



**Human Geography and Planning
University of Groningen**

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info@academion.nl

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Summary

Between 19 and 22 May 2025, an independent peer review panel visited the University of Groningen to assess eight bachelor and master programmes as part of the cluster assessment WO Sociale Geografie en Planologie (Human Geography and Planning). This report addresses the panel's assessment of seven programmes at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences in Groningen; the programme offered at Campus Fryslân in Leeuwarden is presented in a separate report. The panel established that the seven programmes under review all meet the four NVAO standards: intended learning outcomes, teaching-learning environment, assessment, and achieved learning outcomes. As a result, the panel's overall assessment of the BSc Human Geography and Planning, the BSc Spatial Planning and Design, the MSc Economic Geography, the MSc Environmental and Infrastructure Planning, the MSc Population Studies, the MSc Real Estate Studies, and the MSc Society, Sustainability and Planning is **positive**.

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The seven degree programmes each have a clear and carefully delineated profile that aligns with the vision, mission and profile of both the Faculty of Spatial Sciences (FSS) and the University of Groningen. This profile is also known to students, who often made a very conscious choice to come to Groningen and enrol for one or the other FSS programme. The learning outcomes of the programmes are formulated adequately and reflect their substance, level and orientation. The respective end qualifications befit the programme profile and cover both the scientific and professional requirements of the domain. Moreover, there are links to the professional field at all levels of the faculty, which also receives strategic input from a long-standing Advisory Council. In this way, not only the academic but also the professional relevance of the degree programmes is safeguarded. Nonetheless, the panel suggests to establish grass-roots oriented advisory bodies per degree programme (cluster), featuring alumni and other representatives from the professional field who together cover the breadth of the respective programme domain(s). Furthermore, the written materials and the discussions on site have illustrated convincingly that both FSS and its degree programmes pay particular attention to continuous evaluation and improvement. According to the panel, this signals a quality culture that is broadly shared by all stakeholders and interviewees, and visible in the systematic consideration and concrete follow-up of recommendations from both internal and external bodies.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The seven programmes operate in a robust teaching and learning environment. The curriculum contents are interesting for students and do justice to the profile of the respective programmes. Since the previous accreditation, each programme has altered several elements and these changes have invariably been for the better. Long-standing components and newly developed courses are accounted for in programme Assessment Plans which ensure that the organization and the delivery of the respective curricula allow students to achieve the programme learning outcomes. Moreover, the learning environment befits the vision on education of the faculty and responds to the needs of national and international, bachelor and master students. Hence, students benefit from good quality information and can rely on a comprehensive system of academic and personal guidance and support. If anything, individual programmes and services may want to pay extra attention to the situation of international students, notably those entering a master programme and are less familiar than their fellow students with the education culture in the Netherlands and in Groningen. Each programme offers its education in an international classroom setting that caters to the different cultural and geographical perspectives of its students. Acknowledging the value added of this approach, the panel sees room across programmes for a stronger underpinning of - and a better connection between - the contents and the didactics of the international classroom. Intake figures vary and fluctuate almost on a yearly basis but are monitored closely and analysed by the programme teams. This also holds

for the success rates, which overall tend to be and demonstrate that the respective curricula are feasible. Across programmes, dedicated and enthusiastic teaching and service staff are an important asset: they are praised for their know-how and expertise, open to improvement and innovation, and committed to go the extra mile for their students. Furthermore, the panel endorses the English name of the degree programmes, as well as the decision to offer the BSc Spatial Planning and Design, the BSc Human Geography and Planning, the MSc Economic Geography, the MSc Environmental and Infrastructure Planning, the MSc Population Studies, the MSc Society, Sustainability and Planning, and the MSc Real Estate Studies in English. According to the panel, the international dimension in each programme enriches the teaching and learning environment for both Dutch and non-Dutch students.

Standard 3. Student assessment

Each programme relies on a qualitative system of assessment that is embedded in long-standing policies and practices of the faculty and the university. The operationalization of the assessment principles at course level reflects the respective profiles and objectives of the programmes, while the assessment plans safeguard that course learning objectives are assessed adequately and cover the programme learning outcomes. Each programme features a good mixture of individual and group assignments, written exams, and formative and summative evaluations that are distributed in a balanced way across the courses. Hence, the panel established that course assessment is properly organised in each programme. In addition, the quality assurance system for assessment is both comprehensive and effective. The panel commends the Board of Examiners for its expertise and pro-active commitment. Since the previous accreditation, faculty and programmes have produced new, relevant and user-friendly thesis assessment formats, which are very similar for the bachelor and the master thesis. The panel thinks highly of the coordination of the thesis process and its assessment procedures among the two bachelor programmes, and between the five master programmes. The panel's thesis review demonstrated that the final scores of assessors and panel members are often very close to one another and that the new form proved its worth in almost all cases. Nonetheless, the review also showed some flaws in the administrative part of the thesis assessment: this concerned notably the substantiation of grades - how the scoring and weighing of subgrades relate to the final grades - and the role of the second examiner in establishing the final grade. Although these elements were most apparent in the bachelor SPD, they also appeared in other programmes. The thesis assessment plan which the faculty outlined following the discussion on site constitutes a good basis for implementation across programmes in 2025-2026, as well as for evaluation and follow-up by the Board of Examiners in 2026-2027.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

Each programme assesses the intended learning outcomes in a systematic way. The panel's thesis review showed that across programmes graduation projects are of adequate to good quality and that students invariably deserve to pass. Hence it is fair to conclude that students who graduate one of the FSS programmes under review have effectively demonstrated the programme learning outcomes. In so far as follow-up career steps are concerned, hardly any bachelor graduate at FSS proceeds right-away to the labour market because almost all relevant positions in the human geography / spatial planning domain require a master's degree. The two bachelor programmes, however, should be commended to include labour market preparation and professional relations in their curriculum. Graduates from the five master programmes tend to quickly find a job in line with their domain and their level of study. The written materials, the labour market data, and the testimonies of alumni on site demonstrate according to the panel that studying at FSS in Groningen constitutes a very good lever for a follow-up master study and a relevant position on the labour market. As a point for attention in the future, faculty and degree programmes may want to trace more systematically their alumni, and collect data on their professional whereabouts and the factors that helped or hindered their employment.

BSc Human Geography and Planning

The Bachelor of Science (BSc) Human Geography and Planning (HGP) is a three-year full-time degree taught in English. The programme at FSS is unique in the Netherlands because of its international classroom, its fieldwork in all three years, and its courses on demography and physical geography. The courses are connected through three pathways: People & Place, Planning, and Research. The programme team is commended for its efforts since the previous accreditation visit to consolidate this curriculum structure, the courses and their contents. As a point for attention, the BSc HGP could articulate the role of planning in human geography: the P in HGP is integrated in the design of the programme, but deserves elaboration in course contents and assignments. The thesis review showed that all graduation projects were of sufficient quality and had been assessed in an insightful way. While HGP theses address societally relevant topics, some research questions were quite broad and could focus more on geography.

BSc Spatial Planning and Design

The BSc Spatial Planning and Design (SPD) is a three-year full-time degree taught in English. The programme stands out for its exclusive focus on spatial planning, its attention to water, infrastructure and environment challenges, and its combination of spatial and institutional design. Since the previous accreditation, the curriculum has been adjusted, translating among others the BSc SPD profile in four curriculum learning pathways. The current build-up is clear, logical and coherent; by strengthening academic research, students are now better prepared for the bachelor thesis. The BSc SPD will emphasise its design-led planning component in a dedicated learning pathway. Acknowledging that design-led planning is a strong selling point, the panel advises to substantiate the learning pathway further from an institutional lens. The thesis review showed that almost all graduation projects were of sufficient quality and that many theses had been assessed in an insightful way. Nonetheless, most of the critical findings regarding thesis assessment were applicable to the BSc SPD. The improvements outlined in the thesis assessment plan gives the panel the confidence that its findings have been picked up and that the proposed measures will enhance the BSc SPD thesis assessment process.

MSc Economic Geography

The MSc Economic Geography (EG) is a one-year full-time degree taught in English. Since the previous accreditation, the programme features two tracks: Regional Competitiveness and Trade, and Sustainable Rural Futures. The MSc EG at FSS is distinctive in its emphasis on fairness, inclusion and well-being beyond economic growth. The profile and tracks reflect the research strengths of the faculty, and its focus on socio-economic disparities and sustainability resonates with societal debates and challenges. Although it is too early to assess the relevance of the new set-up, the curricula of the core programme and the two tracks look coherent. The thesis review showed that all graduation projects were of sufficient quality and had mostly been assessed in an insightful way. While the panel was overall pleased with the quality of the research question, the literature review, the methods section and the level of English, some discussion and conclusion sections were rather short, and the use of cartographic materials was not always appropriate.

MSc Environment, Infrastructure and Planning

The MSc in Environmental and Infrastructure Planning (EIP) is a one-year full-time degree taught in English. The programme stands out for its specific focus on water, infrastructure and environmental planning issues in relation to (institutional) design and policy innovation. The curriculum set-up is clear and coherent, aligns well with the programme profile, and makes a good link to the prospective labour market. The thesis review showed that EIP students reached a high to very high level in their research work, while graduation projects had often been assessed in an insightful way. As some theses covered unexpected topics, it might be good to clarify the substantive elements an EIP master thesis should contain.

MSc Population Studies

The MSc in Population Studies (PS) is a one-year full-time degree taught in English. The programme is unique in the Netherlands as it is fully dedicated to demography, and stands out for its combination of perspectives from different disciplines, cultures and methods. Since the previous accreditation, the curriculum was redesigned considerably and now combines theme-based, method-based and project-based courses. The panel agrees with students and staff that the changes are clearly for the better. MSc PS students are diverse in nationality, (academic) culture and educational background; quite a few (international) students follow a dual degree variant. Acknowledging that diversity is a particular strength, it also constitutes a challenge to design courses that cater for the diverse needs of students. The thesis review showed that all graduation projects were of sufficient quality and had mostly been assessed in an insightful way. PS graduates tend to do very well on the labour market, which is linked in part to the targeted professionalisation activities of the programme team during the study.

MSc Real Estate Studies

The MSc in Real Estate Studies (RES) is a one-year full-time degree taught in English. It is the only full-time academic programme in the Netherlands with a professional accreditation from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS). Since the previous accreditation, both the programme learning outcomes and the curriculum were revised to better reflect the RES profile. The result is a balanced programme that is aligned with industry, has a solid structure and allows students to apply the acquired knowledge in practice. The MSc RES identified several cross-cutting themes which are important to the domain of real estate studies and align with the research interests of FSS. While mentioned in the materials, it was not always clear how these topics were integrated in the curriculum. Their operationalisation deserves attention, notably in so far as business/professional ethics, research ethics, and ethical reflection on the real estate sector is concerned. The thesis review showed that all graduation projects were of sufficient quality and had all been assessed in an insightful way. This result constitutes a net improvement compared to the previous accreditation visit.

MSc Society, Sustainability and Planning

The MSc in Society, Sustainability and Planning (SSP) is a one-year full-time degree taught in English. It stands out in the Dutch and European higher education landscape for its specific focus on people as sources of knowledge, as co-creators and as end-users. It addresses not only the human experience of places, but also the intervention and policy perspectives needed to transform places in line with sustainability and spatial justice goals. Since the previous accreditation, the programme changed name, and adjusted its learning outcomes and curriculum accordingly. The panel welcomes the MSc SSP 'new style' as a very relevant, attractive and societally pressing programme. The thesis review showed that all graduation projects were of sufficient quality and had often been assessed in an insightful way.

Dual degree variants

Four master programmes – the MSc EG, the MSc EIP, the MSc PS and the MSc SSP – offer at least one dual degree variant where FSS students combine their one-year master programme in Groningen with another master programme at a higher education institution abroad. Some of the - currently 11 - variants go back a long time and attract a good number of students, while others are relatively new and have not yet resulted in dual degree graduates. The panel established that these dual degrees have been prepared meticulously and that the "Groningen" part of the dual degrees fulfils the same quality requirements as the single degrees at FSS. The panel revised a total of 10 graduation projects from dual degree students. These final products fulfilled the same requirements as 'regular' FSS master theses, were assessed according to the same thesis evaluation form, and were quality controlled by the FSS Board of Examiners. The thesis review showed that

dual degree students invariably delivered similar good quality projects and demonstrated the same end level qualifications.

Recommendations

The panel identified for each programme a few points for development, as well as a few issues that apply to all programmes. Hence, the panel recommends:

All programmes

- to establish grass-roots oriented advisory bodies per degree programme (cluster);
- to connect more strongly the contents and didactics of the International Classroom;
- to implement, monitor and evaluate the actions outlined in the thesis assessment plan:
 - set minimum requirements for some essential assessment criteria;
 - operationalize the criteria that assess the components 'presentation' and 'peer review';
 - clarify in writing the grading procedure for second examiners;
 - set clear conditions and a timeline for the thesis resit.

BSc HGP

- to articulate the role of Planning in the programme;
- to agree on common expectations regarding the emphasis on geography, on the breadth of the topic, and the use of AI in the bachelor thesis;
- to ensure that GIS and statistics are covered throughout the curriculum;
- to pay more explicit attention to the practical and professional dimension of course topics;
- to pay attention in the thesis 'course' to formulating research questions.

BSc SPD

- to promote its distinctive character more explicitly in its communications;
- to substantiate the design-led planning learning pathway, setting realistic expectations for students, teachers and future employers;
- to strengthen the teaching of digital skills in class;
- to pay attention in the thesis 'course' to the discussion and conclusion sections, as well as to the use of cartographic materials.

MSc EG

- to pay attention in the thesis 'course' to the discussion and conclusion sections, as well as to the use of cartographic materials.

MSc EIP

- to substantiate the new Designing Spatial Transformations track, and evaluate its roll-out;
- to provide targeted support for international students on both course and career preparation;
- to set clear guidelines on the EIP elements a master thesis should certainly contain to fulfil both thesis learning goals and programme learning outcomes.

MSc PS

- to accommodate the needs and wants of its diverse student audience in the respective courses;
- to pay attention in the thesis 'course' to formulating research questions;
- to clarify the geographical/spatial component in the thesis.

MSc RES

- to promote the RICS quality mark in communication to applicants and students;
- to give a more prominently visible position to all cross-cutting themes in the curriculum, and in particular to the ethical component;
- to support – notably international – students in finding relevant data sets for master thesis topics.

MSc SSP

- to provide targeted support for international students on both course and career preparation.

Score table

The panel assesses the programmes as follows:

Bachelor's programme Human Geography and Planning

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard
General conclusion	positive

Bachelor's programme Spatial Planning and Design

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard
General conclusion	positive

Master's programme Economic Geography

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard
General conclusion	positive

Master's programme Environmental and Infrastructure Planning

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard
General conclusion	positive

Master's programme Population Studies

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard
General conclusion	positive

Master's programme Real Estate Studies

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

meets the standard

Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment

meets the standard

Standard 3: Student assessment

meets the standard

Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

meets the standard

General conclusion

positive

Master's programme Society, Sustainability and Planning

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

meets the standard

Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment

meets the standard

Standard 3: Student assessment

meets the standard

Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

meets the standard

General conclusion

positive

On behalf of the entire peer review panel,

Prof. dr. E.M. (Ellen) van Bueren
Panel chair

M. (Mark) Delmartino MA
Panel secretary

Date: 24 September 2025

Introduction

Procedure

Assessment

Between 19 and 22 May 2025, an independent peer review panel visited the University of Groningen to assess eight bachelor and master programmes as part of the cluster assessment WO Sociale Geografie en Planologie (Human Geography and Planning). This report addresses the panel's assessment of seven programmes at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences in Groningen: the bachelor's programmes Human Geography and Planning, and Spatial Planning and Design, and the master's programmes Economic Geography, Environmental and Infrastructure Planning, Population Studies, Real Estate Studies, and Society, Sustainability and Planning. The master's programme Cultural Geography is offered at Campus Fryslân in Leeuwarden and is presented in a separate report.

The cluster consist of 19 programmes, offered by the Radboud University, University of Amsterdam, University of Groningen and Utrecht University. The assessment follows the procedure and standards of the NVAO Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (April 2024). On request of the cluster partners, quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment of all programmes. On behalf of Academion, Peter Hildering coordinated the entire assignment, while Mark Delmartino acted as panel secretary for programme assessments in Groningen and Leeuwarden. Both coordinator and secretary are certified and registered by the NVAO.

Panel composition

Academion composed the peer review panel in cooperation with the institutions, taking into account the expertise and independence of the respective members. To strengthen consistency between the assessment panels in the cluster, the coordinator ensured joint instruction for the panel members, a comparable assessment method for all site visits, and a common approach during the respective concluding panel meetings on site. Moreover, the panel composition was such that per visit at least three panel members participated also in another assessment panel in the cluster. On 4 February 2025, the NVAO approved the composition of the panel.

The coordinator instructed the panel chairs on their role in the site visit according to the Panel chair profile (NVAO 2016) on 3 September 2024. Moreover, a common introductory briefing was held on 10 January 2025 for all panel members in the cluster. At this online meeting, the coordinator informed the panels on the assessment framework, the working method and the planning of the site visits and reports.

Preparation

Preparing for the external assessment, the accreditation team at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences produced several self-evaluation reports: one containing general information that applied to all programmes under review, and seven dedicated programme reports. Together they outlined the key elements of the programmes per accreditation standard and included student chapters and a SWOT-analysis. The team also made available an extensive portfolio of programme-specific and faculty-wide documents on a dedicated online drive. Furthermore, the panel reviewed per programme a sample of graduation projects and their completed evaluation forms as part of its external assessment. The list of materials put at disposition of the panel, as well as details on the thesis review, are provided in appendix 4.

The panel members studied the programme information, reviewed the thesis selection and sent their first observations to the secretary, who compiled the input. This compilation served as a basis for the preparatory

online meeting on 12 May 2025, when the panel identified the key strengths, challenges and questions per programme. On behalf of the panel, the secretary reported the main outcomes of this meeting to the accreditation team in Groningen on 14 May.

An Open Consultation Hour for students, teaching and support staff involved in the programme was scheduled alongside the panel's preparatory meeting. Eventually, nobody used the opportunity to discuss individually and confidentially with the panel.

Site visit

The accreditation team at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the coordinator and the panel secretary (see appendix 3). The faculty selected representative partners for the various interviews. At the end of each day, the panel discussed its findings in an internal meeting and shared its preliminary findings with the programme management. At the end of the three-day visit, the chair presented the overall considerations and conclusions of the panel in a public session to all programme representatives.

A development dialogue was held on site during the visit. The findings from these thematic sessions – one on spatial planning and one on human geography – did not impact on the outcome of the accreditation exercise and have been captured in a separate report.

Report

After the site visit, the secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to the coordinator for peer assessment. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel for feedback. After processing this feedback, the draft report was submitted to the accreditation team in Groningen for a check on factual inaccuracies. The secretary discussed the ensuing comments with the panel chair and changes were implemented accordingly. The panel then finalized the report, and the coordinator sent it to the Faculty of Spatial Sciences and the University of Groningen.

