

NVAO Initial Accreditation Assessment
International Business Innovation Studies - Inholland University
of Applied Sciences (003108)
Assessment of conditions

1. Introduction and Procedure

This report is issued by the panel appointed by NVAO to assess the conditions for initial accreditation of the professional bachelor programme International Business Innovation Studies (IBIS) submitted by the Inholland University of Applied Sciences (Inholland). The application concerns a four-year full-time programme leading to a Bachelor in Business Administration (BBA) degree.

At the end of 2013, the panel reviewed the information dossier and visited the programme at the Inholland campus in Amsterdam/Diemen. In its report to the NVAO of 13 January 2014, the panel indicated that the framework for the IBIS programme is in place as it can rely on centrally designed policies and procedures in so far as staff, facilities, services, tutoring, quality assurance and assessment are concerned. Moreover, the panel noted the extensive preparation undertaken until then by the development team with support of both in-house management and external professionals. As a result, most of the information on the objectives and curriculum was available and of acceptable quality. However, the panel also noted in December that two elements had not yet been sufficiently addressed: the so-called ‘customised programme’ covering the entire fourth semester of the programme and the envisaged study load of the respective course units. Moreover, the existing study manuals per course component required a considerable update before the start of the programme.

The panel therefore advised NVAO to take a positive conditional decision regarding the quality of the proposed IBIS programme. The NVAO followed this advice and issued the final decision on 28 March 2014 stating that the programme quality is assessed positively on condition that within six months, the applicant would (i) update the study manuals for all course units in year one, clarifying how learning objectives are linked to intended learning outcomes and how examiners assess that students have indeed reached the learning objectives; (ii) break down the envisaged study load for each course unit in year one; and (iii) develop an outline (content and structure) of the fourth semester, which consists of the study unit ‘customised programme’. Within three months, i.e. by the end of June 2014, the applicant

should provide NVAO with materials that demonstrate that the conditions are fulfilled. The panel in turn would verify by the end of July if the applicant has indeed met the conditions.

On 27 March 2014, a delegation of Inholland met at the NVAO in The Hague with the panel chair, as well as with the NVAO process coordinator and the secretary. The meeting was requested by Inholland to get clarification on the specific content of the three conditions and to ensure that the applicant understood what the IBIS programme is expected to deliver / demonstrate to NVAO by the end of June 2014. At this meeting, the applicant agreed to deliver the materials during the first half of June. This in turn would allow the panel to review the materials and report on its findings and considerations to the NVAO before summer break.

Inholland sent an electronic version of the materials on 5 June 2014. After an initial screening whether the provided documents were complete, the applicant provided NVAO with paper copies of the following materials:

- a note on IBIS programme developments between December 2013 and June 2014;
- study manuals on seven course units to be delivered in year one;
- assessment descriptions for the study units;
- a note on the assessment approach;
- a description of the so-called 'customised programme' in year 2, semester 2;
- materials on international partnerships;
- an overview of the teaching positions and qualifications;
- CV's of eight lecturers envisaged to teach the programme's key disciplines;
- the IBIS quality chart.

The information materials have been reviewed, discussed and assessed by the same panel, which performed the initial accreditation assessment. This panel of experts consists of:

- Drs. Dennis Richters, MBA, chair;
- Ir. Rolf Bossert, member;
- Drs. Gijs van Wulfen, MMC, member;
- Miss Florine Boeding, student-member.

On behalf of NVAO, drs. Niek Pronk was responsible for the coordination of the assessment process. The external secretary, Mark Delmartino, drafted the panel report in close cooperation with all panel members and in agreement with the chair.

The panel met on Wednesday 25 June 2014 in Utrecht. At the meeting the panel: (i) discussed the developments on the programme since the site visit in December 2013, (ii) exchanged general impressions on the additional information, (iii) formulated specific findings and considerations on each of the three conditions, and (iv) assessed the extent to which the three conditions have been fulfilled. After the meeting, the secretary drafted this report, which was circulated to the panel members for comments. Their feedback was integrated in a final

version of the report, which was validated by the chair on 1 July 2014 and submitted on behalf of the panel to NVAO.

