

The logo for AeQui, featuring the letters 'AeQui' in a purple, sans-serif font. A light blue, brush-stroke-like line loops around the letters, starting from the 'A', passing under the 'e', looping around the 'Q', and ending under the 'i'.

AeQui

PO Box 5050

NL-3502 JB Utrecht

info@AeQui.nl

www.AeQui.nl

**Master of Arts in Interior Architecture
Maastricht Institute of Arts
Zuyd University of Applied Sciences**

*Report of the limited programme assessment
24 June 2021*

Utrecht, The Netherlands

October 2021

www.AeQui.nl

Assessment Agency for Higher Education

Colophon

Programme

Zuyd University of Applied Sciences

Master of Arts in Interior Architecture

Location: Maastricht

Mode of study: fulltime

Croho: 49238

Result of institutional assessment: positive

The assessment was conducted under responsibility of

AeQui Nederland

PO Box 5050

3502 JB Utrecht

The Netherlands

www.AeQui.nl

This document is best printed in duplex

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Summary

On 24 June 2021 an assessment committee of AeQui visited the Master programme Interior Architecture (MMIA) at the Academy of Architecture Maastricht / Maastricht Institute of the Arts of the Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. Since 2010 the international programme offers students a design research education at master level with research being at the service of design. Interior architecture students at Maastricht focus on the concept of 'place' and do so by paying attention to its manifestations through landscape, town and house. MMIA students demonstrate their end level competences via two interconnected deliverables of theoretical (thesis) and design research (anatomical model). For its assessment the committee has used the 2018 NVAO framework for limited programme assessment. It found the programme to meet all four NVAO standards. Its overall judgement on the quality of the MMIA programme is therefore **positive**.

Intended learning outcomes

As a Master in Interior Architecture, the programme in Maastricht has a clear, accurate and distinctive profile. Its exit qualifications are straightforward, operationalised meticulously and do justice to the national disciplinary guidelines and the MMIA profile. The intended learning outcomes are formulated in line with the domain, level and orientation of the programme. While the professional field is involved in validating the programme, the programme could do more to formalise their role and make their ambition more explicit. The focus on the border region between the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany constitutes an interesting unique selling proposition towards other master programmes in the Netherlands. The committee judges that the MMIA programme meets the standard.

Teaching-learning environment

The teaching and learning environment of the MMIA programme is adequate. The curriculum is coherent and reflects both the profile of the programme and the competences students are expected to achieve. The teaching staff is competent in both disciplinary and educational terms and committed to the programme and the students. The studio-based learning environment of the MMIA programme still constitutes a particularly attractive feature. The assessment committee supports the choice for an English language programme and welcomes the highly diverse student intake which allows for international and in-

tercultural interaction. The curriculum components, the studio-based education and the global student population all contribute to a particularly strong learning community where students also acquire competences through the hidden curriculum.

In terms of improvement, the English language skills of the teaching staff can be further improved; the number of hours for contact, supervision and guidance require some clarification for students, and the programme may do with some better-quality documentation in English towards (potential) students. The committee judges that the MMIA programme meets the standard.

Student assessment

The assessment system of MMIA aligns nicely with the profile, objectives and didactic approach of the programme. Its operationalisation in competence-based indicators is both comprehensive and robust. The evaluation form for the graduation project is extensive and adequate. The Board of Examiners fulfils its tasks in an independent and competent way.

For further improvement, the quality of feedback can be enhanced by providing students with straightforward indications on their progress towards achieving the competences, and by motivating more explicitly in the evaluation forms why a given thesis or anatomical model obtained a particular grade.

Achieved learning outcomes

The quality of the graduation projects is strong. Through the thesis and the anatomical model, students demonstrate that the programme delivers what it set out to do. The quality of the graduation projects makes it all the more important to keep track of MMIA's highly competent alumni. The committee judges that the MMIA programme meets the standard.

Recommendations

The assessment committee has issued a positive judgement on each standard and on the quality of the MMIA programme as a whole. In support of further development of the programme the committee makes the following suggestions:

- to enhance the involvement of the professional work field in setting the agenda for the programme;

- to clarify to students the number of hours for contact, supervision and guidance in the programme. Currently students indicate different expectations from how it is intended;
- to further enhance the English language skills of the teaching staff;
- to further improve the clarity of written feedback. This includes both explicitly motivating the grade, and providing students with more directly formulated feedback on their development;
- to strengthen the ties with alumni and involve them in (ensuring the quality of) the curriculum.

All standards of the NVAO assessment framework (2018) are assessed positively; the assessment committee therefore issues a **positive** recommendation for the accreditation of the MMIA programme.

On behalf of the entire assessment committee,
Utrecht, October 2021

Raoul van Aalst
Chair

Mark Delmartino
Secretary

Introduction

The Maastricht Master Interior Architecture (MMIA) is one of three programmes offered by the Academy of Architecture Maastricht (AAM) at the Maastricht Institute of Arts of Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. Since its start in 2010, the programme has been adjusted to national and international developments. Nowadays, MMIA is a small-scale full-time English-language programme of 120 ECTS featuring a local team of tutors and a selective and highly diverse group of about fifteen mostly international students per year. All AAM programmes share the didactic vision on inquisitive research-based design and an autobiographical approach to the themes of place, architectural conditions and materiality. The MMIA stands out among fellow interior architecture programmes in the Netherlands because of its focus on the concept of 'place' as the first step of research and design development and for its attention to developments in the border EU-region of the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium.