Panel

The panel assessing the seven programmes of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences in Groningen consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. E.M. (Ellen) van Bueren, professor in Urban Development Management at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment of the TU Delft [panel chair];
- Prof. dr. F.J.A. (Frank) Witlox, senior full professor in Economic Geography at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. M. (Micheline) van Riemsdijk, professor of Human Geography at Uppsala University (Sweden);
- Dr. A.(Ayeshah) Emon, lecturer in Public Health at het Institute for Epidemiology and Public Health of University College London (United Kingdom);
- Dr. M.(Melika) Levelt, senior lecturer and researcher in Logistics at the Faculty of Technology of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences;
- E. R. (Robin) Pleizier BA, master's student in Urban & Economic Geography at Utrecht University [student member];
- Prof. dr. T.M. (Tom) Berkhout, professor in Real Estate at Nyenrode Business Universiteit [referee];
- Prof. dr. T. (Tom) Coppens, professor in Urban planning and Design at the University of Antwerp (Belgium) [referee];
- Prof. dr. M. (Mari) Vaattovaara, professor in Urban Geography at de University of Helsinki (Finland) [referee].

Each panel member, the panel secretary and the programmes have filled out the Statement of impartiality and non-disclosure, as required by the NVAO. They can confirm that the assessment was carried out in complete independence.

The referees did not participate in the on-site visit, but contributed to the assessment through studying a selection of theses prior to the site visit. Due to unforeseen circumstances, Prof. Frank Witlox was not able to attend the site visit at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences in person. He studied all materials, sent his findings to the panel secretary prior to the site visit, and was available during the visit through video conferencing. This arrangement was communicated to the NVAO on 22 April 2025 and approved on 14 May 2025.

Information on the programmes

Name of the institution:	University of Groningen
BRIN-number:	21PC
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive

Programme name:	B Human Geography and Planning
ISAT number:	50974
Orientation of the programme:	wo
Level of the programme:	Bachelor (NLQF6)
Number of credits:	180 EC
Language of instruction:	English
Location:	Groningen
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Awarded degree:	BSc.
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2025

Programme name:	B Spatial Planning and Design
ISAT number:	56194
Orientation of the programme:	wo
Level of the programme:	Bachelor (NLQF6)
Number of credits:	180 EC
Language of instruction:	English
Location:	Groningen
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Awarded degree:	BSc.
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2025

Programme name:	M Economic Geography
ISAT number:	60657
Orientation of the programme:	wo
Level of the programme:	Master (NLQF7)
Number of credits:	60 EC
Language of instruction:	English
Specializations or tracks:	Regional Competitiveness and Trade Sustainable Rural Futures
Location:	Groningen
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime

Awarded degree:	MSc.
Dual degree:	Leibniz University Hannover (Germany) - MSc. International Programme in Economic Geography
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2025
Programme name:	M Environmental and Infrastructure Planning
ISAT number:	66194
Orientation of the programme:	wo
Level of the programme:	Master (NLQF7)
Number of credits:	60 EC
Language of instruction:	English
Location:	Groningen
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Awarded degree:	MSc.
Dual degrees:	1) Carl von Ossietzky University (Germany) - MSc. Water and Coastal Management 2) Institut Teknologi Bandung (Indonesia) - MSc. Development Planning and Infrastructure Management 3) Gadjah Mada University (Indonesia) MSc. Sustainable Water Management and MSc. Urban Planning, Environment and Infrastructure 4) Renmin University of China - MSc. Urban Governance within a Global Environment
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2025
Programme name:	M Population Studies
ISAT number:	60658
Orientation of the programme:	wo
Level of the programme:	Master (NLQF7)
Number of credits:	60 EC
Language of instruction:	English
Location:	Groningen
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Awarded degree:	MSc.
Dual degrees:	1) University of Cologne (Germany) - MSc. Demography and Social Inequality, 2) Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Spain) - MSc. Social Demography
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2025
Programme name:	M Real Estate Studies
ISAT number:	60659
Orientation of the programme:	wo
Level of the programme:	Master (NLQF7)
Number of credits:	60 EC
Language of instruction:	English

Location:	Groningen
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Awarded degree:	MSc.
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2025
Programme name:	M Society, Sustainability and Planning
ISAT number:	66653
Orientation of the programme:	wo
Level of the programme:	Master (NLQF7)
Number of credits:	60 EC
Language of instruction:	English
Location:	Groningen
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Awarded degree:	MSc.
Dual degrees:	1) Gadjah Mada University (Yogyakarta, Indonesia) - MSc. Urban Planning, Society and Sustainability 2) Gadjah Mada University (Yogyakarta, Indonesia) - MSc. Sustainable Urban and Regional Development 3) Renmin University of China - MSc. Urban Governance within a Global Environment
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2025

Description of the assessment

Organization

The University of Groningen is a comprehensive university with locations in the city centre, Zernike Campus and Leeuwarden. As the only research university in the three northern provinces of the Netherlands, UG has a strong regional function. Over the past decades, moreover, UG has developed into an internationally oriented institution: staff, students, partner networks and research outputs are increasingly international.

The Faculty of Spatial Sciences (FSS) is one of UG's eleven faculties, featuring around 1100 students, 110 staff and 140 PhD researchers. FSS offers education and performs research in demography, geography and planning. The faculty forms a tight-knit community with strong connections in the region and a prominent international position for its education programmes and research projects.

The Faculty Board (FB) of FSS is responsible for the organization of research, teaching and the general management. It consists of the dean, the vice-dean and the managing director, and includes a student assessor. As the official representative body of FSS, the Faculty Council has a hold among others on teaching and education, degree programmes, research, budget, and staffing policy. The Advisory Council is appointed by the FB to monitor and advice among others on programme contents and their relation to the labour market.

The faculty's four departments – Cultural Geography, Demography, Economic Geography, and Spatial Planning – are responsible for research and teaching and reflect the disciplinary specialisations of the staff. Research takes place in the Urban and Regional Studies Institute (URSI) and its cross-department faculty-wide research programme TRACE (Transformations, Communities and Environments). The faculty's Director of Education is responsible for the design, implementation and quality assurance of the degree programmes and formally directs each individual programme. The day-to-day developments in the respective degree programmes are managed by dedicated Programme Coordinators, i.e. staff members involved in these programmes.

The faculty features a Board of Examiners which is responsible for the examination and assessment quality of all degree programmes. The board fulfils all legal obligations in an independent way, consists of seven members across all departments and includes an assessment expert. The Programme Committee (PC) is a consultative participation body consisting of students and staff at degree programme level. Within FSS, there are six PCs who advise on how to guarantee and improve the quality of the respective degree programmes.

Recommendations previous panel

In the previous accreditation round, the then panel issued a positive conclusion on the seven degree programmes under review. Nonetheless, the panel did make some recommendations at both faculty and programme level. The current panel noticed that FSS and the programme teams have not only considered these suggestions, but also integrated these in the respective programmes. These adjustments will be reported in the relevant standards and programmes.

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

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

Findings

Profile

The panel gathered from the General Part of the written materials that the Faculty of Spatial Sciences (FSS) at the University of Groningen (UG) offers education and performs research in demography, geography and planning. Its four departments – Cultural Geography, Demography, Economic Geography, and Spatial Planning – reflect the specialist expertise of the staff. As a disciplinary domain, Human Geography and Planning revolves around the complex relationship between people - society - and their environment, space. It is the vision of FSS that cities, regions and their communities transform spatially, behaviourally and socially in ways that facilitate improvement in well-being, sustainability and innovation. Therefore, research, teaching, and learning at FSS focus on this relationship between places and people. In this way FSS staff, researchers and alumni aim to contribute with their activities to the innovation, sustainability, and resilience of regions and enhance community well-being through socially acceptable and sustainable innovations and spatial transformations.

The panel noticed in the programme-specific materials and during three days of discussions on site that the seven degree programmes under review all fit within this over-arching vision. In this way, each of the two bachelor and five master programmes have a distinctive selling proposition within the Dutch (and European) higher education landscape. The panel gathered from the discussions with students that they know about the specific profile of the degree programmes in Groningen. Several students indicated to the panel that they have made a conscious choice to study in Groningen and enrol for a specific degree programme at FSS.

Two elements that contribute to this attractiveness are the strong regional function of the university and the faculty, as well as their focus on the international dimension: all FSS programmes are offered in English and therefore attract good numbers of international students, researchers and staff. In addition, several one-year master programmes offer the opportunity to pursue a dual degree at a partner university around the world. Furthermore, the panel acknowledges that the bachelor programmes constitute a good preparation for one of the follow-up master's programmes under review, while the master programmes prepare for an academic or professional career regionally, nationally and internationally.

Following a detailed description in the general part, the panel discussed with faculty management the recent higher education developments in the Netherlands and their impact on both UG and FSS. The panel was informed that by 2030, structural government funding will be cut by 15% while demographic changes are likely to reduce student intake by a similar percentage. Moreover, new legislation foresees a shift to Dutch language in undergraduate programmes and thus jeopardizes the current intake of international students in bachelor programmes. In addition, students increasingly switch university for their master studies, which means that FSS must look for ways to not only attract external but also retain internal bachelor graduates. Because these developments are interconnected, the faculty is adjusting its strategic plan for the future and foresees a downsizing by 15-20% between 2024 and 2030. The panel is aware that the impact of these measures will affect the future development of each of the seven degree programmes under review, and has tried to take this into account in its advice and recommendations for the coming years.

The panel also discussed some of the disciplinary developments that have taken shape within the faculty. For some time now, FSS is emphasizing the combination of spatial transformations, technology and design:

integrating technological and design knowledge with social science expertise is increasingly viewed as essential for addressing societal challenges, underscoring the importance of interdisciplinary work. Moreover, while FSS was already well rooted in society and among stakeholders, there is a growing expectation to further solidify this position. Hence, the faculty's role within regional ecosystems is becoming increasingly significant. According to the panel, these disciplinary developments are relevant and worth pursuing, also in view of budget cuts and student demography.

Another development concerns the recognition of the Spatial Planning and Design (SPD) and Environmental and Infrastructure Planning (EIP) programmes within the technology domain. The strength of the faculty traditionally lies in bridging spatial and institutional design with policy development and planning; the new element is that the faculty's technological profile is enhanced by incorporating technical skills and considerations of the societal impact of technology. Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel recognizes that this strategic expansion supports the strategy of the faculty to increase enrolment in both bachelor and master programmes. Moreover, it is likely to affect positively the research and teaching offer in domains such as the spatial effects of technological change (including impacts on health, labour markets, and urban-rural dynamics) and the application of technology in spatial research and design.

Further to the recommendation in the previous accreditation report, the panel noticed that the two FSS bachelor programmes now each have a much clearer profile: while they share courses, the BSc Human Geography and Planning is broader and puts emphasis on social, demographic, cultural and economic developments in relation to space and place. The BSc Spatial Planning and Design focuses more on (spatial and institutional) design and includes courses on water, infrastructure and environmental planning. The panel noticed the respective positioning clearly in the information materials, while students on site provided very telling examples of what each programme does and why they enrolled in one or the other programme.

The panel also wants to commend both the faculty and the programme teams for the informative self-evaluation reports and background materials, which allowed the panel to prepare in an optimal way for the site visit. In this regard, the panel is particularly positive about the way FSS in general and the respective programmes in particular pay attention to continuous evaluation and improvement. This came to the fore quite clearly in the self-evaluation reports and concerned not only the recommendations of the previous accreditation panel but also the advice from internal bodies such as the Programme Committee or the Board of Examiners. The three days of discussions on site, moreover, have convinced the panel that this attention to continued improvement is part and parcel of the quality culture that pervades all levels in the faculty, ranging from students and alumni to staff and management.

Intended learning outcomes

The panel has studied the intended learning outcomes for each of the seven programmes under review, which are presented in Appendix 1 to this report. Every programme formulated learning outcomes that pertain to the knowledge, skills and attitude students have to acquire during their study and should demonstrate by the time they graduate. The panel noticed that all programmes have been meticulous in formulating these end qualifications, taking into account the European-wide Dublin Descriptors, as well as the domain specific reference framework for academic programmes in Human Geography and Planning in the Netherlands. Through this design, the alignment with the Netherlands Qualification framework (NLQF) for bachelor's and master's level also became apparent.

Hence, the panel established that the respective sets of learning outcomes are both appropriate and relevant: they do justice to the profile of the respective programmes and reflect their substance, level and orientation.

Professional field

The panel was informed that FSS has an Advisory Council consisting of both programme alumni and professionals from government, industry and higher education. The Council, which features as an official body on the faculty's organogram, meets two to three times per year. While the Advisory Council mainly operates on a strategic level, discussing items such as internationalization, employability and educational innovation, it also advises on the academic skills and competencies graduates of the respective degree programmes should ideally acquire according to the professional field.

In addition, faculty, departments, staff and programmes have long-standing connections to partners from the professional field and guest lecturers. This allows programmes to include the developments in, and requests from, the professional field.

The panel acknowledges the efforts of all stakeholders to safeguard the continued relevance of the individual degree programmes at FSS. While it gathered from the discussions on site that every programme is well connected to the professional field, the panel sees room for a further operationalization of the Advisory Council. In addition to FSS having a high quality advisory body at its side to inform on strategic developments in the professional field, it could be advantageous for (clusters of) degree programmes to have similar grass-roots oriented advisory bodies with representatives covering the breadth of the respective programme domain(s). According to the panel, this may be all the more relevant in view of the above-mentioned disciplinary, demographic and regulatory developments.

BSc Spatial Planning and Design

The Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Spatial Planning and Design (SPD) is a three-year full-time degree taught in English. Students learn to analyse, understand and reflect on spatial and institutional planning challenges, and to create spatial and institutional design solutions to meet these challenges. Spatial planning is both a reflection and an activity: students are trained to become reflective and critical planning professionals, and at the same time develop spatial and institutional design solutions in real-life assignments.

The panel understands that this bachelor programme stands out in the Dutch higher education landscape for its exclusive focus on spatial planning, its attention to water, infrastructure and environment challenges, and for its combination of spatial and institutional design. While this attention to space ('ruimtelijkheid' in Dutch) is something unique, the panel got the impression during the site visit that the programme representatives are so used to this profile that they do not always realize how unique it is in the Dutch context. Hence, the BSc SPD should show that it is proud of this distinctive character and 'sell' this aspect more explicitly in its communications. In fact, all SPD students should realize that what they learn at FSS is something unique.

While the programme takes insights from Dutch planning practice as the starting point for understanding and dealing with contemporary planning challenges, these challenges are in the course of the programme addressed from a global perspective. This diversity is embraced through the international classroom concept, a learning environment that facilitates inclusive learning and uses diversity as a resource. The panel acknowledges that the international classroom is a crucial concept for – and a strong feature of – this English-language programme that attracts a mixture of Dutch and international students.

The intended learning outcomes of the BSc SPD do justice to the profile of the programme and prepare students for a follow-up degree in spatial planning, such as the Environmental and Infrastructure Planning (EIP) or Society, Sustainability and Planning (SSP) master programmes at FSS. The ILOs are formulated in line with the Dublin Descriptors and reflect the academic and professional orientation set out in the educational vision of FSS and in the aims of the programme. According to the panel, the learning outcomes fulfil the requirements for bachelor programmes as described in NLQF level 6 and their formulation reflects the substance (spatial planning and design), level (bachelor) and orientation (academic) of the programme.

Discussing the future developments of the SPD programme, the panel acknowledges that design-led planning is a very strong selling point. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile substantiating the learning pathway further, setting realistic expectations for students, teachers and future employers. At the time of the site visit, it was not entirely clear (i) what the learning pathway offers, and what not; (ii) what expertise is available in-house, and which profile(s) need to be recruited; and (iii) to what extent the learning pathway prepares students for a future in architecture, technology or landscape, and at what level. The panel advises the programme to clarify this.

MSc Environmental and Infrastructure Planning

The Master of Science (MSc) in Environmental and Infrastructure Planning (EIP) is a one-year full-time degree taught in English. It focuses on the relationship between institutional innovation (i.e. improved policy and plan-making) and water, infrastructure, and environment related spatial transformations in cities and regions. The MSc EIP therefore integrates a focus on water, infrastructure and environmental planning issues and challenges, with the analysis, formulation, and design of strategies, approaches, and interventions for highly dynamic and complex planning situations, and does so in a setting that emphasizes international and interdisciplinary comparative research and learning.

The panel recognizes that this master programme stands out in the Dutch – and European - higher education landscape for its specific focus on water, infrastructure and environmental planning issues in relation to (institutional) design and policy innovation. Its profile resonates with current and urgent water, infrastructure and environmental challenges that cities and regions face worldwide, such as energy transition, climate change adaptation, resilience building, refurbishment, and sustainable and inclusive transport systems. By embedding the MSc EIP in a classical university with a large Faculty of Science and Engineering allows to offer a broad variety of relevant electives in the programme. All these elements contribute according to the panel to the programme's attractiveness for local, national and international students who are interested in / committed to this specific domain. In this regard, the profile befits practice where professionals can bridge the gap between engineering disciplines and social-institutional aspects of planning and spatial development. Moreover, the focus on water, infrastructure and environment and their related challenges is clear.

The intended learning outcomes of the MSc EIP fit well with the aims of the programme, do justice to its unique profile, and address all its above-mentioned focus elements. The ILOs are formulated in line with the Dublin Descriptors and fulfil the requirements for master programmes as described in NLQF level 7. According to the panel, the EIP learning outcomes reflect the substance (environmental and infrastructure planning), level (master) and orientation (academic) of the programme.

Discussing the future developments of the EIP programme, the panel acknowledges that the Designing Spatial Transformations track, which will start in September 2025, is very promising and likely to add another new dimension to the programme and the higher education landscape in planning in the Netherlands and beyond. Nonetheless, the panel advises substantiating the track further – what design skills

will students be offered, what can they design after the end of the programme, and how deep will their technical knowledge be of the new thematic disciplines? In addition, it is important according to the panel that the track is evaluated, and if necessary redirected, as soon as it has been implemented.

MSc Society, Sustainability and Planning

The Master of Science (MSc) in Society, Sustainability and Planning (SSP) is a one-year full-time degree taught in English. It centres around understanding the human factor in spatial interventions and attracts Dutch and international students who are interested in a multidisciplinary domain at the crossroads of spatial planning, human geography and sociology. The MSc SSP highlights the social aspects and spatial foundations of the global transition towards a sustainable society and the spatial, societal, economic, and technological changes therein.

The panel recognizes that this master programme stands out in the Dutch – and European – higher education landscape for its specific focus on people as sources of knowledge, as co-creators and as end-users. It addresses not only the human experience of places, but also the intervention and policy perspectives needed to transform places in line with sustainability and spatial justice goals.

Since the previous accreditation visit, the then Socio-Spatial Planning programme was renamed into Society, Sustainability and Planning. The panel acknowledges that in the meantime the SSP new style has become a front-runner programme for educating future planning professionals in Europe, addressing the complex interplay between socio-spatial aspects of sustainability and the built environment. The programme cultivates this new type of planning professional through three focal points: the inter-subjective nature of spatial planning; critical judgements on social and socio-spatial trends; and its international outlook.

The intended learning outcomes of the MSc SSP have been revised in view of the new programme title. They are aligned with the Dublin Descriptors, place significant emphasis on fostering a holistic attitude that transcends individual courses, and enhance the personal and professional development of students in the international domain of spatial planning. The panel has attentively studied the new set of ILOs and found these to be in line with the requirements for master programmes as described in NLQF level 7. In addition, it established that their formulation reflects the substance (society, sustainability, planning), level (master) and orientation (academic) of the programme. The learning outcomes also follow key elements of the AESOP Core Curriculum (i.e. the core requirements for a high-quality European planning education according to the Association of European Schools of Planning), emphasising justice, inclusivity, sustainable place-making, citizen empowerment, community development, and the need to develop an attitude that is both critical and ethical. In sum, the panel welcomes the MSc SSP ‘new style’ as a very relevant, attractive and societally pressing programme. It stands out not only in the higher education landscape of the Netherlands and beyond, but also found its specific place in the FSS programme portfolio.

