

Assessment report
Limited Framework Programme Assessment

Bachelor Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology

VU Amsterdam

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1. Executive summary

In this executive summary, the panel presents the main considerations which led to the assessment of the quality of the Bachelor Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology programme of VU Amsterdam, which has been assessed according to the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, as published on 20 December 2016 (Staatscourant nr. 69458).

The programme objectives are sound. The panel appreciates the programme to be strongly research-based and to be closely aligned with the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology research programme. The panel welcomes the programme's objectives to focus on the relevance of anthropological theory and methodology for addressing societal problems. The panel advises to articulate these dimensions more explicitly in the programme objectives. The programme objectives are up-to-date.

The programme objectives meet the requirements of the Reference Framework for Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology in the Netherlands. The panel welcomes the efforts by the joint programmes to draft this framework and regards this to be a sound description of this domain.

The panel welcomes students being educated to enrol in master programmes in this domain or related domains or to be prepared to enter the labour market, acknowledging the latter option to be taken by limited numbers of students. The intended learning outcomes of the programme correspond to the programme objectives, are well-articulated and conform to the bachelor level. The panel is positive about the recent update of the intended learning outcomes, bringing these in line with current trends.

The entry requirements and admission procedures are adequate. The panel is pleased to see additional funds having been made available to accommodate rising student influx numbers.

The panel is positive about the contents of the curriculum. The curriculum meets the intended learning outcomes of the programme. The courses are up to standard. The curriculum is well-organised and coherent. The panel appreciates both the research orientation of the curriculum as well as the labour market orientation. The panel advises to organise the sixth and last semester of the curriculum more strictly as the preparation for the Bachelor thesis project.

The panel considers the lecturers to be both good researchers and skilled teachers. The lecturers are strongly education-minded. The panel notes the lecturers being appreciated by students. The panel welcomes the diversity of the staff.

The panel regards the educational concept and study methods to be appropriate, allowing students to complete the curriculum. The panel appreciates the student-activating education. The study guidance by the mentors is effective and appreciated by students. The panel recommends to maintain the system of individual guidance for students, in the face of rising student numbers. The study load is balanced. The student success rates are up to standard.

The panel approves of the examinations and assessment rules and regulations of the programme, these being in line with Faculty policies. The panel finds that the Examination Board, including the sub-committee for this programme, monitor the quality of examinations and assessments appropriately.

The panel approves of the examination methods adopted in the programme. These are consistent with the goals and contents of the courses.

The supervision processes for the Bachelor thesis projects are well-organised and intensive. Effective measures have been taken to counter free-riding in the group projects. The panel advises to keep both the individual and group options for Bachelor thesis projects open for students. The assessment processes for the projects are up to standard as well. The panel recommends to allow examiners to discuss their assessments of the Bachelor thesis projects in case of differing grades. The panel also suggest to narrow the margin of 2.0 points between the examiners' grades of the Bachelor thesis projects, before inviting the third examiner.

The panel considers the measures ensuring the validity, reliability and transparency of examinations and assessments to be up to standard.

The panel regards the Bachelor theses to be adequate academic projects. The panel appreciates the students being required to complete the empirical cycle. The panel supports the grades given by examiners of the programme, although the panel would have given somewhat lower grades for some of the theses. The panel advises to strengthen the theoretical dimensions of the analyses by students in the Bachelor thesis projects.

The panel appreciates the measures taken in the programme to promote the labour market orientation of students.

The panel regards the programme graduates to have reached the intended learning outcomes and to be qualified to enrol in master programmes or to enter the labour market.

The panel that conducted the assessment of the Bachelor Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology programme of VU Amsterdam assesses this programme to meet the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, judging the programme to be satisfactory. Therefore, the panel advises NVAO to accredit the programme.

Rotterdam, 20 February 2019

Prof. dr. T. Otto
(panel chair)

drs. W. Vercouteren
(panel secretary)

2. Assessment process

The evaluation agency Certiked VBI received the request by VU Amsterdam to manage the limited framework programme assessment process for the Bachelor Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology of this University. The objective of the programme assessment process was to assess whether the programme would conform to the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, published on 20 December 2016 (Staatscourant nr. 69458).

