

The logo for AeQui, featuring the letters 'AeQui' in a purple, sans-serif font. A light blue, hand-drawn style line loops around the letters, starting from the 'A', passing under the 'e', and ending under the 'i'.

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**Master of Science
Marketing part-time
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam**

***Report of the limited programme assessment
16 – 18 November 2022***

Utrecht, The Netherlands

March 2023

www.AeQui.nl

Assessment Agency for Higher Education

Colophon

MSc Marketing part-time

VU Amsterdam

Academic master (wo-ma)

Location: Amsterdam

Mode of study: part-time

CROHO: 75134

Result of institutional assessment: positive (June 2020)

Panel

Hans van Ees, chair

Niels Hermes, domain expert

Eelke de Jong, domain expert

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The panel was presented to the NVAO for approval.

The assessment was conducted under responsibility of

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This document is best printed in duplex

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Summary

From 16 to 18 November 2022 an assessment committee of AeQui visited the School of Business and Economics (SBE) at VU Amsterdam to perform a quality assessment of 11 degree programmes in Economics. This document reports on the committee's assessment of the part-time Master of Science in Marketing according to the 2018 NVAO framework for limited programme assessment. The privately funded post-initial MSc Marketing is a two-year part-time 60 ECTS programme offered in Dutch. The assessment committee has established that the part-time Marketing programme meets all four NVAO standards under consideration: intended learning outcomes, teaching-learning environment, assessment and achieved learning outcomes. As a result, the committee's overall assessment of the quality of the MSc Marketing part-time programme is **positive**.

Intended learning outcomes

The programme has a clear vision on the academically trained marketing professional, which aligns with the vision on education of both VU and SBE and is adequately reflected in the learning outcomes and curriculum of the programme. The features of this post-initial programme have been sharpened recently and are communicated clearly to (potential) students. Since the previous accreditation, the intended learning outcomes have been restructured and reformulated; the current set reflects properly the domain, level and orientation of the programme. Although formulated in a quite general way, the learning outcomes do reflect the ambitions of the university, the school and the part-time programme. Moreover, it makes perfect sense according to the committee to have identical learning outcomes for both fulltime and part-time Marketing programmes. The post-initial programme pays extensive attention to the professional component in the curriculum. In order to keep this component up to date, the programme relies on a mixture of internal and external stakeholders who together cover the breadth of the marketing domain. The assessment committee judges that the MSc Marketing part-time programme **meets this standard**.

Teaching-learning environment

The teaching-learning environment of the part-time MSc Marketing is strong. The programme structure is transparent and the curriculum set-up coherent. The course learning goals and the programme learning outcomes are well attuned, thus ensuring that students can achieve all intended learning outcomes. Acknowledging the efforts of the programme team in addressing the recommendations of the previous panel, the assessment committee established that the part-time Marketing programme

now has a strong thesis process in place, as well as a consistent pre-master programme. The didactical approach is particularly suited for a post-initial programme and its principles reflect the university's core values. The admission policy is clearly communicated and very effective: students who enrol have the knowledge, skills and attitude to successfully complete the programme. The number and quality of the staff involved in the part-time MSc Marketing programme is good: they are active in research and have expertise in the domain of the courses they teach. The assessment committee judges that the MSc Marketing part-time programme **meets this standard**.

Assessment

Assessment in the part-time Marketing programme is robust. This appreciation is based on the fact that both course and thesis assessment are embedded in well-established policies and frameworks at the level of the university and the school. The sample of assessment formats the committee has reviewed shows that the assessment principles and policies are properly implemented in the course assessments. The Marketing assessment plan, moreover, demonstrates that course learning goals are assessed adequately, which in turn ensures that the learning outcomes at programme level are covered. Since the previous accreditation visit, both school and programme have made considerable efforts to bring assessment quality up to par. The Examination Board Executive Education has grown in capacity and competency, as is demonstrated by the variety of assessment tasks it has been assuming, and is capable to assure the assessment quality of the part-time Marketing programme. In this regard, the committee welcomes the initiative to exchange master

theses and their evaluation forms with Tilburg University. Thesis assessment is organised very well. The programme can rely on a solid and transparently communicated thesis procedure and policy. It is using a relevant thesis evaluation form with adequate criteria, an extensive assessment matrix, and space for individual appreciations and feedback of the supervisor and the second reader. Moreover, the sample of thesis assessments reviewed by the committee showed that in almost all cases, the final grade was in line with the committee's appreciation. While appreciating the constructively-critical feedback of many assessors, there is room for more consistency in the level and size of feedback across all assessors. The assessment committee judges that the MSc Marketing part-time programme **meets this standard**.

Achieved learning outcomes

In order to establish whether the programme learning outcomes have been achieved, the committee reviewed a sample of master theses and checked what graduates were doing professionally after they finished the programme. The thesis sample and the discussions on-site revealed that upon graduation, part-time MSc Marketing students have definitely achieved all programme learning outcomes. The thesis review has shown that students are capable of

writing high quality final products. While participants tend to have a relevant job when they enrol on the programme, several students get a promotion during their studies and others advance in their career afterwards. It is a strong feature of the programme that all students and alumni felt that the programme had impacted on their life and career as academic professional. The assessment committee judges that the MSc Marketing part-time programme **meets this standard**.