BSc Human Geography and Planning

The Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Human Geography and Planning (HGP) is a three-year full-time degree taught in English. It develops the capacity of students to understand the interaction between society and space, between economic activities, population development, physical environment, and well-being. The programme content is broad in scope and focuses on the interactions of different processes in place rather than detailed knowledge of particular processes. It includes an understanding of the geography of social, economic, demographic, and cultural developments. Moreover, it develops students’ skills to investigate the interactions between these developments, assess their spatial consequences from different perspectives, contribute to solving spatial conflicts, and present these understandings clearly and coherently. The panel

recognizes that the BSc HGP at FSS is unique in the Netherlands for its international classroom, its fieldwork in all three years, and its courses on demography and physical geography.

The programme aims to contribute to the characteristics of the Domain Specific Reference Framework, and its intended learning outcomes are aligned with the Dublin Descriptors. According to the panel, the ILOs fulfil the requirements for bachelor programmes as described in NLQF level 6. Moreover, their formulation reflects the substance (human geography and planning), level (bachelor) and orientation (academic) of the programme. The panel found the HGP learning outcomes to be clear in covering both thematic knowledge and practical skills. These end qualifications ensure that upon graduation students are ready for further studies and a professional career as contemporary critical geographers and planners.

As a point for attention in the future, the panel advises the programme to make the planning aspects of the programme more explicit, and articulate the role of planning in human geography. This suggestion follows from the discussion with HGP students during the site visit: the panel acknowledges their viewpoint that planning may well be integrated in the design of the programme, but it is less clear how the course contents and the assignments relate to planning.

MSc Economic Geography

The Master of Science (MSc) in Economic Geography (EG) is a one-year full-time degree taught in English. It focuses on place-based strategies to address socio-economic inequalities and regional development in a rapidly changing world. Set against the backdrop of technological progress and globalizing forces, the programme seeks to understand how regions - and the people, firms, and governments within them - face diverse initial conditions, challenges, and opportunities for socio-economic development. In line with the scientific tradition in Groningen, the EG programme focuses on spatial behaviour and regional science perspectives.

The panel recognizes that the MSc EG at FSS distinguishes itself through its emphasis on fairness, inclusion, and well-being beyond economic growth. It acknowledges that the profile reflects the research strengths and expertise of the faculty. Moreover, the programme's focus on socio-economic disparities and sustainability resonates with pressing societal debates and challenges.

The panel was informed that since the previous accreditation, the EG programme introduced two tracks: Regional Competitiveness and Trade, and Sustainable Rural Futures. The former track emphasizes the role of international trade in regional economic development and the application of spatial econometric techniques; the latter track focuses on rural geography, socio-cultural change, and landscape dynamics. While it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the tracks on the overall programme, the panel thinks that their design clearly constitutes a value added to the EG programme and its students.

The intended learning outcomes of the MSc EG fit well with the aims of the programme and do justice to its distinctive character. Since the introduction of the tracks, there are both common learning outcomes which ensure that all graduates develop a strong foundation in economics geography, and track-specific learning outcomes on trade and competitiveness, rural development and socio-cultural transformations. The ILOs are formulated in line with the Dublin Descriptors and fulfil the requirements for master programmes as described in NLQF level 7. According to the panel, the EG learning outcomes reflect the substance (economic geography), level (master) and orientation (academic) of the programme. Moreover, the ILOs align well with the programme goals and showcase a breadth of topics and methods.

MSc Real Estate Studies

The Master of Science (MSc) in Real Estate Studies (RES) is a one-year full-time degree taught in English. It educates students to become critical, ethical and independent leaders in real estate and provides innovative real estate solutions for inclusive, liveable and sustainable places. The multidisciplinary programme relates to major sub-disciplines in social and spatial sciences such as geography, spatial planning, demography, finance, urban economics, sustainability, governance and institutions.

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the MSc RES is the only full-time academic programme in the Netherlands which has a professional accreditation from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), the global professional body promoting and enforcing the highest international standards in the valuation, management and development of land, real estate, construction and infrastructure. Moreover, the panel found the MSc RES to be a balanced programme that is well aligned with industry. Its structure is solid and provides plenty of opportunities to use the acquired knowledge in practice.

Following the previous accreditation report, the programme revised its learning outcomes to better reflect its profile. The panel acknowledges that new ILOs, which were implemented since 2020-2021, give the programme a clear profile and connect better to the strategies of both FSS and UG. In this way, the changes have clearly been for the better. The ILOs are formulated in line with the Dublin Descriptors and fulfil the requirements for master programmes as described in NLQF level 7. According to the panel, the learning outcomes reflect the substance (real estate), level (master) and orientation (academic) of the programme. Overall, the panel found the programme very balanced and well aligned with the ILOs. It agrees to the statement in the self-evaluation report that the narrative of the RES programme 'new style' has shifted towards real estate societal issues on sustainability, governance and institutions and their interplay with the real estate industry.

As a point for attention in the future, the panel noticed during the site visit that (potential) students are not always aware of the importance of this RICS quality mark. Hence, the programme may want to publicise it more explicitly in its external – and internal – communication to applicants and students.

MSc Population Studies

The Master of Science (MSc) in Population Studies (PS) is a one-year full-time degree taught in English. It investigates how demographic events in their socio-cultural and spatial context impact populations and societies. Upon graduation, MSc PS students will have been trained for the profession of demographer and should be (i) critical and independent professionals and researchers of contemporary population issues; (ii) engaged and proficient in the societal challenges attached to ageing, migration and health; (iii) equipped with tools essential to population research; and (iv) capable to work in a culturally and socially diverse professional community.

The panel recognizes that this MSc PS is the only master programme which is fully dedicated to demography in the Netherlands. Compared to other demography programmes globally, the programme at FSS offers an original combination of perspectives from different disciplines, cultures and methods. Moreover, as one of the few one-year demography programmes in Europe, the MSc PS appeals to students who opt for a short specialization or a professional reorientation.

The intended learning outcomes of the MSc PS fit with the aims and the vision of the programme, and address theories and tools on population issues, their translation in public policies and research practices, and professional skills. The ILOs are formulated in line with the Dublin Descriptors and fulfil the

requirements for master programmes as described in NLQF level 7. According to the panel, the PS learning outcomes reflect the substance (demography), level (master) and orientation (academic) of the programme. Moreover, the sheer number of learning outcomes does justice to the broad scope of the study.

The panel was informed that a new set of learning outcomes has been designed and will be implemented as of September 2025. The new ILOs (i) emphasize the application of knowledge on topics that are at the heart of current policy debates (health, ageing, migration); (ii) include the unique situation of specific subpopulations and the diversity of population challenges across and within societies; and (iii) reinforce the professional skills of students in communication and inclusive collaboration. The panel had a look at the new set of intended learning outcomes and found these to be relevant and fitting.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the seven degree programmes under review each have a clear and carefully delineated profile that aligns with the vision, mission and profile of both the Faculty of Spatial Sciences and the University of Groningen. This profile is also known to students, who often made a very conscious choice to come to Groningen and enrol for one or the other FSS programme.

Moreover, the panel considers that the learning outcomes of the respective programmes are formulated adequately and reflect their substance, level and orientation. Moreover, the respective end qualifications befit the programme profile and cover both the scientific and professional requirements of the domain.

The panel welcomes the links to the professional field at all levels of the faculty, as well as the strategic high-level input from the long-standing Advisory Council. In this way, not only the academic but also the professional relevance of the degree programmes is safeguarded.

The panel thinks highly of the way FSS in general and the respective degree programmes in particular pay attention to continuous evaluation and improvement. This quality culture is shared by all stakeholders and is demonstrated among others by the systematic consideration and concrete follow-up of recommendations from both internal and external bodies.

In addition to these considerations that altogether warrant a positive judgement on this standard, the panel suggests to establish grass-roots oriented advisory bodies per degree programme (cluster), featuring alumni and other representatives from the professional field who together cover the breadth of the respective programme domain(s).

In so far as individual programmes are concerned, the panel advises the:

- BSc SPD to promote its distinctive character more explicitly in communications;
- BSc SPD to substantiate the design-led planning learning pathway, setting realistic expectations for students, teachers and future employers;
- MSc EIP to substantiate the new Designing Spatial Transformations track, and evaluate its first roll-out;
- BSc HGP to make the planning aspects of the programme more explicit, and articulate the role of planning in human geography;
- MSc RES to promote the RICS quality mark in communications to students and applicants.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that all seven programmes **meet** standard 1.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

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

Findings

This report describes the findings and considerations of the peer review panel with regard to the external assessment of seven degree programmes. This section on teaching-learning environment first covers topics that are addressed in a similar way across programmes before entering into the programme-specific details.

Curriculum

The panel established that each of the seven degree programmes has been revised at least to some extent over the past few years. These changes were often a direct consequence of the recommendations of the previous accreditation panel. The current panel was informed that changes have been prepared extensively before being implemented in the respective curricula. The panel studied the changes in the information materials prior to the site visit and discussed their uptake with students, staff and programme management on site. Programme representatives overall welcomed the changes. While some revisions were implemented too recently to measure their impact, the panel found that the changes are generally for the better of the programme. As will be exemplified in the programme-specific part, it is fair to state according to the panel that all seven degree programmes have a clear structure, are solid, ambitious, well thought-through and often innovative.

Each programme has its own Assessment Plan, which includes among other a specific overview on the link between the programme learning outcomes and the course units. These plans are regularly monitored and where necessary adjusted. They serve among others as a tool for programme management to maintain the overview of the entire curriculum, monitor whether individual components benefit the overall picture, and ensure that the entire curriculum is cohesive. The panel studied the respective assessment plans and found these to be comprehensive and relevant. While in essence a planning instrument, the panel found the assessment plans to instil confidence that the organization and delivery of the curriculum allows students to achieve the programme learning outcomes.

The panel was informed that four master programmes under review – the MSc EG, the MSc EIP, the MSc PS and the MSc SSP – also offer at least one dual degree variant where FSS students combine their one-year master programme in Groningen with another master programme at a higher education institution abroad. In most cases, FSS students first follow the programme at the partner institution before they return to Groningen to follow the entire programme curriculum together with their fellow students at FSS. The dual degrees are also open for students from the partner institutions. They will be admitted to the Groningen master provided they have completed the first-year programme at their home university. The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that these dual degrees have been prepared meticulously. The “Groningen” part of the dual degrees fulfils the same quality requirements as the single degrees at FSS. In certain cases, students from FSS have to fulfil additional requirements if they want to enrol for the dual degree variant and start abroad. Some of the - currently 11 - variants go back a long time and attract a good number of students, while others are relatively new and have not yet resulted in dual degree graduates. Across the four master programmes, the panel included a total of 10 graduation projects from dual degree students in its thesis review (see standard 4). These final products fulfilled the same requirements as the ‘regular’ FSS master thesis, were assessed according to the same thesis evaluation form, and were quality controlled by the FSS Board of Examiners. In some cases, dual degree students were encouraged to include a second supervisor from the partner university. The thesis review showed that these

dual degree students invariably delivered similar good quality projects and demonstrated the same end level qualifications. If anything, the panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that master degree programmes could be (even) more explicit towards (potential) students about the existence and added value of their dual degree variants.

The previous accreditation panel issued several recommendations that pertained in particular to the teaching-learning environment of the degree programmes under review. One suggestion for example concerned the option for students to do an internship. The current panel noticed that FSS has facilitated this option in most programmes, while the two bachelor programme teams have developed separate internship modules in the meantime with a standardized course guide and procedure. In another case of the second enrolment moment in February, which the previous panel advised against, the current panel endorses the decision of FSS and the programmes concerned to actively advise students to start in September; however, the current panel also sees the benefit from the February option not being abolished altogether because the limited influx (about 10% of the total intake) can be handled easily by the respective programmes. These examples confirm according to the current panel that FSS and the programme teams have not only considered the suggestions, but also integrated these in the respective programmes. In this way, each programme demonstrates a quality culture that is characterized by attention for continuous quality improvement.

Finally, the panel was informed of a new development in FSS since the previous accreditation visit that affects all programmes. As students frequently handle personal data in research projects and must learn to implement safeguards to protect the rights of individuals and comply with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), data management training has been incorporated in the curricula. Moreover, a faculty-wide structured procedure for integrating privacy considerations in research design has been developed. Students are now required to submit a data management plan as part of their (bachelor or master) thesis, which is reviewed by their supervisor. While students generally do not work with highly sensitive data, supervisors must consult the faculty's Research Ethics Committee if projects contain significant ethical risks and might have to be adjusted. The panel welcomes this development and commends the faculty for addressing this important component in such an explicit and comprehensive way.

Language of instruction

At the time of the site visit in 2024-2025, all seven degree programmes under review have an English-language title and are offered in English. The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site the programmes had either been offered in English right from the start (for instance in the case of the MSc EIP) or had changed to English over the past ten years (e.g. BSc SPD). In all cases, the programme title followed the language of instruction.

The panel was informed that this approach to the language of instruction is part of the internationalization strategy laid down in the educational vision of FSS, which includes the application of the international classroom concept. According to this strategy, internationalization is important for the Dutch labour market, for Dutch planning practice which increasingly operates on the international market, and for learning from best practices abroad. In addition, the numerous dual degrees that were established over time could not have been realized without offering English-language programmes in Groningen. FSS, moreover, put in considerable efforts to live up to the recommendation in the previous accreditation report to attract more international students.

The panel understood from the discussions on site that recent provisions of the government may affect the internationalization ambitions of FSS, notably but not exclusively in so far as student intake in the bachelor

programmes is concerned. Having reviewed the different programme-specific motivations to offer each of the bachelor and master programmes in English, the panel endorses the decision of the faculty and the programmes to adopt English as language of instruction to combine the local and global dimensions of human geography and planning in internationally oriented degree programmes. The international orientation makes each programme accessible to both Dutch and international students to realize the international classroom ambitions, and allows for greater research opportunities and wider stakeholder collaborations. Similarly, the panel approves of the English-language titles of each programme.

This endorsement is also based on the fact that both UG and FSS have developed several policy instruments to implement English as the Medium of Instruction with the aim to ensure that the language of instruction is a qualitative part of each degree programme. The university-wide Language Centre analyses the language competencies of each lecturer on several categories (range, accuracy, coherence and fluency) and checks their level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Students, moreover, are asked to judge the language skills of their teachers in each course evaluation. If students indicate in their evaluations that the English proficiency of a lecturer is below expectation, then the Programme Committee will take this up and monitor improvement. The panel gathered from the evaluation outcomes and the discussions on site that students tend to be (very) satisfied with the English proficiency of the teaching staff.

Learning environment

The vision on teaching and learning of the FSS is based on the vision of the university and focuses on the following themes: research-driven education, independent academics, active learning, real-world practice, and internationalization. In line with these principles, students across programmes (i) learn to understand the dynamic relationship between people and places; (ii) are trained to become critical researchers, generate new ideas and take ownership of the learning process; (iii) are exposed to varied teaching methods to accommodate different learning strategies; (iv) are taught in an international classroom where diversity of cultural backgrounds, experiences and knowledge are input to the learning process; and (v) are equipped with knowledge, skills and attitudes to be successful on regional, national and global labour markets.

The panel gathered from the student chapters and the discussions on site that across programmes there is a clear and purposeful emphasis on learning. The above-mentioned themes are effectively addressed in class and guide students towards achieving the programme learning outcomes. The sessions with teaching staff provided good examples of how each of the themes are operationalized in the respective courses. Students from their side emphasized that they appreciate the learning environment of their respective programmes.

In so far as the international classroom is concerned, staff and students indicated that each programme includes elements of the international classroom. The panel gathered from their input that the success of this educational principle depends among others on the size of the international student cohort within the programme and the course. The panel welcomes the programmes' attention to the international classroom in terms of contents and didactics. The way this approach is rolled out in the day-to-day practice of a given programme differs considerably, ranging from highly enthusiastic reactions by some bachelor students to a few international master students complaining they had to rely on their Dutch fellow students when working on Dutch cases for local clients. Across programmes, the panel sees room for a stronger underpinning of - and a better connection between - the contents and the didactics of the international classroom: what do students learn from and with each other, how does this relate content-wise to the disciplinary domain, how can both Dutch and international 'cases' be embedded better in the course, and - ultimately - how does the international classroom in a given programme contribute to graduates with additional competences for their CV?

The panel was informed that since the previous accreditation, FSS has by stepped up its educational efforts by establishing an Educational Quality and Innovation Platform (EQIP). This open forum supports lecturer experiments with innovative teaching, learning, and assessment methods, and facilitates knowledge exchange and evidence-based educational research. EQIP also provides peer support and organizes six annual sessions on topics such as virtual fieldwork, inclusion, and generative AI. It supports teacher-led education projects to further improve the educational quality in FSS courses and programmes, and advises programme management on educational innovations. During the visit, the panel met teachers who are involved in EQIP as providers or users. The panel thinks highly of this initiative as it enhances educational innovation in a very bottom-up way.

Another development is the creation of Active Learning Classrooms. These classrooms promote active learning and are designed to foster higher-order thinking such as analysis, evaluation, and creation, through flexible furniture, mobile screens, and whiteboards. During the site visit, the panel attended a course session in an ALC and witnessed how such ALC can support group work and student engagement.

In sum, it is fair to state according to the panel that the seven degree programmes under review can rely on a strong and effective learning environment that befit the vision on education of the faculty and respond to the needs of the national and international, bachelor and master students. Moreover, the panel appreciates that the lecturers are not only implementing the educational vision, but are offered the tools and the opportunity to improve and innovate their teaching practices.

Student support, guidance and information

The panel gathered from the written materials that FSS informs students through various channels: prospective students access programme details via the UG website and participate in events such as Open Days, Student for a Day, and the Master Event. Moreover, FSS student ambassadors join information sessions in secondary school in the northern Netherlands. Current students find programme and course details, career opportunities, and regulations via the website, the Student Portal/Brightspace, and Ocasys. Students mentioned in their chapters and during the site visit that the information on the programmes and the courses is readily available and can be retrieved easily.

Student support is provided at both faculty and university level, with Study Advice (faculty) and Student Service Centre (university) as the key hubs of expertise. The Student Service Centre offers counselling, psychological support, and training, and is available for both prospective and enrolled students through individual appointments, workshops or group meetings. Study Advice provides guidance and plays a key role in student well-being, special needs, study strategies, and personal advice. The panel gathered from the materials that about 100 students, mostly with special needs, contact the faculty for support every year. The FSS study advisers provide guidance on available facilities and assist in setting up long-term support plans. Moreover, these study advisers maintain connections with various university departments and implement the UG-wide student support policies at the faculty. Together with the International Office, study advisors host events on minors, electives, internships and study abroad options, guiding students in aligning their programme with personal goals. They also make sure that international students feel at home in Groningen, on Zernike campus and at FSS.

Study advisers, moreover, play an important role in the life of first-year bachelor students, overseeing their learning communities of about 15 peers. The groups meet weekly in the first semester to discuss study-related topics, exam preparation, and university resources, and foster social connections through academic-social events. Moreover, when they fail exams leading up to the Binding Study Advice, students are actively contacted by study advisors for consultation and guidance.

