



NVAO • THE NETHERLANDS

INITIAL ACCREDITATION
ACADEMIC MASTER
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Radboud University Nijmegen

FULL REPORT
30 MARCH 2023

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1 Peer review

The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) determines the quality of a new programme on the basis of a peer review. This initial accreditation procedure is required when an institution wishes to award a recognised degree after the successful completion of a study programme.

The procedure for new programmes differs slightly from the approach to existing programmes that have already been accredited. Initial accreditation is in fact an ex ante assessment of a programme. Once accredited the new programme becomes subject to the regular review process.

The quality of a new programme is assessed by means of peer review. A panel of independent peers including a student reviews the plans during a site visit to the institution. A discussion amongst peer experts forms the basis for the panel's final judgement and the advisory report. The agenda for the panel visit and the documents reviewed are available from the NVAO office upon request.

The outcome of this peer review is based on the standards described and published in the limited NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands (Stcrt. 2019, nr. 3198). Each standard is judged on a three-point scale: meets, does not meet or partially meets the standard. The panel reaches a conclusion about the quality of the programme, also on a three-point scale: positive, conditionally positive or negative.

NVAO takes an accreditation decision on the basis of the full report. Following a positive NVAO decision with or without conditions the institution can proceed to offer the new programme.

This report contains the findings, analysis and judgements of the panel resulting from the peer review. It also details the commendations as well as recommendations for follow-up actions. A summary report with the main outcomes of the peer review is also available.

Both the full and summary reports of each peer review are published on NVAO's website www.nvao.net. There you can also find more information on NVAO and peer reviews of new programmes.

2 New programme

2.1 General data

Institution	Radboud University Nijmegen
Programme	Academic master International Development
Mode of study	Parttime
Degree	Master of Science
Location	Nijmegen
Study load	69 ECTS credits ¹
Field of study	Gedrag en Maatschappij (Behaviour and Society)

2.2 Profile

The master International Development (MID) prepares young professionals for a career as 'change agent' in international development. They become scientist-policy makers-practitioners who bridge the gap between what is taught in academic master's programmes and what is needed in the practice of international development, while contributing to a fairer, more just, inclusive, equal and greener world. MID combines academic learning and professional experience by means of a traineeship that runs throughout the programme.

The programme is offered by the Radboud Centre for Social Sciences at Radboud University Nijmegen's Faculty of Social Sciences. The programme was founded in 1998 and previously accredited by the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI). Academic staff members of MID are all employed by Radboud University Nijmegen. Teaching staff involved in the programme is also employed at other universities.

2.3 Panel

Peer experts

- Prof.dr. Wil Hout (chair), professor of Governance and International Political Economy, International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam;
- Prof.dr. Maggi Leung, professor in International Development Studies, University of Amsterdam;
- Dr. Arne Musch, former Head of Department Europe, Middle East, North Africa at VNG International, The Hague;
- Alex Tess Rutten MA (student), recently graduated from the master's programme Comparative Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam.

Assisting staff

Anne Martens MA (secretary)

Drs. Jona Rovers (NVAO policy advisor and process coordinator)

Site visit

Nijmegen, 7 February 2023

¹ European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

3 Outcome

The NVAO approved panel reaches a conditionally positive conclusion regarding the quality of the master International Development (MID) offered by Radboud University Nijmegen. The institution intends to offer the programme of 69 ECTS credits as a parttime programme in Nijmegen. The programme complies with one standard and partially complies with the two other standards of the limited NVAO framework.

MID prepares young professionals who already have a master's degree for a career as 'change agents' in international development. The panel established that MID's intended learning outcomes are in line with what is to be expected from a master's programme in international development. A more precise formulation of the intended learning outcomes would strengthen the academic orientation of the programme and would safeguard that these learning outcomes are operationalised.

The programme combines academic learning and professional experience by means of a traineeship that runs throughout the programme. The panel noted that this leads to a very high study load. Students work on written assignments that are built around cases from the traineeships. The academic part of programme is offered in a hybrid form, allowing students to collaborate with peers partly situated in other countries.

MID intends to create a 'double loop': students apply newly acquired knowledge and skills at their workplace and bring their professional experiences to the academic discourse in the programme. The panel noted that academic insights reach development policy and practice and that students also implement them in the professional field. However, the second loop – where professional experience feeds back to academic reflection – is far less evident.

The programme has a core team of qualified and dedicated academic staff members, who are all employed at Radboud University Nijmegen. Teaching staff involved in the programme is also employed at other universities. In addition, policymakers and practitioners share their practical experience and real-life cases in guest lectures.