Having conferred with management of the VU Amsterdam programme, Certiked invited candidate panel members to sit on the assessment panel. The panel members agreed to do so. The panel composition was as follows:

- Prof dr. T. Otto, full professor of Anthropology and Ethnography, University of Aarhus, Denmark, full professor and tropical leader, The Cairns Institute, James Cook University, Australia (panel chair);
- Dr E.D. Rasch, associate professor, Sociology of Development and Change Group, Wageningen University (panel member);
- Dr M.E. Pelkmans, associate professor in Anthropology, London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom (panel member);
- Drs E.B. Heiman, city anthropologist, organisational anthropologist, co-owner company De Staalmeesters (panel member);
- I. Corbeek, student Bachelor Cultural Anthropology and Development Studies, Radboud University (student member).

On behalf of Certiked, drs W. Vercouteren served as the process coordinator and secretary in the assessment process.

All panel members and the secretary confirmed in writing being impartial with regard to the programme to be assessed and observing the rules of confidentiality. Having obtained the authorisation by the University, Certiked requested the approval of NVAO of the proposed panel to conduct the assessment. NVAO have given their approval.

To prepare the assessment process, the process coordinator convened with management of the programme to discuss the outline of the self-assessment report, the subjects to be addressed in this report and the site visit schedule. In addition, the planning of the activities in preparation of the site visit was discussed. In the course of the process preparing for the site visit, programme management and the Certiked process coordinator regularly had contact to fine-tune the process. The activities prior to the site visit have been performed as planned. Programme management approved of the site visit schedule.

Well in advance of the site visit date, programme management sent the list of final projects of graduates of the programme of the most recent years. Acting on behalf of the assessment panel, the process coordinator selected the final projects of 15 graduates from the last few years. The grade distribution in the selection was ensured to conform to the grade distribution in the list, sent by programme management.

The panel chair and the panel members were sent the self-assessment report of the programme, including appendices. In the self-assessment report, the student chapter was included. In addition, the expert panel members were forwarded a number of theses of the programme graduates, these theses being part of the selection made by the process coordinator.

Several weeks before the site visit date, the assessment panel chair and the process coordinator discussed the self-assessment report provided by programme management, the procedures regarding the assessment process and the site visit schedule. In this meeting, the profile of panel chairs of NVAO was discussed as well. The panel chair was informed about the competencies, listed in the profile. Documents pertaining to a number of these competencies were presented to the panel chair. The meeting between the panel chair and the process coordinator served as the briefing for panel chairs, as meant in the NVAO profile of panel chairs.

Prior to the date of the site visit, all panel members sent in their preliminary findings, based on the self-assessment report and the final projects studied, and a number of questions to be put to the programme representatives on the day of the site visit. The panel secretary summarised this information, compiling a list of questions, which served as a starting point for the discussions with the programme representatives during the site visit.

Shortly before the site visit date, the complete panel met to go over the preliminary findings concerning the quality of the programme. During this meeting, the preliminary findings of the panel members, including those about the theses were discussed. The procedures to be adopted during the site visit, including the questions to be put to the programme representatives on the basis of the list compiled, were discussed as well.

On 22 November 2018, the panel conducted the site visit on the VU Amsterdam campus. The site visit schedule was as planned. In a number of separate sessions, the panel was given the opportunity to meet with Faculty Board representatives, programme management, Examination Board members, lecturers and final projects examiners, and students and alumni.

In a closed session at the end of the site visit, the panel considered every one of the findings, weighed the considerations and arrived at conclusions with regard to the quality of the programme. At the end of the site visit, the panel chair presented a broad outline of the considerations and conclusions to programme representatives. Clearly separated from the process of the programme assessment, assessment panel members and programme representatives met to conduct the development dialogue, with the objective to discuss future developments of the programme.

The assessment draft report was finalised by the secretary, having taken into account the findings and considerations of the panel. The draft report was sent to the panel members, who studied it and made a number of changes. Thereupon, the secretary edited the final report. This report was presented to programme management to be corrected for factual inaccuracies. Programme management were given two weeks to respond. Having been corrected for these factual inaccuracies, the Certiked bureau sent the report to the VU Amsterdam Board, to accompany their request for re-accreditation of this programme.

3. Programme administrative information

Name programme in CROHO: B Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology (B Culturele Antropologie en Ontwikkelingssociologie)
Orientation, level programme: Academic Bachelor
Grade: BSc
Number of credits: 180 EC
Specialisations: None
Location: Amsterdam
Mode of study: Full-time (language of instruction either Dutch or English)
Registration in CROHO: 50035

Name of institution: VU Amsterdam
Status of institution: Government-funded University
Institution's quality assurance: Approved

4. Findings, considerations and assessments per standard

4.1 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.