Students indicated in their chapters and during the discussions on site that they know about the different initiatives and appreciate the guidance that is available in general, as well as in case they need individual support on personal and/or academic issues. The panel appreciates that this support is available and known to students as every year, about 100 FSS students request information and receive guidance and assistance. During the visit, several students gave personal or peer examples to emphasize that these provisions really make a difference for both Dutch and international students in terms of student well-being, inclusion and special needs. The panel therefore established that each of the degree programmes is accessible to all students, irrespective of their nationality or individual condition.

The academic year consists of four periods with dedicated courses, assignments and deadlines. In order to mitigate some of the stress caused by this ongoing cycle of workload peaks, FSS is participating in a nationwide initiative, the Smarter Academic Year. This pilot project addresses the intensive and lengthy structure of the Dutch academic year by reducing the workload whilst maintaining educational quality. Since September 2023, FSS introduced in all its programmes and teaching blocks a low-intensity week: a period now consists of seven teaching weeks, two assessment weeks and a break/low intensity week. Based on feedback after the first roll-out, the current academic year 2024-2025 includes scheduled breaks, a true Christmas break without pending deadlines, dedicated resit periods, and a faculty-wide Career Week in April. The panel welcomes this initiative and encourages FSS and its degree programmes to continue monitoring and finetuning the scheme. The panel is aware that these adaptations require additional efforts from lecturers who have to reorganise course contents and review assessment plans. However, the new approach undoubtedly contributes to a smarter study-life balance for students.

In sum, the panel concludes that students on each of the seven degree programmes under review benefit from adequate information provision and can rely on a comprehensive system of guidance and support. The panel acknowledges that these services apply to all students – prospective, enrolled, first-year, bachelor, master, Dutch and international students. Also in this case, the panel appreciates that staff, programmes and faculty are not merely implementing the centrally agreed policies, but actively go the extra mile for their students.

Staff

According to FSS, the quality of teaching and learning is a vital part of the quality of higher education and is inherently connected to the competencies of the teaching staff. Hence, it is of utmost importance to pay good attention to their professional development, also after individual staff have obtained their basic teaching qualification.

While information on staff was provided per programme, the overall picture is that in the current academic year 2024-2025, about 110 staff teach at FSS. Almost all staff are active researchers in the disciplinary domain they teach and have at least a basic teaching qualification (BKO) or are in the process of obtaining it. Roughly 30% of the teaching staff is international. However, as funding cuts from the Government affect all higher education institutions, including FSS, the faculty is reducing resources and downsizing by 15-20% over the period 2024-2030. This means that by 2030, FSS will employ approximately 80 full-time equivalent staff.

Students indicated in their chapters and during the discussions that they highly value the disciplinary knowledge of the teachers, as well as their didactical skills, sharing great stories of super-committed and enthusiastic lecturers and supervisors. Students confirmed that dedicated staff often work in teams and provide research-informed teaching. Moreover, they appreciate the open door policy in the faculty, which contributes to a close-knit community of teachers and students.

Further to what was already mentioned under learning environment, the panel acknowledges that there is a lively and active educational culture in FSS. Many lecturers experiment with new forms of learning, testing and lecturing through EQIP and in ALCs. Hence, it is fair to state according to the panel that all seven programmes can rely on teaching staff who is highly qualified in the disciplinary field, has good research expertise, and is didactically qualified.

BSc Spatial Planning and Design

The BSc SPD is a three-year full-time bachelor programme of 180 EC. Its curriculum is presented in Appendix 2 to this report. The programme profile is translated in four curriculum learning pathways: Spatial Design, Spatial Planning, Water-Infrastructure-Environment, and Academic Research. The pathways are built and scheduled in such a way that the focus gradually shifts from spatial design - the physical aspects of planning - to institutional design - the organization of planning, decision-making, and implementation. The panel has studied the programme curriculum and noticed very clearly the four pathways and their logical build-up. It gathered from the discussion with students that they recognize the pathways, appreciate the structure, and very much like the focus on the core domains water-infrastructure-environment. Staff emphasized that these key domains continue to be core to SPD and are offered both separately and in an integrated way: energy questions for instance are intersecting the different planning domains. Students and staff, moreover, emphasized that the combination of theory and practice in the curriculum constitutes a major additional selling proposition. Finally, students were highly positive about the international orientation of the programme, which is particularly visible in the curriculum contents, the composition of the student and staff body, and in the didactical principle of the international classroom. Based on the extensive written materials and the discussions on site, the panel finds the curriculum set-up clear and coherent across the three-year programme. Moreover, it aligns very well with the programme profile and meets the expectations of both national and international students.

The panel was informed that since the previous accreditation, several changes have been made to the curriculum to strengthen the academic research pathway. As a result, SPD students are now better prepared for the bachelor project. Another accreditation-driven change is the closer cooperation with the bachelor Human Geography and Planning (HGP). Currently both programmes largely share two learning pathways – spatial planning and academic research – and coordinate their respective bachelor thesis component. This, in turn, has led to economies of scale in teaching, as well as to more interaction between the two disciplines. The panel welcomes these developments. Students from both bachelor programmes indicated to the panel that the common elements make it easier for them to see also the differences between and unique features of the respective programmes, which the panel noticed was also a suggestion in the previous accreditation report. Moreover, students in the very first blocks of their study realize soon if they have chosen the right programme, and can still switch rather easily during the first year. Staff informed the panel that every year, a few students transfer – mainly from HGP to SPD - because of the practical component in SPD.

In addition to many positive points, students mentioned two aspects of the SPD programme that could be improved: first, the study load is rather high throughout the three-year programme. While acknowledging and appreciating the efforts of the faculty and the programme team in this regard – such as the smart academic year, study block of two instead of three courses, coordination of course deadlines across blocks - it remains to be seen according to students if these measures, which were implemented very recently, will effectively alleviate the study load. Second, students appreciate the attention to digital skills such as Adobe Suite or Sketch-up in the programme but indicated that there is far too less time in class to acquire these skills in-depth. Hence, students rely on training via YouTube to learn the software programmes ‘in their own time’. Acknowledging this point, the panel advises the SPD programme to strengthen the teaching of these

skills. After all, these are skills which students will need in their professional career; leaving university with a good understanding of these programmes might give them a competitive advantage during job applications.

Over the years the BSc SPD has attracted an increasing number of students (from 109 students in 2019 to 145 in 2023) with non-Dutch students representing between 23% and 30% of the yearly intake. In order to be admitted, SPD students need a secondary school degree, as well as sufficient mathematical background (Mathematics A) and a good level of English. Each application is checked individually. If students do not meet the admission requirements, they can take an entrance examination that tests the knowledge and levels of mathematics and English. The panel noticed that the admission requirements are clear and appropriate because they allow to attract the student group the programme envisages, i.e. a diverse group of national and international students with an interest in both planning and design. Moreover, admission is effective as most students (87%) manage to obtain a positive Binding Study Advise after the first year. In terms of success rate, the panel noticed from data in the self-evaluation report that the share of students who graduate nominally (i.e. after three years) differs considerably per year (between 30% and 52%), while usually around 75%-80% does so in four years. The panel acknowledges that the four-year completion rate is a decent result and demonstrates that the curriculum is feasible.

The panel gathered from the programme-specific materials and the discussions that 36 teaching staff are currently involved in the BSc SPD. The increase in student numbers has led to additional staff recruitment and has been supported with more studio spaces to maintain the quality of the programme's active teaching formats. SPD students indicated in their chapter and to the panel that they appreciate the disciplinary expertise of the lecturers, as well as their didactical skills and their availability. They also value the guidance and support mechanisms of the faculty, and in particular the people, like study advisors, behind these services. According to the panel, the dedicated and enthusiastic teaching and service staff on this SPD programme are an important asset to the teaching-learning environment.

MSc Environmental and Infrastructure Planning

The MSc EIP is a one-year full-time master programme of 60 EC. Its curriculum is presented in Appendix 2 to this report. It consists of six compulsory courses (30 EC), two electives (10 EC), and a master thesis (20 EC). Three compulsory courses are thematic and address infrastructure planning, water management, and environment planning; two courses are theory-oriented and foster critical thinking, and one course focuses on methodology. The choice in the elective courses is restricted: one elective is planning-methodology oriented, while students can choose an internship (possibly connected to the master thesis), a consultancy project (the so-called EIP Living Lab where students work for a real-life client and develop their consultancy skills), or a disciplinary course as second elective. The acquired competencies then culminate in the master thesis. Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel finds the curriculum set-up clear and coherent. Moreover, it aligns very well with the programme profile, makes a good link to the prospective labour market, and ensures that EIP students can achieve the intended learning outcomes.

As of September 2025, the programme will offer a dedicated track on Designing Spatial Transformations. The panel noticed that the track curriculum will follow a similar logic as the core programme, with track students taking three different courses. Moreover, the master thesis has to include a design component. The panel thinks both the track and its curriculum are relevant and may attract additional students, notably from the BSc SPD, who want to enhance their design competencies.

Students indicated in their written contribution and during the discussion on site that they are very positive about different aspects of the EIP learning environment: the curriculum contents, the attention to different research methods and techniques, the expertise of lecturers and supervisors, the academic guidance, the

international dimension of the programme (orientation, contents, diverse students and staff). With regard to the latter, the panel appreciates in particular the value added of the international classroom for the programme, as it provides students with very different cultural and geographical perspectives.

As points for attention, the panel gathered from the discussion with students that international students cannot always operate on an equal footing. While the first two blocks have a high workload for all students, international students with no previous exposure to the Dutch education system tend to face an even tougher time. Hence, the panel suggests to provide them targeted support to explain how classes are prepared, course materials are processed, and how to prepare for assignments. Similarly, the panel suggests to pay specific attention in the programme to the internship and consultancy opportunities of international students in relation to language barriers, and to how non-Dutch students can prepare their professional career (in the Netherlands).

In order to be admitted, EIP students need a bachelor's degree in HGP or SPD. Students who successfully passed the first year of one of the EIP Dual Degrees are also accepted. Each application is checked individually. If students do not meet all admission requirements, they can take a pre-master programme. Students indicated to the panel that they found the admission process clear, simple and streamlined. The panel noticed that the admission requirements are effective as the EIP programme attracts the student group it envisages.

Since the previous accreditation, the intake of MSc EIP students has fluctuated between 40 and 68. In September 2024, 49 students enrolled. About one third of the intake consists of non-Dutch students, who often come to Groningen as Dual Degree student. These students sometimes have a different disciplinary background, which in turn enhances and diversifies the international classroom discussions. In terms of success rate, the panel noticed from data in the self-evaluation report that the share of students who graduate nominally (i.e. after one year) differs considerably per year (between 25% and 54%), while usually around 75%-80% does so in two years. The panel acknowledges that the two-year completion rate is a decent result, which demonstrates that the curriculum is feasible.

The panel gathered from the programme-specific materials and the discussions that 17 teaching staff are currently involved in the MSc EIP. Students indicated in their chapter and to the panel that they appreciate the disciplinary expertise of the lecturers and supervisors, as well as their didactical skills and their availability. They also value the guidance and support of the study advisors. According to the panel, the dedicated and enthusiastic teaching and service staff on this EIP programme are an important asset to the teaching-learning environment.

MSc Society, Sustainability and Planning

The MSc SSP is a one-year full-time master programme of 60 EC. Its curriculum is presented in Appendix 2 to this report. It consists of six compulsory courses (30 EC), two electives (10 EC), and a master thesis (20 EC). Compulsory courses first focus on theoretical underpinnings of space, society, and spatial planning and then move towards their meaning and application in local and regional practices. Sustainability is embraced in its human factor and transformative dimension in relation to both theory and practice across core courses. Elective courses allow for deeper critical, international, and multidisciplinary engagement. The acquired competencies then culminate in the master thesis. Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel finds the curriculum set-up clear and coherent. Moreover, the curriculum aligns well with the programme profile, makes a good link to the prospective labour market, and ensures that SSP students can achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Students indicated in their written contribution and during the discussion on site that they are very positive about different aspects of the SSP learning environment: the curriculum contents, the expertise of lecturers, the thesis guidance by their supervisors, the exposure to the professional field, the international dimension of the programme (orientation, contents, diverse students and staff). With regard to the latter, the panel appreciates in particular the value added of the international classroom for the programme, as it provides students with very different cultural and geographical perspectives.

As points for attention, the panel gathered from the discussion with students that international students sometimes cannot keep up. While the first block has a high workload for all students, international students with no previous exposure to the Dutch education system sometimes face a tough time. Hence, the panel suggests to provide them targeted support to explain how classes are prepared, course materials are processed, and how to prepare for assignments. This is all the more important as for many students this workload peak in block one makes them postpone their thesis preparation, which in turn leads to a delayed study completion. Similarly, the MSc SSP has a strong reputation for its solid preparation for professional practice and for the opportunities it offers its students to work with relevant clients in the field. According to the panel, it is crucial that the programme goes the extra mile to ensure that international students benefit to a similar extent from this professional exposure, and that the language barrier does not form a hindrance to this.

In order to be admitted, SSP students need a bachelor's degree in Spatial Planning, Human Geography, or in related domains such as Urban Studies, Landscape Architecture, or Public Administration. Students who successfully passed the first year of one of the SSP Dual Degrees are also accepted. Each application is checked individually. If students do not meet all admission requirements, they can take a pre-master programme. Students indicated to the panel that they found the admission process clear, simple and streamlined. The panel noticed that the admission requirements are effective as the SSP programme attracts the diverse student group it envisages.

In recent years, the intake of MSc SSP students has fluctuated from 19 students in 2019 over 47 students in 2021 to 30 students in September 2024. About one third of the intake consists of non-Dutch students, and includes the Dual Degree students. The panel noticed from data in the self-evaluation report that the programme's success rate differs considerably per year, both for students who graduate nominally (between 13% and 47%) and those who finish in two years (between 50% and 81%). The panel welcomes the monitoring efforts of the programme team in this regard, and acknowledges that the most recent data available are quite promising. The figures demonstrate according to the panel that the curriculum is feasible.

The panel gathered from the programme-specific materials and the discussions that 13 teaching staff are currently involved in the MSc SSP. Students indicated in their chapter and to the panel that they appreciate the disciplinary expertise of the lecturers and supervisors, as well as their didactical skills and their availability. They also value the guidance and support of the study advisors. According to the panel, the dedicated and enthusiastic teaching and service staff on this SSP programme are an important asset to the teaching-learning environment.

BSc Human Geography and Planning

The BSc HGP is a three-year full-time bachelor programme of 180 EC. Its curriculum is presented in Appendix 2 to this report. The different courses are connected through three pathways: People & Place, Planning, and Research. The first year introduces students to geography, planning, and academic research. The second year deepens their knowledge of the key research themes and trains methodological skills. In the third year, students broaden their horizons in the first semester and employ the previously acquired competences in

the second semester through fieldwork and the bachelor thesis. Around the time of the previous accreditation, the BSc HGP obtained its current name (it was called Human Geography & Urban and Regional Planning / Sociale Geografie before) and was implementing a fully English-taught curriculum for the first time. Hence, the panel noticed that the past few years have been used to consolidate the curriculum, the courses and its contents, a process the programme team should be commended for.

An important accreditation-driven change is the closer cooperation with the bachelor Spatial Planning and Design (SPD). The two programmes currently share 13 courses because of the many disciplinary interactions between human geography, planning, and spatial design. This, in turn, has led to economies of scale in teaching, as well as more interaction between the two disciplines. The panel welcomes these developments. Students from both bachelor programmes indicated to the panel that the common elements make it easier for them to see also the differences between and unique features of the respective programmes, which the panel noticed was also a suggestion in the previous accreditation report.

In order to be admitted, HGP students need a secondary school degree, some mathematical background and a good level of English. According to the panel, the admission process is clear. While formal requirements beyond a secondary school degree are limited, the admissions page on the website contains indications and self-tests on the expected level of mathematics and English. As a result, the HGP programme attracts the student group it envisages, i.e. a diverse group of national and international students with an interest in both human geography and planning.

Over the years the number of BSc HGP students has decreased gradually (from 120 students in 2019 to 103 in 2024, and a one-time dip of 84 in 2021), while the programme continues to attract a good number of non-Dutch students, around one third of the yearly intake. Moreover, the BSc HGP has a relatively high number of drop-outs (between 23% and 36%). The panel was informed that the programme team has investigated these trends and identified several possible explanations, which often relate to expectation management: some students had hoped on a more practical programme (and therefore switch sometimes to the BSc SPD), while others think the programme is too broad (and therefore see no clear career perspectives), and still others find the programme too easy and had expected a more theoretical and challenging programme. In order to improve student expectations, the HGP programme is now communicating more clearly on the website and during open days on the differences with SPD, on the specific features of HGP, and on the opportunities for honours and extracurricular education. At the time of the site visit, it was too early for the panel to establish if these measures are paying off. The students the panel spoke to understand on the one hand why some of their fellow students drop(ped) out; on the other hand, they themselves were very clear on why they had chosen HGP and emphasized their expectations had been met fully. Contrary to intake and drop-out, the success rate figures are more positive. In fact, the panel noticed from data in the self-evaluation report that the share of students who graduate nominally is about 45%, while around 80% does so after four years. According to the panel, these completion rates are quite high, and prove that the curriculum is feasible.

The panel gathered from the programme-specific materials and the discussions that 41 teaching staff are currently involved in the BSc HGP. Students indicated in their chapter and to the panel that they appreciate the disciplinary expertise of the lecturers, as well as their didactical skills and their availability. They also value the guidance and support mechanisms of the faculty, and in particular the people, like study advisors, behind these services. According to the panel, the dedicated and enthusiastic teaching and service staff on this HGP programme are an important asset to the teaching-learning environment.

In addition to many positive points – the international and intercultural orientation of staff and students, the multiple perspectives, the fieldwork component, the build-up of the curriculum, the learning communities, the competent and engaged staff – HGP students mentioned two aspects that could improve: first, the programme could pay more attention to skills such as Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and statistics, thereby ensuring that students build up their competencies throughout the three-year programme rather than in one-off courses. While lecturers and management indicated that GIS and statistics are also offered outside the dedicated courses, they announced they would raise the issue with course coordinators and at curriculum meetings. Second, students indicated that the HGP programme very much focuses on the theoretical, academic and research dimension of the discipline. Given that most students do not envisage a PhD trajectory, they would like courses to include more practical viewpoints on their future profession, e.g. through guest lectures from field experts. Lecturers and management emphasised that there is attention to the professional aspects of HGP but that it is sometimes not (made) clear to students that (guest) lecturers are addressing the practical professional dimension of a topic. Also in this case, the course coordinators could make this more explicit in the syllabi and in their teaching.

MSc Economic Geography

The MSc EG is a one-year full-time master programme of 60 EC. Since the previous accreditation, the programme is offering two tracks in addition to its main curriculum. All three curriculum variants are presented in Appendix 2 to this report and consist of four common compulsory courses (20 EC), four track-related courses/electives (20 EC) and a master thesis (20 EC). The common compulsory courses are spread over the entire academic year and introduce the past and present state of economic geography. The introduction of the two tracks has led to a reorganization of the contents in the core programme, giving it a thematic focus of its own. Hence, the core programme (EG) has now the sub-title Global Transformations Local Impact, while the variants are referred to as Regional Competitiveness and Trade, and Sustainable Rural Futures. The former track offers the full scope of regional science research as practiced at the University of Groningen. The latter track emphasizes the growing importance of rural regions in shaping Europe's future, notably in the context of major transformations such as energy transition or demographic shifts. Students indicated that the curriculum has been carefully updated to provide a continuous and adaptable education experience. It starts with foundational courses before proceeding to more complex subjects. They also like the combination of methodological and thematic components, which encourages greater understanding and allows for a good preparation for the thesis. Although it is too early to assess the relevance of the Sustainable Rural Futures track, which only started in the current academic year 2024-2025, the panel found the curricula of the core programme and the regional competitiveness track clear and coherent. The panel's thesis review (see standard 4) included five master theses submitted under the Regional Competitiveness and Trade track, which reflected the same good quality as the rest of the sample. The panel commends the programme team for its hard work on the curriculum: the result looks good and offers students not only a strong foundation in economic geography but also three specialization opportunities. As a point for attention in the future, students indicated that there could be more coordination among course coordinators in terms of both course contents and assignment scheduling. Confronted with these suggestions, the programme team mentioned to the panel that it is aware of both issues and has taken measures which it hopes will be effective as of next academic year.