Overall, the panel issues a conditionally positive assessment about the programme's quality and formulates the following conditions, which are to be met within a period of ten months:

- (1) The programme restructures the curriculum in such a way that the study load and nominal duration of the programme are brought in line, either by limiting the study load to 60 ECTS credits and reducing the workload involved in the traineeship or by expanding the nominal duration of the programme.
- (2) The programme strengthens the second loop in double-loop learning, and ensures that the professional experience from students' traineeships feeds back to academic reflection.
- (3) The programme registers MID as a dual programme (instead of a parttime programme) and brings the programme's Education and Examination Regulations (EER) in line with article 7.7 of the WHW, including formal arrangements about the share of the traineeship that is allocated for work on students' assignments and the preparation of coursework activities.
- (4) The programme reformulates the assessment criteria in a more concrete way and makes them more transparent. They should be explicitly aligned with the intended learning outcomes and clarify what the programme expects from students, especially when it comes to the academic master's level.

Standard	Judgement
1. Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
2. Teaching-learning environment	partially meets the standard
3. Student assessment	partially meets the standard
<i>Conclusion</i>	<i>conditionally positive</i>

4 Commendations

The programme is commended for the following features of good practice:

1. Relevance – The programme addresses current trends, debates and needs in the field of international development.
2. Traineeship – The traineeship is a very valuable experience for students who wish to pursue a career in international development.
3. Staff – The programme has a core team of highly qualified and dedicated staff members.
4. Module assignments – The module assignments have clear relevance to the international development practice.
5. Calibration – The programme has a thorough assessment procedure in place, with assessors coming to a final mark in multiple calibration rounds.

5 Recommendations

For further improvement of the programme, the panel recommends a number of follow-up actions:

1. Formulation of intended learning outcomes – Introduce more concrete elements in the intended learning outcomes, especially regarding using, synthesising and critically evaluating research and research outcomes in the evidence-based environment that the students are in.
2. Trainee supervision – Create structured toolkits for supervisors to prepare them especially on the topic of power relations and to support them in critical reflections with their trainees that contribute to closing the second loop.
3. Assessors – Ensure that all assessors follow specific training related to assessment.

6 Assessment

6.1 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.

Judgement

Meets the standard.

Findings, analysis and considerations

The master International Development (MID; also known as AMID Young Professional) prepares young professionals for a career in international development. The programme offers students who already have a master's degree the opportunity to grow as scientist-policy maker-practitioners. It aims to bridge the gap between what is taught in academic master's programmes and what is needed in the practice of international development. Graduates are able to apply academic knowledge and work with evidence-based insights in an increasingly complex field. The programme was founded in 1998. The panel established that the programme has been developed in cooperation with stakeholders (including an external Advisory Board) who are aware of current trends and debates, and that it meets their needs.

MID starts from the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the principles underlying the SDG agenda. It considers four trends in the field of international development as key elements of the programme: (1) universality & decolonisation of development, (2) new aid structure, (3) multistakeholder partnerships, and (4) complexity. The panel finds that the programme takes relevant topics as a starting point, including development problems broader than the global South, decolonisation, complex multistakeholder collaboration in reaching development objectives, and innovative ways of planning and measuring development objectives.

The concept of 'change agent' plays a central role: students learn to question the ordinary and embrace the extraordinary in order to professionally contribute to a fairer, more just, inclusive, equal and greener world. Change agents consider their own position and organisation, and draw upon academic knowledge and thinking to stimulate change in their own environment. Throughout the site visit, the panel discussed this topic with different stakeholders and learnt that they share a common view on this concept as well as on its importance. The panel thinks that graduates of the programme may not immediately be able to take up the role of change agent in a junior position. Making changes also takes time. The panel, however, agrees with the programme that it is valuable to equip students with knowledge and skills that will enable them to do so later on in their careers. The panel advises that MID tracks the longer-term impact of the programme, taking into account the differences between organisations where graduates end up.

The programme's fifteen intended learning outcomes are related to three pathways that guide students to become change agents: (1) academic knowledge and reflection, (2) professional skills, and (3) personal development as a professional. The panel thinks this is a logical structure. The first two pathways comprise six learning outcomes each and the last pathway contains three. They all address aspects that are considered critical for change agents to operate in the field. In the information dossier, the learning outcomes are linked to the Dublin descriptors. The panel agrees with the programme that they are formulated at master's level.

