



PO Box5050  
NL-3502 JB Utrecht  
+31 30 87 820 87  
[www.AeQui.nl](http://www.AeQui.nl)  
[info@AeQui.nl](mailto:info@AeQui.nl)

**M International Communication Management  
The Hague University of Applied Sciences**

*Report of the limited programme assessment  
21 January 2022*

Utrecht, The Netherlands  
February 2022  
[www.AeQui.nl](http://www.AeQui.nl)  
*Assessment Agency for Higher Education*

## Colophon

### Programme

The Hague University of Applied Sciences  
Master International Communication Management  
Location: The Hague  
Mode of study: fulltime and parttime  
Croho: 70016  
Result of institutional assessment: positive with conditions

### Panel

Raoul van Aalst, chair  
Jan van den Hoff, domain expert  
Anne-Marie Cotton, domain expert  
Margarida Jardim, student  
Marianne van der Weiden, secretary

The panel was presented to the NVAO for approval.

The assessment was conducted under responsibility of:

AeQui VBI  
P.O. Box 5050  
3502 JB Utrecht  
The Netherlands  
[www.AeQui.nl](http://www.AeQui.nl)

*This document is best printed in duplex*

## Table of contents

Colophon .....	2
Table of contents .....	3
Summary .....	4
Introduction .....	6
Intended learning outcomes .....	8
Teaching-learning environment.....	10
Assessment.....	14
Achieved learning outcomes.....	16
Attachments.....	19
Attachment 1 Assessment committee.....	20
Attachment 2 Programme of the assessment.....	21
Attachment 3 Documents .....	22

## Summary

On 21 January 2022 an assessment panel of AeQui visited the Master programme International Communication Management at The Hague University of Applied Sciences. The committee judges that the programme meets each standard; the overall quality of the programme **meets the standard**.

The 60 EC programme is offered to both fulltime and parttime students. Fulltime students complete the curriculum in one year, parttime students do so in two years. The programme prepares international students for managerial or consultancy positions in various communication fields, with companies and organisations that operate in international contexts and environments.

### Intended learning outcomes

MICM has formulated appropriate intended learning outcomes to express what they expect of their graduates as professionals in international communication management. The panel confirms that the link to national and international frameworks guarantees the master's level. MICM's cross-cultural orientation is a strong point. The programme uses input from the Advisory Board and other stakeholders to keep up to date with current trends in the professional field. Since the previous accreditation, MICM has sharpened its profile. The panel appreciates this and advises to take further steps in the chosen direction with the involvement of all lecturers and the Advisory Board. Especially the relationship between communication and marketing and the role of management in communication needs clarification. The assessment panel assesses that the intended learning outcomes **meet the standard**.

### Teaching-learning environment

The curriculum is coherent and offers students suitable possibilities to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Students learn to apply relevant theoretical knowledge to several domains of international communication, and develop their professional, personal and research skills in two parallel learning lines. The final period is devoted to a thesis project. More hands-on activities would increase the applicability of the programme and are the wish of students and alumni. Students experience a safe learning environment, both in class and in the learning communities. They consider the cross-cultural environment inspiring and feel respected and encouraged to express themselves. The panel advises MICM to consolidate the implementation of the HILL teaching method and develop the feedback culture that is an integral part of this method. The

panel agrees that English as the working language is a logical choice, given the international nature of the programme and the range of international students and staff, and appreciates the linguistic entrance level has been upgraded. The programme was able to respond to the COVID-19 situation and to adapt the course format to meet the new circumstances. The intake and selection procedure is well-considered and results in a good match between students and programme. Because of the decline in student numbers, the panel encourages the programme to step up its recruitment efforts, using the network of alumni, the recommendations of the Advisory Board and the resources of the Graduate School. The teaching staff is qualified and committed. Communication between staff and students is open. Student facilities, services and information are good: students are well taken care of and recognise this as a strong point of the programme. The assessment panel assesses that the teaching-learning environment **meets the standard**.

