



Research Master's Program
Linguistics and Communication Sciences
Radboud University

© 2022 Academion

www.academion.nl
info@academion.nl

Project code P2110

Contents

- Summary** 4
 - Score table 5
- Introduction** 6
 - Procedure..... 6
 - Panel 7
 - Information on the program 8
- Description of the assessment** 9
 - Organisation 9
 - Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes 9
 - Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment..... 10
 - Standard 3. Student assessment 17
 - Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes 19
 - General conclusion 19
 - Development points 20
- Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes** 21
- Appendix 2. Program curriculum** 22
- Appendix 3. Program of the site visit** 23
- Appendix 4. Materials**..... 24

Summary

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The research master's program Linguistics and Communication Sciences (LCS) is offered jointly by Radboud University (RU)'s Faculty of Arts (FoA) and Tilburg University (TiU)'s Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences (TSHD). The ReMa LCS has an interdisciplinary profile, combining linguistics and communication, which the panel appreciates. The faculties offering the program are complementary in research focus, yet at the same time each offers both disciplines. The panel finds this a fruitful setup for cross-university interdisciplinary collaboration. According to the panel, the program's profile has been translated clearly into a set of well-formulated, detailed intended learning outcomes, which stand out through their attention for (research) ethics, valorization and communication and clearly express the research master's level. The panel agrees with the program's explicit focus on quantitative methods, yet it invites LCS to consider whether qualitative research deserves more explicit attention in the profile and ILOs in order to better reflect the program's width.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The panel considers the setup, content and structure of the LCS curriculum to match the intended learning outcomes and to reflect the research master's level. LCS is clearly directed at training future researchers, introducing students to the various stages of the research cycle and allowing them to participate in ongoing research. LCS explicitly draws attention to (research) ethics and research integrity and integrates skills and content. In the TiU electives, students share classes with students of 'regular' master's programs and are required to do a separate assignment that enhances their exposure to research. The panel points out that the alternative assignment should not add to the workload of a course, and that this should be communicated more clearly to all teachers and students. The program contains elements connecting students to career options outside academia, but the panel feels that this aspect might be enhanced, for instance by communicating more clearly about the option of doing a Lab Rotation internship outside academia or sketching alternative, non-academic career paths.

The quantitative focus of the program is clear to and appreciated by all involved, including students specializing in qualitative methods. The panel does recommend making this choice and the motivation behind it more explicit in external communication. It also suggests looking again at the place of qualitative methods in LCS in order to do more justice to the breadth of the program. The panel noticed that the methodological STEM courses are experienced as difficult by many students, and wonders whether they could be allotted more credits.

The panel agrees with the admission criteria of LCS and applauds the personalized guidance system in place, which is necessary due to the program's flexibility in allowing students to shape their own learning trajectories. The main challenge for LCS lies in dealing with day-to-day communication and administrative issues due to the flexible setup of the program and its organization within two universities. The panel recommends clearly informing students right from the start of the program that practical issues may occur and that students can be sure that these will be solved for them by the staff. The panel appreciates Covid-19 adaptations, staff quality and quantity, and research facilities. Students are offered a challenging research environment where they can develop into young researchers through close cooperation with the teaching staff. The choice for English is fitting and matches the staff members' didactic qualities.

Standard 3. Student assessment

Assessment policy and quality are up to standard within LCS. The panel considers this a positive achievement in light of the complicated setup between universities, with two Examination Boards and

varying sets of rules and regulations. The panel concludes that assessment is in line with relevant policies and regulations and that there is a good variety of assessment types. The assessment of internship and thesis is well designed and in line with the research master's level; students follow the entire research cycle. The panel noticed that written feedback on the thesis could sometimes be improved, but learned to its satisfaction that this has the attention of the Examination Boards. The respective Examination Boards (RU and TiU) take up their roles in assuring the quality of LCS in a proactive manner, cooperating closely but also working according to the policies of their own Faculty. The panel suggests making use of quantitative information on assessments, e.g. assessment scores and statistics, to further improve the Boards' effectiveness.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The panel finds the level of LCS theses to be generally high, and concludes that alumni do well upon graduation, both inside and outside academia. All in all, it concludes that LCS manages to educate and deliver talented junior researchers.

Score table

The panel assesses the program as follows:

Research master's program Linguistics and Communication Sciences

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard
General conclusion	positive

Prof. dr. Maarten Mous, chair
Date: 25-4-2022

Dr. Fiona Schouten, secretary

Introduction

Procedure

Assessment

On 10 December 2021, the research master's program Linguistics and Communication Sciences of the Radboud University and Tilburg University was assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the assessment of the Research Master's Linguistics & Literature cluster. The assessment cluster consisted of 9 programs, offered by the institutions University of Groningen, Leiden University, Utrecht University, University of Amsterdam, Radboud University and Tilburg University. The assessment followed the procedure and standards of the NVAO Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (September 2018), as well as the Specification of additional criteria for research master's programs (May 2016). The site visits to Groningen, Leiden, Amsterdam, and Nijmegen/Tilburg were held online due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment upon request of the Research Master's Linguistics & Literature cluster after taking over from Qanu per August 2021, when the first two site visits to Leiden University and University of Groningen had already taken place. On behalf of Qanu, Fiona Schouten acted as coordinator and secretary during the start-up phase and the site visit to Leiden University and the University of Groningen. On behalf of Academion, Fiona Schouten acted as coordinator for the remaining process, and as secretary for the site visits at the University of Amsterdam, Radboud University and Tilburg University. Peter Hilderling was secretary for the site visit at Utrecht University. Both secretaries have been certified and registered by the NVAO.