According to the panel, MID's intended learning outcomes are in line with what is to be expected from a master's programme in international development, with a focus on professional application of academic knowledge and insights. Although the panel is convinced of their level, the panel remarks that intended learning outcomes are formulated in a rather generic way. The intended learning outcomes would benefit from the introduction of more concrete elements, especially regarding using, synthesising and critically evaluating research (outcomes) in the evidence-based environment that the students are in. A more precise formulation would strengthen the academic orientation of the programme and would safeguard that the intended learning outcomes are operationalised in a similar way across different cohorts. All in all, the panel concludes that the programme meets standard 1.

6.2 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.

Judgement

Partially meets the standard.

Findings, analysis and considerations

The panel established that the programme's intended learning outcomes have been translated into a coherent curriculum that is linked to the aforementioned pathways. Central to the programme is the idea that collaboration between academia and practice is crucial for innovation, learning and effectiveness. MID combines academic learning and professional experience by means of a traineeship that runs throughout the programme. This enables students to approach topics from several angles, using different disciplinary perspectives, to deepen and widen their understanding of development issues and policy solutions. Simultaneously, they bring the latest knowledge to and improve existing practices at their host organisations and MID academic staff members get a better sense of current issues in the field of international development.

The programme applies strict entry requirements and the panel established that MID has developed a thorough selection procedure. The programme aims to attract students from a wide range of academic backgrounds in order to reflect the diversity in the field of international development. Applicants need to have finished a master's programme – with at least an 8 (or equivalent) for their thesis – in a discipline related to international development, so MID can build on previously acquired academic skills and knowledge. The panel agrees with the programme that this entry requirement means that students may be expected to have acquired academic research skills in their previous degree. However, the panel stresses that the curriculum of an academic master's programme cannot be completely professionally focused and that students do need to show that they are able to apply and contribute to academic knowledge and engage with academic research.

The panel learnt that there are three groups of participating students: (1) from the Netherlands, (2) from Kenya and (3) from other countries (e.g., Ethiopia, India, Uganda, Zimbabwe). All students are enrolled at Radboud University Nijmegen. The programme is currently considering to admit (non-Dutch) students without a master's degree but with multiple years of relevant work experience. Because of the content of the curriculum, which relies very much on previously acquired academic skills and knowledge at master's level, the panel deems this

undesirable. The panel agrees with the Examination Board that applicants without a relevant master's degree should only be admissible if they have completed a premaster programme.

The curriculum consists of four consecutive modules: (1) International Development in Perspective, (2) Cooperating for Change, (3) Assessing Change, and (4) Global Issues in International Development. MID intends to reflect current changes and issues in international development. The panel agrees that the topics of the modules are relevant to the field of international development and the position of change agents in that field. In an appendix to the information dossier, the learning outcomes have been adequately linked to the curriculum components: modules' learning activities and assignments, work assessment and evaluation, and overall activities. All three pathways are represented in each of these components. Each module consists of several activities: weekly online academic lectures, skills-based training, basic Q&A sessions, a two-day training, literature dialogue sessions, assignment introduction and intervision, group coaching sessions related to professional development, and performance and practice at the workplace.

In line with the Radboud Centre for Social Sciences' view on learning and teaching, MID considers learning to be an active, personal process, influenced by prior knowledge and personal characteristics. Interaction with others is crucial to learning because it brings differences in experiences, insights and opinions to light and opens the path to new knowledge and perspectives. Didactically, the MID curriculum is built on two pillars: (1) problem-based learning in lectures, where academic insights are applied to real-life cases, and (2) experience-based learning in a mentor-mentee relation during the traineeship. According to the panel, these pillars are relevant for a programme that prepares students for a professional career in international development. Learning from diversity is an important element of the programme. MID strives for diverse student and lecturer bodies as well as different types of organisations and job functions where students spend the majority of their time.

The programme also greatly values 'double-loop learning', a form of experience-based learning. It aims to create constant interaction between the academic programme and the learning process at the student's workplace. Students apply newly acquired knowledge and skills at their workplace and bring experience from their work to the academic discourse in the programme. During the site visit, the panel discussed this approach with various stakeholders and noted that academic insights reach development policy and practice, and that students also implement them in the professional field. The second loop, however, where professional experience is connected to academic discussions and students reflect on the value added of their work experience to theoretical development, seems to be far less developed. According to the panel, this loop should be strengthened with more academic content and reflection to reach the intended master's level.

The academic part of the programme is offered in a hybrid manner. On Fridays, students meet their fellow students in interactive online lectures. Discussions, group work and reflection enable students to collaborate with their peers who are partly situated in other countries. The panel remarks that while online education offers opportunities such as cross-border collaboration, it also has drawbacks, especially in larger groups. Therefore, the panel recommends that the programme monitors the effects of online education closely and provides lecturers with additional support if needed. Special attention may be needed to ensure that all students in the increasingly larger group engage fully with the learning process. Each of the four modules includes a two-day training session at a conference centre midway through the module. These meetings are organised in the Netherlands and Kenya; students in other

countries participate online. Attendance is mandatory for all meetings, both online and on location.

