



NVAO • THE NETHERLANDS

**PEER REVIEW NEW PROGRAMME**  
M MBA IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS  
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

SUMMARY REPORT  
8 March, 2021



## 1 Procedure

The quality of a new programme is assessed by means of peer review. A panel of independent peers including a student reviews the plans during a site visit to the institution. A discussion amongst peer experts forms the basis for the panel's final judgement and the advisory report. The focus is on the curriculum, the teaching and learning environment, and student assessment.

The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) takes a formal decision on the quality of the new programme based on the outcome of the peer review. This decision can be positive, conditionally positive or negative. Following a positive NVAO decision with or without conditions the institution can proceed to offer the new programme. Upon completion of the programme graduates are entitled to receive a legally accredited degree.

This summary report contains the main outcomes of the peer review. A full report with more details including the panel's findings and analysis is also available. NVAO bases an accreditation decision on the full report.

Both the full and summary reports of peer reviews are published on NVAO's website [www.nvao.net](http://www.nvao.net). There you can also find more information on NVAO and peer reviews of new programmes.

Because of COVID-19 temporary measures apply for this peer review.

## 2 Panel

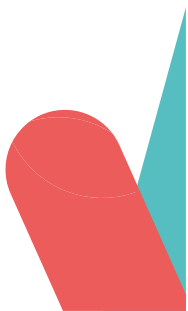
### Peer experts

1. Prof. Dr. Ed Peelen (chair), Endowed Professor in Content Marketing, University of Amsterdam and partner at FutureofBusiness;
2. Prof. Dr. Ir. Marion Debruyne, Dean and Professor in Strategic Innovation and Marketing, Vlerick Business School, Brussels;
3. Prof. Dr. Woody van Olffen, Professor of Organizational Change and Development at TIAS School for Business and Society, Tilburg University;
4. Menno van Gameren MSc (student member), graduate master Business Administration, University of Amsterdam.

### Assisting staff

- Dr. Marianne van der Weiden, secretary
- Ir. Lineke van Bruggen, NVAO policy advisor and process coordinator

Site visit (online): 18-19 January 2021



### 3 Outcome

The NVAO approved panel reaches a positive conclusion regarding the quality of the academic master MBA in International Business offered by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The parttime programme is offered in Amsterdam and covers a period of 18 months.

The MBA in International Business is an English-taught programme for young and mid-career professionals with at least three years of postgraduate work experience. An advisory board with representatives from industry gave feedback to the programme designers and assisted in shaping it into a hands-on programme with a strong focus on the complexity of today's globalising world. The programme is built on three interconnected 'pillars': international business management, cross-cultural leadership and an entrepreneurial attitude. The programme starts with an International Business Incubator to lay the groundwork for an entrepreneurial attitude and as a teambuilding exercise. In the courses, participants gain state-of-the-art theoretical knowledge and learn to apply this in real-life business cases. The programme uses suitable tests and assignments. The final element is a project in which they apply their knowledge and research skills to find an answer to a practical or academic problem of their choice. The programme intends to offer personal and professional skills courses as extracurricular activities. The panel advises these to be part of the curriculum.

The programme is compared to a journey, transforming the participants who often have a technical or specialist background, into business administration generalists, who are able to make forward-looking decisions. Learning takes place in small groups. Participants with a diversity of backgrounds bring in their experiences and perspectives, which creates a strong and interactive learning environment. Some courses have an innovative format, such as the International Business Incubator and the Writing & Applied Research Bootcamp. The panel also commends the programme for the teaching team with its international experience. Because the programme has a wide scope, the panel advises the teaching team to come together and forge stronger connections between courses, so the programme really becomes an integrated journey, more than a set of individual courses. In the admission process, the programme should aim for a sufficient number of international participants, to provide a learning experience with a real international flavour.

The panel concludes that the programme meets the quality standards: it has a clear profile and meets the expectations of an international MBA programme, the range and level of courses and the qualities of the teaching staff will help participants to achieve the learning goals. These are assessed with appropriate tests and assignments.