The institute

According to its website, Zuyd is an ambitious University of Applied Sciences located in the heart of Europe and focusing on three core activities: education for students, research for companies and institutes, and training courses and study programmes for professionals. Located in the cities of Heerlen, Sittard and Maastricht, Zuyd is strongly anchored in Limburg and the Euregio Meuse-Rhine. Overall, Zuyd features 14600 students, 47 degree programmes, 30 schools and about 1800 staff members.

The schools (sometimes called academies) form the connection between education, research, and practice. Schools either have a corresponding degree programme or a limited number of closely intertwined study programmes, like for instance the Academy of Architecture Maastricht (MAA). Together with the academies of Interdisciplinary Arts, Fine Arts and Design, and Media Design and Technology, the AAM constitutes the Maastricht Institute of Arts.

The three AAM programmes – BA in Architecture and Interior Design, MSc in Architecture and MA in Interior Architecture – are in dialogue with each other and based on a coherent didactic vision: the art of inquisitive research-based designs. Moreover, all programmes share an autobiographical approach to the themes of place, architectural conditions and materiality.

While the MMIA programme and its location go back a long time, the organisation and clustering of programmes at Zuyd are relatively new. From September 2019 all art education programmes are covered through two clusters: performing arts and visual arts, with the latter cluster operating under the name Maastricht Institute of Arts since the current academic year 2020-2021.

The programme

The Maastricht Master programme in Interior Architecture (MMIA) is a two-year fulltime English language programme of 120 ECTS that was offered for the first time in 2010-2011. Over the years it has been adjusted to the needs and the national and international changes in the profession. Following the Government's decision in 2015 that the registration in the register for architects is only possible for graduates with a master's degree, interior architecture has been given an equal position to architecture. Students with a relevant bachelor degree envisaging such registration can pursue a two-year Master of Arts in Interior Architecture, which is often offered by art education institutes.

There are several higher education institutions in the Netherlands that offer degree programmes in Interior Architecture. Compared to these programmes, the MMIA is particularly focused on the

concept of 'place': at MMIA students learn to understand place in all its manifestations, as the first step of research and design development. Moreover, MMIA is geographically closer to similar programmes in Germany (Düsseldorf, Aachen) and Belgium (Hasselt) than to its fellow (competitor) programmes in the Netherlands; hence its attention to developments in the EU-region.

The first year of MMIA focuses on themes including 'interior and landscape', 'interior and town', and 'interior and house' and starts from concrete settings in Maastricht, Liège and Aachen. In the second year, students write a thesis on a chosen topic that is connected to the anatomical model they produce; thesis and model together constitute the graduation project.

The assessment

Zuyd University of Applied Sciences assigned AeQui Nederland to perform a quality assessment of its Maastricht-based Master programme Interior Architecture (MMIA). In close co-operation with the programme management, AeQui convened an independent and competent assessment committee. A short CV of the committee members is provided in attachment 1. A preparatory meeting with representatives of the programme was held to exchange information and plan the date and programme of the site visit.

In the run-up to the site visit, the assessment committee studied the self-evaluation report on the programme and reviewed a sample of graduation products that had been accepted during the last two years. The findings of the report and the results of the review were discussed during an internal meeting of the assessment committee on 21 June 2021. The key findings of this meeting

served as input for the discussions during the visit.

The site visit was carried out on 24 June 2021 according to the programme presented in attachment 2. The visit took place in a hybrid format: the chair of the assessment committee, as well as most programme representatives were present on site at the Academy of Architecture in Maastricht, while the other panel members and a few interviewees participated online.

The committee has assessed the programme in an independent manner; at the end of the visit, the chair of the assessment committee presented the initial findings of the committee to representatives of the programme and the institution.

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

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

Initiated by the programme, a development dialogue will be planned in the latter half of 2021. The results of this development dialogue have no influence on the assessment presented in this report.

1. Intended learning outcomes

As a Master in Interior Architecture, the programme in Maastricht has a clear, accurate and distinctive profile. Its exit qualifications are straightforward, operationalised meticulously and do justice to the national disciplinary guidelines and the MMIA profile. The intended learning outcomes are formulated in line with the domain, level and orientation of the programme. The professional field is involved in validating the programme, but the programme could do more to formalise their role and make their ambition more explicit. The programme's focus on the border region between the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany constitutes an interesting unique selling proposition towards other master programmes in the Netherlands. According to the assessment committee, the MMIA programme **meets this standard**.

