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**Master Historical, Literary & Cultural
Studies (research)
Radboud University Nijmegen**

*Report of the limited programme assessment
25 November 2021*

Utrecht, The Netherlands
February 2022
www.AeQui.nl
Assessment Agency for Higher Education

Colophon

Master Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies (research)

Radboud University

Research Master

Location: Nijmegen

Mode of study: fulltime

Croho: 60857

Result of institutional assessment: positive (expiration date 20 November 2023)

Panel

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The panel was presented to the NVAO for approval.

The assessment was conducted under responsibility of

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Summary

On 25 November 2021 an assessment committee of AeQui visited the Research Master (RMA) programme Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies (HLCS) at Radboud University Nijmegen. In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the visit took place in a hybrid setting. HLCS combines interdisciplinary training with educational modules in three disciplinary specialisations: Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Art and Visual Culture.

For its assessment the committee has used the 2018 framework for limited programme assessment, as well as the additional criteria for research master's programmes (2016). The committee judges that the programme meets each standard; hence it considers that the overall quality of the programme is **positive**.

Intended learning outcomes

The merger of three long-standing disciplinary Research Master (RMA) programmes into one single RMA Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies (HLCS) has resulted in a strong and stable two-year programme with its own specific profile. It combines a focus on research, disciplinary depth and interdisciplinary breadth in humanities and offers a curriculum that stretches from Antiquity to the 21st century. The intended learning outcomes of the programme reflect not only the domain, level and orientation of HLCS, but also do justice to the profile and objectives of this RMA: students who successfully demonstrate all learning outcomes are ready for a research career where they can use their combination of disciplinary background and interdisciplinary grounding in humanities to solve complex questions and problems in society. Currently, the programme management is fine-tuning the HLCS profile and implementing curriculum adjustments that reflect this profile. These adjustments are relevant and their results should be communicated to (potential) students and formalised in programme documents, notably the set of intended learning outcomes. In this regard, it is important that the programme strengthens the opportunities for students with research ambitions outside academia and incorporates ethics and scholarly integrity in the learning outcomes. The committee judges that the RMA Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies **meets** the standard.

Teaching-learning environment

The RMA programme is embedded in a learning environment featuring a relevant curriculum, good quality research staff and a truly academic atmosphere for students to pursue their educational and research interests. The curriculum structure is clear

and the learning goals of the respective core courses align with the overall learning outcomes of the programme. Students are taught in intensive small-scale educational settings and have a considerable degree of freedom in tailoring their individual study plan. This freedom, the system of individual student tutoring and the compulsory research training abroad are highly appreciated by both students and alumni. The combination of learning trajectories, course contents and teaching formats ensures that all HLCS students become independent university graduates with advanced research skills. The research character of the programme is guaranteed by the involved staff, who are excellent researchers and committed teachers with good didactic skills, English proficiency and a strong commitment towards the students. While the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting on the quality of education and the wellbeing of both students and staff, the programme is managing this crisis well. In order to further increase the quality of the programme, it is important that HLCS implements the envisaged curriculum adjustments, demonstrates that students can use their acquired research competencies in both academic and non-academic settings, expands its network of scientific contacts to relevant non-academic institutions, and attracts more good quality applications from international (non-EU) students. The committee judges that the RMA Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies **meets** the standard.

Student assessment

Assessment at the RMA HLCS is organised very well: the assessment system is embedded in the policies and frameworks of the Faculty and the vision on assessment of the university; there is alignment between programme, courses and assessment meth-

ods; course teams design and implement assessments together and provide feedback to students; assessors take thesis evaluation seriously and complete the dedicated evaluation form in an insightful way; the Board of Examiners and the Assessment Advisory Committee fulfil their quality assurance tasks in a professional way. HLCS can rely on a good quality assessment system that is backed up by robust quality assurance processes and implemented by stakeholders with a shared quality culture. The committee judges that the RMA Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies **meets** the standard.

Achieved learning outcomes

RMA students who graduated from the HLCS programme have the necessary competencies to pursue a research-based career inside and outside academia. Graduates from the programme have demonstrated through their invariably good quality theses and their professional careers – featuring a high percentage of PhD positions and a wide range of relevant positions outside academia – that they achieved all learning outcomes. Since the proof of the pudding is in the eating, the findings on the achieved learning outcomes confirm that HLCS is doing a good job. The committee judges that the RMA Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies **meets** the standard.

Recommendations

The committee has issued a positive judgement on the quality of each individual standard and on the quality of the RMA programme as a whole. Nonetheless the committee sees room for improvement in a number of areas. The following suggestions constitute no formal recommendations but points for consideration the committee picked up during the visit and reported in the respective assessment standards. The committee advises the RMA HLCS to:

- strengthen the interdisciplinary dimension of courses, tracks and programme by executing the envisaged curriculum adjustments;
- have the results of these adjustments reflected in the (intended) learning outcomes;
- communicate and demonstrate that the programme teaches research competencies that can be used in both academic and non-academic settings;
- strengthen the opportunities for students with research ambitions outside academia;
- allow some flexibility in the contents of both research proposal and research article to accommodate the specific interests and envisaged career paths of students;
- make the international training also compulsory for students who focus on Dutch literature;
- accept well-motivated requests from students to include Dutch-language courses or Dutch-language research outputs in their study programme;
- reflect whether tutors are best placed to verify the intensified course deliverables of ‘their’ students and become also their thesis supervisor and grader;
- expand its network of scientific contacts towards relevant non-academic institutions;
- adjust recruitment information and materials to attract more good quality applications from international (non-EU) students;
- enhance signposting to students, i.e. communicating and regularly repeating (also orally) key information on programme deadlines and exam / assessment procedures;
- fine-tune existing rubrics and criteria in the thesis evaluation form and calibrate the thesis quality that is expected to qualify for *cum laude*;
- invite alumni to present to HLCS students the full and broad range of career opportunities.

All standards of the NVAO assessment framework (2018) as well as the additional criteria for research master’s programmes are assessed positively; the assessment committee therefore issues a **positive** recommendation for the accreditation of the programme.

On behalf of the entire assessment committee,
Utrecht, February 2022

Jan Baetens
Chair

Mark Delmartino
Secretary

Introduction

The Research Master Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies is a two-year full-time programme of 120 EC. The interdisciplinary programme is taught by research staff from the Radboud Institute for Culture and History and attracts about twenty students per year. It is structured around four learning trajectories featuring common interdisciplinary courses, disciplinary specialist courses and an international research training. Students have a considerable degree of freedom in tailoring their individual study plan with the support of a dedicated tutor.

Institute

While Nijmegen already hosted a university in the 17th Century, the Radboud University (RU) was established in 1923 as the Catholic University Nijmegen. Currently, the university consists of 7 Faculties and features almost 25000 students and 6000 staff. The Faculty of Arts offers 27 degree programmes in the fields of art, culture, history, communication and language, including two Research Master programmes. Research is conducted in the Centre for Language Studies and the Radboud Institute for Culture and History (RICH).