Recommendations

The assessment committee has issued a positive judgement on the part-time Marketing programme and on the quality of each individual accreditation standard. Nonetheless the committee also sees room for improvement in a number of areas. The following suggestions constitute no formal recommendations, but points for attention the committee picked up during the visit and reported in the respective assessment standards. The committee advises the MSc Marketing part-time programme to:

- ensure consistency in the level and size of insightful feedback across all assessors;
- communicate explicitly to the outside world that the programme has a strong and positive impact on the career of its participants.

In view of its positive assessment of the programme quality as a whole and its judgement on each of the four accreditation standards, the committee issues a **positive advice** to NVAO regarding the accreditation of the part-time MSc Marketing at the School of Business and Economics of VU Amsterdam.

On behalf of the entire assessment committee, Utrecht, March 2023

Hans van Ees
Chair

Mark Delmartino
Secretary

Introduction

The School of Business and Economics at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam offers a two-year part-time MSc programme in Marketing, which is taught in Dutch. Since its creation in 2009, the programme has addressed the needs of professionals to grow academically and deepen their knowledge of marketing. This privately funded post-initial Marketing programme falls under the responsibility of SBE Executive Education. Over the years the student intake has fluctuated between 6 and 23 students. The external assessment of this programme is part of a wider cluster assessment covering degree programmes at Erasmus University Rotterdam, VU Amsterdam, the University of Utrecht and Wageningen University.

Institution

Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam is a university with nine faculties in Humanities, STEM, Social and Medical Sciences. Since its foundation in 1880, VU Amsterdam has stood for scientific and value-driven education, research and knowledge transfer. Its education and research are closely linked and have a strong social orientation. All education is provided on one campus in the heart of the Zuidas Knowledge District.

The School of Business and Economics (SBE) is one of VU's faculties and offers four BSc, ten MSc and 15 postgraduate programmes in economics and business administration. Since its establishment in 1948, SBE has evolved into a school with more than 8,000 students and over 500 academic and non-academic staff members.

The school is governed by the SBE faculty board under the leadership of the dean. The academic staff is divided in departments; each head of department assigns the teaching, research and administrative tasks. SBE has a well-established system of quality assurance of teaching and assessment, which is based on the VU Manual for quality assurance of teaching and learning and to which all programmes adhere. SBE has two examination boards in the economics cluster: one governing all government-funded programmes and one for accredited postgraduate programmes.

SBE Executive Education (EE) offers nine post-initial degree programmes, as well as several short

courses and in-company training. SBE EE is an integral part of the faculty, but operates independently on strategic, financial and support matters. A dedicated associate dean is responsible for the educational portfolio of EE and reports to the dean and the faculty board.

Programme

Each degree programme has a dedicated programme director who is responsible for content, organisation and quality assurance. The director ensures that the curriculum is adjusted to the intended learning outcomes and that the learning environment meets the quality requirements of SBE.

The post-initial MSc Marketing is a two-year part-time 60 ECTS programme, which is offered in Dutch. It targets students with professional experience, who are often in an early or intermediate phase of their career, and want to develop both academically and as marketeer. The part-time programme falls under the responsibility of SBE EE. Over the years the student intake has fluctuated between 6 and 23 students. In addition to this privately funded master, SBE also offers a fulltime initial MSc Marketing programme.

During the previous accreditation round in 2016, the part-time programme was still a formal part of the fulltime programme. Hence both programmes were assessed together while paying proper attention to the specificity of each variant. At the time of the current assessment in 2022-2023, both programmes share the same learning

outcomes, but have a different educational approach, target group and CROHO registration. Moreover, both programmes prepared their own self-evaluation report with dedicated annexes. During the visit, it was very clear to the committee which participants spoke on behalf of the part-time and the fulltime programme, respectively. This report covers the external assessment of the part-time MSc Marketing programme; the assessment of the fulltime programme is addressed in a separate report.

Assessment

This assessment is part of a wider cluster assessment Economics group 1, which consists of the Erasmus University Rotterdam, VU Amsterdam, Utrecht University and Wageningen University. The group assigned AeQui to perform a quality assessment of its bachelor, master and research master programmes in Economics. Together with the cluster group and its individual schools/faculties, AeQui convened an independent and competent assessment committee. The committee members are shortly presented in attachment 1.

At VU Amsterdam, the cluster assessment features 11 bachelor, master and post-experience (executive) master programmes. In the run-up to the visit, a preparatory meeting was held with representatives of SBE to exchange information and plan the dates and programme of the site visit. The visit was carried out from 16 until 18 November 2022 according to the programme presented in attachment 2.

In so far as the part-time Master of Science (MSc) Marketing is concerned, the assessment committee members studied the programme's self-evaluation report and reviewed a sample of 15 theses. Their first impressions on the report and the thesis (evaluations) formed the basis for discussion

during an online preparatory meeting on 8 November 2022, and guided the committee's questions during the site visit.

Prior to the visit, the committee held an Open Consultation Hour for students, teaching and support staff; eventually nobody used the opportunity to speak individually and confidentially with the committee. Initiated by the programmes, the visit also featured a Development Dialogue. The results of this dialogue have no influence on the assessment in this report.

Furthermore, the programme put at disposition many relevant materials, which served as background information for the assessment committee before and during the visit. An overview of these materials is listed in attachment 3.

The committee has assessed the programme in an independent manner; in relation to, and in consideration of, the cluster of programmes in which this programme is placed. The contextualisation of the programme within its cluster was conducted by the complete committee during the preliminary meeting and the final deliberations. At the end of the visit, the chair of the assessment committee presented the initial findings of the committee to representatives of the programmes and the school.