### Assessment

The programme has an adequate assessment system, based on the vision that assessment is an integral part of a student's learning process. The panel finds that assessments are geared at the appropriate master level and that validity, reliability and transparency are sufficiently ensured, but that further improvements are possible. Assessment methods are suitable, but do not show much variety. The Examination Board and its assessment committee play a proactive role and have provided the programme manager and lecturers with good advice, based on the issues they encountered in their regular check of assessment portfolios. All lecturers have now received proper training in assessment and are BKE-qualified (BKE Basiskwalificatie Examinering, Basic

Qualification in Assessment). Internal workshops, e.g. on how to give constructive feedback on assessments and theses, have already been organised and should be continued. The panel assesses that the student assessment system **meets the standard**.

#### **Achieved learning outcomes**

Students do applied research and write a master thesis to show that they have achieved the intended learning outcomes. The panel studied a sample of fifteen theses of the last three years and is satisfied that they are at master's level. The panel advises to strengthen their link to the programme's characteristics (professional orientation, focus on cross-cultural communication) and to improve the quality of written feedback, to emphasise that the thesis is not only an assessment, but also a learning experience. Alumni look back on their master's programme with appreciation and acknowledge the added value of the MICM programme for their careers. The panel assesses that the achieved learning outcomes **meet the standard**.

All standards of the NVAO assessment framework are assessed positively; the assessment panel therefore awards a positive recommendation for the accreditation of the programme, for both study modes.

On behalf of the entire assessment panel,  
Utrecht, February 2022

R.R. van Aalst,  
Chair

#### **Recommendations**

The programme meets the criteria for accreditation. To support the programme in its further improvement, the panel formulates the following recommendations:

- Organise team sessions to (1) sharpen the programme's profile, (2) support the implementation of the HILL teaching method and specifically strengthen the feedback culture as part of it, (3) increase awareness of assessment issues such as variety of assessment forms, assessment criteria and quality of feedback;
- Reinforce the applicability of the programme by offering students more opportunities for practical and hands-on experiences;
- Step up the recruitment efforts, using the network of alumni, the recommendations of the Advisory Board and the resources of the Graduate School;
- Link the theses more strongly to the programme's characteristics (professional orientation, focus on cross-cultural communication);
- Improve the quality of written feedback on the theses and give more guidance to students in methodology and writing skills.

M.J.H. van der Weiden,  
Secretary

## Introduction

This report describes the outcome of the evaluation of the master's programme International Communication Management of The Hague University of Applied Sciences, on 21 January 2022. The Hague University of Applied Sciences (further: THUAS) offers a wide range of associate degree, bachelor's, post-bachelor's and master's programmes. The Master International Communication Management (further: MICM) can be completed in one year (fulltime) or in two years (parttime). It provides international professionals with the theory, skills and competences they will need to succeed on a managerial level within the communication fields of their choice.

### The institute

THUAS is a university of applied sciences, located in The Hague, Delft and Zoetermeer, and rooted in its environment, collaborating with partners to solve social issues and to work towards a smart and economically strong region. THUAS aims to educate students to become qualified, independent professionals on the job market and responsible citizens in a globalising society. The current student population comprises almost 26,000 students from more than 140 different countries. Programmes are organised in seven disciplinary Faculties, while the post-bachelor's and master's programmes are also part of The Hague Graduate School. MICM is embedded in the Faculty of Management & Organisation and organised by The Hague Graduate School. Applied research and innovation projects will be organised in seven Centres of Expertise.

### The programme

MICM is a 60 EC programme. Students can choose for the two-year parttime or the one-year fulltime curriculum. They develop their knowledge and skills in a range of modules, such as Media Relations, Crisis Communication and Brand Management. Parallel to the seven modules (35 EC in total), the programme offers two learning lines: Communication Research & Methodology and Personal Development & Professional Skills (5 EC each). The last period is fully dedicated to the master thesis (15 EC).

The programme attracts applicants with at least two years of relevant working experience. The maximum number of students per group (fulltime

and parttime) is 20 to 25. The programme is taught in English, because of its international orientation, attracting students from many different countries and preparing them for the international communication management professional practice.

The teaching staff consists of nine lecturers, four of whom have a PhD and five have a master's degree. They represent a wide range of experience in professional practice. Over the past two years, lecturers have represented seven nationalities and a cross-section of cultures as diverse as the students they teach. This reinforces the international and intercultural perspectives in the field of communication.

### The assessment

THUAS assigned AeQui to perform a quality assessment of its Master International Communication Management. In close co-operation with the programme management, AeQui convened an independent and competent assessment panel. 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 panel has studied the self-evaluation report on the programme and reviewed the graduation projects accepted during the last three years. The findings of the report and the results of the review of graduation projects were input for discussions during the visit.