Programme

The two-year full-time Research Master (RMA) programme Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies (HLCS) combines interdisciplinary training with educational modules in three disciplinary specialisations: Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Art and Visual Culture. The curriculum concentrates on theoretical, conceptual and methodological debates and approaches in the humanities in connection to relevant scholarly and societal problems. Key features include the international research training period, the individual study programmes, and student supervision by a personal tutor.

The predecessor of this RMA was launched in 2006-2007 and consisted until 2017 of three individual RMA programmes with a more disciplinary focus in Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Art and Visual Culture. Both 'old' and 'new' programmes were hosted by the then Institute for

Historical, Literary and Cultural Studies at the Faculty of Arts. In 2019 this Institute changed name and became the RICH. At the time of this external assessment, the 'single' RMA has been running for a few years. The previous accreditation panel still reviewed three individual programmes; the current assessment committee acknowledges the recommendations of this panel, studied the programme's recent developments and adjustments, and focused in particular on the current quality and envisaged enhancements of the RMA HLCS.

Assessment

Radboud University (RU) assigned AeQui Nederland to perform a quality assessment of its research RMA HLCS. In close co-operation with the programme management, AeQui convened an independent and competent assessment committee. The committee members are briefly presented in attachment 1. A preparatory meeting with representatives of the programme was held to exchange information and plan the date and programme of the site-visit.

In the run-up to the site visit, the committee studied the programme's self-evaluation report and reviewed a sample of theses accepted during the last three years. The first impressions on the programme based on this report and the thesis review were input for discussions among the committee members in their online preparatory meeting on 23 November 2021, as well as during the visit.

The site visit was carried out on 25 November 2021 according to the programme presented in

attachment 2. In view of the public health situation following the COVID-19 pandemic, the visit was performed in a hybrid setting: part of the committee members and most of the programme stakeholders met on site, while other members and some stakeholders attended the site visit online. Because of unforeseen personal circumstances, the student-member did not attend the visit. Her findings and questions from the preparatory phase have been addressed during the sessions, while the chair ensured that her viewpoints on the overall quality of the programme were taken on board in this report.

The committee has assessed the programme in an independent manner; at the end of the visit, the chair of the assessment committee presented the initial findings of the committee to representatives of the programme and the institution. The visit also featured an open consultation hour for RMA HLCS students, teaching and support staff; eventually one person used the opportunity to speak individually and confidentially with the committee.

The committee performed its assessment in relation to, and in consideration of, the cluster of programmes in which this programme is placed. The contextualisation of the programme in its cluster was conducted by the complete committee during the preliminary meeting and the final deliberations. The knowledge required for this was present in (part of) the committee.

In the following document, the committee is reporting on its findings, considerations and conclusions according to the NVAO framework for limited programme assessment. The report also takes into account the additional criteria for research master's programmes formulated in the NVAO publication dated May 2016. A draft version of the report was sent to the programme management; its reactions have led to this final version of the report.

Initiated by the programme, a development dialogue will be planned early 2022. The results of this development dialogue have no influence on the assessment presented in this report.

1. Intended learning outcomes

The merger of three long-standing disciplinary Research Master (RMA) programmes into one single RMA Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies (HLCS) has resulted in a strong and stable two-year programme with its own specific profile. It combines a focus on research, disciplinary depth and interdisciplinary breadth in humanities and offers a curriculum that stretches from Antiquity to the 21st century. The intended learning outcomes of the programme reflect not only the domain, level and orientation of HLCS, but also do justice to the profile and objectives of this RMA: students who successfully demonstrate all learning outcomes are ready for a research career where they can use their combination of disciplinary background and interdisciplinary grounding in humanities to solve complex questions and problems in society. Currently, the programme management is fine-tuning the HLCS profile and implementing curriculum adjustments that reflect this profile. These adjustments are relevant and their results should be communicated to (potential) students and formalised in programme documents, notably the set of intended learning outcomes. In this regard, it is important that the programme strengthens the opportunities for students with research ambitions outside academia and incorporates ethics and scholarly integrity in the learning outcomes. According to the committee, the RMA programme Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies **meets this standard**.

Findings

Profile

The roots of the current RMA programme Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies (HLCS) go back fifteen years: for ten years, three stand-alone RMA programmes each focused on a combination of research competencies and disciplinary knowledge in a particular domain of humanities. Since the merger in one single RMA as of September 2017, the 'new' programme HLCS combines interdisciplinary training with educational modules in three disciplinary specialisations: Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Art and Visual Culture. It emphasises the methodological aspects of the humanities in order to contribute to academic depth, interdisciplinarity and future flexibility. In terms of structure and profile, the committee noticed that the integration of the three disciplinary programmes into one RMA HLCS has been accomplished and is currently being reinforced further.

In line with its predecessor programmes, the RMA HLCS pays considerable attention to research. On completion of the programme, RMA students are trained in all phases of the research cycle. In this

regard, HLCS concentrates on research-related knowledge and skills: theoretical, conceptual and methodological debates and approaches in the humanities, in connection to relevant scholarly and societal problems. By combining disciplinary and interdisciplinary elements the programme is in a position to address societal questions which scholars in the humanities may approach from disciplinary, or cross- or interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives connected to specific data and sources that require a range of methodical and analytical skills. Hence, students – in their position of young scholars – can focus during their RMA studies on issues such as citizenship, (political) power, societal resilience, migration, cultural heritage, gender, systemic racism, de/postcolonialism, health, environment and climate change. According to the committee, the profile of the programme is such that HLCS graduates will become accomplished young academics, trained as disciplinary specialists whose interdisciplinary training allows for the scholarly flexibility needed for complex questions. Moreover, the committee noticed with satisfaction that HLCS students learn to assess the relevance and impact of humanities scholarship in terms of societal questions and problems.

Based on the informative Benchmarking section in the self-evaluation report, the committee acknowledges that the RMA HLCS has a number of features that set it apart from other similar (research) master programmes in the Netherlands: HLCS has an explicit theoretical and methodological focus, combines interdisciplinary and disciplinary components, and offers students a curriculum ranging from Classical Antiquity to the present. Based on its discussions with students and alumni, the committee confirms the statement in the report that the RMA HLCS has a distinctive structure that is particularly appreciated by students who seek to strengthen their research skills.

Furthermore, the committee gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the programme is constantly striving to improve the balance between the disciplinary and interdisciplinary components of the programme. According to the programme management, the ambition is to arrive at a situation where HLCS students identify with the overall programme rather than with one of its disciplinary specialisations. Over the last two years, a number of courses have been revised to strengthen the interdisciplinary and international profile. Moreover, as of 2022-2023 new learning trajectories will be devised to stimulate the further integration of what students learn, apply and create. The committee appreciates the constant attention of the management to fine-tuning the programme profile and implementing curriculum adjustments that reflect this profile. It supports the ambitions of the programme and the incremental step-by-step approach of the management to realise these ambitions. According to the committee, it is important that the results of these adjustments are also communicated to (potential) students and formalised in programme documents.