Findings

Profile

The assessment committee gathered from the extensive information materials – notably but not exclusively the MMIA Self-Evaluation Reflection on education – and the informative pitch of the programme director during the site visit that the Maastricht Academy of Architecture and the MMIA hold a specific viewpoint on Interior Architecture and on the Interior. All programmes in the Maastricht Academy of Architecture share an autobiographical approach to the themes of place, architectural conditions and materiality. The Interior seen and interpreted from perception is not a niche or nuance of architecture but an attitude (posture) towards the encompassing world in its various layers. Interior is viewed as the investigation of place as the driving force, of the physical and spatial relationships. Focusing on the concept of 'place', MMIA students learn to understand place in all its manifestations, as the first step of research and design development. The programme's primary focus is on research methods and on gaining knowledge in the complex layers of place and the substantial link of the gained knowledge to the strategic intention and architectural intervention. MMIA is both a research and a design programme with research being at the service of design. The assessment committee noticed that this vision on research and the discipline of interior architecture is effectively transposed to / translated in the programme: MMIA education is grounded in hermeneutical research, an approach that is based on spatial perception

and which ultimately leads to autobiographical graduation assignments.

With this profile, MMIA takes up a specific position within the Dutch higher education landscape of interior architecture. In this regard, the assessment committee appreciated the way in which the programme director emphasised the specificity of MMIA in relation to its fellow (competitor) programmes in the Netherlands: students interested in pursuing a master programme in Interior Architecture should come to Maastricht if they want to focus on both theory and design, and if they want to reflect theoretically on the work (anatomical model) they are designing. The committee understood from the discussions that the difference between architecture and interior architecture at AAM lays in MMIA's attention to sensory perception, the vicinity, the small-scale and the philosophical level, while the MSc Architecture covers more the architectural context.

Moreover, Maastricht is geographically more distant from its fellow Interior Architecture programmes in the Netherlands than from similar courses abroad, for instance in Aachen, Düsseldorf and Hasselt. The committee noticed that this location impacts on the orientation of the programme towards developments in the border (EU-)region of the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany and has a concrete bearing on the study assignments.

Finally, the committee learned that the MMIA programme director is a member of European Interior Educators. The presence and discussions at

European level are important to follow-up international developments, position the Interior Architecture strategically in and beyond the Netherlands, promote the specific MMIA approach, and set up transnational collaboration.

Intended learning outcomes

The assessment committee noticed that the specific programme profile of MMIA is situated within the Dutch education framework for interior architecture programmes. In terms of intended learning outcomes (ILO), MMIA reflects and incorporates the national guidelines issued by the *Overlegorgaan Beeldende Kunsten* (OBK). In addition to the eight nationally agreed exit qualifications of a master interior architecture, MMIA has formulated a ninth competence, perception and expression, to reflect its own specific profile. According to the committee, this additional competence – the student is able to design and present conclusions as an essential component of architectural design – constitutes a relevant addition for this particular MMIA programme.

Each of the nine competences are operationalised in sets of assessment criteria, which in turn are split in three groups: the first group of assessment criteria reflects the entrance level for the master programme, the second group describes the basic exit level of a master interior architecture, and the third group covers the specific qualification a MMIA student should display after having followed the master programme in interior architecture in Maastricht. The committee gathered from the extensive information that was added to the Self-Evaluation, such as the *Onderwijsbeleidsplan* MMIA and the *document Dublin Descriptoren* that there is a clear understanding of the terminology, as well as a strong alignment between the intended learning outcomes / competences at programme level and the learning goals at course level.

Moreover, the committee understood from the written materials and the discussions that the ILOs are in line with the internationally accepted Dublin descriptors at master level. It read in the

Dublin Descriptoren document that MMIA has operationalised the five descriptors in four so-called *periodeniveaus*, with the fourth and final stage reflecting the master level.

Similarly, the final competences of the MMIA programme reflect the requirements included in the Law on the registration for the profession. This means that students who successfully graduate from this programme are entitled to apply with the architects register and pursue a two-year internship as the third and final stage of their education. Given that many MMIA students do not pursue this registration but prefer to develop the substantive / theoretical / philosophical component of the programme, MMIA representatives were considering to offer two different graduation profiles with different learning outcomes. Given the title of the programme and the specific expectations a master programme in interior architecture entails, the assessment committee advised strongly against this plan.

Overall, the committee thought that both profile and ILOs were elaborated strongly. Although the overall rationale for the programme and its learning outcomes were described in English in the Self-Evaluation and the competences / assessment criteria were mentioned in the curriculum booklets, the panel wondered if the more extensive description in the above-mentioned policy documents / appendices was also available in English.

Professional field

The assessment committee spoke to the Academy Council, which functions as a committee representing the relevant (EU-)regional work field. According to the Self-Evaluation, it is an explicit objective of the programme to have its professional vision and competences recognised by this Academy Council. Furthermore, the committee noticed that the MMIA programme is also validated through the professionals who are involved as contract teachers in the curriculum.

The Academy Council consists of three members, who are based in Maastricht, Belgium and Germany. The representatives emphasised that students who graduate the programme have indeed achieved the ILOs and are ready to enter the market. This does not mean though that each graduate fully masters each and every technical tool; such instruments, which are useful in interior architecture offices, can be learnt during the placement or on the job. In fact, the Academy Council considers it a strong point of the MMIA programme that students are educated about architecture and trained to transform, not to merely fit, the market. Until now, the three council members mainly operated in an informal way and advised directly the programme director. The assessment committee agrees with the Academy Council that it would be good to extend their involvement to the teaching staff and the students.