The research master's program Linguistics and Communication Sciences is offered jointly by Tilburg University and Radboud University. In practice, it functions largely as one program, but formally, it consists of two programs offered in Tilburg and Nijmegen respectively. Therefore, there are two separate reports, one for each program. These reports differ slightly when dealing with university-specific themes. The present report is that of LCS offered at Radboud University.

Preparation

Qanu composed the peer review panel in cooperation with the institutions and taking into account the expertise and independence of the members as well as consistency within the cluster. On 25 May 2021, the NVAO approved the composition of the committee. The coordinator instructed the committee chairs on their role in the site visit.

The contact persons for the Radboud University and Tilburg University composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the coordinator (see appendix 3). They selected representative partners for the various interviews. It was determined that the development dialogue would take place separately, after the site visit. A separate development report was made based on this dialogue.

The programs provided the coordinator with a list of graduates over the period 2019-2021. In consultation with the coordinator, the panel chair selected 15 theses from the program for each university. He took the diversity of final grades and examiners into account, as well as the various specializations. Prior to the site visit, the programs provided the panel with the theses and the accompanying assessment forms. They also provided the panel with the self-evaluation report and additional materials (see appendix 4).

The panel members studied the information and sent their findings to the secretary. The secretary collected the panel's questions and remarks in a document and shared this with the panel members. In a preliminary meeting, the panel discussed the initial findings on the self-evaluation reports and the theses, as well as the division of tasks during the site visit. The panel was also informed on the assessment framework, the working method and the planning of the site visits and reports.

Site visit

During the online site visit, the panel interviewed various program representatives (see appendix 3). The panel also offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour. No consultation was requested. The panel used the final part of the site visit to discuss its findings in an internal meeting. Afterwards, the panel chair publicly presented the preliminary findings.

Report

The secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it for peer assessment within Academion. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel for feedback. After processing this feedback, the secretary sent the draft report to the Faculty of Arts of Radboud University in order to have it checked for factual irregularities. The secretary discussed the ensuing comments with the panel chair and changes were implemented accordingly. The panel then finalised the report, and the coordinator sent it to the Radboud University.

Panel

The following panel members were involved in the cluster assessment:

- Prof. dr. M.P.G.M. (Maarten) Mous (panel chair)
- Prof. dr. H.E. (Henriette) de Swart (panel chair/panel member)
- S. (Sannah) Debreczeni BA (student member)
- Prof. dr. Y. (Yra) van Dijk (panel member)
- S. (Suze) Geuke BA (student member)
- Prof. dr. B. (Birgit) Hellwig (panel member)
- Dr. N.H. (Nivja) de Jong (panel member)
- Prof. dr. B.L.J. (Bettelou) Los (panel member)
- Em. prof. dr. M.J.H. (Maaike) Meijer (panel member)
- Prof. dr. A. (Ad) Neeleman (panel member)
- J. (Julia) Neugarten MA (student member)
- Prof. dr. D.M. (Diederik) Oostdijk (panel member)
- Prof. dr. H. (Hugo) Quené (panel member)
- Prof. dr. D. (Dominiek) Sandra (panel member)

The panel assessing the program at the Radboud University and Tilburg University consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. M.P.G.M. (Maarten) Mous, professor of African Linguistics at Leiden University (panel chair)
- Prof. dr. B. (Birgit) Hellwig, professor of General Linguistics at the Universität zu Köln (panel member)
- Dr. N.H. (Nivja) de Jong, senior university lecturer at the Leiden University Centre for Linguistics /ICLON Leiden University Graduate School of Teaching (panel member)
- Prof. dr. H. (Hugo) Quené, professor of Quantitative Methods of Empirical Research in the Humanities (panel member)

- S. (Sannah) Debreczeni BA, research master's student Language & Cognition at the University of Groningen (student member)

Information on the program

Name of the institution:	Radboud University
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Program name:	Linguistics and Communication Sciences (research)
CROHO number:	60960
Level:	Master
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	120 EC
Specialisations or tracks:	Linguistics and Communication
Location:	Nijmegen
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Language of instruction:	English
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2022

Description of the assessment

Organisation

The Research Master's program in Linguistics and Communication Sciences (ReMa LCS) is offered jointly by Radboud University (RU)'s Faculty of Arts (FoA) and Tilburg University (TiU)'s Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences (TSHD). Students hold a main registration at one of the two universities and are subsidiary students at the other institute. Three program coordinators, one at RU and two at TiU (one academic director and one coordinator), are responsible for the overall quality and coherence of the program and take care of its day-to-day running. Cooperation and coordination have been formalized in a partnership agreement. Each location has its own Program Committee (PC) and its own Examination Board (EB); the PCs always convene jointly, and the EBs regularly meet to coordinate their work. The Education and Examination Regulations (EER) are produced separately at each location, in view of legal and university regulations.

In daily practice, the program functions as one indivisible unit that has activities at two campuses. Formally, however, the ReMa LCS comprises two separate programs, one offered by Tilburg University and the other by Radboud University. As a consequence, LCS was assessed by one review panel in a single site visit, but attention was paid to the differences between the ways it is offered at each university. In addition, the panel read 15 final theses for each university (30 in total). The site visit resulted in two assessment reports that differ somewhat when describing university-specific findings. The current report deals with the ReMa LCS as it is offered at Radboud University.

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

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

Findings

The Research Master's program in Linguistics and Communication Sciences focuses on communication as a defining property of human behavior, and on the privileged role of language in it. Although language and communication are intimately related, the disciplines that investigate them are not always closely connected in the international research landscape. LCS combines the two disciplines and aims to equip students with enough general conceptual knowledge to enable them to work in a variety of disciplines that are relevant to understanding language and communication. It teaches students how research is carried out in these traditions, and provides them with in-depth knowledge, methodological and research skills in their area of specialization. The program offers all students, regardless of their specialization, knowledge of and experience with quantitative research.