The site visit was carried out online on 21 January 2022 according to the programme presented in attachment 2. The panel agreed unanimously to the online procedure. Both the preparatory meeting of the assessment panel and the discussions with representatives of the programme did not, in terms of substance, deviate from an onsite procedure. It gave the panel a good insight into the quality of the programme.

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

At the end of the visit, the chair of the assessment panel presented the initial findings of the panel to representatives of the programme and the institution.

In this document, the panel 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 course of 2022. The results of this development dialogue have no influence on the assessment presented in this report.

## Intended learning outcomes

MICM has formulated appropriate intended learning outcomes to express what they expect of their graduates as professionals in international communication management. The link to national and international frameworks guarantees the master's level. MICM's cross-cultural orientation is a strong point. The programme uses input from the Advisory Board and other stakeholders to keep up to date with current trends in the professional field. Since the previous accreditation, MICM has sharpened its profile. The panel appreciates this and advises to take further steps in the chosen direction with the involvement of all lecturers and the Advisory Board. Especially the relationship between communication and marketing and the role of management in communication needs clarification. The assessment panel assesses that the intended learning outcomes **meet the standard**.

### Findings

MICM aims to educate students into competent and effective specialists in strategic communication, with an emphasis on international and cross-cultural communication and management. Graduates have learnt to do applied research and developed their personal and professional skills. MICM has defined its profile into six core competencies (intercultural communication, analysis, advice, design, management and decision-making) and specified these into the programme's intended learning outcomes. These are further specified for each module and described in the module handbooks. Internationalisation, research and master level competences are specifically emphasised. The panel recognises that the intended learning outcomes are aligned with the professional qualifications identified by Logeion (Dutch Association for Communications Professionals) and the core principles of IABC (International Association for Business Communicators), as well as with the requirements for a master's level as indicated in the Dublin Descriptors, NLQF level 7 and the Standard for Master Programmes adopted by the Association of Universities of Applied Sciences.

Since the previous accreditation in 2016, MICM has formulated a new mission statement that ties in with the THUAS mission of global citizenship, and sharpened its profile, emphasising its Unique Selling Points (USPs), i.e. the focus on manage-

ment and the international and intercultural classroom. Students and alumni confirmed during the site visit that the cross-cultural dimension of the programme is MICM's strongest USP. They also mentioned the location of The Hague as a point in favour of MICM. Matrices now show the linkages between the intended learning outcomes at programme and module level and the various indicators (Logeion, IABC, Dublin Descriptors, NLQF). The programme plans a benchmarking exercise with the international market in 2022. The panel appreciates that the programme has taken these important steps in an uncertain period with the recent transition to a different Faculty and new management.

On the basis of the documentation and the discussions during the site visit the panel thinks that further steps are possible and necessary to strengthen both mission and profile: the relationship between communication, marketing and management is not always clear; alumni and students feel that the practical applicability of the communication competencies could be emphasised more strongly; the role of research and the master thesis has historically grown but could be revisited; and new views on the importance of stakeholder engagement in communication, put forward by the Advisory Board, should be taken into account. The panel feels that it is important that not the matrices as such are used by staff (ticking the boxes), but that the thoughts behind the framework are internalised and are used to



make a better programme, e.g., by organising joint discussions and workshops. This might even lead to a simplification and reduction of the matrices.

The programme regularly updates its contents, following developments in the professional field: trends indicated by Logeion and IABC are discussed in the curriculum committee and with stakeholders. The panel thinks that the IABC reference frame could be made more visible in the implementation of the programme, e.g. the professional categories and steps based on the four IABC profiles in their career roadmap (foundation, generalist/specialist, strategic advisor, business leader). The panel appreciates the role of the Advisory Board in keeping the programme up to date. Since November 2021, its membership has been renewed and now has a broad representation of relevant categories, such as professional field, academia and alumni. In its discussion with this Board, the panel found that the Board is well aware of current trends and how these could be reflected in MICM.