In the underlying document, the committee is reporting on its findings, considerations and conclusions according to the NVAO framework 2018 for limited programme assessment. A draft version of the report was sent to the programme management in February 2023; its reactions have led to this final version of the report.

1. Intended learning outcomes

The MSc Marketing part-time has a clear vision on the academically trained marketing professional, which aligns with the vision on education of both VU and SBE and is adequately reflected in the learning outcomes and curriculum of the programme. The features of this post-initial programme have been sharpened recently and are communicated clearly to (potential) students. The intended learning outcomes reflect the domain, level and orientation of the programme. The professional component takes up an important position in the curriculum. In order to keep this component up to date, the programme relies on a mixture of internal and external stakeholders who together cover the breadth of the Marketing domain. According to the assessment committee, the MSc Marketing part-time programme **meets this standard**.

Findings

Purpose

The part-time Master of Science (MSc) in Marketing was established in 2009 as the Dutch-language variant of the fulltime English-language programme. Since its creation, the programme has addressed the needs of professionals to grow academically and deepen their knowledge of marketing. Also today the purpose of the programme is to educate marketing professionals with highly developed critical and analytical skills and profound understanding of and insight in the marketing discipline. Upon completing the programme, Marketing graduates should be able to apply theoretical insights to practical marketing problems and thus make a genuine difference in the field of marketing. Although the programme targets a distinctly different group of students, the committee noticed that its purpose is very similar to the aim of the fulltime marketing programme.

The written materials and the discussions on-site, moreover, showed that the objective of this post-initial master programme aligns with the vision of both VU and SBE, which is formulated along two axes: (1) the behavioural component is firmly embedded in the core values responsible, personal and open of the VU; and (2) the content component consists of the roles academic, professional and citizen. These elements have guided the elaboration of education in the part-time MSc Marketing and are reflected in the learning outcomes of the programme and the course learning goals.

The committee endorses that integrating the academic, professional and citizen roles with the behavioural components responsible, personal and open creates a unique profile for both SBE and for the professionals who graduate from the part-time Marketing programme.

Further to the recommendation of the previous accreditation panel, the programme team has sharpened the features of the part-time programme. The committee acknowledges that the current programme lives up to the promises of its mission, i.e. educating professionals to become marketeers with an academic level of thinking and working who have an impact on people, organisations and society. The concept of value creation is a central element of the courses and of the way students are challenged to solve marketing problems. The academic approach takes centre stage throughout the programme, which allows to develop the problem-solving skills of the participants and enhances their strategic perspective on the marketing domain.

According to the benchmark section of the self-evaluation report, only VU Amsterdam and TIAS School for Business and Society in Tilburg offer a complete part-time MSc in Marketing. TIAS is targeting a more experienced audience and focuses on the application of the course materials in the participants' own professional environment. The strong academic orientation and its focus on young professionals are unique characteristics of the Marketing programme at VU. Compared to

VU's fulltime programme, the student numbers in the part-time variant allow for small-scale education featuring lots of interaction with students and staff and a personal approach by the programme management.

Intended Learning Outcomes

The programme's intended learning outcomes consist of learning goals and learning objectives: the goals refer to what graduates are or have and are set SBE-wide; the objectives refer to what graduates can do or make and are specific to the Marketing programme. The committee observed that there is a direct link between the respective goals and objectives, and that both goals and objectives are clustered around five dimensions: academic and research skills, bridging theory and practice, social skills, broadening horizons, and self-awareness.

The part-time MSc Marketing programme features six learning goals and seven learning objectives. Compared to the previous accreditation visit, the intended learning outcomes have been reformulated to reflect the AACSB format: the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business is a highly reputed accreditation body whose international quality standard SBE managed to obtain since the previous accreditation visit.

The assessment committee has studied the intended learning outcomes and noticed that they are identical to the fulltime MSc Marketing programme. According to the programme team, this is logical because both programmes want to deliver graduates with a good academic foundation in combination with specialist knowledge and with a comparable level of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The committee endorses this rationale and established that the intended learning outcomes are formulated at the appropriate master level and reflect the academic orientation of the programme.

The committee understands that it is a conscious choice of SBE (EE) and the programme(s) to keep

the formulation of the programme learning outcomes at a fairly abstract level. Nonetheless, the learning outcomes do indicate what the programme stands for. The committee appreciates in this respect the way in which the learning goals have been concretised in learning objectives that reflect the programme profile. In terms of "bridging theory and practice", for instance, Marketing students should by the end of the programme be able to "develop solutions from different theoretical perspectives for complex real-life business problems by applying relevant marketing theories and methodologies."

Professional Field

Students of the part-time Marketing programme mostly work fulltime and have jobs that are relevant for their domain of study. The programme has therefore good connections to the professional field through its students and through some teaching staff members who are active in industry. These staff and students bring first-hand expertise to the table when discussing the relevance of the programme and its learning outcomes for the professional field.

Moreover, both part-time and fulltime Marketing programme have a long-standing common advisory board to ensure the connection between the academic and the professional world. The board consists of six members and meets at least twice a year to discuss programme updates and specific themes.

Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the assessment committee considers that the part-time MSc Marketing has a specific profile, which aligns with the vision on education of both VU and SBE and is adequately reflected in the learning outcomes and curriculum of the programme. The committee thinks highly of the programme's vision on the academically trained marketing professional. Since the previous accreditation the programme features have

been sharpened and communicated clearly to (potential) students.