Findings

The Bachelor Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology is one of the programmes of the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology of the Faculty of Social Sciences of VU Amsterdam. The dean of the Faculty has the responsibility for all programmes of the Faculty. The programme director of the programme, being assisted by the programme coordinator, is in charge of the coordination and organisation of the programme. The programme director is advised on the quality assurance of the programme by the Programme Committee, being composed of equal numbers of lecturers and students. The Faculty Examination Board has the authority to monitor the quality of examination and assessment processes and products. The Board is assisted in their responsibilities and tasks regarding this programme by the sub-committee for this programme.

The Bachelor Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology programme of VU Amsterdam is a three-year, broad, research-based, academic bachelor programme in this field. The programme objectives are to study anthropological theory and methodology and to address complex societal problems, adopting anthropological theory and methodology. The programme focusses on cultural, political and social-economic processes on local, national or global levels and on the interaction between these levels. The programme allows for thematic specialisations, not being directed towards regional specialisations. The two thematic specialisations are anthropology of religion, diversity, ethnicity, identity and belonging and anthropology of development and globalisation. These specialisations are derived from the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology research programme *Mobilities, Beliefs and Belonging: Confronting Global Inequalities and Insecurities*.

The objectives of the programme conform to the Reference Framework for Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology in the Netherlands, which has been drafted by the joint programmes of this assessment cluster in the Netherlands.

Students are primarily educated to continue their studies at master level. Students are prepared to enter master programmes in anthropology, but may also enrol in master programmes in neighbouring domains. Students are prepared for the labour market as well, although the number of graduates entering the labour market is limited. As mentioned above, one of the programme objectives is to guide students in their professional orientation and to prepare them for the professional field. Programme management is counselled by the External Advisory Board on the alignment to academic and professional field requirements. The Board, being composed of senior academics and professionals, meets with programme management once a year.

The programme objectives have been translated into intended learning outcomes. The intended learning outcomes address, as the main points, knowledge and understanding of theory, concepts and current debates in anthropology; knowledge of and skills in social sciences and especially ethnographic research methods and techniques; knowing how to address societal problems, using anthropological theory; academic attitude, critical thinking competencies, being integer and taking responsibility. In 2017, the intended learning outcomes as well as the curriculum of the programme were profoundly renewed and updated.

Programme management presented the comparison of the intended learning outcomes to the Dublin descriptors for the bachelor level.

Consideration

The panel considers the programme objectives to be sound. The panel appreciates the programme to be strongly research-based and to be closely aligned with the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology research programme. The panel welcomes the programme objectives to focus on the relevance of anthropological theory and methodology for addressing societal problems. The panel advises to articulate these dimensions more explicitly in the programme objectives. The programme objectives are up-to-date.

The programme objectives meet the requirements of the Reference Framework for Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology in the Netherlands. The panel welcomes the efforts by the joint programmes to draft this framework and regards this to be a sound description of this domain.

The panel welcomes students being educated to enrol in master programmes in this domain or related domains or to be prepared to enter the labour market, acknowledging the latter option to be taken by limited numbers of students.

The intended learning outcomes of the programme correspond to the programme objectives, are well-articulated and conform to the bachelor level. The panel is positive about the recent update of the intended learning outcomes, bringing these in line with current trends.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 1, Intended learning outcomes, to be satisfactory.

4.2 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.

Findings

The student influx remained rather stable during the last six years, being on average about 40 incoming students per year. From 2018 onwards, the English-taught specialisation of the programme is offered. This doubled the influx to over 80 students. Additional funds have been made available to accommodate these rising student numbers. The programme does not intend to change the programme into an English-taught curriculum, but wants to allow students both Dutch- and English-taught options. The programme promotes student diversity. The programme admission requirements are the pre-university (vwo) diploma or the higher professional education (hbo) propaedeutic diploma, mathematics certificates to be included. The proportion of hbo-students is about 30 %. Applicants are invited to attend matching days. On these days, they attend lectures, take examinations on articles they studied and meet with study advisors.