One area in which this communication and formalisation is urgent is the openness of the programme to students who look for a high-quality research training but do not necessarily envisage a PhD trajectory and/or a career in academia. In this regard, the programme announced that the

current revisions should clarify that the RMA is also intended for highly qualified students with ambitions other than obtaining a PhD position. Students and alumni indicated during the discussions that on the one hand staff and tutors are clearly passing on the message that not every RMA student should (want to) strive for a PhD, that positions in academia are limited and that there are many relevant and interesting opportunities for research-based employment outside academia. On the other hand, (former) students told the committee that they lack(ed) information about doing research in other-than-academic environments. The alumni indicated that they are available to speak to current student cohorts about their work and thought it would be a value added if HLCS students would learn about all possible career paths. The committee therefore encourages the programme to invite alumni to talk about the very diverse paths their careers have taken since they graduated from the RMA. It also recommends the programme to be more explicit in its publicity and its programme / course descriptions that the RMA HLCS prepares students with research ambitions for relevant careers in both academic and non-academic settings.

Learning outcomes

The RMA HLCS features 8 intended learning outcomes (ILOs). While there is no direct (visible) link between the ILOs and the Dublin Descriptors, the committee noticed that the five descriptors – knowledge, insight, judgement, communication, learning – are covered throughout the set of programme learning outcomes and are addressed at the appropriate level of a second-cycle degree. Moreover, the learning outcomes reflect the profile of the programme with its three disciplinary components and its interdisciplinary context founded in humanities. Hence, the committee established that the learning outcomes are formulated in such a way that they cover the domain (HLCS), the level (master) and the orientation (academic) of the programme.

Furthermore, the committee noticed that the specific research-oriented nature of this RMA programme is clearly visible in the formulated ILOs. Graduates have the ability to develop and execute research plans, to access and manage complex information with adequate command of advanced heuristic skills, and to write an in-depth and comprehensive research report based on thorough, independent and critical research. Moreover, it is the explicit objective of the programme that students are in a position to write a scholarly article before they graduate.

Contrary to ILO sets in many other RMA programmes, the learning outcomes do not explicitly refer to ethics and scholarly integrity. The committee noticed, however, that these elements are addressed in the curriculum. Moreover, the learning outcomes do not refer to the existence of – or the programme preparation for – career pathways outside academia that require extensive high-level research competencies. The committee was informed by several stakeholders that there is growing awareness of – and attention to – this career path in the programme. According to the management, the programme wants to ensure on the one hand that research remains the core of the programme; on the other hand, the programme needs and wants to demonstrate that research competences are transferable to a wide range of domains and lead to employment opportunities that may include but are by no means restricted to a PhD trajectory at a university. The committee endorses these intentions and recommends that the programme review and where necessary adjust the current set of (intended) learning outcomes following the implementation of the envisaged learning pathways. At that point, the programme's coverage of ethics and scholarly integrity could also be reflected in the learning outcomes.

Considerations

The committee considers that the merger of three long-standing disciplinary research master programmes into one RMA has been accomplished. The current RMA HLCS is the proper successor of

these programmes and now constitutes a strong programme in its own right. HLCS takes up a specific position within the higher education landscape in the Netherlands because it combines a number of features in a unique way: the focus on research and on the methodological aspects of the humanities, the combination of disciplinary depth and interdisciplinary breadth, a curriculum that stretches from Antiquity to the 21st century, the international research training period, the individual study programmes and personalised student supervision.

The intended learning outcomes of the programme reflect not only the domain, level and orientation of HLCS, but also do justice to the profile and objectives of this particular research master programme. According to the committee, students who successfully demonstrate all learning outcomes are ready for a research career where they can use their combination of disciplinary background and interdisciplinary grounding in humanities to solve complex questions and problems. The committee thinks highly of the attention of the programme (learning outcomes) to the contribution of humanities to societal questions; (training HLCS students in) highlighting the possible societal role of the humanities constitutes a unique feature of this RMA.

The committee welcomes the ongoing efforts of the management to improve the balance between the disciplinary and interdisciplinary components of the programme by fine-tuning the HLCS profile and implementing curriculum adjustments that reflect this profile. In this regard, the committee endorses the recent adjustments, the plans for the immediate future and the step-by-step approach of the management to achieve these ambitions.

According to the committee, it is very important that the results of these adjustments are also communicated to (potential) students and formalised in programme documents, notably in the set of (intended) learning outcomes. One area that requires immediate action is strengthening

the programme's opportunities – and communicating its relevance – for students with research ambitions outside academia. Moreover, the committee suggests to review and where necessary adjust the current learning outcomes following the implementation of the envisaged learning pathways. At that point, the programme's coverage of ethics and scholarly integrity, as well as its explicit objective to prepare students for a research career both inside and outside academia should be reflected in the learning outcomes.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment committee concludes that the RMA Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies **meets standard 1, intended learning outcomes.**

2. Teaching-learning environment

The RMA programme is embedded in a learning environment featuring a relevant curriculum, good quality research staff and a truly academic atmosphere for students to pursue their educational and research interests. The curriculum structure is clear and the learning goals of the respective core courses align with the overall learning outcomes of the programme. Students are taught in intensive small-scale educational settings and have a considerable degree of freedom in tailoring their individual study plan. This freedom, the system of individual student tutoring and the compulsory research training abroad are highly appreciated by both students and alumni. The combination of learning trajectories, course contents and teaching formats ensures that all HLCS students become independent university graduates with advanced research skills. The research character of the programme is guaranteed by the involved staff, who are excellent researchers and committed teachers with good didactic skills, English proficiency and a strong commitment towards the students. While the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting on the quality of education and the well-being of both students and staff, the programme is managing this crisis well. In order to further increase the quality of the programme, it is important that HLCS implements the envisaged curriculum adjustments, demonstrates that students can use their acquired research competencies in both academic and non-academic settings, expands its network of scientific contacts to relevant non-academic institutions, and attracts more good quality applications from international (non-EU) students. According to the assessment committee, the RMA programme Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies **meets this standard**.

Findings

Programme

The RMA HLCS amounts to 120 EC and is offered as a full-time two-year programme. It is structured around four learning trajectories: a general and common set of interdisciplinary courses (20 EC), a set of specialisation courses per discipline (15 EC), an individual programme (45 EC) including elective courses and an international research training, and a research component (40 EC). The committee obtained detailed information on the respective trajectories and courses in the self-evaluation report and in the materials provided through the digital base room. The committee found the HLCS programme to be coherent, well-structured and logically built. The course structure is clear, coherent and well thought-through, and allows students to develop the necessary competencies progressively throughout the programme. The overview of the course structure in the self-evaluation report demonstrates nicely how the interdisciplinary and disciplinary components reinforce each other in the first year of the programme. In terms of individual courses, the committee appreciated the attention to science

communication and outreach, the focus on concrete research proposals in the Research in Practice courses and the inclusion of an International Research Training as a mandatory component of the curriculum. In this regard the committee strongly advises the programme to make this international training compulsory also for students who focus on Dutch literature.