Considerations

The assessment committee considers that the MMIA programme has a clear and accurate profile. Through this profile it distinguishes itself on the one hand from similar programmes in the Netherlands, but remains on the other hand within the Dutch professional and educational frameworks.

A similar appreciation applies to the exit qualifications: the nine competences are straightforward, operationalised meticulously and do justice to the OBK framework and the MMIA profile. According to the committee, the intended learning outcomes are formulated in line with the domain (interior architecture), level (master) and orientation (professional) of the programme.

While the professional field is involved in validating the programme, the committee considers that there is plenty of room to enhance this involvement by formalizing the operations of the Academy Council, by extending its membership to cover the entire spectrum of student / programme activities and by explicitly asking them to support the MMIA programme in developing its vision on the future, together with management, staff and students.

Finally, the assessment committee thinks that the programme's focus on the border region between the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany constitutes an interesting unique selling proposition towards other master programmes in the Netherlands.

According to the written materials and the discussions, this choice for an English-language programme relates to the programme aim to prepare students for an international career and to attract students from different countries and engage them in a debate on relevant concepts of interior architecture. The assessment committee understands and appreciates the rationale of the programme to offer an English-language programme. The assessment committee considers the English name for this English-language programme a consistent choice.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment committee establishes that the MMIA programme **meets standard 1, intended learning outcomes.**

2. Teaching-learning environment

The teaching and learning environment of the MMIA programme is adequate. The curriculum is coherent and reflects both the profile of the programme and the competences students are expected to achieve. The teaching staff is competent in both disciplinary and educational terms and committed to the programme and the students. The studio-based learning environment of the MMIA programme still constitutes a particularly attractive feature. The assessment committee supports the choice for an English language programme and welcomes the highly diverse student intake which allows for international and intercultural interaction. The curriculum components, the studio-based education and the global student population all contribute to a particularly strong learning community where students also acquire competences through the hidden curriculum. Taken together, these positive features warrant a satisfactory judgement on this standard.

In terms of improvement, the English language skills of the teaching staff can be further improved; the number of hours for contact, supervision and guidance require some clarification for students, and the programme may do with some better-quality documentation in English towards (potential) students. According to the assessment committee, the MMIA programme **meets this standard**.

Findings

Programme

The Maastricht master programme Interior Architecture offers students who are interested in combining research and design on the interior as the investigation of place, physical and spatial relationships a two-year fulltime programme. The curriculum consists of two years of 60 ECTS each. In the first year, students start with a four-week introduction on the theme landscape settlement. Its main aim is to bring all master students from both Architecture and Interior Architecture together and reflect on literature and architecture theory via a small assignment of notation and design. The core part of the first year consists of three MMIA projects that combine theory and design on the themes of landscape (the enclosed garden, in Maastricht), town (montage de Liège) and house (soup kitchen, in Aachen). In addition to working on assignments, students participate in subject specific skills training or workshops.

All four components are described in so-called booklets featuring the objectives of the course, the timing of sessions and deadlines, and the assessment criteria. The study credits are not linked to the individual components, but to student performance per semester. Throughout the semes-

ter, students are followed-up regularly and receive formative feedback, while at the end of each semester all teachers involved during that period discuss the student's essays (10 ECTS) and design work (20 ECTS) in terms of competence development. The second year is entirely dedicated to the graduation programme, which consists of a graduation proposal, graduation plan, research theory (thesis, 20 ECTS) and an interconnected research design (anatomical model, 40 ECTS).

The written materials and the discussions have provided the assessment committee with good arguments to establish that the programme constitutes a relevant operationalisation of the MMIA profile. In research and design assignments, learning takes place in a studio-like situation with a collaborative character. Learning on the basis of assignments has the character of learning on the basis of research and visual work, followed by tailor made feedback from the supervising team of teachers. Next to conducting products by using digital tools, the academy encourages students to make design sketches, drawings and models by hand. These sketches are considered as an expression of the students' own identity and handwriting just like working with (study) models. Both the curriculum components and the didactic ap-

proach ensure that students acquire an autobiographical approach to the themes of place, architectural conditions and materiality.

Furthermore, the assessment committee noticed that there is a clear link between the curriculum components and the competences students have to acquire throughout the programme and achieve at master level in the graduation project. For each part of the curriculum, the education team has indicated four ascending levels of knowledge and insight, which have been documented in a competence matrix and in the booklets. These levels provide teachers and students with a sense of what should be achieved within a project / semester. Moreover, the various curriculum components explicitly build on the knowledge and skills acquired in previous projects and thus entail an increase in complexity. In this regard, the assessment committee confirms that the curriculum builds up / contributes to students achieving the intended learning outcomes after two years.

The main teaching format is studio-based education; other methods include lectures, literature colloquia, workshops and excursions. The emphasis on studio-based education requires extensive group supervision and intensive personal guidance. According to the Self-Evaluation, there is 12 hours of supervision per group of approximately 15 students per week. Students are expected to participate in giving feedback on the work of their peers. While students overall appreciate the supervision and the guidance, several students were critical about the limited amount of personal supervision and guidance. The panel was informed that the total number of contact hours was way less than the twelve hours per week announced in the information materials. These contact hours would only be reached if students were to schedule their own activities in such a way that they could attend each and every feedback session a teacher has with a fellow student. As students tend to work on individual assignments, such feedback sessions are not always relevant for the entire cohort. A few students mentioned that the

limited individual guidance causes delay in finishing project components successfully and hinders them in completing the entire programme in time. According to the assessment panel, the MMIA programme could clarify the concepts of contact hours, (group) supervision and (personal) guidance. Moreover, it may want to investigate how to enhance the supervision and guidance in order to counter study delay.