### 4 Commendations

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

1. Involvement of the professional field – Relevant companies are part of the advisory board. The programme management has used their feedback to create an attractive programme for young and mid-career professionals in international business.

2. Curriculum – The programme includes innovative and intensive courses, such as an International Business Incubator, a Writing & Applied Research Bootcamp, a Leadership Lab and a Business Modelling Innovation Lab. The case studies in the courses are relevant for an international MBA.
3. Interactive learning environment – Participants with different backgrounds and perspectives will share their experiences in the courses. This will stimulate critical thinking, develop analytical skills and generate creative solutions.
4. Teaching staff – The teachers are experts in their fields and enthusiastic to make a success of the programme. They are full of ideas about suitable business cases and cooperation with international companies. They invite practitioners as guest lecturers to complement their own expertise.
5. Quality culture – Management, teachers and examination board work together constructively and are open for suggestions to further develop and improve the programme.

## 5 Recommendations

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

1. Learning goals – Make the learning goals at programme level more focused and tailored to the aim of the programme, by including the three building blocks of the curriculum (international business management, cross-cultural leadership, entrepreneurial acting and thinking). This helps to ensure that all aspects are assessed at the end of the programme.
2. Personal and professional skills – Include personal and professional skills in the curriculum instead of organising them as extracurricular activities, and assess them at the end of the programme.
3. International flavour – Make sure in the admission process that the student population is sufficiently diverse and international.
4. Coordination between courses – Organise discussions with the full course team, in addition to the bilateral meetings of course coordinators with the programme director, to strengthen the links between blocks and courses.

## 6 What comes next?

NVAO grants initial accreditation to a new programme on the basis of a panel's full report. The decision is valid for a maximum of six years. Upon accreditation, the new programme will follow the NVAO review procedures for existing programmes. NVAO publishes the accreditation decision together with the full report.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nvao.net/nl/besluiten>

Each institution has a system of quality assurance in place ensuring continuous follow-up actions and periodic peer-review activities. Peer reviews help the institution to improve the quality of its programmes. The progress made since the last review is therefore taken into consideration when preparing for the next review. The follow-up activities are also part of the following peer-review report. For more information, visit the institution's website.<sup>2</sup>

## 7 Summary in Dutch

Het panel oordeelt positief over de kwaliteit van de MBA in International Business van de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Dit is de uitkomst van de kwaliteitstoets uitgevoerd door een panel van *peers* op verzoek van de Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie (NVAO). Voor deze beoordeling heeft het panel gesprekken gevoerd met de opleiding op 18 en 19 januari 2021.

De MBA in International business is een parttime opleiding van 18 maanden voor jonge professionals die kennis en vaardigheden willen opdoen om in een leidende positie binnen hun onderneming de uitdagingen van een globaliserende wereld aan te kunnen gaan. Het accent in de opleiding ligt op internationaal zakendoen, crosscultureel leiderschap en ondernemendheid. De persoonlijke en professionele vaardigheden die daarbij horen, zouden niet naast, maar in het curriculum moeten worden aangeboden. De onderwijsvorm van verschillende cursussen is innovatief, zoals een bootcamp voor schrijf- en onderzoeksvaardigheden. De toetsvormen zijn eveneens gevarieerd. Deelnemers sluiten de opleiding af met een onderzoek waarin ze hun opgedane kennis toepassen op een vraagstuk uit hun eigen praktijk. De docenten hebben stevige internationale ervaring en zijn enthousiast om de opleiding tot een succes te maken. Het panel concludeert dat de kwaliteit van de opleiding aan de eisen voldoet.