### Considerations

The assessment panel considers that the intended learning outcomes match the professional qualification frameworks and the requirements of the

international field. The programme is defined at master's level. Its international and cross-cultural orientation is a strong point. The panel notes that MICM has elaborated its profile since the previous accreditation, but advises to take this further: especially the relationship between communication and marketing and the role of management in communication needs clarification. A benchmark with the educational profile developed by LOCO (Landelijk Overleg Communicatie Opleidingen, National Coordination of Communication Programmes) could be helpful. Based on the improvements that have already been started, and the open atmosphere in the discussions during the site visit, the panel is confident that suggestions, also from the Advisory Board, will be taken seriously. After the transition period with its changes in management, MICM is ready for further development.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment panel establishes that the intended learning outcomes **meet the standard**. This applies to both study modes.

## Teaching-learning environment

The curriculum is coherent and offers students appropriate possibilities to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Students learn to apply relevant theoretical knowledge to several domains of international communication, and develop their professional, personal and research skills in two parallel learning lines. The final period is devoted to a thesis project. More hands-on activities would increase the applicability of the programme and are the wish of students and alumni. Students experience a safe learning environment, both in class and in the learning communities. They consider the cross-cultural environment inspiring and feel respected and encouraged to express themselves. The panel advises MICM to consolidate the implementation of the HILL teaching method and develop the feedback culture that is an integral part of this method. The panel agrees that English as the working language is a logical choice, given the international nature of the programme and the range of international students and staff, and appreciates the linguistic entrance level has been upgraded. The programme was able to respond to the COVID-19 situation and to adapt the course format to meet the new circumstances. The intake and selection procedure is well-considered and results in a good match between students and programme. Because of the decline in student numbers, the panel encourages the programme to step up its recruitment efforts, using the network of alumni, the recommendations of the Advisory Board and the resources of the Graduate School. The teaching staff is qualified and committed. Communication between staff and students is open. Student facilities, services and information are good: students are well taken care of and recognise this as a strong point of the programme. The assessment panel assesses that the teaching-learning environment **meets the standard**.

### Findings

MICM is offered as a fulltime (1 year) and parttime (2 years) programme of 60 EC. Students complete seven module (5 EC each) on a range of topics: corporate communication, cross-cultural communication, internal communication, media relations, crisis communication, brand management and social media. Two vertical learning lines run parallel to these modules: communication research & methodology, and personal development & professional skills. The last period is devoted to the master thesis (15 EC).

### Orientation

MICM is a professional master, aimed at international students with a minimum of two years' relevant work experience. Both students and alumni confirm that the programme has a professional orientation and introduces relevant case studies and simulations in the classes. The students especially value how lecturers make use of the rich variety of student backgrounds and stimulate students to exchange experiences. Nevertheless, students and alumni told the panel that they would

welcome more hand-on experience. They feel that some lecturers focus less on the applicability of what they teach and could include stronger links with real-life companies and organisations, e.g., through study visits, 'shadowing' a professional in his/her work environment, guest lectures or an internship.

The panel appreciates that the two vertical learning lines enable the students to develop both their professional skills and their research capabilities. In the master thesis students must show that they are able to combine relevant theory with empirical field research and to reach relevant conclusions and recommendations for a client. The panel will discuss the thesis in more detail in the chapter on standard 4. Currently, links with the THUAS knowledge centre on Global Governance are being strengthened and, as of this year, students will be given the opportunity to work with researchers on their thesis.

### *Contents*

The MICM curriculum is coherent and well-considered. Students are gradually confronted with more complexity and recognize that their teachers invest in building a logical programme rather than a set of separate modules. The first course in the programme is the module on Cross-cultural communication. This module is much appreciated by the students because it sets the scene and helps to create an environment where experiences can be shared safely in such an international and intercultural group. The knowledge and skills in each module are derived from the programme's Body of Knowledge and Skills (BoKS). The panel has studied the module outlines and confirms the students' positive view on the build-up of the programme.

The programme management mentioned that being part of the Graduate School with other international master programme creates the possibility of increasing the range of courses, e.g., by offering modules as electives to each other's students. The panel agrees that this is an interesting option, offering a more personalised learning path to the students. Exchanging modules across programmes makes it more difficult to vary the number of EC within MICM, although this in itself could be advantageous, allowing for larger learning units.