The committee endorses the way the intended learning outcomes have been restructured and reformulated since the previous visit; the current set of learning goals and learning objectives reflects the domain (marketing), level (master) and orientation (academic) of the programme. Although formulated in a quite general way, the learning outcomes do reflect the ambitions of the university, the school and the part-time programme. Moreover, it makes perfect sense according to the committee to have identical learning outcomes for both fulltime and part-time Marketing programmes.

The committee appreciates the extensive attention of the programme to the professional component in the curriculum. In order to keep this component up to date, the programme can rely not only on its teaching staff members but also on the students who are active professionals themselves and on the advisory board which represents the breadth of the marketing domain.

In view of the above findings and considerations, the assessment committee judges that **the MSc Marketing part-time programme meets standard 1, intended learning outcomes.**

2. Teaching-learning environment

The programme's teaching-learning environment is strongly developed. The programme structure is transparent and the curriculum set-up coherent. The course learning goals and the programme learning outcomes are well attuned. The didactical approach is particularly suited for a post-initial programme and its principles reflect the University's core values. The admission policy is clearly communicated and very effective: students who enrol have the knowledge, skills and attitude to successfully complete the programme. The number and quality of the staff involved in the part-time MSc Marketing programme is good: they are active in research and have expertise in the domain of the courses they teach. According to the assessment committee, the MSc Marketing part-time programme **meets this standard**.

Findings

Programme

The part-time MSc Marketing amounts to 60 ECTS, which are spread over two years. It is taught in Dutch while most of the materials are provided in English. The curriculum consists of seven courses (42 ECTS) and a master thesis (18 ECTS). During year one students follow four courses that provide an in-depth view on the different marketing domains, as well as a strategic marketing integration project. The second year starts with two marketing and research methods courses before students prepare their master thesis.

The committee gathered from the extensive description in the self-evaluation report that the programme structure is transparent and the curriculum set-up coherent. Across the courses, there is synergy between the scientific study and the application in real cases, between the academic dimension taught at the university and the professional dimension which students bring in themselves. Staff indicated that students take a deep dive into academic knowledge and theory and then use these in their day-to-day work. Students from their side mentioned that the staff is particularly good at selecting scientific papers that are useful in their professional situation.

Furthermore, the committee learned that there is a link between the course learning goals and the programme learning outcomes, which is not only visible on paper – the committee studied the curriculum map, the assessment plan and the study

guide – but is also implemented in the day-to-day teaching and assessment practice of the courses. The committee gathered from the extensive description in the self-evaluation report that the respective programme learning objectives are addressed throughout the curriculum and that each course has formulated specific course objectives that contribute to an overall programme objective and are assessed explicitly.

The relationship between course-level objectives and programme-level intended learning outcomes is made clear to students in the course descriptions in the study guide. Moreover, the learning objectives and their related course objectives are presented in the Assessment Plan, which also indicates the forms of assessment used in each course in relation to the course-level learning objectives. The committee observed in the assessment plan for the part-time MSc Marketing that the courses and the thesis together ensure that all learning outcomes are covered in the curriculum.

As a response to the previous panel's finding that the thesis topics were not always within the boundaries of the marketing domain, the programme team has put in a lot of effort to enhance the master thesis process. Students now receive a list of themes and a range of topics to choose from and develop their research question. In this way the programme ensures that thesis topics fall within the domain of marketing and align with the research expertise of the supervisors. Students indicated to the committee that they are satisfied

with the current organisation of the thesis trajectory. The information they receive is timely, extensive and clear. This is much appreciated given that students experience the thesis process as quite intensive. According to the committee, the team efforts are paying off. Anticipating on standard 4, the sample of theses reviewed by the committee indicates that the thesis quality in the academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 is good.

Furthermore, the committee discussed the programme developments with regard to the pre-master programme. In fact, since the start of the part-time programme, hardly any participant could enrol directly on the programme. Still today, almost all participants hold a professional bachelor degree from a university of applied sciences or an academic degree in a different domain. Following the previous accreditation in 2016, the programme had to raise the proportion of incoming students with an academic master degree and to enlarge substantially the pre-master programme. In 2018 the part-time MSc Marketing programme was judged to comply with both conditions. In the meantime, the new assessment framework does no longer require such academic credentials for post-initial programmes. The pre-master programme, however, has been extended from 9 ECTS to 30 ECTS and consists of three pillars: academic knowledge and skills, methods and techniques, and marketing. According to the programme team, the part-time programme *de facto* consists of 90 ECTS and starts with the pre-master programme. The pre-master courses are quite challenging and constitute a natural selection. Students who pass the pre-master have the knowledge and skills to start the 'real' programme, and definitely acquired the proper attitude to engage in a post-initial master study. Students and recent alumni confirmed that the pre-master was on the one hand challenging but on the other hand also constituted a proper preparation for the degree programme.

Didactics

The educational vision of the part-time MSc Marketing programme is based on two concepts:

'Learning from and with each other' (*leren van en met elkaar*) and 'Application based on academic thinking and action' (*toepassing vanuit academisch denken en handelen*). These concepts are implemented throughout the programme and in different ways. Given the size of the cohorts, courses are set-up as small-size educational units offering plenty of opportunities for interaction among students and between students and staff. The committee noticed that this didactical approach is closely aligned with the educational vision of VU and the teaching methods at SBE. In this way, the part-time MSc Marketing reflects the university's core values responsible, personal and open, and promotes the academic, professional and citizen role of the (future) marketeer.