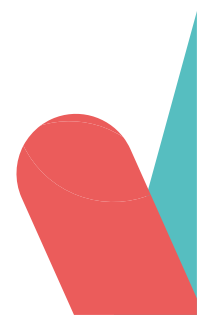
Meer informatie over de NVAO-werkwijze en de toetsing van nieuwe opleidingen is te vinden op [www.nvao.net](http://www.nvao.net). Voor informatie over de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam verwijzen we naar de website van de instelling.<sup>3</sup>

Als gevolg van de beperkende omstandigheden door COVID-19 geldt voor deze kwaliteitstoets een tijdelijke procedure.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.vu.nl/nl/index.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.vu.nl/nl/index.aspx>



The summary report was written at the request of NVAO and is the outcome of the peer review of the new programme wo-pi-master MBA in International Business of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Application no: 009875



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# INITIAL ACCREDITATION

## M MBA IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

FULL REPORT  
8 March, 2021



## Content

<b>1</b>	Procedure.....	3
<b>2</b>	New programme.....	4
2.1	General data.....	4
2.2	Profile.....	4
2.3	Panel.....	4
<b>3</b>	Outcome.....	5
<b>4</b>	Commendations.....	6
<b>5</b>	Recommendations.....	7
<b>6</b>	Assessment.....	8
6.1	Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes.....	8
6.2	Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment.....	9
6.3	Standard 3: Student assessment.....	11
6.4	Degree and field of study.....	13



# 1 Procedure

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Because of COVID-19 temporary measures apply for this peer review.

## 2 New programme

### 2.1 General data

Institution	: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Programme	: wo-master MBA in International Business
Mode of study	: Part-time
Degree	: Master of Business Administration
Tracks	: not applicable
Location	: Amsterdam
Study load	: 60 EC <sup>1</sup>
Field of study	: Economics (confirmed by the panel)

### 2.2 Profile

The MBA in International Business provides knowledge and skills in multiple functional business areas through an international lens and aims to transform early- and mid-career professionals (at least three years of postgraduate work experience) from specialists into generalists who will succeed in global markets. The programme also fosters the entrepreneurial attitude and skills of participants as well as their leadership competencies.

### 2.3 Panel

#### Peer experts

1. Prof. Dr. Ed Peelen (chair), Endowed Professor in Content Marketing, University of Amsterdam and partner at FutureofBusiness;
2. Prof. Dr. Ir. Marion Debruyne, Dean and Professor in Strategic Innovation and Marketing, Vlerick Business School, Brussels;
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4. Menno van Gameren MSc (student member), graduate Master in Business Administration, University of Amsterdam.

#### Assisting staff

- Dr. Marianne van der Weiden, secretary
- Ir. Lineke van Bruggen, NVAO policy advisor and process coordinator

#### Site visit (online)

18-19 January 2021

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<sup>1</sup> European Credits

### 3 Outcome

The NVAO approved panel reaches a positive conclusion regarding the quality of the academic master MBA in International Business offered by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The programme complies with all standards of the limited NVAO framework.

The MBA in International Business is a parttime English-taught programme for early- and mid-career professionals with at least three years of postgraduate work experience. An advisory board with representatives from industry gave feedback to the programme designers and assisted in shaping it into a hands-on programme with a strong focus on the complexity of today's globalising world. The programme is built on three interconnected 'pillars': international business management, cross-cultural leadership and an entrepreneurial attitude. The programme starts with an International Business Incubator to lay the groundwork for an entrepreneurial attitude and as a teambuilding exercise. In the courses, participants gain state-of-the-art theoretical knowledge, learn to apply this in real-life business cases and are assessed with suitable tests and assignments. The final element is a project in which they apply their knowledge and research skills to find an answer to a practical or academic problem of their choice. The programme intends to offer personal and professional skills courses as extracurricular activities. The panel advises these to be part of the curriculum.

The programme is compared to a journey, transforming the participants who often have a technical or specialist background, into business administration generalists, who are able to make forward-looking decisions. Learning takes place in small groups. Participants with a diversity of backgrounds bring in their experiences and perspectives, which creates a strong and interactive learning environment. Some courses have an innovative format, such as the International Business Incubator and the Writing & Applied Research Bootcamp. The panel also commends the programme for the teaching team with its international experience. Because the programme has a wide scope, the panel advises the teaching team to come together and forge stronger connections between courses, so the programme really becomes an integrated journey, more than a set of individual courses. In the admission process, the programme should aim for a sufficient number of international participants, to provide a learning experience with a real international flavour.