The panel appreciates the program's strong interdisciplinary profile. Students become familiar with the different disciplines and their intersection, gaining insight into how these strands can strengthen one another. The panel is also pleased with the fact that the disciplines of language and communication are present at both universities participating in the program, although each has its own emphasis. RU FoA has a strong linguistics section, which benefits from close cooperation with the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, but it also offers communication science; and TSHD is strong in online culture and communication, but also offers linguistics. The panel finds this a fruitful setup for cross-university interdisciplinary collaboration.

The profile of LCS has been translated into a set of 10 intended learning outcomes (ILOs; see appendix 1). According to the panel, these ILOs are detailed and well-formulated, and clearly reflect the Dublin descriptors for master's programs. The panel considers the attention paid to (research) ethics and the connection to the professional field to be especially strong points of the ILOs. It highly appreciates the fact that the program considers valorization and communication of research to be an integral part of the research cycle, and that the program highlights these aspects in the ILOs. As a result, the panel considers the intended learning outcomes to be a good reflection of the research master's level students attain upon completing LCS.

The program has chosen to primarily offer students a quantitative research focus, and this focus is reflected in the intended learning outcomes (cf. outcome 3). The panel learned from students that they are well aware of this focus when they start the program and that they appreciate the quantitative components even when they end up specializing in qualitative methods. The panel considers this quantitative focus a valid choice. All the same, it invites the program to consider whether in the future, more attention should be paid to the precise position of qualitative research in the program's profile and ILOs in order to better reflect the program's wide range of qualitative specialization options (see also standard 2).

Considerations

The panel appreciates the ReMa LCS's interdisciplinary profile, combining linguistics and communication. The faculties offering the program are complementary in research focus, yet at the same time each offers both disciplines. The panel finds this a fruitful setup for cross-university interdisciplinary collaboration. According to the panel, the program's profile has been translated clearly into a set of well-formulated, detailed intended learning outcomes, which stand out through their attention for (research) ethics, valorization and communication and clearly express the research master's level. The panel agrees with the program's explicit focus on quantitative methods, yet it invites LCS to consider whether qualitative research deserves more explicit attention in the profile and ILOs in order to better reflect the program's width.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the program meets standard 1.

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

Curriculum

The ReMa LCS curriculum (120 EC, see the overview in appendix 2) contains courses with a substantive, research, skills, or methodological focus. The program starts with the mandatory course Foundations of Language and Communication (6 EC). Here, fundamental aspects of the respective fields and the links between them are explored. The course provides the students with a degree of common ground and explicitly motivates the combination of linguistics and communication sciences in the program. All students also follow two core courses focusing on methodology: Statistics and Experimental Methods (STEM) I and II. The STEM courses (3 EC each) take a quantitative approach and offer a mixture of research methodology, research design, and statistical data analysis. Students also acquire basic skills in using the statistical software package SPSS.

Furthermore, all students follow three courses that help them develop research-related skills. In the first course, Research Orientation (3 EC), students get acquainted with the various research groups in Tilburg and Nijmegen. At the end of the course, they write a (draft) proposal for work they plan to undertake during their first Lab Rotation (see below). This course helps students define their interests and develop their own profiles. In two other, workshop-style courses, Grant Proposal Writing (6 EC) and Valorization (6 EC), students learn about acquiring research funds and writing a grant proposal, about collaborating with relevant partners and stakeholders, about addressing a non-academic audience and about communicating their research findings.

In four courses, students do actual research. The first is Term Paper (6 EC), in which students write a literature review in an area of their choosing under individual supervision of a staff member who is a researcher in that field. This process is backed up by group sessions that serve to monitor progress. In Term Paper, students are trained to adopt a critical attitude to the research they get exposed to in articles. Term Paper serves as early practice for the independent literature review that will be an essential part of the thesis.

In the second and third semesters, the research strand is continued as students take two internships or Lab Rotations of 15 EC in total (6 + 9 EC). Students usually follow their Lab Rotations at one of the research groups at TiU or RU (they are free to choose between universities, independent of the university they are enrolled at), although students may also establish their own ad hoc group. All researchers involved in such internships are members of the research institutes or Departments associated with the program (TiCC in Tilburg and CLS in Nijmegen). Students may also do their Lab Rotation at an external institute or organization, such as the Meertens Institute. During a Lab Rotation, skills such as identifying and formulating useful research questions and (collaboratively) designing a study to answer these questions are learned hands-on in an apprentice-like situation. Finally, students write a thesis (30 EC) under supervision of a senior staff member.

In addition to these fixed components, students complete their program with electives. They choose 30 EC in substantive courses and 12 EC in research skill electives. The program offers a large number of electives on both locations (Nijmegen and Tilburg), allowing students to build their own research profiles and specialize in their preferred direction.

The panel studied the setup and structure of LCS and discussed it with program management, teaching staff, alumni and students. The panel concludes that the intended learning outcomes have clearly and recognizably been translated into course components. The division into substantive, methodological, research and skills courses allows for a clear compartmentalization that grants students insight into what they learn in the various courses, and how the mandatory and elective parts relate to each other. The panel appreciates these labels, since they provide a useful framework for students to establish individual learning pathways. At the same time, the panel finds that skills and educational content are offered in a sufficiently integrated way, not only through parallel programming and integrative elements such as Lab Rotations, Term Paper, and thesis, but also through the way the various components connect methodology, content and skills internally.