2. Findings

General developments

In its cover note to the information materials, Inholland gives an overview of the developments on the IBIS programme since the panel's site visit on 4 December 2013. During the first half of 2014, the study units for year 1 have been further described and fine-tuned in the respective travel brochures, course materials have been developed, assessment matrices have been designed, and a detailed blueprint for the curriculum in year 2 was prepared. The panel notices that in terms of curriculum development, the programme is advancing according to what can be expected of a new programme that is scheduled to start in September 2014.

The applicant has also worked on the development of its company network: IBIS programme representatives visited companies and held information sessions on the aims and the delivery of the programme. Moreover, agreements were made with the professional field on how their representatives can contribute to the delivery of the programme. At the time of the site visit, the panel thought highly of the involvement and commitment of the professional field and is happy to read that their engagement is ongoing. The panel, moreover, acknowledges with sympathy the efforts of the programme to inform / look for new corporate stakeholders that are interested in / working on innovation.

In terms of marketing and recruitment, an international campaign was developed. It includes a dedicated IBIS programme site, participation in study fairs abroad and an information campaign for secondary schools, in particular international and bilingual schools in the Netherlands. An international recruitment team was set up to provide information to potential candidates and interview foreign candidates by skype. Until now, about 180 students from more than 30 countries have reportedly indicated an interest in IBIS. Just over half of these candidates are non-Dutch. According to the panel, the applicant has been successful in marketing the new programme. Moreover, this wide interest in the programme shows that IBIS is addressing a need among potential students both at home and abroad.

In so far as staff is concerned, Inholland developed the IBIS quality chart indicating the different types of expertise necessary to deliver the programme. As part of a major reorganisation of staff at Inholland, the programme identified among the existing staff a number of lecturers with appropriate expertise. Because there were no suitable internal candidates for the programme areas 'innovation and design thinking / concept development', external lecturers will be hired. The panel thought highly of the competencies and enthusiasm of the lecturers it spoke to during the site visit. Taking on board the information on the most recent developments in terms of staffing, the panel is convinced that the key programme areas

of the new IBIS curriculum will be delivered by lecturers with relevant know-how, didactic skills and exposure to the professional world.

Condition 1 – update of study manuals

The panel had noticed at the time of the site visit that the available information on the study units in year one was sufficient. However, the panel did not fully understand how the learning objectives of individual study units were linked to the intended learning outcomes and how examiners would assess that students had indeed reached the learning objectives. Already during the site visit, the panel recommended the programme to reformulate some of the materials and indicate clearly in the study manuals (the so-called ‘travel guides’) how learning outcomes, learning goals, study contents and assessment are intertwined. The NVAO agreed to the panel suggestion and made the approval of the new programme conditional upon updating the study manuals for all course units in year one. The programme should moreover clarify in these travel brochures how the learning objectives are linked to intended learning outcomes. As a separate exercise the programme should also demonstrate to the panel how examiners assess in the course units that students have indeed reached the learning objectives.

In order to demonstrate that this condition in the meantime has been fulfilled, Inholland submitted travel brochures on seven study units, as well as a description of the assessment approach for each of these seven units. Reviewing these materials, the panel noticed that the documents are much more comprehensive than the versions available during the site visit in December 2013. The travel brochure consists of a bullet-point overview of the study unit, as well as of texts describing why this study unit is included, what it is about, how it is organised, what will be the type of assessment and which criteria will be used for the examination. The study manual also provides information on the learning objectives of the study unit, as well as on the literature students are required or recommended to read. The panel also noticed that the travel brochures contain all the information that students need to have in order to be properly prepared for the assessment.

Whilst on the one hand applauding this comprehensiveness, the panel realised on the other hand that the study manuals in their current form are too comprehensive for students who may not read the documents and thus miss out on important information. The panel therefore suggests IBIS to also produce a brief (two-page) bullet-point fact-sheet on each study unit, much in line with what is now the overview section of the travel brochure but also covering the key information from the other sections.

