excellent* in the most recent research assessments in 2020. Staff members experience high but manageable workload.

The educational concept of the programme rests on the integration of research and teaching, student-activating teaching, and the gradual transition from teacher-led, collective learning to student-led, individual learning. The study methods in the courses are mainly lectures, tutorials, and seminars. Class sizes are small and the interaction between lecturers and students is intensive. In the students' views, lecturers can easily be approached. The master coordinator guides student in the study abroad part of the curriculum. Students are individually supervised by one of the staff members in the master thesis project. During the study abroad, students usually are supervised by the external supervisor of the host institution. Every two months in extracurricular familiarisation sessions, students are introduced to staff members and their research interests and may from these sessions gather topics for their master thesis projects. In extracurricular Urban Futures Lectures and Urban Futures Research Days, students are invited to lectures on research subjects. Students find the programme challenging, but experience the study load in the programme as being acceptable. The number of students dropping out of the programme is limited to one or two students per cohort. The other students all complete the programme within three years. Most of them do so within the nominal study time of two years.

Programme management has taken measures to organise education in the Covid crisis and to monitor the quality of the education. On-campus education often proves not to be not feasible, mainly due to government regulations. Therefore, teaching is 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, familiarisation sessions are more frequently organised to foster community building. In addition, second-year students serve as buddies for first-year students. Students expressed to much appreciate the assistance offered in the programme and the attention of programme management for students' well-being in Covid times.

### *Considerations*

Although the intake of 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 plans of programme management to raise the intake of students.

The panel approves of the entry requirements and admission procedures of the programme. These 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. The intended learning outcomes are evenly distributed over the courses. The panel recommends to rename the course *Key Thinkers in Urban and Economic Geography* to reflect the contents of the course, which addresses key issues, problems and arguments in the domain, and also advises to schedule it at the beginning of the first year to allow students to benefit from the generic contents of the course. Although the methods training in the programme is appropriate, the panel recommends to add courses on specific skills, allowing students to become versed in these skills. The panel recommends to offer preparatory courses in empirical, quantitative research methods to students who have deficiencies in this respect or feel otherwise less comfortable with quantitative methods.

The lecturers have very good credentials in terms of educational expertise, academic qualifications and research track records. The research programme groups which the lecturers are involved in, all show very good to excellent results in recent research assessments. The panel, therefore, finds the programme to be embedded in high-quality research activities. Although the workload of staff is manageable, the panel suggests to stay attentive in this respect.

The panel regards the educational concept and study methods as appropriate for this programme. Both the master coordinator and the lecturers offer adequate assistance and guidance to students and are responsive to students' needs. The panel recommends, nevertheless, to offer more systematic and institutionalised guidance of students in finding and organising the study abroad. Currently, the study abroad guidance seems to be rather individualistic. The study load is doable. The drop-out and study success figures for the programme are up to standard.

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.

#### *Findings*

The examination and assessment rules for the programme are specified in the Education and Examination Regulations of the Faculty of Geosciences. The assessment plan for the programme sets out the assessment policies implementation at programme level and at course level, and specifies the relations between the programme intended learning outcomes and the course goals. Examiners in courses present draft examinations and accompanying test matrices for review to their colleagues. For the grading of all course examinations, model answers or assessment forms have been drafted.

The Faculty-wide Board of Examiners, and within this Board the chamber for this and the other programmes of the Department of Human Geography and Spatial Planning in particular, has the authority to monitor the quality of examinations and assessments of the programme. The Board of Examiners reviews examinations and master theses on a regular basis. For the Board of Examiners, the Faculty-wide Committee of Assessments takes care of part of these reviews. The Board informs programme management about their findings. Programme management is requested to follow up on the Board's recommendations.

The system of continuous assessment has been adopted in the programme, which implies various examination methods being used in courses and final course grades depending upon two separate assessments at least. The examination methods in the programme are, among other, papers, presentations, take-home assignments, and group seminars. Fraud and plagiarism rules are in place and apply to all examinations and graded assignments. All written assignments, including master theses, are checked for plagiarism by dedicated software.

Students drafting the master thesis are individually guided in the process by the thesis supervisor. Before being allowed to start the thesis process, students have to obtain approval of the research proposal, study abroad plan and the thesis time plan. Students are obliged to present their interim results before fellow-students and staff members. Master theses are assessed and graded by the supervisor and second reader. They give their marks independently on the basis of the thesis (90 % of grade), defence (5 %) and interim report (5 %), making use of the standardised thesis assessment form. When the supervisor and second reader differ on the thesis mark with more than 0.5 points, a third reader will be asked to grade the thesis.

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 are no longer feasible. The Faculty action team assists examiners in modifying examinations and assessments. The examinations mentioned are adapted to other formats, such as take-home examinations with no specific unique correct answers. The thesis processes are conducted at home, as study abroad is not possible. 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 regards the rules and regulations for the programme examinations and assessments to be appropriate. Programme management and the Board of Examiners have put elaborate procedures in place to assure the quality of examinations and assessments.

The panel regards the Board of Examiners taking up their tasks very responsibly and effectively. In addition to the activities the Board is already undertaking, the panel suggests the Board to review more theses than the current numbers. Programme management follows up very well on the Board of Examiners' recommendations.