### *Structure*

MICM strives for an activating, challenging and studyable programme. For this purpose, the programme has introduced the HILL model (High Impact Learning that Lasts) as its teaching method, and learning communities where small groups of 3-4 students can develop new perspectives through interaction with each other. Peer review and collective learning are part of the learning communities and students explicitly appreciate the peer-to-peer opportunity these learning communities are offering. Teaching methods are seminars, guest lectures, workshops, student presentations and online activities (web lectures, webinars and consultation hours). The panel rec-

ognises the carefully built teaching-learning environment and notes with appreciation that it makes students feel respected and encouraged to express themselves. The attention to acquire time-management skills is mentioned explicitly by students as very helpful both during their studies and for their future career.

The panel agrees that HILL is a viable choice and deserves further implementation, especially to strengthen the feedback culture that is meant to go with it. The safe study environment is a fertile soil for this. Workshops and training sessions for teachers on feedback and assessment have taken place in spring-summer 2021. The panel advises that these be continued to emphasise the importance of feedback and also provide a platform for exchange and calibration. This will help teachers to develop ways to using feedback sessions in class as moments of learning, and spread the example set by individual teachers.

### *Recent developments*

In 2020 and 2021 the programme was offered online for a larger part. At first, teachers had to adjust their pedagogic and didactical strategies and students encountered problems in gathering data for assignments and the thesis project. For most students the programme proved solid, but a number of parttime students requested a deviation from the original assessment schedule from the Examination Board. When physical attendance was again possible, teachers used their experience with online teaching to expand the blended learning environment, combining online, onsite and practical learning activities. The quality of the learning environment as well as the wellbeing of students was monitored. The programme manager was the first point of contact for students. The fact that in the past two years study visits and guest lectures were offered online may have diminished for students the "external" perception of getting insights from a "real" practitioner and have increased their need of stronger links with real-life companies and organisations.

### *Incoming students*

Students have to meet a number of requirements to be admitted to the programme: a recognised bachelor degree, a minimum of two years relevant work experience, English proficiency, and a match with the MICM profile. All admissible candidates are invited for a face-to-face (online or in The Hague) intake interview with the programme manager to investigate if there is a good match between the candidate and the programme's profile and objectives. The entry requirements regarding the relevance of the applicant's work experience and the level of English proficiency have been raised since 2019, following the advice of the previous accreditation panel. This has resulted in a more cohesive group of students, but also in a decrease of intake numbers, especially for the parttime programme. The panel agrees that raising the entry requirements was a good step, and that efforts to attract more student are now in order, using the international and cross-cultural classroom and the location of The Hague as USPs. Plans have been made, involving the Graduate School and alumni.

When the student is accepted, the admission/administrative offices arrange and discuss finances, visa, housing and other logistics. Before the start of the programme, students meet each other and the school via an introduction week. Students commend the programme for these services: they feel welcome and supported.

### *Staff*

The information dossier shows the qualifications of teaching team members in terms of academic degree, professional experience, didactic expertise and nationality. The number of lecturers with a PhD has increased substantially over the past few years (from 14 to 44%). The management aims for a further increase to 50% and a stronger involvement in research of all lecturers. All members are qualified didactically, including the basic qualification on assessment (BKE, Basiskwalificatie Examinering). Students are positive about their teachers, not only in terms of substance, but especially for their openness and approachability. If

they have questions, e.g., on the feedback they received, they feel no hesitation to contact their teacher for more information or a discussion. The panel feels that the intercultural competences of the staff and their sensibility to working in an international environment are generally satisfactory, but could be improved and could then lead to more culturally diverse teaching material (e.g. literature, case studies, simulations, etc.). Since a great number of academic papers are open sourced nowadays and published in English, also by colleagues from non-Anglo-Saxon countries, a broader range of academic literature would allow to add more cross-cultural approaches to the content.

The self-evaluation report mentions the intention to strengthen the involvement of lecturers in the development of the programme, coordinated by the curriculum committee. The panel advises to use such staff meetings to sharpen the MICM profile (see standard 1) and exchange experiences with the HILL model in order to enrich the feedback culture, as mentioned above.

### *Language*

The programme runs in English because of its international orientation. Both students and lecturers come from countries in almost all continents. The panel agrees that international and intercultural perspectives in the field of communication are reinforced when the staff is international, and confirms that all are fluent in English.

### *Infrastructure*

MICM is housed in the Poseidon building of THUAS. Sufficient facilities for online and offline teaching are available. The services provided by the admission/administration offices are commendable.