The panel concludes that the programme meets the quality standards: it has a clear profile and meets the expectations of an international MBA programme, the range and level of courses and the qualities of the teaching staff will help participants to achieve the learning goals. These are assessed with appropriate tests and assignments.

Standard	Judgement
1 Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
2 Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
3 Student assessment	meets the standard
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>Positive</b>

## 4 Commendations

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

1. Involvement of the professional field – Relevant companies are part of the advisory board. The programme management has used their feedback to create an attractive programme for young and mid-career professionals in international business.
2. Curriculum – The programme includes innovative and intensive courses, such as an International Business Incubator, a Writing & Applied Research Bootcamp, a Leadership Lab and a Business Modelling Innovation Lab. The case studies in the courses are relevant for an international MBA.
3. Interactive learning environment – Participants with different backgrounds and perspectives will share their experiences in the courses. This will stimulate critical thinking, develop analytical skills and generate creative solutions.
4. Teaching staff – The teachers are experts in their fields and enthusiastic to make a success of the programme. They are full of ideas about suitable business cases and cooperation with international companies. They invite practitioners as guest lecturers to complement their own expertise.
5. Quality culture – Management, teachers and examination board work together constructively and are open for suggestions to further develop and improve the programme.

## 5 Recommendations

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

1. Learning goals – Make the learning goals at programme level more focused and tailored to the aim of the programme, by including the three building blocks of the curriculum (international business management, cross-cultural leadership, entrepreneurial acting and thinking). This helps to ensure that all aspects are assessed at the end of the programme.
2. Personal and professional skills – Include personal and professional skills in the curriculum instead of organising them as extracurricular activities, and assess them at the end of the programme.
3. International flavour – Make sure in the admission process that the student population is sufficiently diverse and international.
4. Coordination between courses – Organise discussions with the full course team, in addition to the bilateral meetings of course coordinators with the programme director, to strengthen the links between blocks and courses.

## 6 Assessment

### 6.1 Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

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

#### **Judgement**

Meets the standard.

#### **Findings, analysis and considerations**

The MBA in International Business targets two groups: ambitious participants with at least three years of postgraduate work experience and current and potential small business owners. It aims to transform the first group from specialists into generalists who will succeed in global markets, and aims to provide the business owners with professionalisation of their entrepreneurship and management. The MBA in International Business offers holistic knowledge and skills in multiple functional business areas from an international business perspective. Because increased international interconnectedness leads to greater cultural diversity within firms as well, the programme puts a strong emphasis on cross-cultural leadership competencies as a second pillar. The third pillar is fostering the participants' entrepreneurial thinking and acting, to improve their firms' competitiveness and their own personal careers. The panel appreciates this programme profile with its three pillars, but also recognises that the pillars represent the popular themes for many current European MBA programmes. The panel encourages the programme to work on further differentiation from other MBA programmes. The profile aligns well with the university's priority areas (sustainable, enterprising and diverse) and two of its profile themes (Connected World, Science for Sustainability).

The intended learning outcomes are presented in the information file. Five general learning goals for executive degrees (academic and research skills; bridging theory and practice; professional social skills; broadening your horizon; self-awareness) are made more specific in six learning outcomes, describing what a graduate can do or make. These intended learning outcomes are linked convincingly to the Dublin descriptors at the master's level. The panel also recognises that the programme adopted the common MBA structure, with internationalisation as a specific thematic application. The panel confirms that the intended learning outcomes meet the standards for an MBA degree on a generic level. The panel would have expected the learning outcomes to be more specific, especially as there is the possibility to make explicit references in the intended learning outcomes to the three pillars. The panel recognises that they are used as learning lines in the curriculum, but advises to give them a more explicit position in the learning goals at programme level as well. Such reference helps to ensure that all aspects are assessed at the end of the programme and will make it clearer for (prospective) students what they may expect.