Looking at the contents of the study manuals, the panel notices that study units on key aspects of innovation focus more on training analytical than creative skills. Moreover, the process of innovation management does not yet get the attention it deserves. It is obvious to the panel that a lot of effort has already gone into this programme, but that the heart of the curriculum is still under development. Or, to put it more differently: IBIS is already doing fine in terms of International, Business and Studies, but is not yet there in terms of Innovation.

As a separate document for each of the study units, the applicant provided a description of the assessment from the point of view of the lecturer. This document takes over the examination criteria of the study manuals and adds an assessment matrix, assessment rubric, assessment scoring form and a table with points and their corresponding grades. This type of information was not available to the same extent at the site visit and demonstrates according to the panel that the programme in the meantime has undertaken considerable work in this area and that study units, for which such descriptions are available, will be assessed properly.

Condition 2 – breakdown of study load

When designing the IBIS curriculum, the number of credits allocated to a given study unit was based on the amount of content to be covered and the number of activities to be undertaken to achieve the learning objectives. On this basis, the programme estimated the study load this would entail for students and translated this load into credits. In its report to the NVAO, the panel acknowledged that the IBIS programme itself and the study credits attached to the various elements of the programme were structured in such a way that students are able to meet the established statutory norms for study load. The panel also understood the reasoning of the programme with regard to allocating credits to study units. However, the descriptions in the programme-specific Tuition and Examination Regulations did not allow to establish why each of the study units had been allocated a particular number of credits. Following the suggestion of the panel, the NVAO made the approval of the programme subject to receiving a detailed breakdown of the envisaged study load for course units in year one. Per study unit, the study load should be broken down per type of activity, such as contact hours, pre-class preparation, assignments and exam preparation. Moreover, the breakdown should indicate specifically the study load foreseen in each course unit for studying the literature and the materials.

In order to demonstrate that this condition in the meantime has been fulfilled, Inholland submitted detailed indications on the study load as part of the seven travel brochures. This information is presented under the section ‘how is this study unit organised’. Students are briefed on the type of contact moments (plenary lectures, workshops, guest lectures, etc.), the class size and the literature that will be used. The total study load is calculated on the basis of 28 hours per credit and is broken down in a number of activities, such as active participation in workshops, active participation in guest lectures, reading/preparing for workshops/lectures, assignments, assessment preparation, etc. In a few cases, activities specific to one particular study unit are mentioned, such as coaching or company visits. The panel notices that the information provided is useful and clarifies a number of issues that were outstanding at the time of the site visit, notably the organisation of the individual study units, the amount of literature to be processed and the time students were supposed to dedicate on the different activities related to the respective study units. Before it was not possible – on the basis of the study manuals - to understand why a certain study unit had been allocated more or less credits. With the new travel brochures and their detailed section on how the course units are organised, this has all become much more clear.

Condition 3 – outline of ‘customised programme’

At the time of the site visit, the panel was particularly concerned about the lack of concrete information on the fourth semester, which it considered to be a blind spot of 30 credits in the curriculum. This study unit ‘customised programme’ was only described in terms of intentions, i.e. what students might do and which options they can choose from. The panel agreed with the intentions of the programme, but invited the applicant to develop this study unit indicating clearly for each of the options the contents, learning objectives and examination criteria. The programme should also describe how it will ensure the quality of the assessment and how it will verify that the various learning objectives have indeed been achieved. The NVAO followed the panel in its concern and made the approval of the programme depend on receiving an outline (content and structure) of the curriculum’s fourth semester.

In order to demonstrate that this condition in the meantime has been fulfilled, Inholland submitted the note ‘Negotiated curriculum year 2, semester 2’. In this document, the applicant describes the ‘customised programme’ in the wider context of the Negotiated Learning Units (NLU), i.e. study units across the four-year IBIS programme which students should take by choosing from a wide array of courses. The total package of NLU’s amounts to 60 credits, of which the customised programme covering the entire fourth semester represents the biggest chunk. Reviewing the document, the panel notices that the applicant has indeed provided an outline in terms of content and structure of the customised programme. Students can compose this programme by choosing one of four options: (i) stay at Inholland and choose NLU’s of the IBIS programme for 30 EC; (ii) go abroad and choose 30 EC of approved study units on offer in the partner institution; (iii) tailor a programme with study units offered by other Inholland programmes or other Dutch higher education institutions; (iv) perform an assignment or internship with an international organisation in the Netherlands. For each option, a few examples are given of what the student might do. Moreover, the panel learns from the document how the assessment of NLU (components) will be conducted. Finally, the note describes how students can get their programme approved and which criteria are taken into consideration for the justification and approval of the customised programme package. Because one of the options in this study unit is to study abroad for one semester, Inholland submitted additional documents describing its network of international partners/partnerships.