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 is positive about the fraud and plagiarism rules.

The panel regards the supervision and assessment processes for the master thesis generally to be adequate and approves of the thesis assessment form in use. The panel welcomes criteria on the assessment form being weighted. In some cases, written comments by examiners are somewhat concise and in some other cases, written comments seem not to be in line with the marks given. From the assessment forms, it is unclear what the independent judgements of each of the examiners are, as only the joint assessment is presented. The panel recommends to have the separate assessment forms filled out and documented. In addition, the panel advises to make the conversion of the qualitative assessments of the master theses to the numerical final grade more transparent.

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.

#### *Findings*

Students are to demonstrate the knowledge and skills, they have acquired in the programme, in the master thesis. The average grade for the theses was 7.9 for the last three cohorts. The Board of Examiners for the programme, having reviewed a number of theses, found the marks of the thesis examiners in a number of cases somewhat too high but not substantially too high.

Theses are written in article formats, allowing students to publish the thesis. Whether theses may be submitted for publication is determined after the grading of the thesis. About 20 % of the students (12 out of 64) who graduated in the years 2016 to 2020, had their thesis published in peer-reviewed journals or presented the thesis at international conferences or did both.

The proportion of students graduating cum laude, was 45 % for the 2016 cohort, 25 % for the 2017 cohort, and 47 % for the 2018 cohort. The Board of Examiners regards the cum laude proportions somewhat too high, but is not concerned about the figures. The Board points to the very motivated and very talented students, enrolling in this programme.

The programme aims to prepare students for both PhD positions or for positions in non-academic research. On the level of the Faculty, career services are offered for students to prepare for non-academic positions. The Department of Human Geography and Spatial Planning organises the *Month of Work* for master students, which includes activities to prepare students for non-academic positions.

On the basis of figures for students having graduated from 2016 to 2020, the proportion of students proceeding to PhD trajectories is 23 %. About 20 % of the programme graduates obtained 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 three years. In the selection, theses with lower, average and higher marks were represented. The specialisations of the programme were represented in the selection as well. No theses were found by the panel to be unsatisfactory. Out of all the theses reviewed, seven theses were graded satisfactory by the panel, six theses were found to be good, and two theses were found to be excellent. The marks for seven theses were found to be appropriate by the panel. The panel found the marks for eight theses to be too high, but less than one point too high. The panel recommends to monitor the thesis grades, as these are relatively high.

The panel sees the proportion of students graduating cum laude as being rather substantial. The panel recommends to monitor cum laude requirements.

The panel appreciates the career preparation activities in the programme, including the activities to prepare students for non-academic research or policy careers. The panel, nevertheless, advises to further strengthen career preparation activities, especially for non-academic careers.

The panel appreciates programme management keeping track of the number of graduates finding research positions as PhD students or in non-academic research. The panel welcomes the results of the programme, 43 % of the graduates securing 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 take the steps to add spatial planning and international development perspectives to the programme profile cautiously, in order to avoid the risk of losing depth in the study of themes and methods.
- To complement ethical awareness with ethical behaviour components, in terms of teaching students to carry out ethically sound research, in the programme intended learning outcomes.
- To include the preparation for non-academic research careers in the intended learning outcomes of the programme.
- To offer preparatory courses in empirical, quantitative research methods to students who have deficiencies in this respect or who feel otherwise less comfortable with quantitative methods.
- To rename the course *Key Thinkers in Urban and Economic Geography* to have the name better reflect the course contents, and to schedule the course at the beginning of the first year to allow students to benefit from the generic contents of the course.
- To add courses on specific research skills, offering students opportunities to become versed in these skills.
- To offer more systematic and institutionalised guidance of students in finding and organising the study abroad, as this guidance seems to be rather individualistic at the moment.
- To have the Board of Examiners review more theses than the current numbers.
- To have filled out and to document the separate assessment forms of the two thesis examiners.
- To make the conversion of the qualitative assessments of the master theses to the numerical final grade more transparent.
- To monitor the average master thesis grades, as these are currently rather high.
- To monitor cum laude requirements, as the proportion of students graduating cum laude is rather substantial.
- To strengthen career preparation activities in the programme, especially for non-academic careers.

## Appendix: Assessment process

Certiked VBI evaluation agency was requested by Utrecht University to support the limited framework programme assessment process for the Research Master Human Geography and Planning 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 Stort. 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 programme management of the Research Master Human Geography and Planning programme of Utrecht University, 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. G.B.M. Engbersen PhD, Professor of Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands (panel member);
- B.J. Roelofs 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 three 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 programme specialisations were also covered in the selection.

The panel members were forwarded in time the documents, prepared by programme management. These documents consisted of the self-assessment report, the annexes to the self-assessment report and additional information. The student chapter was part of the self-assessment report. The annexes to the self-assessment report included the domain-specific reference framework, course calendar, course descriptions, overview of staff, staff curricula vitae, main research projects and main publications, list of Urban Futures lectures, programme education and examination regulations, and programme assessment plan. The additional information consisted of Covid-19 measures, course dossiers, course examinations, Master Education 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 12 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  
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, Master Education Committee student member, and programme 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 two weeks 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.