Students

Between 2016-2017 and 2021-2022, the average size of the part-time MSc Marketing cohort was 13. According to the programme team, the post-initial master is a niche product for which there is a need, which the university wants to fulfil. From an educational point of view, the ideal cohort size for interaction and group dynamic is between 15-20 students.

Participants who enrol in the part-time programme all have relevant professional experience and combine their study with work. They often are at an early to midcareer phase of their professional life and want to develop both academically and as a marketeer.

The committee noticed that the programme has a clear admission policy. In order to be accepted right-away, students should have an academic bachelor or master degree in business or business economics, and at least three years of relevant work experience. Almost all applicants, however, do not meet these criteria and therefore take the above-mentioned pre-master programme first. Applicants with academic credentials tend to have a degree in a (completely) different domain. Students indicated in their written contribution that they appreciated the meticulous approach of

the programme towards admission. The requirements were clear and the intake provided useful information on the set-up and delivery of the programme. Students confirmed during the discussion on-site that the pre-master programme constitutes an important milestone in the programme as it remedies deficiencies, refreshes prior knowledge and instils a study attitude.

The available data on student drop-out and success-rate indicate that the programme's admission policy is very effective: hardly anyone drops out and most students finish the programme within the nominal duration of two years.

Asked what they see as the key assets of the programme, students mention the connection between theory and practice, the high quality staff, and the organisation. With regard to the latter, students know whom to contact, are regularly asked for feedback and describe the programme management as approachable and responsive.

Staff

The committee gathered from the self-evaluation report that all teaching and coordination is performed by staff belonging to the Marketing Department of SBE. All staff members are active in research and their research interests are very much in line with the topics they teach in this programme. Hence, they are particularly suited to guide students to the current academic research frontiers and help them shape their conceptual skills and engage in research.

According to the overview in the appendix to the report, the part-time MSc Marketing programme consists of 13 academic staff who have an average 0.65 FTE appointment with SBE. Three staff members are international, four are female, eight hold a university teaching qualification (BKO) and three staff also obtained the senior qualification

(SKO). Comparing the overviews of academic staff, the committee noticed that ten staff members also teach in the fulltime programme.

Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on-site, the assessment committee considers that the teaching-learning environment of the part-time MSc Marketing is strong. The programme structure is transparent and the curriculum set-up coherent. There is a clear link between the course learning goals and the programme learning outcomes. This, in turn, ensures that students can achieve all intended learning outcomes by the time they graduate. Since the previous accreditation, the programme team has been successful in enhancing both the master thesis process and the pre-master programme.

The committee considers that the didactical approach is particularly suited for a post-initial programme. Its principles, moreover, reflect the university's core values. The admission policy is not only clear but also very effective: students who enrol, mostly after a 30 ECTS pre-master programme, have the knowledge, skills and attitude to successfully complete the programme. The number and quality of the staff involved in the programme is good: they are active in research and have expertise in the domain of the courses they teach.

In view of the above findings and considerations, the assessment committee judges that **the MSc Marketing part-time programme meets standard 2, teaching-learning environment.**

3. Assessment

The part-time MSc Marketing features a robust system of assessment, which is embedded in the central policies and procedures of the University and the School. The assessment principles are properly implemented in the course assessments. The programme's assessment plan demonstrates that course learning goals are assessed adequately, which in turn ensures that all learning outcomes at programme level are covered. The current assessment committee recognises that since the previous accreditation visit, both School and programme have made considerable efforts to bring assessment quality up to par. The Examination Board Executive Education has grown in capacity and competency, and monitors and assures the assessment quality of the part-time MSc Marketing. The programme is using a relevant thesis evaluation form with an extensive assessment matrix. While most assessors are grading properly and several assessors provide insightful feedback, there is room for more consistency in the level and size of feedback across all assessors. According to the committee, the MSc Marketing part-time programme **meets this standard**.

Findings

System of assessment

The committee gathers from the written materials and the discussions on site that the Marketing programme operates an assessment system that complies with the assessment policy and procedures of SBE, which in turn are based on a university-wide policy on assessment quality. The programme has put at disposition both policy documents, the *Handboek Onderwijskwaliteit - VU Toetskader* and the *SBE Beleidsplan – Toetsbeleid*.

Moreover, the committee noticed that the part-time MSc Marketing has its own programme-specific Assessment Plan with a vision on education and on assessment, a curriculum map, and an overview of course learning objectives and assessment types. The assessment plan describes the forms of testing; in this way both programme director and examination board have an instrument to control the relationship between the programme's intended learning outcomes and course-level objectives and assessment.

Furthermore, each course coordinator creates an assessment file. This file contains, among other things, a test blueprint, the exam, resit exam and/or assignments, a model answer plus scoring guide, a test and item analysis, the results of the course evaluation, and a short reflection report by the examiner. According to the committee, next

to good quality policy documents, the part-time Marketing programme also developed a relevant assessment plan that does justice to both central policies and the specificity of the degree programme.

Courses

At the level of individual courses, coordinators select the most appropriate assessment methods for testing the learning goals. They do so in close collaboration with the programme director who ensures that across the programme a variety of assessment methods is used. Course coordinators are free to tailor the different exam components to the requirements of their course, provided they inform the programme management accordingly. Teaching staff is encouraged to experiment with innovative forms of teaching and testing; in every course, however, the individual student performance should be the decisive factor in the assessment. The committee agrees to the emphasis on individual exam components and to the promotion of diversity and innovation in assessment formats.