The panel appreciates the central position in the programme of the Foundations course. This provides students with a good, in-depth introduction to the interdisciplinarity of the program while promoting a level playing field and cohort formation among students. Other aspects of the curriculum that the panel applauds are the Lab Rotations providing students with the opportunity to do research in a master-apprentice setup; the valorization and grant proposal courses preparing students for a future in either research or outside it;

and the Term Paper stimulating critical thinking and providing basic research training. The panel learned from students and alumni that they highly appreciate these elements in LCS's curriculum and that they feel taken seriously as future researchers.

In line with the program's profile and learning outcomes (see standard 1), the LCS curriculum focuses on quantitative methods in the fixed components; students interested in qualitative methods can use their elective space to specialize in them. This quantitative focus is especially clear in the Foundations course, which makes clear that the program centers on cognitive science with quantitative methods, and in the STEM courses, which center on linguistics, cognitive science, biology and psychology. Statistics in STEM is taught at an advanced level: STEM I starts in the second block of the first semester, rather than the first block, as this enables students with no or limited statistics knowledge to take an introductory statistics course as a research skill elective during the first block. The panel discussed the program's quantitative focus in general, and the STEM courses in particular, with students and alumni of the program. It learned that even those who ended up specialising in qualitative approaches are satisfied with the emphasis on quantitative methods throughout the curriculum. They told the panel that they had been sufficiently informed of this approach before and at the start of the program, and pointed out that it was beneficial to their careers, since it allows them to understand the approach and viewpoint of colleagues with a quantitative approach.

The panel concludes that the quantitative focus of the program is clear to and appreciated by all involved, although it recommends communicating this choice and the reasons behind it more clearly to externals. The panel also suggests, in line with its suggestion in standard 1, reconsidering the place of qualitative methods in the LCS curriculum. TiU's (qualitative) research focus in online culture draws many LCS students for their specialization electives, and the panel interviewed a number of students and alumni who had ended up specializing and working in qualitative methodology. Therefore, it could be worthwhile to expand attention within the fixed courses and/or STEM to include qualitative methods such as a more socio-political approach.

The panel learned that STEM is experienced as difficult by many students it talked to. It wonders whether STEM I and II could be allotted more credits to reflect this experienced study load. Alumni that the panel interviewed also suggested including programming in R in STEM, and the panel agrees that this could be a worthwhile option for the program to look into.

Research master's level and orientation

LCS matches the requirements of a research master by offering its students courses at this level. The core courses in which all students participate are offered only to students of the LCS research master. Most of these are taught by a team of two lecturers: one from each university. Physical meetings for these courses take place alternately in Nijmegen and Tilburg. With regard to the electives, the RU electives are primarily directed at students of research master's programs (both LCS and other research masters), while in the TiU courses students share classes with students of 'regular' master's programs. Here, they are required to do a separate assignment that enhances their exposure to research and ensures they are taught at research master's level. The panel learned that students often decide on the form and nature of this alternative assignment with their teachers and finds this a good way of ascertaining it has sufficient added value. It also understood, however, that particularly in the less frequently chosen electives, LCS students sometimes perceive the assignment as simply more work. The panel points out that the alternative assignment should not add to the workload of a course, but that it should allow research master students to attain a different and more research-oriented level. This should be communicated more clearly to all teachers and students.

As a research master's program, LCS explicitly draws attention to ethics, research ethics and research integrity. The previous panel advised making attention to ethics and data science more explicit in the curriculum, and this has since been achieved. Ethics, interpreted as scientific integrity, is addressed in several courses, such as Research Orientation, STEM II (which discusses questionable research practices) and both Lab Rotations. It is also an important aspect during the thesis, since every thesis project requires a check to see whether it needs to obtain ethical clearance, and obtaining that clearance when needed. Data science is not part of the core curriculum. However, students who want to explore data science can do so in one or more electives: both RU and TiU offer electives related to this subject. Students and alumni told the panel that they feel well-prepared in this respect, which the panel appreciates.

The panel finds LCS clearly directed at training future researchers, introducing students to the various stages of the research cycle and allowing them to participate in ongoing research while building up research skills and experience throughout the program. The program also contains elements connecting students to career options outside academia, for instance within the valorization course. The panel feels that this aspect might be enhanced in the program, for instance by communicating more clearly about the option of doing a Lab Rotation outside academia or by sketching alternative, non-academic career paths.

Feasibility and guidance

LCS ensures that the curriculum is feasible for all students entering through setting clear admission criteria. For students enrolling in either university, these include a university-level BA/BSc or MA/MSc degree in a relevant discipline, such as communication studies, linguistics, or a modern language; a GPA of 7.5 or higher and a grade of 8 or higher for the bachelor's thesis; proficiency in English (TOEFL); and a strong motivation, demonstrated in a motivation letter. In addition, students have to submit one (TiU) or two (RU) letters of recommendation and an English writing sample. Students with a deficiency in statistics are admitted under the condition that they follow an introductory statistics course as their first elective research skills course in the first semester. Students who want to prepare before entering the program are provided with recommended reading. The panel agrees with the admission criteria and finds them suitable for a research master. The high level achieved in the program (see standard 4) testifies to the program's ability to select successful students.

Flexibility is one of LCS's strong points: its students have ample possibilities to shape their individual learning trajectories and specialize in their preferred direction. The fact that the program is organized by two universities allows for a large number of elective possibilities, which the panel applauds. It learned that the program management is well aware of the fact that this flexibility and large number of options also requires sufficient student guidance, in order to ensure they find their way in a wealth of options.