The panel agrees with the programme that MID has a 'dual nature' at the heart of the programme. The traineeship is a major part of the programme: students spend four days per week at an organisation engaged with issues related to international development, for instance human rights. Organisations range from (semi)profit to knowledge institutes, private foundations, government departments and agencies. All organisations work towards positive change in light of the SDGs. The panel considers the traineeship a very valuable experience for students who wish to pursue a career in international development. The panel established that MID has a structured process in place to combine the demands of partners with student interests. The programme matches organisations with possible trainees based on a job description that the organisations provide before the start of the programme. Subsequently, the organisations select candidates based on interviews. Students who already have a relevant job may also deploy this position for their traineeship.

The panel deems it very important that the programme closely monitors the quality of students' workplaces. On the one hand because of the importance of the traineeship for the programme, and on the other because of the possibly skewed power relations students find themselves in: they are employed as junior staff members who work on tasks at an academic master's level while their employers pay the majority of the tuition fees. At the start of the programme, MID, the trainee and the host organisation sign a tripartite agreement that determines the roles and responsibilities of the three parties involved. According to the panel, the programme is in effect a dual programme according to the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (WHW). The panel urges the programme to register MID as such and to bring the programme's Education and Examination Regulations (EER) in line with article 7.7 of the WHW, including formal arrangements about the share of the traineeship that is allocated for work on students' assignments and the preparation of coursework activities.

Students formulate their personal learning goals, record these in a work plan and discuss their development in a midterm and final evaluation with their traineeship supervisors. These supervisors are senior colleagues who are responsible for day-to-day supervision and ensure that trainees are enabled to realise their objectives. MID organises meetings twice a year to prepare and support supervisors in their role. The panel recommends to create structured toolkits for supervisors to prepare them especially on the topic of dependencies between students and their host organisations and to support them in critical reflections with their trainees that contribute to closing the second loop.

The programme has a study load of 69 ECTS credits and lasts one year, from February to January. The panel remarked that this equals a workload higher than a regular fulltime study programme or job and that it likely requires students to work on the programme during evenings and weekends, also because the current arrangements for the traineeship do not contain allocations for work on assignments and the preparation of coursework activities. As the panel understood from students from the previous cohort, the pressure on students is particularly high at peak moments before deadlines for assignments. The panel thinks this puts too much pressure on students and considers this undesirable in terms of both student well-being and academic development. Students should have sufficient time for digestion and reflection. Therefore, the panel deems it essential that the programme restructures the curriculum in such a way that the programme's study load is feasible, protects student

wellbeing and ensures that students have sufficient time to work on their learning process in an appropriate manner.

The panel is positive about the programme's highly qualified and dedicated staff members. Lectures are delivered by academic lecturers from Radboud University Nijmegen as well as other universities. The programme has especially strong ties with the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi. MID signed a Memorandum of Understanding with IDS, enabling IDS to organise the MID programme in Kenya. Academic lecturers come from a wide variety of academic disciplines. All lecturers work on issues related to international development studies and have at least a PhD qualification. In addition, policymakers and practitioners share their practical experience and discuss real-life cases in guest lectures. Thus, the programme combines academic knowledge with practitioners' perspectives and thereby enriches students' learning experience. Coaches support students in their professional development and help formulating personal learning goals at the start of the programme. MID's core team supports students and lecturers throughout the programme; the team consists of an academic programme director, a vice programme director, a programme coordinator, a lecturer, a programme assistant, as well as two academic staff members from IDS.

The programme is fully taught in English. The panel agrees with the programme that this is a reasonable choice because (1) the related professional field has a strong international orientation, making English language skills a prerequisite for working in this field, (2) the programme reaches out to an international group of young professionals on a global scale, using English as lingua franca, and (3) most academic publications in the field are in English. Academic staff members related to the programme are required to have international experience and a high English language proficiency level.