Students confirmed to the committee that the programme is using different assessment methods. They particularly liked the open book format as students felt that the questions were really challenging. Similarly, students appreciated the

level of expectation on the side of the course coordinators when they had to write papers. In the discussion with representatives of the Examination Boards, the panel learned that the assessment formats are very similar in both fulltime and part-time programmes: while the journey towards the assessment is different, the assessment itself is comparable.

The committee noticed that SBE and the part-time Marketing programme uphold the four eyes principle: when constructing the exam, the examiner – who very often is also the course coordinator – takes the course objectives into account and the extent to which these are assessed by the exam. Every course coordinator appoints a co-reader with content knowledge to check the contents of the exam, thus ensuring that all draft exams are reviewed by at least one other member of staff. The committee welcomes this approach.

In the run-up to the site visit, the part-time Marketing programme put at disposition a few individual courses and their assessments. According to the committee, these materials reflected the overall provisions for assessment and were in line with what one can expect of exams in a master programme of academic orientation.

Thesis evaluation

The master thesis is the culmination of the part-time Marketing programme. The thesis process is governed by clear rules and procedures, which are explained in an information session to students and in the thesis manual. The master thesis is conceived as a course with a thesis coordinator, course learning goals and a detailed assessment grid with nine individually weighted criteria. Given the small size of the programme, the programme director is also the thesis coordinator. In terms of assessment, the evaluation form is completed by the supervisor and the second assessor separately before they reach a final assessment on each criterion. In addition to scoring grids, the evaluation form also features a dedicated space for motivating the grade and the scores per criterion. The extensive and informative manual on the master

thesis contains an assessment matrix: each evaluation criterion has rubrics per score (below 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 or 10). The committee noticed that the thesis process is very comparable to the one in the fulltime MSc programme. This is logical given that both programmes share the same learning outcomes. According to the committee, the part-time Marketing programme has a solid master thesis policy and procedure.

As part of its external assessment, the committee reviewed a sample of 15 master theses and their evaluation forms. Reporting on their review, committee members appreciated that the evaluation form addressed all relevant criteria and allowed for (extensive) feedback. This results in a very transparent evaluation process, which is centred around a detailed rubric yet leaves room for additional comments. Overall, the committee had a very positive impression on the way the theses were evaluated: in all fifteen cases, the final grade was in line with their own appreciation.

While many assessors had provided clear, insightful and constructively-critical feedback to motivate their grade, this good practice had not yet been taken up by all assessors. The committee found the thesis evaluation process to be transparent and structured, and it appreciated the often personal additional comments which showed the engagement and appreciation for the student's work on the part of the supervisor and second reader. However, feedback sometimes remained quite abstract with little additional insight into the grading of sub-criteria. The committee therefore advises the programme to agree on some sort of consistency in the level and size of the feedback across all thesis evaluations.

Asked about the weighting of the evaluation criteria, the programme team indicated that this weighting is a good basis but does not constitute a strict mechanical process. Supervisors have the freedom in individual cases to weigh certain criteria differently. The committee also learned during the discussions that it is the task of second

readers to take a fresh look at the thesis and report on their findings in a separate worksheet. While students expect feedback from the supervisor on the entire thesis trajectory, the second reader assumes the position of the critical reviewer offering comments solely on the substance of the thesis product.

During the discussion on-site, the programme team indicated – and alumni confirmed – that students get extensive and constructive feedback orally or by e-mail during the thesis trajectory and again after the final presentation. The committee was also informed that SBE (EE) and the Marketing programmes are awaiting the introduction of a VU-wide online thesis trajectory platform. This initiative was put temporarily on hold during the COVID-19 pandemic and should facilitate among others consistent qualitative feedback by the assessors.

The committee's distinctly positive impression on thesis evaluation in the part-time MSc Marketing seems to confirm that the efforts of the programme and the Examination Board since the previous accreditation visit are paying off. The Examination Board investigated a sample of completed thesis forms in the year 2019-2020, while an external assessor reviewed some part-time Marketing theses as part of the programme's mid-term review. Moreover, SBE and the Tilburg School of Economics and Management (TiSEM) have exchanged MSc Marketing theses to review both contents and evaluations. In all these cases the results were positive, i.e. in line with the original assessment.

Quality assurance

The committee gathered from the written materials that different stakeholders are involved in assuring the quality of assessment: there is first and foremost the Examination Board, but also the programme director and individual examiners play a role. The Examination Board supervises the examination process and carries final responsibility for safeguarding the quality control of assess-

ment and examinations. It investigates systematically whether the process of assessment within SBE is carried out according to predefined criteria. These criteria are well established and include the reliability and validity of the tests. In the event that tests are not up to standard, the Examination Board reports to the programme director and the examiner and issues interventions for improvement.

During the site visit, the committee met with representatives of the Examination Boards. It gathered from the written materials and the discussion that these Boards – there is one for all publicly funded degrees and another one for privately funded programmes – fulfil their legal tasks adequately and have relevant expertise regarding assessment, fraud and legal issues. The external member has extensive assessment expertise. It is a conscious decision of SBE to have several programmes supervised by one Examination Board as this leads to greater uniformity, clarity and authority. Hence, the Examination Board Executive Education is responsible for the quality of assessment of all accredited post-initial programmes.

The committee noticed, moreover, that since the previous accreditation visit, the Examination Boards have grown in capacity and competence, taking on board the recommendations of the previous NVAO report. In terms of assessment quality assurance, the examination board currently does not only guard the quality of assessment, but also looks into assessment policy, assessment plans, assessment construction, and organization. The committee also established with satisfaction that over the past few years the Examination Boards have stepped up the inspections of course examinations and theses.