Guidance is provided first and foremost in the shape of a tutoring system. Each student is individually tutored by a staff member with a research profile close to their own interests, who is asked by the program coordinators to be available for the student. The tutor helps choosing electives and offers guidance regarding the choice of research environment in which to embed for a Lab Rotation. The program also has study advisors who help choosing a coherent set of electives and a suitable research group for Lab Rotations and provide support in case of personal issues. In addition, the program coordinators are available for mentoring hours each week after the Foundations course, to help first-year students find their way. In practice, students develop a network of their own over the course of the program and find various staff members who can help them make further choices.

The panel learned from students and alumni that the system of frequent and personalized guidance functions well and that they feel supported by tutors, coordinators, study advisors, lab and thesis

supervisors and staff members. Students feel the program is feasible and find that it is possible to complete it in 2 years, even if non-international students often take longer so they can take extra courses or spend more time on thesis or Lab Rotation. The panel congratulates the program with its support system. It encountered a clear community feeling among students and staff. According to the panel, the Foundations course creates a good basis for cohort formation, and even though students end up specializing in very different directions and move between universities, they still feel connected to their cohort and program.

The panel encourages the program to further finetune this guidance system by considering best practices it encountered elsewhere, for instance by showcasing the variety of researchers who could act as supervisors in the thesis or Lab Rotations (this choice is now left up to students and their tutors). Displaying the many available options would also encourage students to broaden their horizons as well as specialize. Currently, it is possible for students to follow all electives, the Lab Rotations and the thesis in the same field, even though staff members stress the importance of broadening as well as deepening students' knowledge.

The main challenge for LCS, as the program representatives from both universities acknowledged to the panel, lies in dealing with day-to-day communication and administrative issues due to the flexible setup of the program and its organization within two universities. Students and alumni pointed out to the panel that they had encountered issues concerning enrolment in courses and exams, timing of courses, conflicting administrative and ICT systems, and communication surrounding electives, and that these issues constitute a source of stress for them. At the same time, they praised the efforts and dedication of their teachers and the program management in solving these issues as soon as they occurred.

The panel finds that the organization of the program in two universities constitutes a strong point, from which the students benefit through the wide variety of electives. It also concludes that the program's staff is aware of potential hiccups in the program's organization and deals with it adequately on a daily basis. Nevertheless, the panel sees room for improvement in communication towards the students about the likelihood of such issues emerging from time to time. It recommends clearly informing students right from the start of the program that practical issues may occur and that students can be sure that these will be solved for them by the staff. Knowing this in advance may reduce the stress students experience when they encounter practical issues.

Covid-19 impact

As a selective research master's program, LCS has 15 to 25 students per year and most courses involve only a small number of students. This allowed the program to adapt well to the Covid-19 pandemic using hybrid forms of education. Also, since a sizable proportion of the work takes place outside of taught courses (individual work, participation in research projects, etc.) requiring types of contact that are relatively easy to organize online (e.g., Zoom meetings with a supervisor or with team members), education was not adversely affected too much. The panel learned during the site visit that in shared courses, Tilburg and Nijmegen each organized a live group session on campus during which the two groups interacted through livestreaming. Students unable or unwilling to join their local peers could join in online. The panel appreciates this creative solution for group teaching and community-building between campuses.

The program coordinators attempted to stay in touch with all students who ran into trouble and helped them find solutions. In the first semester of 2020 in Nijmegen, there was a bi-weekly mentor session during which students could ask questions and share thoughts. In the spring of 2021, at the request of the students, Discord was introduced as a platform to share information. All students also received personal messages from the study advisors and the program coordinators to encourage them to share any issues they ran into. The coordinators extended office hours and paid extra attention to the students' study progress. In Nijmegen

students were also referred to “start-of-the-day” sessions that were organized by the Faculty of Arts (2019-2020) and Radboud University (2020-2021) and the supply of activities concerning studying and well-being during COVID-19. Finally, the Program Committee monitored the effects of the pandemic on students and lecturers, and alerted the coordinators to any issues they found.

All in all, students’ progress was not delayed. Some students had to change their plans for Thesis or Lab Rotation work because the pandemic conditions did not allow the type of data collection needed to investigate their original research questions, for example, if data collection had to be carried out abroad. All in all, students were guided well. They mentioned to the panel they appreciated the program’s help and support during the pandemic. The panel applauds the program for its efforts.

Language and internationalisation

The research master’s program LCS is taught in English in accordance with its English name. The panel agrees with the choice for English, as this is the dominant language in the research fields associated with Linguistics and Communication. Students are prepared for academic and professional positions where they are likely to work in English and/or work in a (partially) international environment. The program itself also benefits from the use of English. Part of the teaching staff and almost half of its students are non-Dutch, and this leads to an international classroom where students learn from each other.

The previous panel encouraged the program to allow students to study abroad. Although studying abroad is still not explicitly encouraged, it is better facilitated now. The fourth semester is entirely dedicated to the thesis; there are no courses scheduled in the last semester. This enables students to do the thesis project abroad without missing compulsory courses. The panel appreciates this option, which matches the international set-up and orientation of LCS.

Teaching staff and research environment

Due to the organisation at two universities, LCS has a large number of staff members (around 65) contributing to its program, from core staff to teachers in electives. This means that there are many experts available in different fields, both in Tilburg and in Nijmegen, and that students are usually taught by senior staff members. All except 3 lecturers have a PhD degree and are active researchers in the field of linguistics and/or communication. In Nijmegen, the researchers are affiliated with the Centre for Language Studies (CLS). In addition, some are also affiliated with the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics or the Donders Institute for Brain, Cognition and Behaviour. Tilburg staff members are affiliated with the research institute TiCC (Tilburg Center for Cognition and Communication) or with the Department of Culture Studies, which also includes the research institute Babylon (Center for the Study of Superdiversity). In past research reviews, the affiliated research groups units all scored 1 (excellent) or 2 (very good) in research quality. The TiU staff was recently reduced due to the departure or retirement of key senior staff members, but the program added promising new hires to make up for this.