In order to be admitted, EG students need a bachelor's degree in the field of regional economic development such as Human Geography, Regional and Urban Planning, Economics and Business Economics, or in related domains. Each application is checked individually. If students do not meet all admission requirements, they can take a pre-master programme. Students indicated to the panel that they found the admission process straightforward. The panel noticed that the admission requirements are effective as the EG programme attracts the diverse student group it envisages.

In recent years, the MSc EG intake has fluctuated between 20 and 29 students, with the highest intake in September 2024. While the programme tends to attract mainly (Dutch) bachelor graduates from different programmes at UG, there is always a minority of non-Dutch students (12%-25%). While current national policy makes it difficult to recruit additional international students, the programme team would like to increase the share of non-Dutch students to make optimal use of the international classroom. The panel noticed from data in the self-evaluation report that the programme's success rate differs considerably per year, both for students who graduate nominally (between 11% and 33%) and those who finish in two years (between 39% and 73%). Students from their side indicated that both individual courses and the entire curriculum are feasible, and even more feasible since the programme revision. Very often students have their own personal reasons for extending the graduation moment: several students mentioned to the panel that they prefer doing a longer internship that prepares them better for the labour market, rather than graduating in time and entering the labour market right away but in a less attractive position. The panel acknowledges this student viewpoint and welcomes the monitoring efforts of the programme team regarding student intake and success rate. It is convinced that the EG curriculum is feasible.

The panel gathered from the programme-specific materials and the discussions that 21 teaching staff are currently involved in the MSc EG. These staff are highly qualified and have good (international) experience. Students indicated in their chapter and to the panel that they appreciate the disciplinary expertise of the lecturers and the guidance by their thesis supervisors. According to the panel, the staff on this EG programme is an important asset to the teaching-learning environment.

MSc Real Estate Studies

The MSc RES is a one-year full-time master programme of 60 EC. Its curriculum is presented in Appendix 2 to this report. It consists of six compulsory courses (30 EC), two electives (10 EC), and a master thesis (20 EC). The self-evaluation report contains the rationale for offering courses in a particular block period. According to the panel it makes sense to offer a curriculum that builds up from foundation to specialization, with a focus first on theory and then on methodology.

The mission of the MSc RES is to educate students with academic knowledge and skills to provide innovative real estate solutions for inclusive, liveable and sustainable places. Since the previous accreditation, the programme identified a list of cross-cutting themes - such as data analytics, sustainability, housing affordability, research ethics, cultural diversity - which are important to the domain of real estate studies and align with the research interests of FSS. While the topics were mentioned in the programme materials, it was not always clear to the panel how they were integrated in the curriculum. In this regard, the panel struggled in particular with the programme's attention to ethics 'on paper', its stated ambition to educate critical researchers "who recognize ethical issues in/of the real estate sector and are able to reflect on its organization", and the day-to-day training for a position in the real estate industry. During the visit, the panel discussed with students and staff how these cross-cutting themes, and in particular ethics, are addressed. While students recognized the themes and staff indicated that these were covered in several courses, the panel established after the discussion that - given the mission of the RES programme - the cross cutting themes could take a more prominent position in the curriculum. It is clear to the panel that students learn a lot in this programme about how the real estate market operates, but more attention could go to a critical reflection on this operationalization. After all, it is at the university that students should learn to take distance and be critical towards the profession they are about to join. Hence, the panel suggests to map how these cross-cutting themes are addressed in the respective courses and to indicate this more explicitly in the courses and their syllabi. While this comment applies to all themes, the panel encourages the

programme team to pay particular attention to business/professional ethics, research ethics and ethical reflection on the real estate sector and provision of real estate as such.

Another topic that was raised during the visit related to data sets for the master thesis. While students appreciate the freedom to propose a thesis topic of their own interest, this topic was often limited / decided by the data set that was available on a given topic, at a given organization, and could be used freely (i.e. without non-disclosure agreements). Moreover, the time available to do the master thesis research does not allow students to collect their own data. The panel invites the programme team to look for ways to balance the need for data sets with the wish of students to investigate a topic of their own interest. In this regard, the programme may want to pay particular attention to the international students who are searching for data sets.

In order to be admitted, RES students need a bachelor's degree in HGP, SPD, Economics, Finance, Business Administration or International Business. Each application is checked individually. If students do not meet all admission requirements, they can take a pre-master programme. About 15% of the students enter with a bachelor's degree from a university of applied science (e.g. Vastgoedkunde) and a pre-master. To ensure the quality of the intake, the programme maintains strict admission requirements as well as selection criteria to rank the admitted students in case there are too many applications. Students indicated to the panel that they found the admission process 'fair and square'. The panel noticed that the requirements are effective as the RES programme attracts the diverse group of students it envisages.

In recent years, the MSc RES intake has fluctuated between 26 and 42 students. For capacity reasons the programme sets a cap on 45 students per year. While the programme tends to attract mainly (Dutch) bachelor graduates from different programmes at UG and from universities of applied sciences, the share of international students has increased from 8% (in 2019) to 31% (in 2024). The panel noticed from data in the self-evaluation report that the programme's success rate has increased since the previous accreditation, both for students who graduate nominally (from 17% to 37%) and those who finish in two years (from 63% to 75%). Students indicated that both individual courses and the entire curriculum are feasible. Very often they have their own personal reasons for extending the graduation moment: several students mentioned to the panel that they prefer doing a longer internship that prepares them better for the labour market, or take a board year in the study association FRESH with very strong links to the professional field, rather than graduating in time and entering the labour market right away but in a less attractive position. The panel acknowledges this student viewpoint and welcomes the monitoring efforts of the programme team regarding student intake and success rate. The most recent data in fact show that the average study duration is improving and has reached a level (17 months) that is comparable to other master programmes at FSS. These new figures demonstrate according to the panel that the RES curriculum is feasible.

The panel gathered from the programme-specific materials and the discussions that six teaching staff are currently involved in the MSc RES. They are qualified content-wise and didactically, and make for a varied team of early-career and experienced teaching staff. Students indicated in their chapter and to the panel that they appreciate the disciplinary expertise of the lecturers, as well as the didactical skills of most teachers. They experience great and accessible communication with the teachers and in the respective courses. Moreover, the materials are presented in a way that students can easily relate to. According to the panel, the staff on this RES programme is an important asset to the teaching-learning environment.

MSc Population Studies

The MSc PS is a one-year full-time master programme of 60 EC. Its curriculum is presented in Appendix 2 to this report. It consists of six compulsory courses (30 EC), two elective courses (10 EC), and a master thesis (20

EC). While this course structure exists already for a long time, the curriculum itself was redesigned in 2022-2023 with contents being redistributed over (new) courses, and some courses being renamed and/or repositioned. Moreover, an optional course 'Population Research Training' was added to offer ambitious students the opportunity to work with a staff member on a research project. All interlocutors agreed during the site visit that the new curriculum is an improvement to the programme. The panel acknowledges the statement in the self-evaluation report that students now follow a curriculum that is balanced between theme-based, method-based and project-based courses.

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the revised MSc PS curriculum allows students to explore both their professional and academic ambitions, e.g. through the above-mentioned Population Research Training or by doing an internship as elective. This internship can also be combined with master thesis work. Hence, the panel established that both the PS curriculum as a whole and its individual courses in particular are very interesting.

While the programme admits bachelor graduates with a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, the international students coming to Groningen as part of their Dual Degree add further layers of diversity in culture, nationality and background. The panel spoke to several Dual Degree students on site. The panel gathered from their contribution that the international (dual degree) students often arrive at FSS with a different educational background and a different academic tradition. Notwithstanding targeted support and guidance from the programme team and FSS, they find it difficult – certainly at the start of the academic year – to integrate in this new domain and in this new academic environment. According to the panel, this is related to the diverse composition of the student population: some PS students are older/more mature, some have a bachelor's degree in demography, while others have a different background, some follow the master to find a job, while others have the ambition to pursue a PhD. This diversity makes it difficult for the programme to (design courses that do justice to and) cater for the needs of all PS students, which in turn leads to criticism/frustration among part of the students cohorts. The panel invites the programme to reflect how to accommodate the needs and wants of its diverse student audience in the respective courses. This point, however, does not weigh up to the many positive points – the international dimension, the attention to both research and professional practice, the build-up of the curriculum, the competent and engaged staff – the PS students have mentioned and the panel has established.

In order to be admitted, PS students need a bachelor's degree from FSS or another degree with courses in population studies, statistics, and academic research. If students do not meet all admission requirements, they can take a pre-master programme. The panel noticed that the admission requirements are effective as the PS programme attracts the diverse student group it envisages.

In recent years, the average intake was around 20 PS students per year. In September 2024, however, only 15 students enrolled. Around 40% of the intake is non-Dutch, including several Dual Degree students per year. The panel noticed from data in the self-evaluation report that the success rates differs considerably per year, both for students who graduate nominally (between 32% and 56%) and those who finish in two years (between 60% and 89%). The panel was informed that the programme team is attentively following up the student data, which demonstrate among others that the PS curriculum is feasible. The relative low number of PS students does not jeopardize the viability of the programme as students from other courses can – and do – join core PS courses.

The panel gathered from the programme-specific materials and the discussions that 12 teaching staff are currently involved in the MSc PS. Students indicated in their chapter and to the panel that they appreciate the disciplinary expertise of the lecturers and supervisors, as well as their didactical skills and their

availability. They also value the guidance and support of the study advisors. According to the panel, the dedicated teaching and service staff on this PS programme are an important asset to the teaching-learning environment.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the seven programmes under review operate in a robust teaching and learning environment. This appreciation applies to the relevant curricula, the befitting learning environment, the appropriate admission criteria, the support and information services, and the disciplinary expertise of the teaching staff.

The panel welcomes the changes to the respective curricula and is convinced that the adjustments are invariably for the better. The programme assessment plans ensure that the organization and the delivery of the respective curricula allows students to achieve the programme learning outcomes.

The panel endorses the English name of the degree programmes, as well as the decision to offer the BSc Spatial Planning and Design, the BSc Human Geography and Planning, the MSc Economic Geography, the MSc Environmental and Infrastructure Planning, the MSc Population Studies, the MSc Society, Sustainability and Planning, and the MSc Real Estate Studies in English. The panel found that the international dimension enriches the teaching and learning environment for both Dutch and non-Dutch students.

The panel thinks highly of the learning environment, which befits the vision on education of the faculty and responds to the needs of national and international, bachelor and master students. Similarly, students benefit from good quality information and can rely on a comprehensive system of academic and personal guidance and support.

According to the panel, the teaching staff forms an important asset of the seven programmes under review. The teaching body at FSS does not only have disciplinary know-how, research expertise and didactic qualifications, but also wants to improve and innovate its teaching practices and is committed to go the extra mile for the students.

In addition to these considerations that altogether warrant a positive judgement on this standard, the panel sees room for a stronger underpinning of - and a better connection between - the contents and the didactics of the international classroom.

In so far as the teaching-learning environment of individual programmes is concerned, the panel advises the:

- BSc SPD to strengthen the teaching of digital skills in class;
- MSc EIP and MSc SSP to provide targeted support for international students on both course and career preparation;
- BSc HGP to ensure that GIS and statistics are covered throughout the curriculum;
- BSc HGP to pay more explicit attention to the practical and professional dimension of course topics;
- MSc RES to support notably international students in finding relevant data sets for master thesis topics;
- MSc RES to give a more prominently visible position to all cross-cutting themes in the curriculum, and in particular to the ethical component;
- MSc PS to reflect how the programme can accommodate the needs and wants of its diverse student body in the respective courses.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that all seven programmes **meet** standard 2.

Standard 3. Student assessment

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

Findings

Assessment system

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the assessment system in all seven programmes under review is embedded in the assessment principles and policies of FSS, which are laid down in the FSS Assessment Policy Memorandum. According to this memorandum, assessment is considered an instrument to monitor student progress and help students realize the programme learning outcomes. It follows the student-oriented education vision that stimulates an active learning environment and expects lecturers to employ transparent, reasoned and appropriate assessment methods based on the intended learning outcomes, the position of the course within the programme and the learning objectives of the course itself.

At the level of the respective programmes, the Teaching and Examination Regulations (TER) and the Assessment Plan play an important role. Every programme has a TER, which contains among others the intended learning outcomes. Based on the TER, the programme management drafts – and the Faculty Board approves – an Assessment Plan featuring learning outcomes, the modes of assessment of all curriculum courses, and a matrix combining programme learning outcomes and curriculum courses. The panel studied the respective Assessment Plans, which were added to the self-evaluation reports, and noticed that in each programme curriculum courses consist of different individual and group assignments, formative and summative tests. In this way students also receive peer and/or instructor feedback without anxiety of losing marks, while altogether the variation in assessment modes does justice to the different learning styles of the students.

In addition to TER and AP, students mainly obtain information on the assessment modes and their relation to the position of the course in the broader programme from the individual course guides produced by the responsible course coordinator. These syllabi, which are available on the learning management system Brightspace, also describe the assessment procedures, including the grading rubrics for written assignments and presentations.

The panel was informed that the quality of every exam is peer reviewed in advance by another member of staff. After the exam/block period, students evaluate the assessment modes in course evaluations and indicate to what extent the assessment ties in with the course learning goals. The results of these course evaluations are discussed in the Programme Committee, shared with the course coordinator for reflection and possible action, and made available to the students.

Students indicated in their written contributions and during the site visit that both the system of assessment and its operationalisation throughout the programmes and courses is transparent and mostly of good quality. Where necessary, students can – and do - indicate flaws which are effectively picked up and addressed by the lecturers.

The panel found that the overall system of assessment is based on relevant principles and policies that are also effectively implemented in the day-to-day reality of the respective programmes. The assessment principles are carefully translated in a variety of assessment formats that do justice to the level and nature of the course, as well as to its learning goals. The panel appreciates in particular the connection between assessment, teaching delivery and programme learning outcomes, as well as the quality assurance provisions before and after an exam.

Furthermore, the written materials and the discussions on site showed that all programmes under review are still looking for the best way to accommodate the (impact of the) developments in Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) on both education and assessment. According to FSS, both existing tools and forthcoming developments in GenAI (will) impact on the way each degree programme is designed, delivered and assessed presenting both staff and students with many (unseen) opportunities. Faculty representatives announced to the panel that FSS will determine in the very near future how to integrate GenAI into the respective programme learning outcomes and their curricula. This, in turn, will require the development of a strategy, addressing ethical considerations, fostering AI literacy among faculty members, and teaching students how to ethically and effectively use AI technologies. The panel appreciates the attention that is given to (strategic developments in) GenAI at all levels of the faculty and encourages FSS and the programme teams to experiment with the integration of GenAI in the programmes.

Currently, each programme abides by the university-wide policy on AI in education and a set of ten general rules for the use of AI tools in teaching. The policy stipulates that using generative AI tools such as ChatGTP for substituting work is not allowed, while integrating generative AI assistance into the academic writing process should be guided by the student's commitment to transparency and integrity. Based on these rules, FSS has distributed a policy brief to guide examiners on the actions they must take to ensure accurate assessment and reduce the risk of GenAI misuse. The discussions on site with all relevant stakeholders indicate according to the panel that there is a commonly agreed – and for the time being seemingly adequate framework – within which faculty, programmes, lecturers, examiners and students operate.

Thesis assessment

Every programme under review culminates in a thesis, the final research project. The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that while the different programmes have their own approach to organizing the thesis process, they share the rationale that the thesis is the pinnacle of all knowledge and skills accumulated during the programme.

The previous accreditation panel advised to develop a thesis assessment form with recognizably independent feedback from both first and second examiner. As a result, FSS developed a standard assessment form for all theses, with slightly different criteria (weights) for the bachelor and the master thesis, and with a dedicated space for feedback on each criterion by the first and the second assessor. The panel appreciates the efforts undertaken by the faculty and the programmes in this regard and established that the two forms are a net improvement compared to the documents used until 2019.

As part of its external assessment, the panel reviewed a sample of mostly 15 theses and their completed evaluation forms per programme. The quality of the thesis samples will be addressed under the next standard. Across programmes, the samples contained a total of 10 graduation projects that were submitted as part of the Groningen part of dual degree programmes. In all these cases, the thesis and the assessment form followed the standards that apply to a 'regular' FSS master thesis. In so far as the quality of thesis assessment is concerned, the panel found that overall, the evaluation forms are relevant, mostly completed

in an insightful way, and the final scores given by the assessors were almost always in line with the appreciation of the panel members.

As points for attention, the panel found that – across programmes – the position of the second assessor was not always clear. While several forms contained insightful feedback from each of the assessors to motivate their overall grade, as well as the scores per criterion, the panel noticed that in a number of cases the form contained one set of scores and feedback without indicating if this was the input from the supervisor or rather the result of a discussion among two assessors. In these cases, the panel could not always find proof that the second assessors had scored the thesis independently, that they had been involved in setting the final score, and whether they were expected to provide a written motivation of their score. Moreover, the panel questioned the internal weighting of the respective evaluation criteria, notably in the bachelor thesis assessment form (see also discussion under the individual bachelor's programmes below). Because some students seemed to pass the thesis while obtaining 'insufficient' scores on some individual criteria, the panel was keen to know if there are essential criteria in the thesis that required a pass. In addition, the panel wondered what the rationale of the programmes was to include tick boxes in the evaluation form to report on the results of a quick scan that verified whether a thesis was fit for defence (see discussion below for the individual bachelor's programmes). Finally, the panel came across a few cases where the selected thesis had been the result of a resit. The materials provided, however, raised questions on the decision and conditions for a resit, as well as the timeframe granted to the student between the first submission and the resit to 'repair' the quality of the thesis.

The Faculty agreed with the panel that the argumentation for the overall thesis grades could be better substantiated in the assessment forms, especially how this appreciation follows from the scores and their motivation of individual criteria, and that this could be more consistently implemented across examiners. Examiners now have considerable freedom in using the individual criteria to arrive at the final grade, including allowing insufficient grades on individual criteria that are balanced out by higher grades on other criteria. At the same time, the Faculty Management and Board of Examiners convincingly explained to the panel that this is most prominently an administrative and implementation issue. The panel could also confirm this from the thesis review (see standard 4). Although the panel felt that the thesis grades did not always fully reflect the quality of the thesis due to the weighing of the subgrades, this did not (apart from two isolated cases out of 111 products) lead to the passing of theses that were overall substandard. This is further discussed below and under Standard 4.