The committee established furthermore that the learning goals of the courses align with the overall learning outcomes of the programme; this in turn ensures that by the end of the programme HLCS students have indeed had the opportunity to demonstrate all intended learning outcomes. The committee understood that issues of ethics and scholarly integrity are an important part of the interdisciplinary course Methods and Techniques in the Humanities: students study and debate cutting-edge research methods, tools and techniques, as well as research ethics and the ground rules of data management; they are prompted to evaluate research designs in terms of relevance, interdisciplinary collaboration, scientific integrity and ethical concerns; moreover,

guest lecturers help students explore the interdependence between the thematic, conceptual, methodological and ethical dimensions of their research design. The committee endorses the programme's approach to ethics in relation to scholarly work.

During the site visit, the committee discussed several components of the curriculum. Further to what was already addressed in the previous section, programme representatives indicated that course contents have been and are being revised to integrate the disciplinary courses in the overall curriculum by including more interdisciplinary components in the specialisation courses, for instance in the disciplinary Research in Practice courses. The committee welcomes this development because the interdisciplinary component seems relatively limited compared to the disciplinary courses. While agreeing in part to this finding, the programme management indicated that the specialisation courses are increasingly paying attention to interdisciplinarity and that the general programme courses are taught by staff from different disciplines.

With regard to the individual programme, students decide on their electives according to their specific ambitions and interests. The committee gathered from the materials and the discussions that students can also select courses that are offered at regular master level. In this case, the study programme is being intensified. This principle is described in the Education and Examination Regulations, the options are discussed between the students and their individual tutors, the concrete plans are validated by the Examination Board, and the implementation is checked by the tutors. According to the committee, the need for a more intensive course plan in case of attending regular master level courses is well organised, monitored and validated. If anything, the programme may want to reflect whether tutors are best placed to check if 'their' students have indeed fulfilled the agreed intensification requirements.

The committee learned, moreover, that the envisaged reorganisation of the learning trajectories should contribute to students identifying with / enrolling for HLCS rather than one of its disciplinary specialisations. According to the management, the programme has to walk a fine line here as there still is considerable discussion among staff how to combine the ambitions for a stronger inter/cross/multi-disciplinary programme with the needs of many students who envisage a PhD trajectory and whose chances of success are still very much dependent on disciplinary training. The committee welcomes the ongoing and envisaged changes in the programme and suggests management, staff, tutors and thesis supervisors to actively look for ways to (convince students to) integrate more theory and methodology from the interdisciplinary components in the disciplinary work and trajectories. Similarly, there is room to pay more attention to interdisciplinary approaches in the (disciplinary) research master thesis. During the discussions, the management indicated that with regard to the latter point, the programme has started to appoint second reviewers with a different expertise.

Furthermore, the committee gathered from the discussions that the programme will launch the concept of academic citizenship: it is of paramount importance that HLCS students understand they acquire skills that are transferable to other environments than academia. In this regard, the programme wants to ensure – and promote actively – that students can valorise their research work in society. The committee supports this plan and advises the programme to communicate the concept of academic citizenship to potential applicants and deploy it from the very start of the programme. Moreover, it is important that the message - and the opportunities the programme offers in this regard - is spread systematically by all teaching staff, tutors and supervisors. In this way, students who right from the start or during the course of the programme decide that their professional future lies outside academia will have the opportunity to tailor their study programme in such a way that they are first trained

and then offered the opportunity to actively pursue the valorisation of their research work in society. According to the committee this is possible in different course assignments, as well as in the international research training and the research article.

Finally, the committee discussed the rationale behind the courses that together constitute the research trajectory: research proposal, research article and master thesis. The course Research Article allows students to condense parts of their research into a scholarly article; the course Research Proposal enables students to develop a research project into a potentially competitive academic research proposal. Both courses build on the Research in Practice course, which considers strategies of publication and funding in connection to the delineation of research projects. During the first year, students are helped to plan the international research training, the research article, research proposal and master thesis and learn how to combine these components, e.g. by using results of their international research training for a research article or by writing a research proposal that builds on the findings of their thesis. Given the increased attention to non-academic career pathways, the committee advises the programme to allow for a certain flexibility in the order, timing and outputs of the research trajectory components. While it is clear that the thesis constitutes the ultimate proof that students have mastered the different components of the research cycle and acquired the disciplinary and interdisciplinary programme outcomes, the committee thinks that the contents of both research proposal and research article can be tailored to the specific interests and envisaged career paths of the students. According to the committee, the programme should allow flexibility in the order and timing of the delivery of the respective products: students aspiring to a PhD trajectory may want to finish early with the thesis in order to produce both a scholarly article and a research application based on the thesis results; students envisaging a research-informed career outside academia may want to build on the findings of their research

training and have their (thesis) research results valorised in a different way.

Language

The title of the RMA HLCS is in English and so is the language of instruction. The name of the programme is in English because it targets both national and international students. The programme is taught in English because of the international nature of the student body and because English is the language of international scholarly communication in the field. The choice for English moreover ensures that students and staff can talk to each other and prepares students to participate in international debates and pursue an international career, both in the Netherlands and abroad. The committee understands and endorses the argumentation to offer the programme in English and have the programme title in English.

Without wanting to downplay the above-mentioned arguments, the committee did notice in the materials and during the discussions that many staff and students are Dutch; moreover, the research interests of some students have a distinctly Dutch dimension, e.g. Dutch history or Dutch literature. Some of the Dutch students and alumni moreover indicated that because of the English-language character of the programme, there is no attention to academic writing in Dutch and that it proves difficult to get relevant courses validated as part of the individual programme if they are taught in Dutch. One alumnus told the committee he would have liked to write his thesis in Dutch given the topic and his own professional career plans. The committee advises the programme to look into these matters: while it is convinced of the relevance to offer the RMA HLCS in English, there should be ways to accommodate more easily well-motivated requests from students to include Dutch-language courses or Dutch-language research outputs in their study programme.

The discussions on site also revealed that international students who wish to learn Dutch have only limited opportunities to do so at an affordable

cost. While it understands that this is not an issue that can be solved at the level of the RMA programme, the committee does think that it is an important element for the integration of international students, who may want to do an internship or have longer-term career plans in the Netherlands.

Didactics

The committee gathered from the materials and the discussions that the RMA consists of an intensive programme featuring different small-scale teaching formats and a high level of individualisation. During the first year, students spend on average 12 to 15 contact hours per week on campus. Depending on the learning trajectory, students attend courses with the entire RMA cohort, with the cohort of their specialisation or with other students from regular master courses, other RMA programmes or PhD students. The teaching formats of the core curriculum aim to develop processes of understanding and applying theories, concepts, methods and techniques, as well as analysing and evaluating scholarship in a societal context, research questions and research designs. During the electives, students get acquainted with other teaching formats, such as masterclasses, workshops and expert seminars where they learn to discuss, exchange and collaborate in new groups of postgraduate students.

Moreover, the RMA HLCS offers plenty of room for customisation and individual study programmes. This customisation is supported by a programme-specific system of supervision: at the start of the programme, students choose a personal tutor from the academic staff who plays an essential role in supervising the individual student. Tutors help students in making choices, advice on planning and support students in organising the international research training and the thesis. Moreover, the student-tutor collaboration supports the integration of specialised courses and interdisciplinary modules in the individual master thesis project. The research trajectory of students is determined in individual sessions with the tutor and the thesis supervisor, who can be

but do not necessarily have to be one and the same person.