The programme also offers general career coaching and professional and career development services, such as intercultural communication and negotiation skills. The panel understands that these aspects will be organised as extracurricular activities, but considers that such aspects are so strongly connected to the programme's pillars that they should be a full part of the curriculum and assessment. This implies that they should also be expressed in the programme's intended learning outcomes.

The MBA in International Business was developed in close interaction with the programme's advisory board, which consists of senior leaders and highly-ranked Human Resources specialists from multinational companies as well as academic experts. During the site visit, the panel discussed the programme with a number of the advisory board's industry members. The advisory board was involved from the beginning, in the design stage, and played a prominent role in sharpening the MBA's profile, from a fairly academic to a more hands-on programme with a strong focus on the complexity of today's world and a 'glocal' view.

The panel concludes that the intended learning outcomes of the MBA in International Business tie in with what is nationally and internationally expected from an MBA programme in international business. The three distinctive pillars (international, cross-cultural leadership, entrepreneurial) and the personal and professional skills should be made more explicit in the programme's intended learning outcomes. The input and feedback from the advisory board have been used well to finetune the programme to the needs of young managers and their companies. The programme meets standard 1.

## 6.2 Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment

*The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.*

### **Judgement**

Meets the standard.

### **Findings, analysis and considerations**

The curriculum of the MBA in International Business (60 EC) comprises an interesting set of courses. Participants begin the MBA programme with the International Business Incubator which introduces key international entrepreneurship topics and how cultural and institutional differences affect international ventures or market entries. The course also serves as a team-building event. Then, three blocks of courses follow, each block addressing one of the three pillars: (1) Fundamentals of Business Administration through an Internationalisation Lens, (2) Becoming a Responsible Leader, and (3) Entrepreneurial Thinking and Acting. In the final block, participants work on their graduation project: an applied research project based on data collected in their own firm or from external sources. This project should yield evidence-based managerial and societal implications. The participants are prepared for this research project in block 3, specifically in the course Data Science and the Writing & Applied Research Bootcamp. The panel appreciates the overview and rationale of how the courses relate to each other and to the intended learning outcomes, presented in the information file. The curriculum is compared to a journey, transforming the participants who often have a technical or specialist background, into professional business administration generalists, who are able to make forward-looking decisions, also in uncertain circumstances. Meetings between the course coordinators and the programme director ensure alignment between the various courses. The programme also offers opportunities to develop professional skills and professional career services as extracurricular activities. The panel is aware that programme time is limited, but, as mentioned above (standard 1), feels that such an important aspect of the learning objectives should not be extracurricular, but be fully part of the curriculum. Overall, however, the panel judges that the curriculum is well-considered and that the blocks cover the intended learning outcomes with logical learning paths. The panel considers the graduation project, embedded in the participants' work, a good way to complete the programme.

The parttime nature of the MBA in International Business allows participants to study alongside their career and to apply the new knowledge and skills in their daily work. The programme has a duration of 18 months and a feasible time schedule: once a month, participants will meet from Thursday to Saturday noon (2.5 days), while they will devote the rest of their study time to preparation and writing assignments.

The working language in the MBA in International Business is English, because this is the leading language in academia and in the business world. Moreover, the use of English is in line with the international orientation of the programme. The panel agrees that this is consistent with comparable MBA programmes in the Dutch market.