The theoretical education is provided through literature research of primary and secondary sources and supported with instructions to evoke independent theoretical research. Students present the outcomes of their research and their handling of sources through essays, research papers and presentations. Students indicated to the assessment committee that they think highly of the way theoretical education is taught in the programme.

Finally, the assessment committee learned from both the written materials and the discussions with students and staff that the so-called hidden curriculum plays an important role in studio-based education: students and staff form a community in which students acquire knowledge and skills about topics without the education programme offering a scheduled training. This is due to a constant reflection on the potential of the projects and the individual variations on approaching them. The conversations with teachers and students contribute to the personal development thanks to the intimate studio setting and the personal approach of the academy. Unfortunately, the potential of the hidden curriculum and the opportunities for community building were considerably reduced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Language of instruction

The MMIA programme is offered in English and the title of the programme is also set in English. According to the written materials and the discussions, this choice for an English-language programme relates to the programme aim to prepare students for an international career and to attract

students from different countries and engage them in a debate on relevant concepts of interior architecture. The assessment committee understands and appreciates the rationale of the programme to offer an English-language programme. Moreover, the attractiveness of the programme to students also beyond Europe proves that the MMIA profile and curriculum accommodate for interactions between students from different national backgrounds and that their diverse traditions indeed enrich the education.

The committee noticed both during the discussions and when reading the written materials prepared by the programme that there is considerable room for improvement in the English language skills of some of the teachers of the programme team. Given the programme's international ambitions and global attractiveness, further investing in English language skills will surely benefit the programme.

Student intake

While there is a considerable interest in the programme, every year about 15 students are selected and eventually enrol. Although the programme strives for 40% of Dutch and 60% of international students, there has been a considerable unbalance over the past few years with the programme attracting mostly international students from both Europe and beyond, with roughly 10% of students being Dutch. The few Dutch students and alumni mostly obtained their bachelor at AAM and indicated that this study prepared them very well for MMIA. The programme management does not know why the programme does not attract more Dutch students but intends to market the programme and its profile more explicitly among bachelor students in interior architecture in the Netherlands.

Having established that the programme allows for international and intercultural interaction, the assessment committee understands - and welcomes - that the very limited presence of Dutch students impacts on the international students,

while the local students benefit from the variety and diversity of their international peers.

The assessment committee did notice though that the diversity of the student body is in stark contrast with the very local grounding of the teaching staff. The committee understands on the one hand that the programme sees itself as the mirror of its (EU-)region, while the students represent the world; on the other hand, however, the by now global student population in the programme deserves an education team with much more international exposure. Also, in this area, the assessment committee sees room for improvement. This development is all the more important given the comments in the student chapter, including one voice that was particularly critical about the programme and its different treatment of international students compared to local students who know the language and are familiar with the education culture. While this different treatment was not repeated during the site visit, several students did indicate that they had a hard time getting used to the Dutch system of education and its relatively egalitarian, non-hierarchical atmosphere among students and staff.

Staff

According to the Self-Evaluation the MMIA features 0.48 FTE of tenured teaching staff and 1.54 FTE of non-tenured staff; the overall workload is spread over 13 teachers, which means that most staff only have a limited appointment on the programme. The student-teacher ratio is 1 on 16.58. The committee gathered from the materials and the discussions that the number of teachers in regular employment has increased over the years, while the AAM allows for flexibility in hiring teaching staff to guarantee that non-salaried teachers provide up-to-date professional knowledge and experience.

Furthermore, the committee noticed that the programme relies considerably on the input of the programme director. Such reliance on / accumulation of responsibilities in one person makes the programme potentially vulnerable.

Overall, students were positive about the quality of the teachers in terms of disciplinary know-how and pedagogical skills. As mentioned before, some students found that the availability of teachers for supervision and guidance was rather limited, and less than they had expected. Moreover, students indicated that the type of feedback provided by the teachers could be more straightforward. The assessment committee shares the students' positive impressions of the quality of the teaching staff. In terms of availability and feedback, the committee suggests that the programme takes a clear stance and communicates its position unambiguously to all future and current students. According to the committee, the English language skills of the teaching staff needs attention and should be brought up to par where needed.

Facilities

The Academy of Architecture Maastricht is housed in the Maastricht Institute of Arts, in a building located in the centre of Maastricht. The education in the MMIA programme is studio based with all students working in connected studios that are part of *Woonhuis Victor de Stuers*, a building that is recognised as cultural heritage. The assessment committee understands that this location is particularly suitable for studio-based education and very attractive for both students and teachers.