According to the committee, the overall RMA programme is conceived in such a way that it allows for intensive small-scale education and a considerable degree of individualisation. Moreover, the teaching formats ensure that at the end of the programme, students attain the level of an independent university graduate with research ambitions and skills. In this regard, the panel noticed that students are encouraged to contribute to the content of their classes, and that across the courses there are good attempts to link theory with case-based teaching. Furthermore, the discussions with students, staff and alumni have convinced the committee that the combination of small-scale teaching formats and a high level of individualisation leads to the delivery of high quality education.

Amidst all positive findings and considerations, the committee did notice from the discussions with students and alumni that the tutor scheme in its current conception may have two downsides: first, RMA students who move on from a bachelor's degree at (the Faculty of Arts of) Radboud University very often 'bring their own tutor', i.e. an academic staff member they related to in their bachelor programme; this creates an unequal starting position compared to students who joined the RMA from the outside. Secondly, the committee noticed that in some cases, the relationship between students and tutors can become very tight to the extent that the latter may not be fully independent when s/he would also take up the role of thesis supervisor (and assessor). While the committee very much appreciates the tutor scheme as a key feature and selling proposition of this RMA, the programme should reflect on how to mitigate the two downsides.

Research

Studying the HLCS staff overview, the committee noticed that the teachers, tutors and supervisors are all active researchers with substantial interna-

tional teaching and research experience who belong to the Radboud Institute for Culture and History (RICH). Their research expertise is very much in line with the contents of the courses, while the topics of the master theses match the work performed in the research institute. According to the committee the research character of the HLCS programme is guaranteed by the involved staff.

The committee has also looked into the external research assessment of the then Institute for Historical, Literary and Cultural Studies, which was performed in November 2018. The institute obtained a "very good" score on research quality and viability, while its societal relevance was rated as "excellent". According to the committee these scores confirm the quality of the research efforts of the staff teaching in the RMA programme. The committee also sees a link between the excellent research score on societal relevance and the explicit objective of the RMA HLCS to address the contribution of humanities to societal questions.

Finally, the committee gathered that both the research institute and the RMA staff are well networked in other research groups such as the Graduate School for Humanities or the relevant National Research Schools; moreover, they have plenty of contacts with research groups at other universities in the Netherlands and abroad. These links the committee understood are used very often when students customise their study programme, notably but not exclusively when students prepare for their international research training. Given the increased attention in the curriculum to transferable research skills and to students valorising their research in non-academic environments, the committee suggests that the programme and its staff expand their network also beyond the inner circles of academia.

Admission

The committee noticed that the RMA has a rigorous selection procedure in order to ensure that students will be able to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from its advanced-level curricu-

lum. Admission requirements include among others a bachelor's degree in a relevant domain with Grade Point Average of 7.5 and a bachelor's thesis score of at least 8. The Admissions Board invites applicants who meet the requirements for a brief personal interview before it decides on the selection. The committee has studied a table with the number of applications between 2016 and 2020: it shows that the number of applications, in particular from students with an international bachelor's degree, has been growing over the years; however, this growth has not led to a growing share of international enrolments. The committee was informed during the discussions that about half of the international applications, mostly from students outside the EU, do not meet the admission criteria; moreover, many international students who are selected for the programme eventually do not enrol because they do not have the financial resources. Students with a Dutch bachelor's degree tend to fulfil the admission criteria: about 80% of these applicants effectively enrol and – with the exception of one cohort – most of these students obtained their bachelor's degree in Nijmegen.

The committee gathered from the extensive information in the report annexes that the student intake between 2014-2015 and 2020-2021 in both the combined disciplinary RMA programmes and the single HLCS programme has fluctuated between 12 (2018-2019) and 22 students (2017-2018 and 2020-2021). Broken down per specialisation, the programme always attracted a similar number of students (on average 7 to 8) in both Literary Studies and History Studies, and much fewer students (on average 3) in Arts and Visual Culture. The programme management is confident that the growing interest in the programme as seen through the intake figures for the academic years 2018-2020 and 2020-2021 will continue once the COVID-19 pandemic is sufficiently reduced to make a two-year stay in the Netherlands feasible for foreign students. Moreover, the programme expects a growing interest – notably in the domain of Visual Arts and Culture

– from students with a bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts and Sciences from Dutch University Colleges, as well as from students with a background in Media Studies.

In terms of allowing students in who are qualified to follow and successfully finish the RMA programme, the intake procedure is clear and robust. However, the committee understood from the materials and the discussions that the composition of the group that applies for HLCS is not in line with the composition of the cohort that eventually enrolls. Hence, the programme has some work to do in explaining (even) more clearly the admission requirements to international students, and in making more publicity for the programme among other Dutch universities. Further to what was mentioned in other sections, the programme may want to communicate how the combination of disciplinary and interdisciplinary components in HLCS offers opportunities for students featuring a broad range of educational backgrounds and with professional ambitions outside academia that require advanced research skills.

Students

Students indicated in their report chapter and during the visit that they are overall satisfied with the programme. The committee gathered a similar impression from the discussion with alumni. Both students and alumni very much like what has been presented in earlier parts of this report as the key features of the RMA HLCS: the focus on research, the broad range of the curriculum, the study period abroad, the opportunity to pursue one's personal scholarly interests in an individualised study programme, and the support and supervision by an individual tutor who accompanies students throughout the two-years' programme.

Students and alumni, however, have mixed opinions about the other key feature of HCLS: its combination of disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity. While their comments seem on the one hand to be triggered by personal ambitions which are situated somewhere on the disciplinarity – interdisciplinarity continuum, the committee also noticed

from the discussions that there has been and still is a tension between both aspects: the way both the general programme courses and the specialist courses are currently implemented still leaves room for improvement. Based on its discussions with the programme management, the committee is confident that the current and future adjustments will contribute to enhancing the cohesion between and within the tracks.

In addition to a personal academic tutor, HLCS students can also rely on the non-academic services of a study adviser. While there have been problems regarding the availability of this staff member in the past, the newly appointed study adviser seems to offer the services RMA students really need. In addition to the regular student guidance activities, the study adviser is tasked to promote a community feeling among the respective student cohorts: although the RMA attracts a sufficient number of students to build a cohort, the attention to disciplinary specialisations and the individualised study programmes are not conducive to taking community-building for granted among HLCS cohorts or even specialisation groups.

The committee was informed that the study adviser is also developing a trajectory to prevent stress and insecurity among students and enhance their study-life balance. This initiative serves the wellbeing of students in two domains: study delay and performance stress. In terms of study delay, the committee noticed that over the past seven years, about 15% of the RMA students left the programme without diploma, about a quarter of the students graduated nominally and another 40% did so in three years. In order to cater for the remaining 20%, the programme has been taking a number of initiatives, such as early planning meetings and the "*Zet vertraging in beweging*" trajectory.