As its didactic method, the programme uses an evidence-based teaching approach, presenting the participants with state-of-the-art research and contextual evidence otherwise unavailable to professionals. This is in line with the VU's ambition to link postgraduate education to the school's research activities. Guest lecturers from renowned firms and real-life case studies will ensure the practical applicability of the newly obtained knowledge. A mixed classroom of participants with diverse backgrounds and different perspectives is expected to stimulate critical thinking, develop analytical skills and generate creative solutions. The interaction between participants will be encouraged by keeping classes relatively small and using interactive teaching methods such as presentations, teamwork and simulations. The programme uses a number of innovative and intensive teaching methods, such as the International Business Incubator and the Writing & Applied Research Bootcamp (mentioned above), a Leadership Lab with an outdoor leadership training and a field trip abroad, a Business Modelling Innovation Lab with an Incubator visit and a Pitch Day, and, finally, a Research Conference where reviewers decide whether the participants' research proposals can be accepted as the basis of the graduation projects. The panel commends the programme for the diversity of course formats.

The programme has formulated appropriate admission criteria: a bachelor's degree, a GMAT score of at least 600 (waived for applicants with a master's degree), a minimum of three years of postgraduate work experience, and adequate English language proficiency. These requirements are similar to those of other MBA programmes. The programme also requires a recommendation letter from the candidate's workplace, signalling that the employer supports the candidate's participation in the MBA in International Business. The programme has set up a thorough admission process of three steps: (1) submission of the required documents, (2) an interview with the programme director to learn more about the candidate's motivation and commitment, and (3) decision-making by the admission committee which consists of the programme director and two members of the advisory board. The panel advises to aim for a truly diverse and international student population, in order to offer the participants a programme with an international flavour. The programme management assured the panel that in the business environment of the Zuidas in Amsterdam a sufficiently large number of employees from various countries can be found to realise an international student community. The requirement to only attend classes on 2.5 days per course should allow participants from neighbouring countries to join the programme as well. The School of Business and Economics (SBE) has attracted a professional recruiter who knows the executive market to compensate its own lack of experience in the MBA market. The panel considers this a worthwhile step and thinks that, in combination with the advisory board and its network, this will help to recruit the right set of participants.



Based on the documentation and the interviews during the site visit, the panel is convinced that the teaching staff is both qualified and committed. Course coordinators and lecturers come from various SBE departments and other VU faculties. They meet the requirements set by the school: a University Teaching Qualification and a high level of English proficiency, academic excellence proven by means of a PhD degree or high-ranked publications, and several years of teaching experience, ideally in executive education. When calling upon external teachers as specialist experts from practice, the course coordinators and the programme director will support them and make sure that they meet the SBE requirements of didactic and English language quality. The teaching team's commitment to the programme and their open attitude were clearly visible during the site visit. They have discussed the design of their courses intensively with the programme director. The panel advises to also organise such discussions with the full course team as this will contribute to the further alignment between blocks and courses. Half of the core staff has a Dutch nationality, most of them combined with extensive working experience abroad. The gender balance is very skewed. The panel considers the diversity of staff a relevant item and encourages the programme to keep diversity in mind when attracting new staff or external guest lecturers. The programme director will be available for student support during the programme, such as answering programme related questions and providing guidance. The panel agrees that the small class size will allow the programme director to fulfil this role adequately, but also advises day-to-day administrative and organisational support to be available for faculty and students.

Summing up, the panel concludes that the curriculum adequately covers the intended learning outcomes and fits the specific programme profile of an international MBA. Professional skills should not be offered as extracurricular services, but be included in the curriculum itself. This observation does not detract from the panel's overall positive assessment. The parttime nature, admission criteria and didactic approach are suitable for the target group of young and mid-career professionals who combine the MBA in International Business with their professional work and who live and work in the neighbourhood of the university (including expats). The teaching staff is well-qualified and committed to make the programme successful. The programme meets standard 2.

### 6.3 Standard 3: Student assessment

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

#### **Judgement**

Meets the standard.