### *Tutoring and student information*

The students have regular meetings with the programme manager who also serves as a counsellor and a mentor for some, and are being supervised in their thesis research by one of the lecturers. Group coaching takes place during the Personal

Leadership and Professional Skills module. Besides classes, the programme manager is always available for specific questions or appointments. The small group size of both the lecturing team and the student cohorts encourage an informal culture and short lines of communication. The panel credits MICM for the attention to the students' personal development.

Students are well-informed about the programme and what is expected from them, starting with the orientation week at the beginning of the programme, and sustained by module descriptions, study guide, timetables, assignments with assessment criteria and deadlines at the beginning of each quarter. Students can find all programme related information on Blackboard, and assessment results in Osiris.

### Considerations

Considering what the panel read before and heard during the site visit, it is convinced that MICM offers its students a coherent curriculum, with adequately balanced attention for theoretical background, research capabilities and professional and personal development. Students value the cross-cultural learning environment and the learning communities. The panel considers it a

strong point that students feel stimulated to share experiences with their lecturers and peers. Students and alumni would welcome a stronger emphasis, however, on the applicability of what they learn. The panel recommends offering more opportunities for practical and hands-on experiences by organising stronger links with real-life companies and organisations. The intake procedure succeeds in admitting students who are able and committed to complete the programme. The panel encourages the programme to step up its recruitment efforts, using the network of alumni and the resources of the Graduate School. The lecturers are qualified and committed to teach in the programme and their communication with students is open and constructive. Adopting the HILL method is a good choice. The panel advises strengthening the exchange and calibration within the teaching team about the full implementation of this concept, including the concomitant feedback culture.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment panel establishes that the programme **meets this standard**. This applies to both study modes.

## Assessment

The programme has an adequate assessment system, based on the vision that assessment is an integral part of a student's learning process. The panel finds that assessments are geared at the appropriate master level and that validity, reliability and transparency are sufficiently ensured, but that further improvements are possible. Assessment methods are suitable, but do not show much variety. The Examination Board and its assessment committee play a proactive role and have provided the programme manager and lecturers with good advice, based on the issues they encountered in their regular check of assessment portfolios. All lecturers have now received proper training in assessment and are BKE-qualified. Internal workshops, e.g. on how to give constructive feedback on assessments and theses, have already been organised and should be continued. The panel assesses that the student assessment system **meets the standard**.

### Findings

MICM considers assessment as an integral part of a student's learning process and uses a combination of formative and summative tests. Assessments are designed to reflect the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy (analysing, evaluating and creating knowledge) and in line with the programme's didactical principles (activating, challenging). MICM uses a matrix to demonstrate that all intended learning outcomes are assessed in the modules and the thesis.

Assessment methods include case studies, written examinations, research papers, presentations and group assignments. The panel agrees that these are suitable ways of assessment, but notes that there is not much variety across modules. It appears that, in the past, lecturers were not aware of their colleagues' practices, but have spent team sessions since then to discuss them. The panel advises to continue organising team sessions to exchange practices and to look for ways to increase the range of methods, including a more extended use of formative assessments.

To safeguard validity and reliability of assessment MICM ensures that all intended learning outcomes at programme and module level are covered by assignments and exams (checked against the assessment matrix) and are assessed multiple times. Module outlines and assessments are checked by a qualified examiner and the programme manager (four-eyes principle). This ex-

aminer's approval is needed before module outline and assessment are included in the module's assessment portfolio and are posted on Blackboard and made available for students. Students are informed about the assessment methods and criteria two weeks in advance of a module.

The Examination Board and its assessment committee play a proactive role in safeguarding the final level of the degree and the quality of assessments. The Examination Board acts as a critical friend and coach in the programme and advises on regulations. The division of roles between management (organising assessment) and Examination Board (safeguarding quality) is clear for all concerned and works well, the panel heard. The management has realised that all lecturers now hold a BKE, following the Examinations Board's advice. The assessment committee screens the assessment portfolios three times each year, checking if they meet all criteria, reports its (positive as well as negative) findings to the Examination Board, and gives feedback and advice to the programme manager and lecturers. The following year they check if improvements have been made. The Examination Board observed during the site visit that the programme has made a big step forward in the past few years.