With regard to performance stress, students reported very openly that RMA students have created among themselves an atmosphere that the

programme has set a high bar. Some students reportedly chose the RMA primarily because they hope it will lead them to a job in academia; they take courses and assignments very seriously and put in a lot of work and effort. In terms of study load this means according to the student section that “remarks about the weight or intensity of the programme do not pertain to the actual courses but rather to the concern that following the programme is not enough to succeed in academia.” The committee welcomes the additional services of the RMA and encourages the study adviser in her forthcoming task. According to the committee, the programme management also has an important task in communicating and demonstrating that the RMA HLCS leads to research competencies that can be used in both academic and non-academic settings.

Finally, the committee gathered from the written materials and the discussions that programme-specific information is readily available for students. Nonetheless, several students and alumni mentioned obstacles in getting individual courses and/or assignments validated; moreover, they were not always aware what to do in case they (would have) failed a course / test. The committee is convinced that this kind of information is available in writing somewhere; nonetheless it advises the programme not to take for granted that students are aware of all possible regulations and procedures, and to communicate the most important information also orally.

Staff

The committee noticed that the ambitions of the RMA programme also manifest themselves through the background and expertise of the scientific staff members involved. All teaching staff are members of RICH and in this capacity participate in national and international scholarly and non-academic societal networks. According to the overview in the report annex, 41 teaching staff and 5 tutors are involved in the HLCS programme: all have a PhD, a large majority has a University Teaching Qualification and all staff either hold

certificates of proficiency in English or have extensive academic training or working experience in English-speaking countries.

The staff only devotes a small portion of its capacity to the research-driven courses of the RMA as they mainly teach in the bachelor and master programmes of the Faculty of Arts. In most RMA courses lecturers operate in teams: in the interdisciplinary courses, they represent multiple disciplines in order to help students integrate both disciplinary and interdisciplinary debates and perspectives, as well as theoretical, conceptual and methodological approaches; the disciplinary courses feature teams of mostly two professors, which strengthens the hands-on, case-based approaches that form the core of the teaching formats.

Based on the written materials and the discussions, the committee established the excellent quality of the staff as researchers and teachers. The discussions furthermore showed the staff’s great enthusiasm for the programme and commitment to the students. Students and alumni for their part emphasized the high level of expertise of all lecturers on the programme, as well as the quality of instruction. Students also feel that staff is committed to the programme and genuinely interested in their academic and personal wellbeing. According to the committee, the lecturers are of an excellent quality and together they represent an interesting mix of disciplines and fields of expertise. Further to what was already mentioned in a previous section, the quality of academic guidance offered by the tutors is excellent.

COVID-19

The committee gathered from the written materials and the discussions that the pandemic has had an impact on the HLCS programme, its students and lecturers. According to the self-evaluation report, teaching in times of COVID-19 required adaptations to the teaching formats; however, the small scale of the student groups usually aligned with the formats enabled by Zoom or Virtual Classroom, the university’s digital learning

environment on Brightspace. Moreover, by dividing lectures into smaller portions and using facilities such as breakout rooms for exchange, discussion and collaboration, the staff ensured that students stayed focused and engaged. In order to ensure coherence among the course contents that were provided online, staff met more regularly. Both staff and students indicated that they received assistance from the faculty to teach in a remote digital format or follow the online courses with proper hardware and software. The committee noticed moreover that the programme – through its staff, tutors and student advisors – paid particular attention to the welfare of students, and that students appreciated this personal attention very much. During the pandemic, the student advisor counselled individual students and where necessary referred students with specific issues to other support facilities of the university.

In sum, the discussions revealed that the HLCS staff managed to mitigate somewhat the effects of the pandemic for the students. Students valued very much the efforts and genuine concern of the staff to be available for students and monitor their wellbeing. Nonetheless, students missed the social aspect of study and the inability to be together in person in class did affect their wellbeing. Despite the problems associated with COVID-19, the committee found that all stakeholders have been very responsive to the situation, trying to reduce as much as possible the impact of the pandemic on the courses, staff and students.

Considerations

The committee considers that the RMA programme is embedded in a learning environment featuring a relevant curriculum, good research staff and an academic atmosphere for students to pursue their educational and research interests.

According to the committee, the programme structure is clear: it consists of four learning trajectories that are constantly under review in order

to do justice to the profile of the RMA. The learning goals of the core courses align with the overall learning outcomes of the programme. Students are taught in intensive small-scale educational settings and have a considerable degree of freedom in tailoring their individual study plan. This freedom and the system of individual student tutoring are highly appreciated by both students and alumni. The committee is confident that the combination of learning trajectories and teaching formats ensure that by the end of the programme all HLCS students are independent university graduates with research skills and ambitions.

The programme features a rigorous and effective selection procedure which ensures that only qualified and motivated students enrol in HLCS. While the intake has been relatively stable over the past seven years, the breakdown of this intake reveals that the RMA attracted mainly Literary and Historical Studies students as well as students with a local bachelor's degree. Academic supervision has been exemplary and the remit of the study adviser has been broadened recently to address all non-academic personal concerns of students.

The committee considers that the research character of the HCLS programme is guaranteed by the involved staff, who are excellent researchers and committed teachers with good didactic skills, English proficiency and a strong commitment towards the students.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has had and continues to have an impact on the quality of education and the wellbeing of both students and staff. Overall, the programme is managing this crisis well. The committee appreciates the efforts of the faculty, management and staff to develop alternatives for their educational offering and to monitor the student's wellbeing.

In addition to these positive considerations, the committee advises the programme to:

- strengthen the interdisciplinary dimension of courses, tracks and programme by executing the envisaged curriculum adjustments;

- communicate and demonstrate that the programme teaches research competencies that can be used in both academic and non-academic settings;
- allow some flexibility in the contents of both research proposal and research article to accommodate the specific interests and envisaged career paths of students;
- make the international training also compulsory for students who focus on Dutch literature;
- accept well-motivated requests from students to include Dutch-language courses or Dutch-language research outputs in their study programme;
- reflect whether tutors are best placed to verify the intensified course deliverables of 'their' students and become also their thesis supervisor and grader;
- expand its network of scientific contacts beyond the inner circles of academia towards relevant non-academic institutions;

- adjust recruitment information and materials to attract more good quality applications from international (non-EU) students;
- enhance signposting to students, i.e. communicating and regularly repeating (also orally) key information on programme deadlines and procedures.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment committee concludes that the RMA Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies **meets standard 2, teaching-learning environment.**

3. Student assessment

Student assessment at the RMA HLCS is organised very well: the assessment system is embedded in the policies and frameworks of the Faculty and the vision on assessment of the university; there is alignment between programme, courses and assessment methods; course teams design and implement assessments together and provide feedback to students; assessors take thesis evaluation seriously and complete the dedicated evaluation form in an insightful way; the Board of Examiners and the Assessment Advisory Committee fulfil their quality assurance tasks in a professional way. HLCS can rely on a good quality assessment system that is backed up by robust quality assurance processes and implemented by stakeholders with a shared quality culture. According to the assessment committee, the RMA programme Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies **meets this standard**.