When discussing the recommendations to improve the substantiation of the final grades and clarifying the weighing of the grades on the individual criteria, the Faculty management and the Board of Examiners made a number of suggestions to improve the existing regulations or procedures to improve the thesis assessment process in the long run. The panel therefore invited the interlocutors to outline these suggestions in a thesis assessment plan. This plan was shared with the panel mid-June 2025 and contained four concrete steps to strengthen the thesis assessment process: (i) to set minimum requirements for three essential criteria in the thesis assessment form; (ii) to operationalize the criteria that assess the thesis components 'presentation' and 'peer review'; (iii) to clarify in writing the grading procedure by both examiners; and (iv) to review the timeline and set clear conditions for a resit. While not every programme was concerned to a similar extent by the findings of the panel, the faculty decided nonetheless that in order to ensure consistency in implementation, the thesis assessment plan will apply to all degree programmes under review. The timing for the steps outlined in the plan is such that changes will be implemented between September and December 2025. In this way students who write their thesis in the latter half of 2025-2026 will be assessed according to the new form. The panel has studied the thesis assessment plan, and was positive on its contents, and informed FSS accordingly. The panel was happy to learn that the programmes took the

observations of the panel during the site visit to heart and used these to improve its procedures rapidly after the site visit. If anything, the panel invites FSS to stipulate very clearly in its procedures how it guarantees the independence of the examiners and how this will be visible in the assessment form.

Quality assurance

The Faculty of Spatial Sciences has one Board of Examiners (BoE), which is responsible for the examination and assessment quality of all bachelor and master programmes. The Board consists of seven members and is supported by an administrative secretary. The chair and five members are examiners in FSS programmes and are appointed by the Faculty Board in such a way that each Department is represented. The external member is an assessment expert.

The panel met several BoE representatives during the site visit and noticed that they are well qualified to fulfil their tasks. While being a faculty-wide body, their embedding in the respective Departments ensures that as a collegial body they are well aware of the specific situation in the respective degree programmes. The Board members also indicated that they feel sufficiently independent from faculty and programme management. While their task is essentially a regulatory and controlling one, they are also approached by their fellow staff members for informal advice on concrete assessment issues.

The BoE informed the panel that they also fulfil the role that is sometimes given out to an Assessment Committee under mandate of the Board. To ensure the quality of examinations, the Board evaluates per year the assessment of ten courses, ten bachelor and ten master theses, and the Assessment Plan of one or two programmes. Every academic year, the BoE reports on its activities in an Annual Report. The panel studied the most recent version of this report and noticed that there were no particularly problematic issues, a finding that was confirmed by the Board members.

The panel used the session with the BoE to discuss its findings on the thesis review, notably the (bachelor) thesis assessment form and the position of the second assessor. The Board welcomed this input, which was based on a considerable sample of 120 thesis evaluation forms. The BoE indicated that there are agreements on the respective roles of the supervisor and second assessor, but that there had been no instances where the divergence in scores by the first and second assessor had been called into question or led to an obvious case of score overrule. Similarly, the BoE understood the panel's concern about the quite considerable weighting that was allocated to certain criteria of the bachelor thesis, which in turn may lead to final scores that do not reflect the quality of the research project. The panel noticed after the site visit that the Board of Examiners had contributed to the improvement plan for the thesis assessment process in 2025-2026 and will evaluate the updated procedures in 2026-2027.

In the previous accreditation report, the panel reported that the then Board of Examiners “works in a professional way, quickly and proactively, and has a clear view of its responsibilities”. The current panel confirms that – also in a different composition – the BoE still operates in a proactive and professional way, keeping oversight over the programmes while diving deep when necessary. The current panel is impressed by the range and the depth of the tasks – in particular the extensive efforts to control every year the assessment quality of so many different courses, theses and programmes – that are carried out by a relatively small group. According to the panel, the degree programmes under review are in good hands with the Board of Examiners at FSS.

BSc Spatial Planning and Design

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel noticed that the system of assessment in the BSc SPD aligns with the assessment policy of FSS. Every course consists of different testing moments:

group assignments are always combined with individual tasks or exams to ensure that students accomplish the course learning goals and programme learning outcomes individually. In every course, the assessment criteria and/or grading rubrics are discussed and shared with students prior to the assignments and tests. Group assignments always feature an element of peer assessment to reduce free-rider behaviour and encourage a professional working attitude. The Internship component in year 3 is assessed through an internship plan, a reflection report, and the performance on site, while students present and discuss their internship progress during return days to the faculty. Further to its overall findings on the assessment system, the panel establishes that course assessment is properly organised in the BSc SPD.

The Bachelor Thesis consists of an individual research project that is organized as a course featuring lectures, seminars, consultations, and deadlines for intermediate and final drafts. All intermediate steps/products are formatively assessed by the supervisor and through peer review. The assessment procedure is detailed in the course guide and explained during the first meeting. Since the previous accreditation visit, the thesis evaluation form has changed for the better. The panel also welcomes the cooperation and coordination on thesis process and assessment procedures between the bachelor programmes SPD and HGP.

In so far as the assessment of final projects is concerned, panel members and referees studied the completed evaluation forms of 21 SPD bachelor theses submitted in the academic year 2023-2024. The assessment form consists of ten rubrics: five criteria relate to the quality of the research (problem, theory, data, analysis, conclusion) while another five (summary, written report, process, presentation, peer review) address other elements of the final project. Although the panel agreed in a majority of cases to the final grade, it found in a number of assessments that there was a mismatch between the final grade and the quality of the thesis. In these cases, the panel noticed that students got a proper but sometimes (very) low score on one or more 'research' criteria, but made up for these weaknesses through relatively high scores on some of the 'other' criteria that together count for 35% of the grade. Given that in a few extreme cases, the high scores on 'other' criteria made a thesis pass the threshold 5.5 score, the panel advises the programme and FSS to either revisit the weighting of the criteria or to introduce criteria minima to pass the thesis. Moreover, given that some of the 'other' scores were not always motivated, the panel suggests to develop rubrics for criteria such as process, presentation or peer review, and organize calibration sessions.

Furthermore, it was not always clear from the completed SPD thesis evaluation forms what the role of the second assessor was in terms of giving an individual score, agreeing on a common final grade, and providing written feedback. Panel members also wondered what the role was of the tick boxes on the evaluation form: while it makes sense according to the panel to use a box to indicate that a thesis was submitted for a plagiarism test, but then it would also be useful to provide the result (percentage). Finally, looking at theses that had been assessed in their resit phase after a (short) repair period, the panel wondered when students can do a repair and what the timeline is between first submission and resit.

Because these critical findings also apply - to different extents - to the thesis assessment of other degree programmes, the panel raised questions on the criteria weightings, the position of the second assessor, the tick boxes on the evaluation form, and the time in between submission and resit in several sessions and with different stakeholders, as described in the above section on thesis assessment. The thesis assessment plan gives the panel the confidence that its findings have been picked up and that the proposed measures will improve not only the overall system at FSS but also the specific BSc SPD thesis assessment process.

MSc Environmental and Infrastructure Planning

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel noticed that the system of assessment in the MSc EIP aligns with the assessment policy of FSS. The learning outcomes take central stage and are assessed in the compulsory courses. The programme has a range of instruments to test both knowledge and skills. Almost all courses combine different assessment methods, ranging from individual and group assignments to digital written exams with essay-type questions. The individual courses collectively prepare students for the final master thesis part of the programme in which all acquired knowledge and skills come together. Further to its overall findings on the assessment system, the panel establishes that course assessment is properly organised in the MSc EIP: the variation of assessment modes is well in line with the programme's vision on learning. The Assessment Plan shows that all learning outcomes are tested summatively at some point.

The master thesis consists of an individual research project in which students conduct largely self-directed research, unravel complexity, compare and reflect upon advanced theories, concepts and methods, and work with a scientific attitude and rigour. The thesis assessment procedure is detailed in the course guide and explained during the first meeting. Since the previous accreditation visit, the thesis evaluation form has changed for the better. The panel also welcomes the cooperation and coordination on thesis process and assessment procedures between the five master programmes under review.

In so far as the assessment of final projects is concerned, panel members and referees studied the completed evaluation forms of 15 EIP master theses submitted in the academic year 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The assessment form consists of nine rubrics: five criteria relate to the quality of the research (problem, literature and theory, methodology, results, discussion and conclusion) while another four (summary, written report, oral presentation, and research process) address other elements of the final project. Although the panel agreed in almost all cases to the final grade, it found that there was huge variance in the way the assessment forms had been completed: several assessment forms were very insightful whereas others hardly contained any feedback. The latter was especially missed when the (final/criteria) scores differ from the perceived thesis quality. Moreover, the contribution of the second assessors was not included on a few evaluation forms. Hence, the panel suggests to agree on common expectations among EIP supervisors and second assessors as to their respective input and feedback on the thesis assessment form.

MSc Society, Sustainability and Planning

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel noticed that the system of assessment in the MSc SSP aligns with the assessment policy of FSS, as well as with the programme's vision on education. The diverse knowledge, skills and attitudes outlined in the programme learning outcomes are tested and demonstrated through a variety of formative and summative assessment forms. Within a course formative and complementary assessments and assignments serve as an 'early warning system' on student progress for both students and teachers. This approach acknowledges the role of formative feedback in enhancing learning, encourages students to stay up-to-date with their course materials, and does justice to the increasingly diverse (learning styles of the) SSP student population. Moreover, the emphasis on theoretical knowledge in the first part, and on skills in practical implementation questions in the second part of the MSc SSP has implications for the assessment formats throughout the curriculum. Further to its overall findings on the assessment system, the panel establishes that course assessment is properly organized in the MSc SSP: the variation of assessment modes is well in line with the programme's vision on learning and the Assessment Plans at both programme and course level ensure that eventually all course learning goals and programme learning outcomes will be tested.

The master thesis consists of an individual research project in which students conduct largely self-directed research. The thesis assessment procedure is detailed in the course guide and explained during the first meeting. Since the previous accreditation visit, the thesis evaluation form has changed for the better. The panel also welcomes the cooperation and coordination on thesis process and assessment procedures between the four master programmes under review.

In so far as the assessment of final projects is concerned, panel members and referees studied the completed evaluation forms of 15 SSP master theses submitted in the academic year 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The assessment form is identical for all master programmes and consists of the nine rubrics described for the MSc EIP. While the panel found that almost all SSP assessment forms had been completed in an insightful way by both supervisors and second assessors, there were several assessments where the panel arrived at a different final score. In these cases, it seemed that assessors – for very good reasons, according to the panel – had given lower scores on certain ‘research’ criteria that were then somewhat ‘overruled’ by very high scores on ‘other’ criteria that were not necessarily motivated. Hence, the panel suggests to develop rubrics for criteria such as process, presentation or peer review, and organize calibration sessions.

BSc Human Geography and Planning

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel noticed that the system of assessment in the BSc HGP aligns with the assessment policy of FSS, as well as with the programme’s vision of assessment. According to this vision, assessment should not only measure the learning outcomes but also support an active learning philosophy and inspire continuous learning. Hence, some courses include pass/fail assignments to encourage preparation for lectures, tutorials or fieldwork. Data gathering, analysis and reflection assignments promote active research-oriented learning. Feedback enables peer learning. The programme uses a mixture of assessment modes, ranging from digital exams over individual and group assignments to authentic assessments (podcast, video, policy brief) that reflect professional practice. Further to its overall findings on the assessment system, the panel establishes that course assessment is properly organised in the BSc HGP.

The Bachelor Thesis consists of an individual research project that is organized as a course featuring lectures, seminars, consultations, and deadlines for intermediate and final drafts. It reflects the programme’s active learning philosophy: students engage in peer assessment, peer encouragement, and individual development. Executing a supervised research project means that students apply the knowledge and skills they acquired, while group supervision provides a shared learning experience. The thesis assessment procedure is detailed in the course guide. Since the previous accreditation visit, the thesis evaluation form has changed for the better. The panel also welcomes the cooperation and coordination on thesis process and assessment procedures between the bachelor programmes SPD and HGP.

In so far as the assessment of final projects is concerned, panel members and referees studied the completed evaluation forms of 15 HGP bachelor theses submitted in the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The assessment form is identical for all bachelor programmes and consists of the ten rubrics described for the BSc SPD. The panel agreed to almost all scores and found that almost all assessment forms had been completed in an insightful way. Only in a few cases, the written feedback was not very informative but short and descriptive. Overall, the panel could very much relate to the assessment criteria and rubrics in the evaluation form, as they allow for a good variation in assessor appreciation yet also show similarities in performance.

MSc Economic Geography

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel noticed that the system of assessment in the MSc EG aligns with the assessment policy of FSS. The programme follows the constructive alignment principle where learning objectives, teaching methods and assessments form an integrated whole. Its assessment strategy is designed to prepare EG students for a professional career through a variety of assessment methods that reflect real-world tasks, such as policy reports, academic papers, presentations, and case-based group work. The diversity of assessments ensures that students develop skills in multiple formats, fostering adaptability in both academic and professional settings. Across the curriculum, courses include formative and summative assessments, with an emphasis on essay writing and oral presentations. All assessments are described in the course guide and explained at the start of a course. Further to its overall findings on the assessment system, the panel establishes that the MSc EG features a broad range of assessments and that course assessment is properly organized in the programme.

The master thesis consists of an individual research project in which students conduct largely self-directed research. It is the primary measure for the EG students to demonstrate their competencies at the end of the programme. The thesis assessment procedure is detailed in the course guide and explained during the first meeting. Since the previous accreditation visit, the thesis evaluation form has changed for the better. The panel also welcomes the cooperation and coordination on thesis process and assessment procedures between the five master programmes under review.

In so far as the assessment of final projects is concerned, panel members and referees studied the completed evaluation forms of 15 EG master theses submitted in the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The assessment form is identical for all master programmes and consists of the nine rubrics described for the MSc EIP. The panel agreed to almost all scores and found that almost all assessment forms had been completed in an insightful way.

As a point for attention, the panel indicated that the evaluation criteria methodology, data analysis and presentation could do with some more weight in the overall grade in order to emphasize more strongly the academic character of the master thesis, as well as the student involvement on the Graduate Research Day. Although scores are adequate and forms are insightful, the programme may nonetheless want to organize a calibration session for all thesis assessors to discuss the evaluation criteria and agree on a common interpretation of the rubrics.

MSc Real Estate Studies

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel noticed that the system of assessment in the MSc RES aligns with the assessment policy of FSS. The programme uses formative and summative assessment modes to enhance learning and to prepare students as critical, independent, academically-trained professionals in the field of real estate. This includes research-driven essays, written exams, industry case studies, computer assignments, presentations, individual or group work, and peer review. Certain assessment methods have been revised recently as they were sensitive to GenAI. All courses use several assessment modes, which are not only scheduled at the end but are integrated throughout the course. The combination of assessments, moreover, take into account the workload for both students and staff, as well as the respective study credits. Further to its overall findings on the assessment system, the panel establishes that course assessment is properly organized in the MSc RES: the programme features a variety of assessment instruments that suit the programme learning outcomes, the teaching methods and the study load of the respective courses.

The master thesis consists of an individual research project in which students conduct largely self-directed research. The thesis assessment procedure is detailed in the course guide and explained during the first meeting. Since the previous accreditation visit, the thesis evaluation form has changed for the better. The panel also welcomes the cooperation and coordination on thesis process and assessment procedures between the five master programmes under review.

In so far as the assessment of final projects is concerned, panel members and referees studied the completed evaluation forms of 15 RES master theses submitted in the academic year 2023-2024. The assessment form is identical for all master programmes and consists of the nine rubrics described for the MSc EIP. The panel agreed to all scores and found that the assessment forms had been completed in an insightful way. The panel noticed that both the final grades and the criteria scores were well accounted for by both assessors. Compared to some of the completed bachelor assessments, 'other' criteria such as presentation or process were graded – and accounted for - in a more nuanced way. This results in the overall grades not being 'inflated' but reflecting the true quality of the respective master theses.

As a point for attention, the panel indicated that the evaluation criteria methodology, data analysis and presentation could do with some more weight in the overall grade in order to emphasize more strongly the academic character of the master thesis, as well as the student involvement on the Graduation Day. Although scores are adequate and forms are insightful, the programme may nonetheless want to organize a calibration session for all thesis assessors to discuss the evaluation criteria and agree on a common interpretation of the rubrics.

MSc Population Studies

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel noticed that the system of assessment in the MSc PS aligns with the assessment policy of FSS, as well as with the educational vision of the programme. Lecturers use assessment methods that reflect the course learning goals, the programme learning outcomes, and the position of the course in the curriculum. Moreover, they design their exams in such a way that they are valid, reliable and transparent. Across the curriculum different formative and summative assessment methods are used, and each course is assessed through different forms of assessments. The panel was informed that also in assessment, the MSc PS pays attention to inclusive education by testing different dimensions of student skills. Moreover, the programme pays good attention to spreading the study and assessment load equally within the blocks and across the academic year. Further to its overall findings on the assessment system, the panel establishes that course assessment is properly organized in the MSc PS.

The master thesis consists of an individual research project in which students conduct largely self-directed research. The thesis assessment procedure is detailed in the course guide and explained during the first meeting. Since the previous accreditation visit, the thesis evaluation form has changed for the better. The panel also welcomes the cooperation and coordination on thesis process and assessment procedures between the five master programmes under review.

In so far as the assessment of final projects is concerned, panel members and referees studied the completed evaluation forms of 15 PS master theses submitted in the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The assessment form is identical for all master programmes and consists of the nine rubrics described for the MSc EIP. The panel agreed to almost all scores and found that almost all assessment forms had been completed in an insightful way. In those few other cases, the panel found that the scores were rather high in view of the quality of the master theses and that the comments from the second assessor were largely

missing. Hence, the panel suggests to organize calibration sessions for the PS thesis assessors to agree on a common appreciation of the rubrics and set expectations for the contributions of the second assessors.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that each of the seven programmes under review can rely on a qualitative system of assessment that is embedded in long-standing policies and practices of the faculty and the university. The operationalization of the assessment principles at course level reflects the respective profiles and objectives of the programmes, while the assessment plans safeguard that course learning objectives are assessed adequately and cover the programme learning outcomes. Overall, the panel appreciates the mixture of individual and group assignments, written exams, and formative and summative evaluations.

The panel thinks highly of the quality assurance system for assessment, which is both comprehensive and effective. It moreover commends the Board of Examiners for their expertise and commitment.

The panel appreciates the efforts of the faculty and the programmes to produce a new, common, relevant and user-friendly thesis assessment format. Its extensive thesis review showed that the final scores of assessors and panel members are very close to one another and that the new form proved its worth in almost all cases. During the thesis review, the panel picked up some flaws in the administrative part of the thesis assessment. Although these were most apparent in the bachelor SPD, they also appeared in other programmes. This mainly concerned the substantiation of grades, especially how the scoring and weighing of subgrades relate to the final grades, and the role of the second examiner in establishing the final grade. The panel therefore recommends to set minimum requirements for some essential criteria, to operationalize the criteria that assess the components 'presentation' and 'peer review', to clarify the grading procedure for second examiners, and to set clear conditions and timeline for the thesis resit.

According to the panel, the thesis assessment plan which the faculty outlined following the discussion on site constitutes a good basis for implementation across programmes in 2025-2026, as well as for evaluation and follow-up by the Board of Examiners in 2026-2027. Given its findings on the thesis review, the panel calls upon the Faculty of Spatial Sciences and the degree programmes to implement the different actions outlined in its thesis assessment plan. Moreover, it invites the Board of Examiners to monitor and evaluate the roll-out of the measures announced in the plan.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that all seven programmes **meet** standard 3.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

There are two ways to determine whether the intended learning outcomes are effectively achieved: through a quality control of the final projects and by examining the career paths of graduates after completing the programme. The panel considered both aspects when assessing the achieved learning outcomes of the seven programmes under review.