Staff members are didactically skilled. Both TiU and RU offer a University Teaching Qualification (UTQ) program, which is compulsory for all staff members with a minimum educational load. All staff members involved in LCS have either obtained a UTQ or are in the process of doing so. The UTQ program includes courses in English for non-native speakers lecturing in English. The panel understood from the self-evaluation report as well as from students and alumni that the staff’s English level and fluency are up to standard. For the RU courses, the panel noticed that relatively many staff members are not yet in the possession of their UTQ. In many cases, this is due to their position, which does not require obtaining one (postdocs, professors by special appointment). The panel is pleased to see that this is currently being addressed for staff members whose position does require gaining a UTQ.

All in all, the panel is pleased with the program's staff quality and quantity. It considers the program's cross- and interdisciplinary staff to be a great asset. Students are offered a stimulating research environment where they can develop into young researchers through close cooperation with the teaching staff.

Facilities

The facilities offered to students in LCS can be considered excellent, according to the panel. Both Tilburg and Nijmegen offer research facilities needed for doing empirical research in the context of, for example, Lab Rotations and Thesis. For surveys and experiments, both Tilburg and Nijmegen have a subject pool (mostly consisting of BA students). There are labs in both locations to carry out experimental research. These include an excellent Baby Lab and advanced neuroimaging equipment at the Donders Institute in Nijmegen, as well as a Virtual Reality Lab in Tilburg.

In both locations, there are occasional opportunities for students to compete for paid research assistantships. Students often make use of these opportunities as they provide them with further possibilities to enhance their CVs and their skillset. The work always involves research, under the supervision of a senior researcher (often staff that is also involved in the research master), and may lead to a conference presentation or a publication.

Considerations

The panel considers the setup, content and structure of the LCS curriculum to match the intended learning outcomes and to reflect the research master's level. LCS is clearly directed at training future researchers, introducing students to the various stages of the research cycle and allowing them to participate in ongoing research. LCS explicitly draws attention to (research) ethics and research integrity and integrates skills and content. In the TiU electives, students share classes with students of 'regular' master's programs and are required to do a separate assignment that enhances their exposure to research. The panel points out that the alternative assignment should not add to the workload of a course, and that this should be communicated clearly to all teachers and students. The program contains elements connecting students to career options outside academia, but the panel feels that this aspect might be enhanced, for instance by communicating more clearly about the option of doing a Lab Rotation / internship outside academia or sketching alternative, non-academic career paths.

The quantitative focus of the program is clear to and appreciated by all involved, including students specializing in qualitative methods. The panel does recommend making this choice and the motivation behind it more explicit in external communication. It also suggests looking again at the place of qualitative methods in LCS in order to do more justice to the breadth of the program. The panel noticed that the methodological STEM courses are experienced as difficult by many students, and wonders whether they could be allotted more credits.

The panel agrees with the admission criteria of LCS and applauds the personalized guidance system in place, which is necessary due to the program's flexibility in allowing students to shape their own learning trajectories. The main challenge for LCS lies in dealing with day-to-day communication and administrative issues due to the flexible setup of the program and its organization within two universities. The panel recommends clearly informing students right from the start of the program that practical issues may occur and that students can be sure that these will be solved for them by the staff. The panel appreciates Covid-19 adaptations, staff quality and quantity, and research facilities. Students are offered a challenging research environment where they can develop into young researchers through close cooperation with the teaching staff. The choice for English is fitting and matches the staff members' didactic qualities.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the program meets standard 2.

Standard 3. Student assessment

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

Findings

Assessment policy

Assessment in LCS is in line with the assessment policies in place at RU and TiU. The RU FoA assessment policy is derived from the university's educational vision. It stresses that course assessment is linked to the intended learning outcomes, with a variety of forms of assessment. Both faculties (RU and TiU) have specific Education and Examination Regulations (EER) for the research master, translating these general principles to the program. The two EERs are mostly identical, but there are some differences related to university-wide regulations. Among these are rules and regulations regarding resits (at RU, resits are only allowed in case of a "fail," whereas at TiU, students can also take a resit when they have passed the exam) and distinctions and their criteria (cum laude and summa cum laude at RU; cum laude and with satisfaction at TiU).

The panel looked at the policies and EERs and the resulting assessment practices in LCS. It concludes that assessment in the program is well-designed, aligned with course goals and learning outcomes, and transparent. The program makes use of rubrics and matrices, and applies the four-eyes principle in the construction of tests, particularly in the team-taught courses. The panel appreciates that differences between universities are inevitable in the program's current setup, and learned through interviews that they are clear to the students.

Student assessment

The panel is pleased with the variety in assessment types it encountered in LCS. For instance, students are asked to do a factual check on a scientific article, write papers and reports, hold presentations and write a grant proposal. The panel finds that assessment types match the intended learning outcomes and are activating for the students. In response to a recommendation of the 2016 panel, the number of courses that are graded on a pass/fail scale is limited to two, which the panel appreciates. Students and alumni confirmed to the panel that the Covid-19 pandemic and the shift to online education did not greatly affect assessment in the program. In Nijmegen, no proctoring software was deployed, while in Tilburg, one of the mandatory courses and a handful of electives made use of the possibility to organize an online written exam through Proctorio. The panel understands such differences in the context of a program organised at two universities.