Findings

Assessment system

The committee gathered from the self-evaluation report that student assessment in the RMA HLCS is embedded in the assessment policy of the Faculty of Arts, which in turn is aligned with the university's vision on assessment. Assessments are subject to the Education and Examination Regulations of the programme, which are formulated by the Examination Board and subject to revision each year. The committee has looked into the faculty and programme documents and found these to be both clear and relevant.

The committee moreover noticed with satisfaction that the programme is implementing the four-eyes principle in designing and implementing assessments and is using dedicated assessment forms and rubrics tailored to the various courses to ensure the quality of the respective assessments. This approach is reportedly not too difficult to implement and maintain given that most courses feature teams of teaching staff who contribute to the assessment of 'their' courses.

Furthermore, the committee learned that across the (core courses of the) programme, there is a link between the individual assessments, the course objectives and the learning outcomes at programme level. The committee established through the highly informative assessment overview in the self-evaluation report how the programme learning outcomes are addressed in the

respective courses and tested in the examinations.

Course assessment

The committee was informed during the discussions that the principles of assessment are effectively implemented in the assessment formats of the respective courses. Teaching teams jointly prepare course exams and organise the assessment. They correct the mostly written assignments using assessment forms and rubrics that are tailored to the specific learning goals of the course.

The programme prioritises written assessments as this allows students to demonstrate their ability to critically evaluate scholarly debates and communicate in an organised, well-written and convincing manner. For the majority of courses, students write substantial papers or prepare portfolios in which they collect smaller assignments. Notwithstanding the focus on written assignments, the committee noticed with satisfaction that across the programme, there are various formats of written examinations such as papers, portfolio, op-ed, referee report, article outlines, proposal, article and thesis. In this regard, the committee welcomes in particular the portfolio as an innovative way to assess student performance in a given course.

Information on the object of assessment, the assessment formats and the criteria for evaluation

are clearly communicated in the respective course descriptions in the study guide. Students indicated to the committee that assessment takes place in a transparent way, that feedback is offered both collectively and individually and that teaching staff is always available to explain the assessment results.

While there is transparent communication about course assessments, the committee gathered from several student comments that the procedures for un-enrolling (*afmelding*) for the first exam and the enrolment (*aanmelding*) for the re-sit are not always clearly communicated. The committee is confident following explanations from both Examination Board and programme management that such procedures exist on paper, but advises the programme to inform students regularly and also orally about these procedures.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic did not so much affect student assessment as it impacted on other parts of the programme. Where needed, the assessment forms and rubrics have been adapted to the online format.

Thesis assessment

The committee noticed that thesis assessment is well organised in the RMA programme. The thesis is written under the supervision of one scholar and assessed by two graders - the supervisor and the second assessor - who have been approved by the Examination Board and often have a different disciplinary background. They both use a dedicated thesis evaluation form containing rubrics with detailed criteria that form the basis for a weighted average with scores on a scale of 1-10. Each assessor reads and marks the thesis; the final grade is jointly determined by the two assessors.

As part of its preparation for the assessment visit, the committee reviewed a sample of 15 RMA theses and their evaluation forms. Overall, the committee is satisfied with the format of the evaluation form and the way it is used by the assessors.

In fact, the committee thought that in a qualified majority of cases, the feedback in the evaluation form was insightful.

While the quality of the comments was generally high, some forms had been completed more extensively and informatively than others: a few assessors provided technical and checkbox-oriented comments, while many others showed a much higher sensitivity for the individual qualities of the thesis. In a few cases it was not clear from the evaluation forms how both assessors had come to a joint judgement. In one case, moreover, the assessors were in agreement on the overall score, but differed markedly (more than 2 points) on two criteria. According to the Examination Board, the rubrics and the cover page of the thesis evaluation can be further improved; the Board will also reflect how to go about cases with considerable grading differences on individual criteria.

Assurance of assessment quality

The assessment quality of the programme is assured by the Examination Board. HLCS has a programme-related Examination Board with three members representing each of the specialisations; it advises the Faculty Examination Board on questions and issues related to the programme through its chair, who is member of the faculty-wide Board. Students direct their requests to the Faculty Examination Board, which seeks the advice of the programme-related Board for its decisions. The discussions confirmed that the position of the Board of Examiners is properly regulated and that the Board members at both programme and faculty level have relevant and complementary expertise to fulfil their duties. Moreover, the Faculty Examination Board has an external member from another higher education institution.

Every two years, the Faculty Examination Board installs an Assessment Advisory Committee (AAC), which checks the quality of assessment and grading of each programme. The latest review of the HLCS programme dates back to 2018

when the AAC evaluated five courses and five theses. As a result of this review, the programme strengthened the implementation of the four eyes principle, the use of assessment matrices and the clarification of assessment criteria in rubrics. During COVID-19 the two-year cycle was interrupted. In 2021-2022 or 2022-2023, the AAC will again review the HLCS programme; at that moment it will also revise the new learning trajectories and their accompanying course revisions. According to the committee, the work of the AAC is useful and contributes to the strong quality assurance culture that exists in the RMA programme and at faculty level.

Considerations

The written materials, the thesis evaluation review and the discussions have convinced the committee that student assessment at the RMA HLCS is organised very well. The assessment system of the programme is embedded in the policies and frameworks of the Faculty and the vision on assessment of the university.

The committee thinks highly of the efforts of HLCS to ensure alignment between programme, courses and assessment methods. Moreover, the committee appreciates the efforts of the course teams to design and implement assessments together. Information on assessment is available to students, who can also address teaching staff for

feedback and clarification of the exam results. The committee's review of thesis evaluations has demonstrated that the programme can rely on a dedicated evaluation form and that the vast majority of assessors take this evaluation seriously.

The Board of Examiners has important tasks within the quality assurance system of the Faculty and the programme. The committee considers that the Board members have relevant and complementary expertise, which in turn allows them to pick up issues of concern and report these to the programme. The work of the Assessment Advisory Committee constitutes a very useful complement in assuring the quality of individual course assessments.

In sum, the committee considers that the programme relies on a good quality student assessment system that is backed up by robust quality assurance processes and implemented by stakeholders with a shared quality culture.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment committee concludes that the RMA Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies **meets standard 3, student assessment**.

4. Achieved learning outcomes

RMA students who graduated from the HLCS programme have the necessary competencies to pursue a research-based career inside and outside academia. Graduates from the programme have demonstrated through their invariably good quality theses and their professional careers – featuring a high percentage of PhD positions and a wide range of relevant positions outside academia – that they achieved all learning outcomes. Since the proof of the pudding is in the eating, the findings on the achieved learning outcomes confirm that HLCS is doing a good job. According to the assessment committee, the RMA programme Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies **meets this standard**.

Findings

There are two ways to establish whether the programme learning outcomes have been achieved – through a quality review of the final products and through checking what graduates are doing after they finished the programme.