The panel recognises a number of issues mentioned by the Examination Board in its 2020 annual report, such as the quality and length of written feedback especially on thesis work, and the implementation of the four-eyes principle. The

thesis is marked by two examiners who both sign the assessment form, but the panel advises to also write down what their discussion was before they agreed on the grade and thus to increase the traceability of comments to improve student's work. The panel also concurs with the Examination Board that more extensive feedback on the thesis is important: the thesis is not only an end product but should also be seen as a step in a student's career and lifelong learning. Feedback and feedforward are tools to help students in continuing their path. The Examination Board's advice led to a workshop for the team of lecturers on how to write constructive feedback. The panel supports such initiatives.

#### **Considerations**

The panel considers that the programme has an adequate and well-organised assessment system, with possibilities for further improvement. The proactive way in which the Examination Board and the assessment committee fulfil their role is commendable. The panel is convinced that following the Examination Board's advice will benefit

the quality of the MICM assessment system. Conditions, such as a clear division of roles and responsibilities between management and Examination Board and assessment qualifications (BKE) for all lecturers, are favourable. The most important items on the agenda are the general quality of feedback (see also standard 2) and especially the written feedback on the thesis, including positive and formative comments. The panel believes that within a small teaching team, as in MICM, it is possible and important to sit together and exchange views, practices and experiences, on various issues such as variety of assessment forms, assessment criteria and quality of feedback. Workshops with the teaching team have already been organised and deserve continuation.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment panel establishes that the programme **meets this standard**. This applies to both study modes.

## Achieved learning outcomes

Students do applied research and write a master thesis to show that they have achieved the intended learning outcomes. The panel studied a sample of fifteen theses of the last three years and is satisfied that they are at master's level. The panel advises to strengthen their link to the programme's characteristics (professional orientation, focus on cross-cultural communication) and to improve the quality of written feedback, to emphasise that the thesis is not only an assessment, but also a learning experience. Alumni look back on their master's programme with appreciation and acknowledge the added value of the MICM programme for their careers. The panel assesses that the achieved learning outcomes **meet the standard**.

### Findings

Students use the last part of their study programme to demonstrate their ability to individually conduct an applied research project, write a master thesis and defend it. They are allowed to start their research when they have successfully completed the previous modules. The thesis manual specifies the criteria that students will be evaluated on in their thesis, and the rules and regulations concerning the requirements and grading. The thesis coordinator assigns a suitable thesis supervisor, in close liaison with the programme manager. Theses are assessed by two examiners: a first examiner (initially the second reader during the research process) and a second examiner (the supervisor). At least one of the examiners must have a PhD degree. Both examiners must agree on the grade (90% of the final mark) before a student is allowed to proceed to the presentation and oral defence (10% of the final mark).

The Examination Board takes an active role in safeguarding the master level and the assessment quality of the theses. Each year, a sample of theses is reviewed by the assessment committee. In addition, external reviews are organised annually by the programme manager and the Examination Board. Results are discussed with the programme manager and the written report is communicated with the lecturers who act as supervisor and the thesis coordinator. In 2021 two calibration sessions with colleagues from the Hanze University of Applied Sciences were added to this external review, and this will be continued annually, due to mutual satisfaction. The panel commends the programme for this calibration initiative.

In preparation of the site visit, the panel studied a sample of fifteen theses submitted by fulltime and parttime students who started their studies in 2018, 2019 or 2020. The panel considers that the work of these fifteen students generally reflects the intended master level, although in one case this was doubtful. The panel found its doubts reflected in the critical feedback provided by the examiners. Overall, the panel agrees with the marking and feedback from the examiners. The panel feels that the quality of written feedback on theses can be improved and brought in line with the desired feedback culture, giving students not only feedback but also feedforward before they leave the programme and continue their career. The panel advises examiners to motivate why they are giving a certain grade, why it is not higher or lower, so that students can understand it and use the feedback for further learning.

In a few theses the focus was not clearly on the domain of communication, but more on marketing. The panel feels this is related to the issue of profile clarity, as mentioned in standard 1. It also struck the panel that the theses do not fully reflect the strengths and uniqueness of the programme: the emphasis is on research and much less on the other elements of the profile. The panel understands that the focus on research and writing a master thesis can be traced to the wish to explicitly show the master's level of graduates, but over the past years, universities of applied sciences and professional master programmes have found ways to design a final assignment with stronger links to the professional practice, such as a design



or advice, based on research. The panel advises the programme to investigate such possibilities for MICM. The panel also advises to guide and correct the students more strongly in methodology and language, and to increase the range of methodology from an almost exclusive focus on management and business to communication methodology as well.