The Lab Rotation internships are evaluated through a portfolio. The portfolio to be submitted consists of a brief overall description of the research setting in which the student worked and of the work that the student has done. This may include a poster presented at a workshop, the manuscript of a paper, a sample of data collected, etc. Assessment criteria include the quality of the final report, the amount of work done, the quality of the specific work assigned to the student, the level of content knowledge and research skills, and the general performance as part of the research team. To assure independent grading of the portfolio, the supervisor is assisted by a second reader. The panel finds that the assessment type of the portfolio allows for great diversity between Lab Rotations, making them harder to grasp and compare. However, it is pleased with the appointment of a second reader to improve assessment quality.

The assessment of the thesis, with its 30 EC sufficiently large for a research master, is done through a single thesis form that is used at both universities upon a recommendation of the previous panel. Both the first and the second reader fill out the assessment form independently. The first assessor is the supervisor, the second assessor a staff member who was not involved in the thesis research. As stated in the assessment policies, both assessors are officially appointed by the relevant Examination Board. Both assessors compare their notes and settle on the final grade. In case they cannot come to an agreement, a third assessor is appointed, who gives an independent assessment of the thesis. The panel appreciates thesis assessment procedures. It studied a selection of 15 theses for each university (see standard 4) and noticed variation in the amount of qualitative feedback students receive on the forms. It learned that the two boards of examiners are aware of this and intend to train supervisors in providing feedback. The panel applauds this and recommends ensuring that written feedback on the thesis is sufficiently extensive for all students in the program. The panel also noticed that the theses received relatively high grades. It concluded that these were justified and reflected the high level attained by the graduates (see standard 4).

Boards of examiners

Both locations have their own Examination Board (EB), but the two collaborate closely. The chairs of both EBs meet at least twice a year, consulting each other in between when necessary and holding joint meetings on topics such as reports of the assessment committees, thesis calibration, and the EERs of both programs. The EBs decide on the courses to be evaluated, the evaluation of the assessment of core courses, and the specific ReMa assignment for TiU courses. The annual report of both Committees is discussed in one of the joint EB meetings. The cooperation of the two EBs is formalized in the partnership agreement.

In Nijmegen, LCS formally falls under the faculty-wide Examination Board (FEX), which is made up of representatives and/or partial committees per program. In addition, there is a chair, an official secretary, and one external member. Chair and secretary handle daily affairs and the full Board meets 4-6 times a year. The Board has also formed an Assessment Advisory Committee tasked with periodical checks of the quality of course and thesis assessment as well as the assessment plan, and discussing these with the examiners and the partial Examination Board. Under normal circumstances, programs at the Faculty of Arts (including LCS) are assessed in this manner every other year. Due to the lockdown, this cycle was temporarily replaced with two online symposiums on long-distance alternative assessment in June 2020 and January 2021.

The panel is convinced that the Examination Boards' efforts in guaranteeing quality of assessment in LCS are sufficient. It appreciates the fact that the program's assessment quality is safeguarded by two separate, but cooperating Examination Boards. In its discussion with the boards, it learned that both have made steps in formalization, professionalization and (where possible) synchronization of their working methods and procedures, both within the faculty or school and between Boards. It applauds these efforts. It suggests making use of quantitative information on assessments, e.g. assessment scores and statistics, to further improve the Boards' effectiveness. This is part of TiU's new assessment policy, and could also be done by the RU Board. The panel also learned that while the RU Board has a cyclical working method for thesis and course checks, the TiU Board as yet works in a more ad hoc manner when it comes to checking courses and theses (for instance through studying a sample of LCS theses in 2021).

Considerations

Assessment policy and quality are up to standard within LCS. The panel considers this a positive achievement in light of the complicated setup between universities, with two Examination Boards and varying sets of rules and regulations. The panel concludes that assessment is in line with relevant policies and regulations and that there is a good variety of assessment types. The assessment of internship and thesis is well designed and in line with the research master's level; students follow the entire research cycle.

The panel noticed that written feedback on the thesis could sometimes be improved, but learned to its satisfaction that this has the attention of the Examination Boards. The respective Examination Boards (RU and TiU) take up their roles in assuring the quality of LCS in a proactive manner, cooperating closely but also working according to the policies of their own Faculty. The panel suggests making use of quantitative information on assessments, e.g. assessment scores and statistics, to further improve the Boards' effectiveness.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the program meets standard 3.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The program demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

The panel read a total of 30 LCS theses, including 15 for the RU program. It is pleased with the high level achieved by LCS's students. The research questions it found in the theses are ambitious, the methods are well-chosen and varied, and the theses attain a high level of reflection and discussion. All theses demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are achieved. The panel advises monitoring whether the research questions are occasionally too ambitious, since this seems to impact the lesser theses. The panel learned that students and alumni often manage to publish based on their thesis (and sometimes also Lab Rotations).

The high quality of the program's output is reflected in the relatively large number of alumni moving on to a PhD position (17 in 27 over the past 3 years). The panel noticed to its satisfaction that alumni also find their way to positions outside of academia, e.g. as consultants or developers in industry. All in all, it concludes that LCS manages to educate and deliver talented junior researchers.

Considerations

The panel finds the level of LCS theses to be generally high, and concludes that alumni do well upon graduation, both inside and outside academia. All in all, it concludes that LCS manages to educate and deliver talented junior researchers.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the program meets standard 4.

General conclusion

The panel's assessment of the research master's program Linguistics and Communication Sciences is positive.