The committee was informed that over the years, part of the location that belonged to the (predecessors of) AAM was given a different destination and that for instance the library in the building was removed. MMIA students now only have a small set of core literature available in the studio environment and make use of the library at the nearby Van Eyck Academy. According to the programme director, the space MMIA and other programmes at AAM had at disposition was reduced considerably; the studio and the technical workshop facilities have now reached the limit of what is feasible with the given number of students. The assessment committee shares the concern of the

programme that it is important to hold on to the accomplished quality and identity of MMIA and its studio-based education model, and therefore calls upon the institutional management to maintain this location and keep it in its current shape for the implementation of MMIA.

Furthermore, the committee thinks the MMIA would benefit from more cooperation with the Master in Architecture. Currently, both programmes have similar facilities within the same AAM building and share some components of their respective learning environments. According to the assessment committee, there is potential for more exchange and finetuning among these programmes in terms of curriculum, lunch lectures, knowledge sharing and theoretical underpinning of the disciplines.

COVID-19 pandemic

The assessment committee gathered from the written materials and the discussions that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on the MMIA programme in general, and on the delivery of its curriculum and organisation of its assessment in particular. While hybrid learning was introduced where possible, the specific teaching format of studio-based education with particular attention to community building and group/individual supervision could not be upheld and thus suffered enormously. Moreover, the dimensions of the studios did not meet the strict requirements imposed during the lockdown. Also in less strict periods, the studios could only be used by a limited number of students, while supervision and guidance were limited to one-on-one situations, excluding intersubjective teacher feedback and peer review. Similarly, excursions and lunch lectures were either suspended or organised in a different – digital – format. At the time of the site visit, students can work two days per week in the Academy while workshops are used on appointment. To expand the studio capacity additional space has been rented by the programme.

According to the committee, the detrimental effect of COVID-19 has been substantial in so far as the MMIA programme is concerned. While management, teachers and students have gone at lengths to mitigate the impact where possible, the assessment committee also noticed that this programme seems to have suffered more from the pandemic than some of the other interior architecture programmes and other academies in the Netherlands. Several particularly attractive features of the programme, such as its location, the studio-based environment, the attention to sketching skills and the intersubjective assessment were particularly hit by the lockdown and continued to suffer when the strictest measures were alleviated and there were opportunities for a partial reopening of the building. In this regard, the assessment committee invites the programme management to reflect how it could adjust (the organisation of) its programme to mitigate the effects of a similar crisis situation in the future.

Considerations

The assessment committee considers that the teaching and learning environment of the MMIA programme is adequate. The curriculum is coherent and reflects both the profile of the programme and the competences students are expected to achieve. The teaching staff is competent in both disciplinary and educational terms and committed to the programme and the students. Although Zuyd has reduced the facilities of

the programme and the academy, the studio-based learning environment of the MMIA programme still constitutes a particularly attractive feature, not in the least because of its location in a cultural heritage environment.

Furthermore, the committee supports the choice for an English language programme and welcomes the highly diverse student intake which allows for international and intercultural interaction. The curriculum components, the studio-based education and the global student population all contribute to a particularly strong learning community where students also acquire competences through the hidden curriculum.

In terms of improvement, the English language skills of the teaching staff needs attention; the number of hours for contact, supervision and guidance require some clarification for students, and the programme may do with some better-quality documentation in English towards (potential) students. In fact, the assessment committee found that the English language communication on the programme was not doing justice to the intrinsic quality of MMIA.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment committee concludes that the MMIA programme **meets standard 2, teaching-learning environment.**

3. Student assessment

The assessment system of MMIA aligns nicely with the profile, objectives and didactic approach of the programme. Its operationalisation in competence-based indicators is both comprehensive and robust. The evaluation form for the graduation project is extensive and adequate. The Board of Examiners fulfils its tasks in an independent and competent way. Taken together, these positive features warrant a satisfactory judgement on this standard. The committee advises the programme to enhance the quality of feedback in two ways: by providing students with straightforward indications on their progress towards achieving the competences, and by motivating more explicitly in the graduation project evaluation forms why a given thesis or anatomical model obtained a particular grade. According to the assessment committee, the MMIA programme **meets this standard**.

Findings

Assessment system

The assessment committee gathered on the basis of the written materials that the MMIA programme features a system of assessment that follows the provisions set by the Maastricht Academy of Architecture. The Self-Evaluation describes the key characteristics of this system, which is covered in full in the AAM *Toetsnota*. Assessment at MMIA aligns in terms of structure and content with the course learning goals, the programme competences and the forms of teaching. In the second year, students complete the programme with a graduation project in which they show that they have actually developed their competencies up to the level set in the intended final qualifications.

Assessment of courses and graduation project

At the end of the first and second semester, a summative assessment takes place that combines an essay with a practical exam and work evaluation. The assessment is competence-based and carried out by the teachers who were involved in the curriculum component. It results in a written assessment for each competence addressed in the period and culminates in a weighted average with the written assignment. In their feedback, teachers address the qualities of the project and provide advice for personal development. The assessment is intersubjective and agreement on the final grade is reached through discussion among

the teachers. According to the assessment committee, this assessment format aligns with the type of education provided and the profile of the programme.

The committee noticed furthermore that there is a clear link between the programme competences and the assessment criteria, and that the competences have been operationalised in detailed assessment criteria. This 'paperwork' according to the committee provides a robust basis for assessment. Students confirmed that assessment is taken very seriously and involves indeed the entire teaching team that was involved in the project / during the semester.