Alumni look back on their master's programme with appreciation, as was apparent from the documentation and from the panel's conversation with alumni. They acknowledge the added value of the MICM programme for their careers. They all work in communication positions and quite a few of them have made a promotion soon after graduation. The self-evaluation report mentions that some graduates have gone on to further studies and have enrolled in a PhD programme.

#### **Considerations**

The panel is satisfied with the overall level of the graduates' final theses. It is evident that they are

at the intended master's level, but the panel advises to strengthen the link to the programme's characteristics (professional orientation, focus on cross-cultural communication). The quality of written feedback on the theses should be improved, to emphasise that the thesis is not only an assessment, but also a learning experience. The panel also advises to guide students more strongly in methodology and language. Alumni appreciate the programme as helpful to gain a good position in the field of communication. The panel concludes that the overall level of the theses, combined with the positive evaluation of alumni, shows the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment panel establishes that the programme **meets this standard**. This applies to both study modes.



## Attachments

## Attachment 1 Assessment committee

De heer drs. R. (Raoul) van Aalst, voorzitter  
Zelfstandig adviseur en organisatiefilosoof

Mevrouw dr. A.M. (Anne-Marie) Cotton  
Lector aan de Arteveldehogeschool, opleiding Communicatiemanagement en coördinator van het Europees netwerk MARPE

De heer drs. J.H. (Jan) van den Hoff  
Hogeschool Utrecht, Programma Manager nieuw curriculum opleiding Communicatie

Mevrouw M. (Margarida) Jardim BA  
Student M International Communication Hanzehogeschool Groningen

Het panel werd ondersteund door mevrouw dr. M. (Marianne) van der Weiden, gecertificeerd secretaris.

## Attachment 2 Programme of the assessment

Friday 21 February 2022 (online)

<u>Time</u>	<u>Meeting</u>
08:00-09:00	Welcome and preparation of panel
09:00-09:45	Dean and Programme Management
10:00-11:00	Lecturers
11:15-12:00	Students
12:00-13:00	Lunch break
13:00-13:30	Panel preparation
13:30-14:15	Alumni
14:30-15:15	Examination Board and Assessment Committee
15:30-16:15	Advisory Board
16:15-16:45	Pending issues
16:45-17:30	Deliberation panel
17:30-18:00	Initial feedback panel

## Attachment 3 Documents

- Self-evaluation report
- Theses of 15 students
- Appendices to the self-evaluation report:
  - 0. Characteristics of the programme
    - 0.1. Vision on learning in a master programme
  - 1. End qualifications
    - 1.1. MICM competency framework
    - 1.2. MICM Competency matrix – Dublin Descriptors and NLQF 7
    - 1.3. MICM Programme Framework
    - 1.4. Programme evaluations
    - 1.5. Module outlines including assessments
  - 2. Programme
    - 2.1. Assessment within the master programmes THGS
    - 2.2. PER/OER MICM
    - 2.3. Facilities for students with a disability
    - 2.4. MICM Body of Knowledge and Skills (BoKS)
    - 2.5. List of literature used in the programme
    - 2.6. Minutes of lecturers meetings
    - 2.7. Minutes of Advisory Board
    - 2.8. Minutes calibration with Hanze University of Applied Sciences
    - 2.9. Minutes calibration THGS
    - 2.10. Intake procedure
    - 2.11. Schedule 2021-2022
    - 2.12. Schedule introduction week 2021-2022
    - 2.13. Minutes of Programme Committee (OC)
    - 2.14. NSE evaluations
    - 2.15. Minutes of Curriculum Committee
  - 3. Faculty
    - 3.1. Overview of lecturers
    - 3.2. Profile of lecturers
  - 4. Facilities
    - 4.1. Student statutes/guidelines THUAS
    - 4.2. Thesis manual 2021 – 2022
    - 4.3. Bright Future Scholarship (BFS)
  - 5. Assessment and final level
    - 5.1. Annual report Examination Board 2020-2021
    - 5.2. Minutes Assessment Committee
    - 5.3. Minutes of review master theses (Examination Board and External)
    - 5.4. Overview of graduates of last two cohorts