Quality of thesis

The RMA programme is completed with a thesis, a substantial test of research competence, which amounts to 30 EC and addresses almost all programme learning outcomes. Through the thesis students demonstrate their ability to design and execute original research in the historical, cultural or literary humanities. They define a relevant topic from which they derive a topical and original research question connected to a relevant theoretical and conceptual framework. Students operationalise their research question within this framework into a relevant selection of data connected to a robust method of analysis. They are able to report on the organisation and execution of their research project in a clear, well-organised, and convincing manner, in accordance with advanced academic standards. In their report students define and specify the contribution of the results of their research to scholarship in the humanities.

In line with the requirements of NVAO, the committee reviewed a sample of fifteen theses produced by students who graduated between September 2018 and August 2021. Based on a list of 45 entries the committee chair and secretary se-

lected fifteen student numbers which were representative in terms of specialisation and final score. The committee found that all fifteen theses were of sufficient quality to pass and clearly met the requirements for a final product at research master level. The individual quality ranged from very good to sufficient and there was not a single doubt on the level of any of the theses; no files were internally redistributed for a second reading. The committee did notice, though, that the interdisciplinary dimension of several theses was rather meagre.

Whilst agreeing on the quality of the entire thesis sample, the committee had a different opinion on the final scores in half of the cases, including four theses it considered overrated by at least one point. These theses had all obtained relatively high marks (at least 8). The committee understood from the self-evaluation report and the discussions that the previous assessment panel had made similar critical remarks about disproportionately high grades for the research master thesis, that as a result of this finding the programme had calibrated the marking criteria through the assessment forms and that RMA students are very keen to obtain high scores as this would increase their chances to enter a PhD trajectory. Moreover, the Radboud University recently lowered the standards for a cum laude distinction to an average score of 8. According to the committee, the programme may want to organise another calibration session for assessors. In view of the committee's review results, the challenge is not so

much about judging the threshold quality of a research master thesis but rather the consideration whether a thesis really deserves 8 out of 10 and thus whether a student is entitled to graduate cum laude.

Performance of graduates

Another way to demonstrate the achievement of programme learning outcomes is to look at the professional whereabouts of the RMA graduates. Until recently the programme mainly focused on helping students achieve a research position in a PhD trajectory. Nowadays, however, the programme is informing students that HLCS can also lead to other employment opportunities outside academia.

The committee gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that RMA graduates are successful in their careers and end up in a wide variety of interesting positions which are commensurate with the domain, level and orientation of the programme. The programme keeps track of its graduates through LinkedIn and provided employment information on 66 alumni who graduated since 2016. The committee noticed that 25 alumni went on to pursue a PhD while 41 graduates found a job elsewhere, including as freelancer or entrepreneur. These graduates are active in a broad range of fields that in most cases relate to the domain of their RMA specialisation.

The group of alumni the committee spoke to also reflected this variety in professional careers. The committee gathered from the discussion that the programme may not have been very outspoken in the past about professional life beyond academia, but that the skills graduates had acquired - and students are still acquiring - are transferable to different professional situations. The alumni indicated they are available to speak to current student cohorts about their work and thought it would be a value added if HLCS students would

learn more about all possible career paths. Alumni also emphasised that they had a great time during the RMA and particularly liked the opportunities offered through the individual programme and the international research training.

Considerations

The committee considers that RMA students who graduated from the HLCS programme have the necessary competencies to move on in their career. Based on the results from its thesis review, the committee is confident that graduates have achieved all learning outcomes: since the proof of the pudding is in the eating, the thesis quality confirms that the HLCS programme has been doing a good job.

Similarly, alumni end up in a wide variety of interesting positions which are commensurate with the domain, level and orientation of the programme. The committee is impressed by the high percentage of PhD positions secured by alumni, as well as by the broad range of career paths outside academia. The fact that alumni are successful in their respective careers is a positive indication according to the committee that graduates have indeed achieved the programme learning outcomes.

In addition to these positive considerations, the committee advises the programme to devise clear quality criteria for scoring a thesis (at least) 8 out of 10 and to invite alumni to present to HLCS students the full and broad range of career opportunities.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment committee concludes that the RMA Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies **meets standard 4, achieved learning outcomes.**

Attachments

Attachment 1 Assessment committee

Jan Baetens, chair

Jan is professor of Cultural Studies at the Arts Faculty of KU Leuven. He works in the field of poetry and French literary history and is specialised in the analysis of so-called minor genres, such as comics and graphic and photo-novels. Professor Baetens has extensive accreditation experience as committee member and chair.

Catrien Santing, member

Catrien is professor of Medieval History at the University of Groningen, where she focuses on the history of medicine and the body in the Late Middle Ages. She also published widely on Visual Culture, Medievalism and the Interchange between Art and Science. Professor Santing has been involved in external assessments before.

Ortwin De Graef, member

Ortwin is professor at the Arts Faculty of KU Leuven. He works in the field of literary theory and English literature and is currently Director of the Doctoral School Humanities and Social Sciences. Professor De Graef has been involved in external assessments before.

Eva-Maria Troelenberg, member

Eva-Maria is professor of Modern and Contemporary Art History at Utrecht University. Her work looks at visual and material encounters in contact zones. Professor Troelenberg is currently Head of the Art History section in the Department of History and Art History at the Humanities Faculty.

Alice Quinn Banville, student member

Alice has a bachelor's degree from Trinity College Dublin in History of Art and Architecture and Classical Civilisations. She is a self-employed art researcher. At the time of the site visit, Alice was about to finish the Research Master Arts and Culture at the University of Amsterdam.

The assessment committee was supported by **Mark Delmartino**, external NVAO-certified secretary.

All committee members and the secretary signed a declaration of independence and confidentiality, which were submitted to NVAO.

Attachment 2 Programme of the assessment

Location: Faculty of Arts, Erasmusgebouw Nijmegen

Wednesday 24 November 2021

08.30 Arrival panel

09.00 Internal panel meeting

09.30 Session with Educational Management

10.30 Session with Students

11.30 Session with Teaching Staff

12.30 Lunch and internal panel meeting

13.30 Session with Examination Board

14.20 Session with Alumni (online)

15.30 Session with Educational Management and Dean

16.15 Internal panel deliberations

17.15 Feedback to programme stakeholders

A list with the names of the participants is available at AeQui.

Attachment 3 Documents

Information materials

- Critical Reflection Research Master Historical, Literary & Cultural Studies, Radboud University 2021.
- Annexes to the Critical Reflection RMA HLCS:
 - Appendix 1: Student Intake and Outflow
 - Appendix 2: Intake/Outflow/Stopped Divided Per Dutch and International Students
 - Appendix 3: Scientific Staff
 - Appendix 4: Quality Assessment
 - Appendix 5: Distinctions
 - Appendix 6: Positions of Graduates
 - Appendix 7: Student Evaluation
 - Appendix 8: Provisional Overview of the New Learning Trajectories
 - Appendix 9: Applications
 - Appendix 10: Student Output

Additional information

The programme set up a digital base room, which contained the following documentation:

- Education and Examination Regulation
- Course guide
- Course manuals
- Annual Reports Examination Committee
- Minutes Programme Committee meetings
- Assessment policy
- Research Assessment

Graduation products

The assessment committee has studied the theses and their assessment of 15 students who graduated the programme between 2018 and 2020. A list with student numbers is available at AeQui.