#### **Findings, analysis and considerations**

Assessment in the MBA in International Business complies with the assessment policies of SBE and VU Amsterdam. These are embedded in the more general quality assurance system which ensures a clear division of responsibilities and a systematic evaluation and monitoring process. At programme level, each course creates an assessment file with a test blueprint, the exam with model answers, and assessment criteria and forms. After the exam, the file is completed with the test results including an item analysis, the results of the course evaluation and a short reflection report by the course coordinator. The panel considers this a valuable instrument for the course coordinator and the examination board to monitor the assessment quality. Other methods to control the assessment quality are the formal appointment of

examiners by the examination board and the involvement of a co-reader with content knowledge to check the contents of an examination before the participants take it. The use of this four-eyes-principle contributes to the assessment validity. The use of model answers and clear assessment criteria and forms will strengthen the reliability of assessment. Participants have the right to review their graded assignment and compare it to a model answer. Upon request, the examiners organise review sessions to answer any questions. This ensures sufficient transparency of assessment.

Course coordinators use a variety of assessment methods that reflect the range of learning objectives: essays, exams, written reports, case studies, individual and group assignments, presentations (pitches and discussions), reflection reports and, finally, the graduation project. In two courses, participants are asked to submit a pre-course assignment, meant to trigger their background knowledge and sensitise them to the course content. After the course, they continue working on this or a similar assignment, but now using their new knowledge and tools. The assessment methods and assignments are part of the course manuals, including the assessment criteria (in general terms) and their relative weight. The panel has not yet seen more detailed assessment criteria or rubrics, but based on the discussions with the teaching team and the examination board, the panel is assured that they will be of the right level. The panel appreciates the range of assessment methods and advises the programme to use the expertise of the examination board to ensure the validity and reliability of the more innovative assessments.

In the graduation project, participants will identify a problem in their own firm or related to a contemporary business administration challenge. They formulate a suitable research question, collect and analyse quantitative or qualitative data and provide an evidence-based answer, including implications for business and/or society. They will work on their project for four months, guided by a supervisor who matches the participant's topic. The final report is checked for plagiarism and will then be assessed by the supervisor and an independent second reader. The assessment form is made available in the course manual, so participants know what to expect. In cases of disagreement between the two examiners, a third assessor is asked to grade the project. The assessment form with the final grade and the examiners' comments is given to the participant as feedback. The panel considers the graduation project a suitable way to assess most of the intended learning outcomes at the final level. For the assessment of the participants' social and professional skills, the panel advises to add an assessment, e.g. in the form of a portfolio, allowing both programme and participant to look back at the learning journey.

The examination board that supervises the MBA in International Business is also responsible for safeguarding the assessment quality and the final degree level of the other accredited postgraduate programmes of SBE. The current board consists of eight members. Upon the start of the MBA in International Business and a second new MBA programme (Executive MBA Leading with Purpose), additional members will join. The panel's discussion with the chair of the examination board showed how the board can draw on its experience with other programmes when it provides feedback to the MBA in International Business. For example, the board encouraged the programme staff to use the experience of SBE's executive coaching programmes to improve and finetune the assessment criteria of reflection exercises. The examination board systematically investigates the assessment procedures, plans and products of each programme, by taking a sample of assessment files and actual tests each year and checking if they meet the quality criteria.

The chair regularly meets with programme directors and core staff to provide feedback, explain procedures and address issues at hand. The panel considers this an important way to help create an awareness of assessment quality and safeguard its assurance.

All in all, the panel concludes that the MBA in International Business uses an appropriate and wide range of assessment methods to evaluate whether participants meet the learning objectives, both in the various courses and, at the final level, in the graduation project. The panel considers it worthwhile to add a portfolio assessment to measure the personal and professional skills at the end of the programme. The examination board organises a systematic process to check the quality of assessment and contributes to a strong quality culture. The programme meets standard 3.

#### 6.4 Degree and field of study

The panel advises awarding the following degree to the new programme: MBA.  
The panel supports the programme's preference for the following field of study: Economics.

## Abbreviations

EC	European Credit
MBA	Master of Business Administration
SBE	School of Business and Economics
VU Amsterdam	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

The full report was written at the request of NVAO and is the outcome of the peer review of the new programme wo-pi-master MBA in International Business of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Application no: 009875



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