Development points

1. Consider rethinking and/or expanding the position of qualitative methods in the profile, ILOs, and curriculum.
2. Inform students of potential administrative and communication issues due to the combined setup in two universities, and let them know these will be solved with the help of the program staff.
3. Ensure that written feedback on the thesis is sufficiently extensive for all students in the program.
4. Consider allowing the Examination Boards to make use of quantitative information on assessments, e.g. assessment scores and statistics, to further improve the Boards' effectiveness.

Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

Knowledge and understanding

In general, graduates of the Research Master's program

1. have acquired general knowledge on the historical roots of and modern developments in the fields of linguistics and communication sciences; they can describe and apply this knowledge and are able to relate these fields to each other;
2. have a thorough and up-to-date understanding of general findings, the theories developed to account for them, and the current state of the art in the discipline(s) in which they have specialized. Graduates are specialists in an established area (for example language acquisition, persuasive communication, multimodal interaction, psycholinguistics, etc.) or in a more interdisciplinary field;
3. have a comprehensive understanding of the relevant methodological approaches and techniques. This includes minimally those that support corpus-based, experimental, and/or computational research into language and communication, and in addition, where appropriate, methods basic to their area of specialization.

Skills and abilities

In their chosen discipline, graduates of the Research Master's program will be able

4. to study independently in order to develop their knowledge beyond what was offered in classes and internships and to evaluate current research and advanced scholarship in a critical manner;
5. to act autonomously in identifying useful research questions and in planning, organizing, and implementing a research project that investigates these questions;
6. to select and apply the appropriate research method(s) given the research questions;
7. to communicate findings and conclusions to a scientific audience in a clear and unambiguous form, in English, orally as well as in writing; they can do this in the various forms that are conventional in academic discourse, including conference proceedings, peer reviewed articles, and presentations at a symposium or workshop;
8. to communicate to a non-specialist audience in spoken and in written English, in a clear and unambiguous form, the findings and conclusions of their research, as well as its significance beyond science; they can do this in the form of, for example, an article in the popular press, a blog, or a press interview;
9. to adopt the academic attitude that enables them to ask new questions, and to cast their ideas about new studies in the form of a fundable research grant proposal, which they can successfully present and defend.

Academic and ethical standards

Graduates will be able

10. to function in an academic environment; this entails that they at all times uphold the professional standards of academic life, i.e., adhere to ethical standards and show curiosity, a critical mind, and an openness with regard to new views.

Appendix 2. Program curriculum

1. The schedule below describes the curriculum for students starting in September. According to TiU policy, TiU students may start in February as well. This occurs incidentally; most TiU students start in September. RU does not offer a second intake opportunity. When a student starts in February, the student and one of the program coordinators settle on a custom-made program.

2. The courses printed in bold are common to all students; other courses are electives.

Semester 1		Semester 2		
Block 1	Block 2	Block 3		Block 4
Foundations of Language and Communication	STEM I ¹	STEM II	Research Orientation	Lab Rotation I
6 EC	3 EC	3 EC	3 EC	6 EC
Skills/methods elective	Term Paper	Skills/methods elective	Skills/methods elective	Skills/methods elective
3 EC	3 EC	3 EC	3 EC	3 EC
Specialization courses		Specialization courses		
12 EC		12 EC		

Semester 3		Semester 4
Lab Rotation II		Thesis
9EC		
Grant Proposal Writing		
6EC		
Valorization		
Specialization course	Skills/methods elective	
6EC	3EC	30EC

Legenda

- Substantive courses
- Doing research
- Research related skills
- Methodological courses

Appendix 3. Program of the site visit

9 December 2021	
15.00 - 17.00	Panel meeting & online consultation hour
17.00 - 17.45	Interview with deans & management

10 December 2021	
08.30 - 09.00	Interview with program management
09.00 - 09.15	Internal meeting panel
09.15 - 10.00	Interview with students
10.00 - 10.15	Internal meeting panel
10.15 - 10.45	Interview with alumni
10.45 - 11.00	Internal meeting panel
11.00 - 11.45	Interview with teaching staff
11.45 - 12.00	Internal meeting panel
12.00 - 12.30	Interview with examination boards
12.30 - 14.00	Lunch & internal meeting panel
14.00 - 14.30	Interview with program management
14.30 - 16.00	Formulating preliminary findings (internal meeting panel)
16.00 - 16.15	Preparing feedback session (internal meeting panel)
16.15 - 16.30	Feedback preliminary results

Appendix 4. Materials

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 30 theses of the research master's program Linguistics (15 RU theses, 15 TiU theses). Information on the theses is available from Academion upon request. The panel also studied other materials, which included:

0. Samenwerkingsovereenkomst ReMa LCS signed

RU Faculty of Arts

1. FoA – EER 2021-20222
2. FoA – Assessment Policy 2017
3. FoA –Thesis Vademecum 2021 -2022
4. FoA – Examination Board – Annual Report 2019 & 2020
5. FoA – Assessment Quality Report 2021
6. Course guide FoA
7. Minutes Focus Group meetings (TiU & Radboud) 2020 & 2021

TiU Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences

1. TSHD –EER ReMa 2021–2022
2. TiU Assessment Policy 2020
3. TSHD Assessment Policy (DRAFT) 2021
4. TSHD - ReMa Thesis Regulations 2021-2022
5. TSHD Examination Board ReMa – Annual Report 2019-2020
6. TSHD Assessment Quality Report 2020-2021
7. TSHD -Thesis Re-Grading Report ReMa Nov 2020
8. TSHD - Guidelines Alternative Assignment Electives 2021-2022
9. Visual Quality Assurance Education @TSHD n/a
10. Minutes Focus Group meetings (TiU & Radboud) 2020 & 2021

Course Selection

1. Foundations of Language and Communication
2. Statistics and Experimental Methods 2
3. Valorization