The Examination Board for privately funded degree programmes is in charge of assuring the assessment in the part-time Marketing programme. The committee noticed from the materials and discussions that the Examination Board follows-up attentively any issue that may pop up in the programme and that the part-time Marketing

programme has been served with similar intensity as all other privately funded degree programmes. Just as for other programmes, the Examination Board has paid considerable attention to online assessment recently and informed students and staff about plagiarism. According to the committee the quality assurance of the assessment in the part-time MSc Marketing is in competent hands with the Examination Board Executive Education.

Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on-site, the assessment committee considers that assessment in the part-time MSc Marketing is robust. This appreciation is based on the fact that both course and thesis assessment are embedded in well-established policies and frameworks at the level of the university and the school. The sample of assessment formats the committee has reviewed shows that the assessment principles and policies are properly implemented in the course assessments. The Marketing assessment plan, moreover, demonstrates that course learning goals are assessed adequately. This, in turn, ensures that the learning outcomes at programme level are covered.

Furthermore, the committee considers that both school and programme have made considerable efforts since the previous accreditation to bring assessment quality up to par. Similarly, the Examination Board has grown in capacity and competency, as demonstrated by the variety of assessment tasks it has been assuming over time. The committee welcomes these developments and is convinced that the Examination Board Executive Education is very capable of assuring the assessment quality of the part-time MSc Marketing pro-

gramme. It also appreciates the exchange of master theses and their evaluation forms for review by Tilburg University.

Following the discussions on-site, the committee endorses that both fulltime and part-time Marketing programmes use very similar assessment formats. This is all the more logical given that the learning outcomes for both programmes are identical. While the study journey of the part-time and fulltime students is different, they all have to demonstrate the same end-level qualifications and thus are tested in very similar ways.

This finding also applies to the evaluation of the master thesis. The committee considers that thesis assessment is organised very well. The programme can rely on a solid thesis procedure and policy, which are communicated effectively in person and on paper to the students. The part-time Marketing programme is using the same evaluation form as the fulltime programme, which the committee found to be relevant. The thesis evaluation form contains adequate criteria, an extensive assessment matrix, and space for individual appreciations and feedback of the supervisor and the second reader. The sample of thesis assessments reviewed by the committee showed that in all cases, the final grade was in line with the committee's appreciation. While it appreciated the often personal and constructively-critical feedback of many assessors, the committee sees room for more consistency in the level and size of feedback across all assessors.

In view of the above findings and considerations, the assessment committee judges that **the MSc Marketing part-time programme meets standard 3, assessment.**

4. Achieved learning outcomes

The thesis sample and the discussions on-site confirmed that upon graduation, part-time Marketing students have definitely achieved all programme learning outcomes. The thesis review has shown that students are capable of writing high quality academic output. While participants tend to have a relevant job when they enrol in the programme, the discussions revealed that several students get promoted during their studies and others advance in their career afterwards. It is a strong feature that all students and alumni felt that the part-time Marketing programme has impacted on their life and career as academic professional. The programme and SBE Executive Education should communicate this positive message more explicitly to the outside world. According to the committee, the MSc Marketing part-time **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. The committee has looked at both elements when assessing the end level qualifications of the part-time MSc Marketing programme.

Thesis quality

The master thesis is seen as the final product of the educational programme and the ultimate test whether students have achieved all learning outcomes. As part of their external assessment, committee members reviewed a sample of 15 part-time MSc Marketing theses. The sample selection was based on a list featuring 32 part-time students who graduated in the academic year 2020-2021 and 2021-22. The selection was representative in terms of scoring and the theses had been assessed by a variety of supervisors and second readers.

According to the committee, all theses were clearly of sufficient quality to pass. Hence, none of the theses was reallocated internally for a second opinion. The committee found that across the sample and taking into account the distribution of scores, the thesis quality was good. Many theses offered a nice mixture of the professional and the academic dimension. The thesis review has demonstrated convincingly, according to the committee, that part-time Marketing students

have achieved the programme learning outcomes when they complete the master thesis.

The committee found that the programme benefits from the highly structured approach in the thesis process, which in turn contributes to the quality of - and the consistency across - the theses. It also makes the entire thesis trajectory transparent for students, assessors and even external reviewers like the members of the assessment committee.

Each thesis starts from a clear conceptual framework that is theoretically reasoned from the literature and nicely articulated in a set of testable hypotheses. The committee noticed that across the theses there is some diversity in terms of what is included in the conceptual model, as well as some variation in the complexity of the study design and the data analysis. While it applauds such variety, it was not fully clear to the committee if and how such complexity is rewarded in the grading process.

Graduate performance

The committee gathered from the materials and the discussions that many students follow the part-time programme to make a next step in their career. Already during their study, some students obtained a new position in their organisation or accepted a better position with a different employer. Moreover, alumni act as ambassadors of the programme by sharing their experience with students and by spreading the mission and values

of the programme in their professional environment. They also keep contact through a LinkedIn group and are invited by SBE EE to both leisure events and masterclasses.

Current and former students feel that the programme impacts on their career and contributes to their future as academic professional. The committee agrees to their advice that SBE EE and the programme team could communicate this message more explicitly to the outside world.

Considerations

Based on the written materials, the thesis sample and the discussions on site, the committee considers that upon graduation, part-time Marketing students have achieved all programme learning outcomes. The thesis review has shown that students are capable of writing high quality final products.