The programme curriculum takes three years, the study load being in total 180 EC. In the assessment plan for the programme, the intended learning outcomes have been mapped to the goals of the courses. The curriculum has been organised in teaching-learning trajectories. These include the content-related trajectories Core Themes, Development, World Making and Social Sciences for Society, and the skills and attitude-related trajectories Academic Skills, Ethnographic Research and Applying Anthropology. Core Themes courses are scheduled in the first year and address fundamental concept and theories in anthropology. Development courses are part of the second year and go into social-economic development, inequality, power relations and sustainability. World Making courses, scheduled in the second and third years, study religion, identity, diversity, inclusion and migration subjects. Social Sciences for Society courses in the second and third years are multi-disciplinary courses, allowing students to work together with students from other social sciences programmes and allowing them to do assignments for organisations in the professional field. Ethnographic Research courses teach students quantitative and qualitative research methods and techniques, concentrating on ethnographic research methodology. Practical exercises, covering the empirical cycle, are part of these courses. The Academic Skills courses, scheduled in all three years, address information processing skills, analytical skills, writing and presentation skills and personal and professional competencies. In the Applying Anthropology courses, students are introduced to the societal and professional relevance of anthropology and are informed about future career perspectives. In these courses, guest lecturers take part. In the first semester of the third year, 30 EC of elective space are scheduled. In the elective space, students may take deepening or broadening minors, take courses abroad or do internships. At the end of the curriculum, students do the Bachelor thesis project, this being a research project. Talented students may opt for the honours programme, implying 30 EC additional courses in the second and third years. As has been mentioned, the curriculum was profoundly renewed in 2017.

The total lecturing team is composed of 27 staff members, about 20 % of them being temporary staff members. The majority of the staff members are engaged in both research and education, most of them being employed at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology. Practically all staff have PhDs, about 90 % of them are BKO-certified and about 25 % of them have obtained SKO-certificates. Temporary staff members are to be recruited for four years and will be offered opportunities to obtain BKO-certificates. Diversity among lecturers is promoted. Lecturers regularly meet to discuss the programme. Lecturers regard their work load to be manageable. Students appreciate the lecturers.

The educational concept of the programme is research-based and student-activating learning. The number of hours of face-to-face education is about 14 hours per week in the first year and about 12 hours per week in the second and third years. Study methods adopted in the programme include lectures, tutorials and practical classes. Larger classes in lectures are scheduled in parallel to smaller classes in tutorials. The student-to-staff ratio is 6.4, not counting junior lecturers. Especially tutorials allow for interactive teaching methods, such as presentations, discussions and practical assignments. Students are guided throughout the programme in their studies and their personal development by mentors, being staff members and in the first year also students. Meetings with mentors may be in small groups or individual. In the first year and in line with the Binding Study Advice, students must obtain 42 EC. The study load is experienced by students to be manageable. The proportion of students dropping out are about 20 % to 25 %, most of them dropping out in the first year. The student success rates are on average about 35 % after three years and about 80 % after four years (last two to three cohorts; proportion students re-entering in second year).

Considerations

The entry requirements and admission procedures are adequate. The panel is pleased to see additional funds having been made available to accommodate rising student influx numbers. The panel is positive about the contents of the curriculum. The curriculum meets the intended learning outcomes of the programme. The courses are up to standard. The curriculum is well-organised and coherent. The panel appreciates both the research orientation of the curriculum as well as the labour market orientation. The panel advises to organise the sixth and last semester of the curriculum more strictly as the preparation for the Bachelor thesis project. The panel considers the lecturers to be both good researchers and skilled teachers. The lecturers are strongly education-minded. The panel notes the lecturers being appreciated by students. The panel welcomes the diversity of the staff. The panel regards the educational concept and study methods to be appropriate, allowing students to complete the curriculum. The panel appreciates the student-activating education. The study guidance by the mentors is effective and appreciated by students. The panel recommends to maintain the system of individual guidance for students in the face of rising student numbers. The study load is balanced. The student success rates are up to standard.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 2, Teaching-learning environment, to be satisfactory.

4.3 Standard 3: Student assessment

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

Findings

The programme examination and assessment rules are in line with the VU Amsterdam assessment policy and the Faculty of Social Sciences policies and guidelines. As has been said, the Faculty Examination Board has the responsibility to ensure the quality of examinations and assessments of the programmes of the Faculty, while the sub-committee of the Board oversees the examination and assessment procedures for this programme in particular.

The examination methods for the courses are selected in line with the courses' goals and contents. In most of the courses, multiple examinations are scheduled. The examination methods include multiple-choice examinations, written examinations with open-ended questions, take-home examinations, papers, essays, practical assignments and presentations. Written examinations are scheduled most in the first and second years. Formative examinations may be part of the courses. Plagiarism and fraud regulations have been implemented. The Examination Board handles cases.