Thesis quality

The master thesis project at FSS culminates in the Graduate Research Day, a congress where students present their (validated) thesis to professionals, staff, students and their family and friends. There are parallel presentation sessions, a poster market and four key-note lectures by students with an excellent thesis. The event is organized faculty-wide and targets all master programmes. The panel welcomes the initiative as it provides students with an attractive platform to present themselves and their research, and shows recognition of their work.

As part of its external assessment, the panel reviewed a total of 125 bachelor and master theses across the seven programmes under review. In all but two cases, the panel thought that the thesis met at least the minimum criteria of what can be expected of a final academic product at bachelor or master level. Hence, it is fair to state that students who successfully pass the bachelor/master thesis, have effectively achieved the learning outcomes of their respective programmes. The findings from the thesis review per programme are summarized below.

As overall points for attention in the future, the panel found that certain theses could have been written in any social science degree programme, not necessarily within the disciplinary domain Human Geography and Planning. Moreover, some of the research questions, even in master programmes, were rather descriptive and not very critical. It advises to increase attention to the choice of topic, the formulation of the research question, and the disciplinary perspective early in the thesis supervision.

Graduate performance

The general part of the self-evaluation report contains an informative overview of the sectors and employers where FSS alumni across programmes pursue their careers. The panel learned from this overview that graduates often find work as policy advisors for governments at different levels dealing with spatial planning, transportation or water management. Others pursue a career as project managers in consultancy or engineering firms. Still another group enters academia, starts their own business or joins a non-governmental organisation. A final group finds employment with housing associations or real estate developers.

While the findings on graduate performance per programme are summarized below, the panel found that two elements apply to (almost) all graduates: first, FSS bachelor graduates tend to continue with a master programme before entering the labour market in pursuit of a career in human geography and planning. Second, graduates tend to find relevant employment quite easily.

Furthermore, the panel was informed that FSS would like to tighten the contacts with alumni and involve them more actively in 'their' study programmes. The panel welcomes this intention as it noticed that there is certainly room for a more systematic follow-up of alumni. While each programme keeps track of its graduates through a LinkedIn page, current data on alumni is rather sparse and anecdotal. Hence, the programmes and FSS would benefit according to the panel from collecting data on the professional whereabouts of its alumni. Similarly, it could retrieve information on the factors that help or hinder alumni in their job application processes, as well as their first and following employment positions. This information, in turn, is useful to identify employability trends, to diversify alumni guest lectures, and to share with students who are preparing for the labour market.

BSc Spatial Planning and Design

The Bachelor Project (15 EC) consists of an individual research project that fits within a central focus theme of the programme: spatial planning and design issues related to water, infrastructure or environment. Each

thesis group has its own overarching theme within which individual students have ample opportunity to shape their own research project. As part of its external assessment, the panel looked at 21 SPD bachelor theses that were representative in terms of final scores and supervisors involved. The panel established that almost every thesis was of sufficient quality: in two cases the assessment grid (see previous chapter) had been completed in such a way that high scores on other criteria had inflated the overall score and ‘overruled’ the poor scores on research criteria. Following the improvements outlined in the updated thesis assessment plan, the panel is convinced that this will no longer be possible in the future.

Across the SPD thesis sample the panel was quite pleased with the quality of the research question, the literature review and the methods section. Moreover, the panel found that the level of English was high in all SPD bachelor projects. As points for attention in the future, the panel noticed that the discussion and conclusion sections were sometimes very short, and the use of cartographic materials was not always very appropriate. According to the panel the former element requires attention in the thesis ‘course’ while the latter should also be addressed in the curriculum prior to the bachelor thesis. The overall impression, however, is positive: the thesis review has demonstrated that SPD students who pass the bachelor thesis have achieved the programme learning outcomes.

In so far as the achieved level of the SPD alumni is concerned, the panel noted that almost all students proceed to a follow-up study at master level. According to data in the self-evaluation report, around two thirds of the SPD graduates enrol in one of the master programmes at FSS, notably Environment and Infrastructure Planning (EIP) and Society, Sustainability and Planning (SSP). Almost all other graduates are accepted in other relevant master programmes in the Netherlands and abroad.

The panel was informed that hardly any SPD graduate proceeds right-away to the labour market, unless with the intention to pursue a master programme afterwards. In fact, almost all relevant positions in the spatial planning and design domain require a master’s degree. Data on the professional whereabouts of EIP alumni (which often hold a BSc SPD) indicate according to the panel that these graduates are doing well on the labour market as they found a job quickly and are employed in positions that are commensurate with their level and study domain.

The share of SPD graduates proceeding to one of the FSS master programmes is decreasing. Moreover, SPD students appreciate the link with professional practice in the spatial design courses. As a result, FSS is currently developing a new track Designing Spatial Transformations in the follow-up master programme EIP. The panel welcomes this development because there is a growing need in the work field for competent design oriented spatial professionals. Moreover, the new track will motivate additional students to stay in Groningen and pursue also their master study at FSS.

In sum, overseeing the labour market data and the testimonies of alumni, the panel is convinced that studying the BSc SPD at FSS in Groningen constitutes a very good lever for a follow-up master study and eventually a relevant position on the labour market.

MSc Environmental and Infrastructure Planning

The Master Thesis (20 EC) consists of an individual research project that takes up most of the academic year. Students on the Spatial Design track must include a design component, while all students present their findings during the Graduate Research Day. As part of its external assessment, the panel looked at 15 EIP master theses that were representative in terms of final scores, dual degree variants, and supervisors involved. The panel established that every thesis was of sufficient quality for a final research product at academic master level.

Across the EIP thesis sample, the panel was quite pleased with the length, structure and quality of the cartographic materials, as well as with the level of positionality and the reflections on ethics. Overall, the panel found that EIP students reached a high to very high level in their master thesis.

As a point for attention in the future, the panel wondered if there is common understanding about the topic-specific knowledge (water, energy, logistics, built environment, infrastructure, circularity) that is needed to function as a planning and design professional in a technical field. This comment follows from two theses on admittedly interesting but for the EIP domain somewhat unexpected thesis topics on art, place making and gentrification. In this regard, the programme team may want to set clear guidelines on the elements an EIP master thesis should certainly contain to fulfil both thesis learning goals and programme learning outcomes.

In so far as the achieved level of the EIP alumni is concerned, the panel noted that graduates are doing well on the labour market as they mostly found a job quickly and are employed in positions that are commensurate with their level and study domain. According to data in the self-evaluation report, most graduates find work either in consultancy, engineering and construction firms, or with local, regional or national government bodies. Furthermore, EIP graduates can take part in a specially tailored cooperation with Rijkswaterstaat. This may lead to an Infrastructure and Environmental Certificate, which in turn offers alumni a special position in the ministry's recruitment procedure and has led several graduates to join Rijkswaterstaat over the years.

Overseeing the labour market data and the testimonies of alumni, the panel is convinced that the MSc EIP at FSS in Groningen constitutes a very good lever for a relevant position on the labour market.

MSc Society, Sustainability and Planning

The Master Thesis (20 EC) consists of an individual research project that takes up most of the academic year. After a thesis market in which staff pitch potential research topics, students indicate their preferences and are matched to a supervisor. The thesis coordinator organizes workshops, tracks the progress of the individual students, and guides staff members in their supervision tasks. All SSP students present their findings during the Graduate Research Day. As part of its external assessment, the panel looked at 15 SSP master theses submitted in 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 and representative in terms of final scores, dual degree variants, and supervisors involved. The panel established that every thesis was of sufficient quality for a final research product at academic master level. Across the SSP thesis sample, the panel was quite pleased with the length, structure and quality of the cartographic materials, as well as with the level of positionality and the reflections on ethics. Overall, the panel found that SSP students reached a high to very high level in their master thesis.

In so far as the achieved level of the SSP alumni is concerned, the panel noted that graduates are doing well on the labour market as they mostly found a job quickly and are employed in positions that are commensurate with their level and study domain. According to data in the self-evaluation report, the work field has become increasingly diverse recently with students finding and starting relevant jobs even before they graduate. Most SSP graduates are employed with regional and local governments, and with engineering companies. Other graduates join ministries, consultancy agencies, NGOs or research institutes. Overseeing the labour market data and the testimonies of alumni, the panel is convinced that the MSc SSP at FSS in Groningen constitutes a very good lever for a relevant position on the labour market.

BSc Human Geography and Planning

The Bachelor Project (15 EC) consists of an individual research project that fits within a central focus theme of the programme, such as well-being, health, migration or rural geography. Groups of eight students work on one of these themes that mirror the main research fields of the staff yet also allow students to contribute to important societal challenges. Within each theme and group, students have the opportunity to shape their own research project. As part of its external assessment, the panel looked at 15 HGP bachelor theses that were representative in terms of final scores and supervisors involved. The panel established that every thesis was of sufficient quality for a final research product at academic bachelor level. Across the HGP thesis sample, the panel was quite pleased with the variety and societal relevance of the thesis topics, as well as with the emphasis on - and proper execution of - empirical analysis and methodologies. Overall, the panel found that HGP students reached a good level, with only few weak or excellent products in the sample.

As points for attention in the future, the panel noticed that some of the theses were quite broad and could have done with a stronger emphasis on geography and/or a more precise and stronger research question. The panel also noticed from the materials that students and assessors struggled with the use of AI in the theses. The panel therefore advises to address these topics within the programme team and agree on common expectations regarding the emphasis on geography, the breadth of the topic, and the use of AI in the thesis. In addition, thesis coordinators and supervisors may want to pay additional attention in the bachelor thesis 'course' to formulating research questions.

In so far as the achieved level of the HGP alumni is concerned, the panel noted that almost all students proceed to a follow-up study at master level. According to data in the self-evaluation report, around three quarters of the HGP graduates enrol in one of the master programmes at FSS or another UG faculty. Other graduates continued their study elsewhere, took a gap-year or found a job. The panel was informed that a more precise breakdown shows an evolution over time where HGP graduates pursue less follow-up masters at FSS (now around 60%) and more at UG (now around 15%). The HGP students moving on to another Dutch university are rather stable around 13%.

The panel was informed that hardly any HGP graduate proceeds right-away to the labour market, unless with the intention to pursue a master programme afterwards. In fact, almost all relevant positions in the human geography and planning domain require a master's degree. The panel appreciates the BSc HGP nonetheless includes labour market preparation and professional relations in its curriculum. Moreover, students can use the university-wide Career Services or opportunities offered by the student association to develop career skills and explore the labour market. Hence, it is fair to state according to the panel that HGP students are well informed about relevant career paths.

In sum, overseeing the labour market data and the testimonies of alumni, the panel is convinced that studying the BSc HGP at FSS in Groningen constitutes a very good lever for a follow-up master study and eventually a relevant position on the labour market.

MSc Economic Geography

The Master Thesis (20 EC) consists of an individual research project that takes up most of the academic year. The thesis trajectory begins with a start-up module where students set up their thesis projects, present their plans and are given feedback. At the end of the year, EG students present their thesis during the Graduate Research Day. The panel was informed that thesis topics align mostly with the research profile of the Department and address timely societal challenges. Moreover, students can develop their thesis in cooperation with an external organization, possibly in the framework of an internship. The EG programme also stimulates students to publish the outcomes of their research in professional or academic journals. As

part of its external assessment, the panel looked at 15 EG master theses that were representative in terms of final scores, track and dual degree variants, and supervisors involved. The panel established that every thesis was of sufficient quality for a final research product at academic master level.

Across the EG thesis sample the panel was quite pleased with the quality of the research question, the literature review and the methods section. Moreover, the panel found that the level of English was high in all EG master projects. As points for attention in the future, the panel noticed that the discussion and conclusion sections were sometimes very short, and the use of cartographic materials was not always very appropriate. According to the panel the former element requires attention in the thesis 'course' while the latter should also be addressed in the curriculum prior to the master thesis. In sum, the thesis review has demonstrated according to the panel that EG students who pass the master thesis have achieved the programme learning outcomes.

In so far as the achieved level of the EG alumni is concerned, the panel noted that graduates are doing well on the labour market as they mostly found a job quickly and are employed in positions that are commensurate with their level and study domain. According to data in the self-evaluation report, more than a third of the EG graduates works for local, regional or national governments; another third works in a consultancy, often advising governments; other graduates choose a different career path, including academic research, self-employment or work in the domain of real estate. While graduates continue to find a job rather easily, students from recent cohorts are increasingly concerned about the connection between the programme and the professional field. As a reaction, the programme pays more attention in the curriculum to work field preparation by supporting students in their search for internships and by inviting work field experts to contribute more often to individual courses and to give feedback to student work. Students indicated that they recognize – and appreciate – these efforts. The panel welcomes this reaction to student concerns and encourages the programme to continue on this path. Overseeing the labour market data and the testimonies of alumni, the panel is convinced that the MSc EG at FSS in Groningen constitutes a very good lever for a relevant position on the labour market.

MSc Real Estate Studies

The Master Thesis (20 EC) consists of an individual research project that takes up most of the academic year. RES students are invited to connect their thesis research to the expertise and ongoing research projects of the staff, but are also free to choose another topic of their interest provided it is connected to real estate. About 30-40% of the students combine their thesis research with an internship at a real estate company. In recent years, many thesis topics build on course content addressing real estate challenges with respect to sustainability, climate change, or affordability. While most students opt for a quantitative approach, there are several theses adopting a qualitative approach. As part of its external assessment, the panel looked at 15 RES master theses that were representative in terms of final scores and supervisors involved. The panel established that every thesis was of sufficient quality for a final research product at academic master level.

The panel was quite pleased with this result because the previous accreditation panel had established that the thesis quality was overall sufficient, but varied considerably. Hence, the efforts of the programme team to increase the minimum standards have clearly paid off. Across the sample, the RES theses contribute more to the academic field, the link between theory and empirics is strong, several students apply advanced statistical techniques, and most topics reflect current debates in society. In sum, the thesis review has demonstrated according to the panel that RES students who pass the master thesis have achieved the programme learning outcomes.

In so far as the achieved level of the RES alumni is concerned, the panel noted that graduates are doing very well on the labour market as they mostly found a job quickly and are employed in positions that are commensurate with their level and study domain. According to data in the self-evaluation report, 60% work for a real estate office, while 20% joined a construction or engineering firm and 15% went into consultancy. Moreover, several students entered a PhD trajectory upon graduation. The programme is proud to have close connections to the real estate industry, among others through the accreditation by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. According to the panel, this recognition by RICS is indeed an asset for the programme and for the employment opportunities of RES graduates. Moreover, several alumni are (board) member of the Real Estate Club Groningen, which aims to connect students, staff, alumni, government and firms in real estate. It organises among others Young Talent Events and provides networking opportunities for RES students. Overseeing the labour market data and the testimonies of alumni, the panel is convinced that the MSc RES at FSS in Groningen constitutes a very good lever for a relevant position on the labour market. Based on the very quick access to the labour market after graduation, the achieved learning outcomes very well fit the professional field.

MSc Population Studies

The Master Thesis (20 EC) consists of an individual research project that takes up most of the academic year. PS students are invited to connect their thesis research to the expertise and ongoing research projects of the staff, but are also free to choose another topic of their interest provided it is connected to demography. About half of the students combine their thesis research with an external internship. In line with the course content and the programme learning outcomes, thesis topics and analytic methods display a variety of macro and micro level analysis, qualitative and quantitative methods and contemporary population issues. As part of its external assessment, the panel looked at 15 PS master theses that were representative in terms of final scores, dual degree variants, and supervisors involved. The panel established that every thesis was of sufficient quality for a final research product at academic master level.

Across the sample the panel was pleased with the overall quality of the theses, as well as with the variety of thesis topics and methodological approaches. As points for attention in the future, the panel noticed that some research questions were merely descriptive. Hence the suggestion to address this more explicitly in the thesis course. Moreover, students could (be supported by the thesis coordinator and supervisor to) clarify better how the thesis research is geographical/spatial, and how it is placed in the existing geography literature. These findings and suggestions, however, do not prevent the panel from establishing that the thesis review demonstrates that PS students who pass the master thesis have achieved the programme learning outcomes.

In so far as the achieved level of the PS alumni is concerned, the panel noted that graduates are doing well on the labour market as they mostly found a job quickly and are employed in positions that are commensurate with their level and study domain. According to data in the self-evaluation report, PS graduates end up in a wide variation of professional trajectories going from consultancy and real estate to government agencies at different levels. Compared to graduates from other FSS master programmes under review, PS alumni end up more frequently in higher education and research institutes (26%), but much less in the corporate world.

The panel was informed that the speed with which PS graduates tend to find a relevant job on the labour market is at least in part linked to the efforts of the programme team: alumni and other professionals are involved in the programme through guest lectures and internship opportunities, PS students are invited to a networking event with alumni in the framework of the annual Dutch Demography Day, and the Population Research Centre has accounts on different social media. The panel welcomes these initiatives and is satisfied

to notice that the professionalisation activities seem to pay off. Overseeing the labour market data and the testimonies of alumni, the panel is convinced that the MSc PS at FSS in Groningen constitutes a very good lever for a relevant position on the labour market.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the intended learning outcomes are assessed and demonstrated in a systematic way. The thesis review shows that across programmes these are of adequate to good quality and invariably deserve to pass. The panel is therefore convinced that all students who successfully pass the thesis have effectively achieved the programme learning outcomes.

Furthermore, the panel considers that FSS graduates are well prepared during their study for a follow-up master study or – if they graduate a master programme – a professional career. The panel is therefore convinced that graduates demonstrate the knowledge, skills and attitudes mentioned in the programme learning outcomes.

In addition to these considerations that altogether warrant a positive judgement on this standard across programmes, the panel suggests FSS and its degree programmes to keep track in a more systematic way of its alumni, and collect data on their professional whereabouts and the factors that helped or hindered their employment.

Regarding the thesis quality of individual programmes, the panel advises the:

- BSc SPD and MSc EG to pay attention in the thesis ‘course’ to the discussion and conclusion sections, as well as to the use of cartographic materials;
- MSc EIP to set clear guidelines on the EIP elements a master thesis should certainly contain to fulfil both thesis learning goals and programme learning outcomes;
- BSc HGP to agree on common expectations regarding the emphasis on geography, the breadth of the topic, and the use of AI in the thesis;
- BSc HGP and MSc PS to pay attention in the thesis ‘course’ to formulating research questions;
- MSc PS to clarify the geographical/spatial component in the master thesis, and how this is placed in existing geography literature.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that all seven programmes **meet** standard 4.

General conclusion

The panel established that the seven programmes under review all **meet** the four NVAO standards: intended learning outcomes, teaching-learning environment, assessment, and achieved learning outcomes. As a result, the panel's overall assessment of the BSc Spatial Planning and Design, the BSc Human Geography and Planning, the MSc Environmental and Infrastructure Planning, the MSc Society, Sustainability and Planning, the MSc Economic Geography, the MSc Population Studies, and the MSc Real Estate Studies is **positive**.

Recommendations

The panel identified for each programme a few points for development, as well as a few issues that apply to all programmes. Hence, the panel recommends:

All programmes

- to establish grass-roots oriented advisory bodies per degree programme (cluster);
- to connect more strongly the contents and didactics of the International Classroom;
- to implement, monitor and evaluate the actions outlined in the thesis assessment plan:
 - set minimum requirements for some essential assessment criteria;
 - operationalize the criteria that assess the components 'presentation' and 'peer review';
 - clarify in writing the grading procedure for second examiners;
 - set clear conditions and a timeline for the thesis resit.