While participants tend to have a relevant job when they enrol in the programme, several students get promoted during their studies and others advance in their career afterwards. The committee considers it a strong feature of the programme that all students and alumni felt that the programme has impacted on their life and career as academic professional.

In view of the development of the programme and the educational offer at SBE EE, the committee considers that more can be done to communicate the message to the outside world that the part-time master programme in Marketing has a strong and positive impact on the career of its participants.

In view of the above findings and considerations, the assessment committee judges that **the MSc Marketing part-time programme meets standard 4, achieved learning outcomes.**

Attachments

Attachment 1 Assessment committee

Hans van Ees, chair

Prof. dr. van Ees is emeritus professor Corporate Governance and Institutions at the University of Groningen and former Dean of the University College Groningen. His research deals with corporate governance, board of directors and sustainable corporate performance. Hans has extensive accreditation experience.

Niels Hermes, member

Prof. dr. Hermes is professor International Finance at the University of Groningen. His expertise lies in the fields of corporate governance, microfinance, international finance, financial systems and economic growth. Niels has extensive accreditation experience.

Eelke de Jong, member

Prof. dr. de Jong is emeritus professor of International Economics at Radboud University in Nijmegen. His research focuses on the role of culture, in the sense of norms and values, in economic behaviour. Eelke has extensive accreditation experience.

Hans van Trijp, member

Prof. dr. ir. van Trijp is professor of Marketing and Consumer Behaviour at Wageningen University. His expertise lays in the domains of consumer studies, environmental marketing, cooperatives, and supply chain management. Hans has relevant accreditation experience.

Judith Kikkert, student-member

Ms Kikkert is a master student MSc Management, Economics and Consumer Studies at Wageningen University and student-member of the university-wide Board of Education. Judith holds a bachelor's degree *Economie en Beleid* from Wageningen.

Mark Delmartino, external secretary

Mark Delmartino is owner of the Antwerp-based company MDM CONSULTANCY. As certified NVAO secretary he regularly supports assessment committees.

All committee members and the secretary have signed a declaration of independence. The assessment committee has been submitted to, and validated by, NVAO prior to the site visit.

Attachment 2 Site visit programme

Venue: VU Amsterdam, De Boelelaan, Amsterdam

Wednesday 16 November 2022

- 08.30 Arrival of the committee and set-up
- 09.00 Session with Faculty Board
- 10.00 Session with Management BSc EBE, BSc EOR & MSc EOR
- 11.00 Session with Students and Alumni BSc EBE, BSc EOR & MSc EOR
- 12.00 Session with Staff BSc EBE, BSc EOR & MSc EOR
- 13.00 Lunch and internal meeting
- 14.00 Session with Management MSc RMFI
- 14.40 Session with Students and Alumni MSc RMFI
- 15.20 Session with Staff MSc RMFI
- 16.00 Break and internal deliberation
- 16.30 Return meeting with Management MSc RMFI
- 17.00 Internal deliberation
- 17.30 End of day 1

Thursday 17 November 2022

- 08.30 Arrival of the committee and internal meeting
- 09.00 Session with Examination Board
- 10.00 Session with Management MSc ECO & MSc STEE
- 10.50 Session with Students and Alumni MSc ECO & MSc STEE
- 11.40 Session with Staff MSc ECO & MSc STEE
- 12.30 Lunch and internal meeting
- 13.30 Session with Management MSc Marketing FT + PT
- 14.20 Session with Students and Alumni MSc Marketing FT + PT
- 15.10 Session with Staff MSc Marketing FT + PT
- 16.00 Break and internal deliberation
- 16.30 Return meeting with Management MSc ECO & MSc STEE
- 17.00 Internal deliberation
- 17.30 End of day 2

Friday 18 November 2022

- 08.30 Arrival of the committee and internal meeting
- 09.00 Session with Management MSc FIN, MSc AC & MSc ITACA
- 10.15 Session with Students and Alumni MSc FIN, MSc AC & MSc ITACA
- 11.30 Session with Staff MSc FIN, MSc AC & MSc ITACA
- 12.45 Lunch and internal deliberation
- 14.00 Return meeting with Management MSc ITACA

- 14.30 Internal deliberation
- 15.30 Preliminary feedback
- 16.00 Development Dialogue Executive Programmes
- 17.00 Development Dialogue Funded Programmes
- 18.00 End of site visit

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

Attachment 3 Overview of materials

Information materials

Self-evaluation report MSc Marketing part-time, VU School of Business and Economics, 2022.

Appendices to the self-evaluation report

- Intended Learning Outcomes
- Programme 2021-2022
- Course descriptions 2021-2022
- Assessment plan 2021-2022
- Thesis Manual and thesis assessment form 2021-2022
- Teaching and Examination regulations 2021-2022
- Regulations and Guidelines regarding examinations SBE 2021-2022
- Overview of academic staff including quality
- List of all graduates in academic years 2020-2021 & 2021-2022
- Intake, drop out and success rates
- AACSB Memorandum

Additional materials

Following materials were made available online for the committee:

- VU Assessment Policy
- SBE Assessment Policy
- Annual Reports Examination Committees
- Annual Reports Programme Committees

Graduation products

For every programme under review, the assessment committee studied a sample of graduation projects. In case of the MSc Marketing part-time programme, the committee reviewed 15 master theses which had been successfully submitted by students in the academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. The selection was representative in terms of scoring and supervision by a variety of staff.

A list with student numbers is available at AeQui