Several students remarked that the feedback – which forms a very important component of the assessment – is not always as straightforward as one would expect. In fact, students found it difficult that teachers did not always provide very direct feedback but instead required students to reflect on elements that were not up to par. On the one hand, the feedback received did not come out of the blue as there had been several sessions of feedback and guidance; on the other hand, students found it difficult that they only received guidance but no answers on their level of performance. In a few cases students reported that even the grades they got came as a surprise because the previous feedback was not sufficiently clear. According to the panel, there is definitely room to

improve the feedback part of the assessment system in the sense that students should be given clear and unambiguous directions as to whether they are on their way to passing an exam – or not. This is all the more important given the highly diverse group of students with different cultural backgrounds and sometimes very little familiarity with the Western / Dutch approach to assessment.

Furthermore, the assessment committee learned that the COVID-19 pandemic is having a considerable impact on the assessment of the first-year components: students and staff cannot meet in group and therefore the intersubjective component of the assessment, involving not only a team of teachers but also the cohort of students, cannot be realised as intended. As students cannot attend each other's feedback sessions and individual students meet with individual teachers rather than a full team, the quantity and variety of feedback is reduced. In such situations, according to the committee, a straightforward system of feedback is even more needed.

As part of the graduation project review, the assessment committee has looked into the accompanying evaluation forms. The assessment process involving a graduation committee as well as the evaluation criteria are described in the graduation project booklet. According to the assessment committee, this process is well defined and executed rather carefully. While students receive clear indications as to the level of achievement with regard to the individual competences, the committee found that the written feedback was more descriptive than analytical. While committee members thought that students overall had obtained the grade they deserved, it was not always clear from the narrative why the graduation committee thought the thesis or the anatomical model had deserved a particular grade. In this regard, the assessment committee sees room for sharpening the written feedback as a motivation for a particular grade.

Assuring the quality of assessment

The MMIA programme features a comprehensive system of quality management. In this system, the Board of Examiners monitors the quality of assessments and exams and guarantees that students who graduate have indeed achieved the end level competences. The assessment committee spoke to the three members of the Board of Examiners, who are responsible for all three programmes offered by the Maastricht Academy of Architecture. According to the assessment committee, the Board of Examiners fulfils its legal tasks in a correct and competent way. It gathered from the Board's annual report that the members only have a very limited appointment and that not all positions on the Board were always filled. Nonetheless, every year an action plan is drafted per programme, its implementation is followed-up throughout the year and reported on in the next annual report.

Both in its annual report and during the discussions, the Board of Examiners indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic required many adjustments to the assessment formats. The impact of the pandemic on both education and assessment has been considerable, leading among others to study delay and to postponing the final graduation of individual students. Nonetheless, the Board of Examiners emphasised that the quality of assessment could be assured throughout the pandemic.

Considerations

The assessment committee considers that the assessment system of MMIA aligns nicely with the profile, objectives and didactic approach of the programme. The competence-based assessment goes back a long time and its operationalisation in assessment indicators is both comprehensive and robust. The evaluation form for the graduation project is extensive and adequate. The Board of Examiners is small yet fulfils its tasks in an independent and competent way.

While the assessment indicators align well with the final competences at programme level, the assessment committee considers that the feedback component can be improved in both first-year components and the graduation project. According to the committee, there is definitely room for more directly formulated feedback that provides students with straightforward indications on their progress towards achieving the competences and successfully passing the respective curriculum components, including the graduation project. Moreover, the written feedback on the graduation project evaluation form was not al-

ways sufficiently analytic to make external reviewers understand why a given thesis or anatomical model obtained a particular grade. The committee therefore calls upon the programme management to enhance the quality of feedback and ask students regularly whether the quality has effectively improved.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment committee concludes that the MMIA programme **meets standard 3, student assessment.**

4. Achieved learning outcomes

The quality of the graduation projects is strong. Through the thesis and the anatomical model, students demonstrate that the programme delivers what it set out to do. The quality of these graduation projects makes it all the more important to keep track of MMIA's highly competent alumni. Hence, the advice to strengthen the ties with alumni, involve them more in the curriculum and in discussions on the future of MMIA and of the interior architecture profession. According to the assessment committee, the MMIA programme **meets this standard**.

Findings

Quality of graduation works

In order to establish whether students achieve the intended learning outcomes, the assessment committee has reviewed all 29 graduation projects from the academic years 2017-2018 until 2020-2021. The graduation project is a yearlong endeavour that consists of both theoretical and design research and culminates in a thesis and a so-called anatomical model. The committee noticed that the set-up of the graduation project is described in good detail in the MMIA graduation project booklet. It states among others that the key learning goal to be achieved is that students can define and research a topic and put forward and formulate a relevant research statement based on spatial, social and field-specific developments. Students should be able to translate this research statement into a concrete task and, based on that task, design a project and present it convincingly.