Looking at the contents of the document, in particular the examples provided by the applicant of what students may choose as part of their customised programme, the panel wondered whether each of the four options will be contributing to a similar extent to the overall intended learning outcomes. For example, the panel expects that the selection of IBIS NLUs presented under option one will probably bring less benefit to the student from a business innovation viewpoint than some of the examples given under the assignments/internship option four. Moreover, the panel expected more examples illustrating the opportunities students have to familiarise with aspects of innovation during the customised programme. In this respect, the panel acknowledges Inholland’s reference to partnerships being negotiated with foreign institutions, but would have appreciated receiving at least a few concrete examples of relevant

modules students could follow at one or two concrete institutions, even with the explicit caveat that agreements are not yet confirmed.

3. Considerations

Further to what is mentioned under each of the findings above, the panel considers that the applicant has provided materials which cover the topics under review. The information package contains clarifications and elaborations that give the panel a much better and more informed view of the IBIS programme in general and the contents of the study units in particular. In this respect, the IBIS programme has been making good progress over the past six months on those issues the panel considered insufficiently developed at the time of the site visit: the link between learning objectives per study unit and overall intended learning outcomes; the way teachers establish whether students have achieved the learning objectives; the activities per course unit and their respective study load; and the structure, process and contents of the customised programme.

Moreover, the panel notices that in the meantime other aspects of the programme have been elaborated, as well: the company network, the international partnerships and staffing are all issues that reportedly are under development and advancing well. The panel also took note of the big number of students potentially interested in signing up for the IBIS programme.

From a formal procedural point of view, the panel considers that Inholland has provided ample clarifications on the topics under review and, by doing so, has demonstrated that by now it fulfils the conditions set in the NVAO report.

However, looking at the contents of the materials provided, the panel has three concerns it wants to report, even if these considerations do not affect the overall positive outcome of this review exercise.

- First of all, the panel is concerned that the creativity component in the programme is not yet sufficiently developed. The current curriculum offers various ingredients on innovation but is still developing the part where one learns to cook the ingredients. This integration component is key for the understanding of innovation and deserves the programme's immediate attention.
- Secondly, the panel is surprised that (at least some of the options in) the customised programme is not so much about innovation but a rather generic set of modules to be found in any regular business management programme. The panel recommends the programme to check how this semester can be organised in such a way that all students – irrespective of the option they choose – are exposed to innovation and gain knowledge, skills and attitude on innovation during the customary programme.
- Finally, the panel considers the information on the international partnership network to be rather vague and wonders to what extent Inholland has already identified partner institutions abroad that effectively address business innovation. If IBIS wants to

organise relevant study periods abroad for its students, then it will need to find many different partners who can each host a limited number of IBIS students and offer these students a set of relevant modules.

4. Conclusion

Given these findings and considerations, the panel concludes that the information provided by the programme covers sufficiently the conditions set by the NVAO for a positive assessment. Therefore, the panel advises NVAO to take a positive decision on the quality of the proposed International Business Innovation Studies programme at Inholland University of Applied Sciences.

Notwithstanding this positive appreciation, the panel wants to have recorded for follow-up attention by future accreditation panels the three concerns it formulated above as part of its considerations.

The Hague, 3 July 2014

On behalf of the Initial Accreditation panel convened to assess the International Business Innovation Studies programme at Inholland University of Applied Sciences.

Drs. Dennis Righters, MBA
(chair)

Mark Delmartino, MA
(secretary)