The panel comes to the conclusion that MID has translated the programme's intended learning outcomes into a relevant but ambitious curriculum. The panel noted that the total number of study hours is very high. The programme aims to create constant interaction between the academic programme and the learning process at the student's workplace by means of a so-called 'double-loop'. The panel established that the first loop – from academia to practice – works well, but that the second loop requires strengthening. The panel concludes that the programme partially meets this standard, and imposes the following conditions:

- (1) The programme restructures the curriculum in such a way that the study load and nominal duration of the programme are brought in line, either by limiting the study load to 60 ECTS credits and reducing the workload involved in the traineeship or by expanding the nominal duration of the programme.
- (2) The programme registers MID as a dual programme (instead of a parttime programme) and brings the programme's Education and Examination Regulations (EER) in line with article 7.7 of the WHW, including formal arrangements about the share of the traineeship that is allocated for work on students' assignments and the preparation of coursework activities.
- (3) The programme strengthens the second loop in double-loop learning, and ensures that the professional experience from students' traineeships feeds back to academia.

The panel is confident that the qualified and dedicated academic staff members will be able to adjust the curriculum accordingly and thus strengthen the programme.

6.3 Standard 3: Student assessment

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

Judgement

Partially meets the standard.

Findings, analysis and considerations

Every module ends with a summative written assignment that is built around a case from the student's traineeship and related to the module's central topic. The assignments are the linking pins between the workplace and the academic programme. The panel agrees with the programme that the assignments have clear relevance to the international development practice. MID intends to assess both academic performance and the students' ability to integrate academic knowledge and skills into the policy and practice of their organisation, and to critically reflect on this. The assignment of the second module (Cooperating for Change) consists of a multistakeholder policy paper and is designed as a group assignment. The assignments for the other modules are individual papers in different formats. In addition to the module assignments, students are formatively assessed based on the performance at their workplace. The job profile and work plan are the basis for this assessment that aims to support students' development to professionals.

The fourth assignment serves as the final assessment of the programme and asks students to demonstrate their ability to operate as a change agent. In a position paper, they present a statement and argumentation to convince their organisation to take action on a topic related to a subject and concept discussed in the MID curriculum. The argumentation needs to be backed by scientific evidence and inductive reasoning.

The panel studied the assessment criteria for each of the module assignments and noted that the assessment criteria are formulated in rather general terms. Representatives of the programme argued that this approach gives assessors the flexibility to take into account differences in starting points at the host organisations. It also leaves more room for peer-to-peer interaction and discussion about students' work. Students receive extensive feedback that clarifies the mark given. During the site visit, members of the Examination Board and academic staff members explained that MID assessors devote a lot of time to discuss students' work and organise multiple calibration rounds to come to a final mark.

Although the panel appreciates the thorough assessment procedure in place and the assessors' dedication to the process, it believes that the assessment criteria should be formulated more clearly. The criteria should be linked to the programme's intended learning outcomes and reflect an academic master's level. The panel considers this crucial to ensure that students are all assessed in a comparable way and that they know what is required of them. This also safeguards the master's level, regardless of the (increasingly) diverse environments students work in. During the site visit, the panel discussed this with the programme management and was pleased to learn that the management agreed that the assessment criteria should be formulated more concretely.

The module assignments are assessed by a group of internal and external assessors, while students' supervisors give advice about the assignment from the host organisations' perspectives. The information dossier specifies that the supervisors must have obtained a PhD, need to have demonstrable experience in and affinity with international development in the field and/or in an academic setting and need to have work experience in academic education.

The panel appreciates the involvement of assessors with relevant professional experience and the programme's efforts to continuously improve the pool of assessors. Nevertheless, the panel strongly recommends that all assessors receive specific training related to assessment.

The panel established that students are adequately informed about assessment procedures and criteria. The MID Examination Board ensures that the programme's assessment procedures align with the Examination and Education Regulations and determines whether students qualify for the MID degree. The Board consists of two internal members and one external member, and acts in line with Radboud University Nijmegen's regulations.

The panel appreciates the relevant design of the module assignments and the dedication of the assessors. Nevertheless, to strengthen the assessment process, the panel strongly recommends that all assessors receive specific training related to assessment. Additionally, the panel is of the opinion that the assessment criteria should be specified, elaborated and linked to the intended learning outcomes. The panel therefore comes to the conclusion that the programme partially meets this standard and imposes the following condition:

- (4) The programme reformulates the assessment criteria in a more concrete way and makes them more transparent. They should be explicitly aligned with the intended learning outcomes and clarify what the programme expects from students, especially when it comes to the academic master's level.

6.4 Degree and field of study

The panel advises awarding the following degree to the new programme: Master of Science. The panel supports the programme's preference for the following field of study: Gedrag en Maatschappij (Behaviour and Society).

Abbreviations

EADI	European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
IDS	Institute of Development Studies, University of Nairobi
MID	Master in International Development
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders ('Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie')
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
WHW	Dutch Higher Education and Research Act ('Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek')