The final project of the programme is the Bachelor thesis project. Projects cover the empirical cycle and include designing research, doing fieldwork and drafting the thesis. Although the Bachelor thesis itself is drafted individually, students may choose to do their research either in group or individually. Students are offered projects to work on in small groups of four students maximum. Students have to ask for explicit approval to do the research individually. Regular meetings are scheduled by student groups and between students and their supervisors to discuss the research done and the progress made. Bachelor theses are assessed by the supervisor and the second examiner independently. For their assessments, both examiners use scoring forms with assessment criteria. Examiners do not discuss their assessments. In case of differences in judgments of 2.0 points or more or in case of unsatisfactory grades, a third examiner will review the thesis as well. The final grade will be the result of this process. Regular meetings of student groups and supervisors prevent free-riding. Process criteria are part of the assessment, allowing to differentiate grades among group members.

Programme management and the Examination Board have taken measures to promote the validity, reliability and transparency of examinations and assessments, most measures being carried out by the Examination Board sub-committee. For the programme, the assessment plan has been drafted, specifying the intended learning outcomes, the course goals and the examination methods adopted as well as the relations of these. The Examination Board reviews the assessment plan. Examiners are appointed by the Board, being required to be PhDs and BKO-certified. Course dossiers have been compiled, documenting the courses, examinations and assessments. The course dossiers are inspected by the Examination Board Examinations including answer models are drafted by examiners and are peer-reviewed by fellow-examiners. Students are offered trial examinations and may inspect their work. The Examination Board reviews on a regular basis samples of course examinations and theses. The Examination Board handles individual requests of students as well as cases of fraud and plagiarism.

Considerations

The panel approves of the examinations and assessment rules and regulations of the programme, these being in line with Faculty policies. The panel welcomes the responsibilities and tasks of the Examination Board and finds that the Board, including the sub-committee for this programme, monitor the quality of examinations and assessments appropriately.

The panel approves of the examination methods adopted in the programme. These are consistent with the goals and contents of the courses.

The supervision processes for the Bachelor thesis projects are well-organised and intensive. Effective measures have been taken to counter free-riding in the group projects. The panel advises to keep both the individual and group options for Bachelor thesis projects open for students. The assessment processes for the projects are up to standard as well. The panel recommends to allow examiners to discuss their assessments of the Bachelor thesis projects in case of differing grades. The panel also suggest to narrow the margin of 2.0 points between the examiners' grades of the Bachelor thesis projects, before inviting the third examiner.

The panel considers the measures ensuring the validity, reliability and transparency of examinations and assessments to be up to standard.

Assessment of this standard

The considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 3, Student assessment, to be satisfactory.

4.4 Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

The panel reviewed 15 Bachelor theses of programme graduates of the last two years.

As has been mentioned above, students are introduced to the societal and professional relevance of anthropology and are informed about future career perspectives in the Applying Anthropology courses of the programme.

The majority of the programme graduates proceed to master programmes Anthropology, Sociology or Culture, Organisation and Management of VU Amsterdam. Only few students enter the labour market.

Considerations

The panel regards the Bachelor theses to be adequate academic projects. The panel appreciates the students being required to complete the empirical cycle. The panel supports the grades given by examiners of the programme, although the panel would have given somewhat lower grades for some of the theses. The panel advises to strengthen the theoretical dimensions of the analyses by students in the Bachelor thesis projects.

The panel appreciates the measures taken in the programme to promote the labour market orientation of students.

The panel regards the programme graduates to have reached the intended learning outcomes and to be qualified to enrol in master programmes or to enter the labour market.

Assessment of this standard

The considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 4, Achieved learning outcomes, to be satisfactory.

5. Overview of assessments

Standard	Assessment
Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes	Satisfactory
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	Satisfactory
Standard 3: Student assessment	Satisfactory
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	Satisfactory
Programme	Satisfactory

6. Recommendations

In this report, a number of recommendations by the panel have been listed. For the sake of clarity, these have been brought together below. These panel recommendations are the following.

- To articulate anthropological knowledge and skills more explicitly in the programme objectives.
- To organise the sixth and last semester of the curriculum more strictly as the preparation for the Bachelor thesis project.
- To maintain the system of individual guidance for students, in the face of rising student numbers.
- To keep both the individual and group options for Bachelor thesis projects open for students.
- To allow examiners to discuss their assessments of the Bachelor thesis projects in case of differing grades.
- To narrow the margin of 2.0 points between the examiners' grades of the Bachelor thesis projects, before inviting the third examiner.
- To strengthen the theoretical dimensions of the analyses by students in the Bachelor thesis projects.