The assessment committee established that all final projects meet at least the minimum level of quality one could expect from a final product at master level, and very often go well beyond that level. The quality of the individual projects differed according to the committee yet followed the variety in grades provided by the graduation committee. Hence, the committee found that MMIA students who successfully pass the graduation project indeed live up to the expectations of the programme, i.e. that they have obtained an understanding of the various aspects of interior architecture as a discipline, as a profession and of

the body of knowledge. Students also demonstrated through the graduation projects that they can convert the acquired knowledge, skills and insights into a personal vision.

Further to what was mentioned on the quality of English in the programme, the language used in the graduation projects was certainly up to par. If anything, the committee did notice in a number of cases that the handwork, the making component, was not as strong as might be expected given the programme's emphasis on the anatomical model. Moreover, the overall level of handwork skills (*het handwerk ambacht*) was found to be less excellent as it was at the time of the previous accreditation visit in 2015. Apart from the individual skill level of the graduating students, this tendency may be caused by the limited access to workshops due to the COVID-19 pandemic and/or the reduced attention in the curriculum to manual skills.

Alumni

In addition to verifying the quality of the graduation projects, the professional performance of graduates is another way to establish whether students achieve the intended learning outcomes upon completion of the programme. According to the Self-Evaluation, alumni end up in various places in the design sector of the architectural domain: some become project designer in architectural offices, others take up advisory functions in policy bodies, move on to become independent designers, and still others make a career in education. While it did see lists of alumni per cohort, the assessment committee was not in a position

to link alumni to functions nor to establish which career developments are most frequent. Asked to clarify this finding, the programme director confirmed that there is only anecdotal evidence available on graduates for the moment, that much more information could be gathered on the whereabouts of alumni and that above all graduates / alumni could be involved much more actively in the MMIA curriculum and its quality assurance activities.

Considerations

The assessment committee considers that the quality of the graduation projects is strong. Through the thesis and the anatomical model, students demonstrate that the programme delivers what it set out to do: as part of a university of applied sciences, the MMIA programme combines both the scientific and the applied part. The phenomenology comes in both theory and

model. Students are taught to make, think, reflect and loop those activities together.

The quality of the graduation projects makes it all the more important to keep track of MMIA's highly competent alumni. According to the assessment committee, the programme can do a lot more to strengthen the ties with its alumni – and understood from the discussions that it has the intention to do so. Hence the committee's advice to involve alumni more in the curriculum and in discussing together with internal and external stakeholders the future of the programme and the profession of interior architecture.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment committee concludes that the MMIA programme **meets standard 4, achieved learning outcomes.**

Attachments

Attachment 1 Assessment committee

Raoul van Aalst, chair

Raoul studied business economics at Groningen University. He has a long track record in quality of education, as student representative, part-time lecturer at the university, and chair of accreditation panels.

Eireen Schreurs, member

Eireen is an architect at SUBoffice architects; she teaches at TU Delft and St. Lucas Ghent, and is PhD fellow at KU Leuven with a dissertation on Material Culture.

Wim van den Bergh, member

Wim is an architect and professor at the RWTH Aachen where he holds the chair for Housing and Design.

Maarten Peels, student-member

Maarten is master student Philosophy and Public Administration at Utrecht University and member of his programme's Education Committee.

The panel was supported by **Mark Delmartino**, external NVAO-certified secretary

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

Attachment 2 Programme of the assessment

Thursday 24 June 2021

- 09.00 Welcome
- 09.15 Pitch – introduction to Master Interior Architecture
- 10.15 Session with students and alumni
- 10.30 Session with teaching staff MIA
- 12.30 Open consultation & lunch
- 13.45 Session on assurance of assessment quality
- 14.30 Session with representatives of the professional field
- 15.15 Session with programme management
- 16.15 Internal panel meeting (findings, considerations, judgement)
- 17.15 Feedback on preliminary findings of the panel
- 18.00 End of online visit

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

Attachment 3 Documents

Information materials

Self-Evaluation. Reflection on Education Master of Arts in Interior Architecture 2021.

Additional information

- Presentation pitch
- Folder Academy of Architecture Maastricht
- Student Chapter
- Beroepsbeeld Interieurarchitectuur. Ruimte voor verdieping
- MMIA Onderwijsbeleidsplan
- Dublin Descriptors / competencies / niveaubeelden
- Opleidingsbrochure MIA
- Curriculum matrix
- Curriculum MIA 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021
- MIA literature list
- Education booklets
- Booklet Settlement 2020-2021
- Booklet Landscape 2020-2021
- Booklet Town 2020-2021
- Booklet House 2020-2021
- Booklet Construct 2020-2021
- Education and Examination Regulations 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021
- Overview teaching staff (CVs)
- MIA student-teacher ratio
- Leden Academieraad MIA
- Academie overleg
- Management team overleg
- Leden Werkveldcommissie MIA
- Studieloopbaanbegeleiding
- Handboek Kwaliteitszorg Zuyd
- Booklet Quality management
- AAM toetsnota
- Annual reports Board of Examiners 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2019-2020
- Transcript of records
- Afstudeerhandleiding MIA
- Graduation projects
- Alumni overzicht
- Scriptieprijswinnaars 2018 & 2019

Graduation projects

The assessment committee has studied the graduation products and their assessment of 15 students who graduated the programme in 2019 and 2020. A list with student numbers is available at AeQui.