BSc HGP

- to articulate the role of Planning in the programme;
- to agree on common expectations regarding the emphasis on geography, on the breadth of the topic, and the use of AI in the bachelor thesis;
- to ensure that GIS and statistics are covered throughout the curriculum;
- to pay more explicit attention to the practical and professional dimension of course topics;
- to pay attention in the thesis 'course' to formulating research questions.

BSc SPD

- to promote its distinctive character more explicitly in its communications;
- to substantiate the design-led planning learning pathway, setting realistic expectations for students, teachers and future employers;
- to strengthen the teaching of digital skills in class;
- to pay attention in the thesis 'course' to the discussion and conclusion sections, as well as to the use of cartographic materials.

MSc EG

- to pay attention in the thesis 'course' to the discussion and conclusion sections, as well as to the use of cartographic materials.

MSc EIP

- to substantiate and evaluate the new Designing Spatial Transformations track;
- to provide targeted support for international students on both course and career preparation;
- to set clear guidelines on the EIP elements a master thesis should certainly contain to fulfil both thesis learning goals and programme learning outcomes.

MSc PS

- to accommodate the needs and wants of its diverse student audience in the respective courses;
- to pay attention in the thesis 'course' to formulating research questions;
- to clarify the geographical/spatial component in the thesis.

MSc RES

- to promote the RICS quality mark in communication to applicants and students;
- to give a more prominently visible position to all cross-cutting themes in the curriculum, and in particular to the ethical component;
- to support – notably international – students in finding relevant data sets for master thesis topics.

MSc SSP

- to provide targeted support for international students on both course and career preparation.

Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

Bachelor's programme Human Geography and Planning

1. Knowledge and Understanding

Graduates have demonstrated a proficiency in knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that graduates are able to, whilst supported by academic literature, study the frontiers of their field of study.

A. Graduates have basic knowledge, and are able to produce an overview of the world's past and recent insights into human geography, spatial planning and demography.

B. Graduates are familiar with the main current social themes, (sub)cultures, research topics and policy aims relating to the fields of human geography, spatial planning and demography.

C. Graduates are familiar with the principal theoretical, methodological and ethical foundations of human geography, spatial planning and demography.

D. Graduates have basic knowledge of standard research methods and techniques (both quantitative and qualitative approaches, including GIS) available for problem analysis.

E. Graduates understand the diversity and complexity of social and physical structures and processes, and their interactions with environmental structures and processes in an international context.

F. Graduates are aware of the relevant national and international career prospects for human geographers, spatial planners and demographers, both on the job market and in advanced studies.

2. Applying Knowledge and Understanding

Graduates are able to apply their knowledge and insights in a manner that indicates a professional academic approach to their work or vocation, and they have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study.

A. Graduates are able to design and conduct supervised research using standard research methods and techniques (both quantitative and qualitative approaches, including GIS) in the fields of human geography, spatial planning and demography.

B. Graduates are able to independently contribute to formulating, analysing and solving problems in the fields of human geography, spatial planning and demography. This implies that graduates are aware of the time-space context in which problems occur.

C. Graduates are able to make informed decisions about the theoretical positioning, the use of previous international empirical research, and which academic research methods to apply.

D. Graduates are able to position important research topics, such as those described in the faculty research programme tWIST, within the context of social and policy-related developments in the world.

3. Making Judgments

Graduates have the skills to gather and interpret relevant data to reach an informed conclusion, goal, or judgement – including a reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues – on frontier topics within the fields of human geography, spatial planning and demography.

A. Graduates are able to gather data effectively – while considering all possible ethical issues involved – using primary (fieldwork, observation, interviews, surveys) and secondary (quantitative and qualitative data) sources.

B. Graduates are able to interpret research findings in an academic manner and they are aware of possible alternative interpretations.

C. Graduates are able to evaluate the (spatial) consequences of spatial (policy) interventions.

D. Graduates are aware of the interdisciplinary and international character of spatial research and they are able to integrate and analyse information from various themes (including social, cultural, economic, spatial planning, demographic and physical geographic themes).

E. Graduates are able to reflect on and criticise their own academic actions, including in terms of the methods used and the ethical implications of a research project.

4. Communication

Graduates are able to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences, whilst taken into account the possible intercultural differences.

A. Graduates are able to convey knowledge and research outcomes to an intercultural audience of specialists or non-specialists, both verbally and in writing.

B. Graduates are able to present and visualise scientific (spatial) information clearly, for example, by using geographical information systems.

C. Graduates are able to work constructively as part of a team, whilst taken into account the possible intercultural differences.

D. Graduates are open and aware to others' perspectives on their work and are open to receive constructive feedback on their work.

E. Graduates are able to incorporate comments and other types of constructive feedback from peers, either obtained in writing and/or during debate, in their own work.

5. Learning Skills

Graduates have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study in their relevant field with a high degree of autonomy.

A. Graduates have developed academic skills – such as comprehending theories, gathering and analysing academic literature and data – and more general skills – such as computer, reporting and presentation skills – that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study in their relevant field in a national or international university.

B. Graduates have obtained academic skills needed to independently gather information relevant to solving a research problem within the fields of human geography, spatial planning and demography.

C. Graduates have obtained academic and other skills needed to perform effectively in national and international jobs related to the fields of human geography, spatial planning and demography.

Bachelor's programme Spatial Planning and Design

1. Knowledge and Understanding

Graduates have demonstrated a proficiency in knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that graduates are able to, whilst supported by academic literature, study the frontiers of their field of study.

A. Graduates can reproduce an overview of past and present developments in the field of spatial planning and human geography.

B. Graduates can explain the complexities of spatial planning and design while paying attention to the relationships between planning and the dynamic social, physical and institutional context.

C. Graduates are able to distinguish the different spatial planning cultures present in the national and international contexts.

D. Graduates know the theoretical, methodological and ethical foundations of spatial planning and design.

E. Graduates can describe the main physical variables and natural laws relevant to planning interventions in physical space, and apply the associated basic formulas and models, with a particular focus on the subsoil, building, water, infrastructure and the environment.

F. Graduates are aware of the relevant Dutch and international career prospects for spatial planners, both in practice and research.

2. Applying Knowledge and Understanding

Graduates are able to apply their knowledge and insights in a manner that indicates a professional academic approach to their work or vocation, and they have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study.

A. Graduates can utilise contemporary experiences from Dutch planning practice as a starting-point for applying knowledge in an international context.

B. Graduates can design and develop innovative strategies and solutions for spatial planning challenges with the aid of design techniques in a creative and substantiated manner.

C. Graduates can devise and design a realistic decision-making and implementation trajectory for institutional planning challenges in a substantiated manner.

D. Graduates can explain and apply mainstream methods and policies used within the fields of environment, water, infrastructure and spatial planning.

E. Graduates can independently formulate, analyse and solve problems in the field of spatial planning and human geography.

F. Graduates are able to make informed decisions about the theoretical positioning of planning questions.

G. Graduates are able to relate important, globally relevant research topics to the faculty research programme and the research programme of the spatial planning department.

H. Graduates are able to design and conduct supervised research using standard research methods and techniques (both quantitative and qualitative approaches, including GIS) in the field of spatial planning.

3. Making Judgments

Graduates have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues.

A. Graduates can develop a clear vision regarding spatial planning challenges motivated from their own research.

B. Graduates are aware of the interdisciplinary and international character of spatial research and they are able to integrate, analyse and reflect upon information from various perspectives (including social, cultural, economic, planning, demographic and physical geographic themes).

C. Graduates are able to give substantiated and critical feedback on analyses, designs and solutions for spatial problems.

D. Graduates have the ability to reflect on relevant social, scientific, intercultural or ethical issues related to spatial planning.

4. Communication

Graduates can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.

A. Graduates are able to present theoretical concepts, proposals, research outcomes, designs and spatial strategies by means of visualisation, written texts and verbal presentations in a convincing and informed way to a diverse audience of specialists or non-specialists.

B. Graduates can work as part of an interdisciplinary and international team and are able to interact with a range of other professionals (e.g. experts, administrators stakeholders)

C. Graduates are able to contribute to thematic discussions and debates in academia and planning practice.

5. Learning Skills

Graduates have developed an academic attitude and the learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study, with a high degree of autonomy.

A. Graduates have developed academic skills (e.g. comprehending theories, gathering and analysing academic literature and data) and general skills (e.g. computer, reporting and presentation skills) – that are necessary to perform effectively in planning related jobs and to undertake further study.

B. Graduates are able to deduce relevant information from a large number of sources with a high variety of purposes.

C. Graduates keep up-to-date on contemporary planning developments and are able to integrate this information in spatial planning processes.

Master’s programme Economic Geography

Learning outcomes Master in Economic Geography	Learning outcomes Master in Economic Geography: Regional Competitiveness and Trade	Learning outcomes Master in Economic Geography: Sustainable Rural Futures
<p>1. Knowledge and Understanding Graduates have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context.</p> <p>A. Graduates can summarize and explain, at the level of academic handbooks, the historical development as well as current insights and societal challenges in the field of economic geography with a focus on labour market issues, entrepreneurship and globalization.</p> <p>B. Graduates can explain how individual decisions by people on the labour market, by firms and by governments influence regional level socio-economic development.</p> <p>C. Graduates know and they can explain the prime theoretical, methodological and ethical paradigms of economic geography in general and in particular where it concerns the link of micro-level behavior by firms, people and policy and regional level outcomes.</p> <p>D. Graduates can describe the institutional context in which regional</p>	<p>1. Knowledge and understanding Graduates have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context.</p> <p>A. Graduates can summarize and explain, at the level of academic handbooks, the historical development as well as current insights and societal challenges in the field of economic geography with a focus on labour market issues, entrepreneurship and globalization.</p> <p>B. Graduates can explain how individual decisions by people on the labour market, by firms and by governments influence regional level socio-economic development.</p> <p>C. Graduates know and they can explain the prime theoretical, methodological and ethical paradigms of economic geography in general and in particular where it concerns the link of micro-level behavior by firms, people and policy and regional level outcomes.</p> <p>D. Graduates can describe the institutional context in which regional</p>	<p>1. Knowledge and understanding Graduates have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context.</p> <p>A. Graduates can summarize and explain, at the level of academic handbooks, the historical development as well as current insights and societal challenges in the field of economic geography with a focus on labour market issues, entrepreneurship and globalization, and rural communities in rural landscapes.</p> <p>B. Graduates can explain how individual decisions by people on the labour market, by rural communities, by firms and by governments influence regional level - including rural areas - socio-economic and socio-cultural development.</p> <p>C. Graduates know and they can explain the prime theoretical, methodological and ethical paradigms of economic geography in general and in particular where it concerns the link of micro-level behavior by firms, people, rural communities and policy and regional level outcomes.</p> <p>D. Graduates can describe the institutional context in which regional</p>

<p>socio-economic dynamics take shape. This includes knowledge of (regional) governance structures as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations that influence economic dynamics.</p> <p>E. Graduates understand their labour market prospects: They can describe the occupations and tasks they may fulfill and the organizations that typically employ graduates with the skills and knowledge associated with the programme of Economic Geography.</p> <p>2. Applying Knowledge and Understanding Graduates can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study.</p> <p>A. Graduates can apply, adapt, analyze and complement their understanding of the actions of individual people, firms and governments and relate the outcome to regional socio-economic dynamics in multiple organizational, institutional and cultural contexts in order to address place-specific issues and challenges.</p> <p>B. Graduates can independently execute quantitative empirical techniques that allow them to address research questions in the field of economic geography. This includes multi-variate regression techniques suitable for regional level data as well as techniques to</p>	<p>socio-economic dynamics take shape. This includes knowledge of (regional) governance structures as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations that influence economic dynamics.</p> <p>E. Graduates understand their labour market prospects: They can describe the occupations and tasks they may fulfill and the organizations that typically employ graduates with the skills and knowledge associated with the programme of Economic Geography.</p> <p>F. Graduates can explain the role of international trade in the economic development of countries and regions within countries.</p> <p>2. Applying Knowledge and Understanding Graduates can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study.</p> <p>A. Graduates can apply, adapt, analyze and complement their understanding of the actions of individual people, firms and governments and relate the outcome to regional socio-economic dynamics in multiple organizational, institutional and cultural contexts in order to address place-specific issues and challenges.</p> <p>B. Graduates can independently execute spatial econometric techniques that allow them to address research questions in the field of economic geography. This includes the mastering of suitable statistical software.</p>	<p>socio-economic and socio-cultural dynamics take shape. This includes knowledge of (regional) governance structures as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations that influence local dynamics.</p> <p>E. Graduates understand their labour market prospects: They can describe the occupations and tasks they may fulfill and the organizations that typically employ graduates with the skills and knowledge associated with the programme of Economic Geography.</p> <p>F. Graduates can explain the socio-cultural and landscape impacts of global, national, regional and local transformations and policies in rural areas in the Global North.</p> <p>2. Applying Knowledge and Understanding Graduates can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study.</p> <p>A. Graduates can apply, adapt, analyze and complement their understanding of the actions of individual people, rural communities, firms and governments and relate the outcome to regional socio-economic dynamics in multiple organizational, institutional and cultural contexts in order to address place-specific issues and challenges.</p> <p>B. Graduates can independently execute quantitative or qualitative empirical research methods that allow them to address research questions in the field of economic geography, including rural geography. This includes community engagement and landscape biographies.</p>
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<p>address research questions at the micro-level.</p> <p>C. Graduates can explain how the regional institutional and socio-economic context, including policies, influence regional economic dynamics and how this can lead to place-specific development paths.</p> <p>D. Graduates are able to position the discipline of economic geography and the research done in the field in relationship to other disciplines.</p> <p>E. Graduates are able to independently perform academic research, whether or not in an interdisciplinary context.</p> <p>3. Making Judgements Graduates have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements.</p> <p>A. Graduates can independently formulate an academically and/or societally relevant problem definition making use of their understanding and knowledge of the academic field of economic geography and relevant societal developments.</p> <p>B. Graduates can make a substantive argument, using academic sources, for their</p>	<p>C. Graduates can explain how the regional institutional and socio-economic context, including policies, influence regional economic dynamics and how this can lead to place-specific development paths.</p> <p>D. Graduates are able to position the discipline of economic geography and the research done in the field in relationship to other disciplines.</p> <p>E. Graduates are able to independently perform academic research, whether or not in an interdisciplinary context.</p> <p>F. Graduates are able to interpret and use theoretical economic models, particularly within the approach of the New Economic Geography, to address issues regarding regional economic development, both between countries and within countries.</p> <p>3. Making Judgements Graduates have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements.</p> <p>A. Graduates can independently formulate an academically and/or societally relevant problem definition making use of their understanding and knowledge of the academic field of economic geography and relevant societal developments.</p> <p>B. Graduates can make a substantive argument, using academic sources, for their</p>	<p>C. Graduates can explain how the regional institutional and socio-economic context, including policies, influence regional economic dynamics and how this can lead to place-specific development paths.</p> <p>D. Graduates are able to position the disciplines of economic geography, including rural geography, and the research done in these fields in relationship to other disciplines.</p> <p>E. Graduates are able to independently perform academic research, whether or not in an interdisciplinary context.</p> <p>F. Graduates are able to interpret and use theories on rural community development, the social impacts of rural transformations, and nature and landscape identities and values, to address issues regarding the impact of global and rural transformations for rural communities and regions.</p> <p>3. Making Judgements Graduates have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements.</p> <p>A. Graduates can independently formulate an academically and/or societally relevant problem definition making use of their understanding and knowledge of the academic fields of economic geography and relevant societal developments.</p> <p>B. Graduates can make a substantive argument, using academic sources, for their</p>
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<p>theoretical and empirical approach to a research problem.</p> <p>C. Graduates are able to draw practical (policy) implications from their research.</p> <p>D. Graduates are able to critically reflect on reasoning, arguments and points of view of others as well as on their own work.</p> <p>E. Graduates have an understanding and a vision of the possibilities of application and of the limitations of science in general and Economic Geography in particular.</p> <p>4. Communication Skills Graduates can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously.</p> <p>A. Graduates are able to clearly present the motivation, approach and results of academic research in an academic context as well as in a professional context, for example in discussions regarding business strategies, and regional development policies.</p> <p>B. Graduates are aware of cultural differences in communication and co-operation and they can adapt accordingly to effectively work together or communicate research findings.</p> <p>C. Graduates are used to working in teams and they can effectively collaborate on research projects as well as in formulating and presenting regional development strategies.</p>	<p>theoretical and empirical approach to a research problem.</p> <p>C. Graduates are able to draw practical (policy) implications from their research.</p> <p>D. Graduates are able to critically reflect on reasoning, arguments and points of view of others as well as on their own work.</p> <p>E. Graduates have an understanding and a vision of the possibilities of application and of the limitations of science in general and Economic Geography in particular.</p> <p>F. Graduates can interpret and reflect on the outcomes of spatial econometric analysis within the context of regional economic development issues.</p> <p>4. Communication Skills Graduates can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously.</p> <p>A. Graduates are able to clearly present the motivation, approach and results of academic research in an academic context as well as in a professional context, for example in discussions regarding business strategies, and regional development policies.</p> <p>B. Graduates are aware of cultural differences in communication and co-operation and they can adapt accordingly to effectively work together or communicate research findings.</p> <p>C. Graduates are used to working in teams and they can effectively collaborate on research projects as well as in formulating and presenting regional development strategies.</p>	<p>theoretical and empirical approach to a research problem.</p> <p>C. Graduates are able to draw practical (policy) implications from their research.</p> <p>D. Graduates are able to critically reflect on reasoning, arguments and points of view of others as well as on their own work.</p> <p>E. Graduates have an understanding and a vision of the possibilities of application and of the limitations of science in general and Economic Geography in particular.</p> <p>F. Graduates can interpret and reflect on the socio-spatial outcomes of socio-cultural and economic transformations, within the context of rural areas in the Global North.</p> <p>4. Communication Skills Graduates can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously.</p> <p>A. Graduates are able to clearly present the motivation, approach and results of academic research in an academic context as well as in a professional context.</p> <p>B. Graduates are aware of cultural differences in communication and co-operation and they can adapt accordingly to effectively work together or communicate research findings.</p> <p>C. Graduates are used to working in teams and they can effectively collaborate on research projects as well as in formulating and presenting regional development strategies,</p>
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<p>5. Learning Skills Graduates have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous. A. Graduates have the learning skills that enable them to continue their education largely self-directed and autonomously, for example in a professional or academic context.</p> <p>B. Graduates are able to independently follow relevant developments in the field of economic geography and they are able to reflect on those developments.</p>	<p>5. Learning Skills Graduates have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous. A. Graduates have the learning skills that enable them to continue their education largely self-directed and autonomously, for example in a professional or academic context.</p> <p>B. Graduates are able to independently follow relevant developments in the field of economic geography and they are able to reflect on those developments.</p>	<p>including rural transformation processes and policies.</p> <p>5. Learning Skills Graduates have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous. A. Graduates have the learning skills that enable them to continue their education largely self-directed and autonomously, for example in a professional or academic context.</p> <p>B. Graduates are able to independently follow relevant developments in the field of economic geography and they are able to reflect on those developments.</p>
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Master's programme Environmental and Infrastructure Planning

1. Knowledge and Understanding

- A. Acquire knowledge at the level of international academic debates on the theories, methodologies and techniques that enable the analysis of water, environmental and infrastructure planning problems, their possible solutions and socio-institutional consequences in specific spatial and temporal context.
- B. Develop advanced understandings of planning institutions, actor-networks and decision-making processes related to water, environmental and infrastructure issues so that they can carry out innovative research and contribute to new ideas in the field.
- C. Unravel complexity: Recognize that processes underlying challenges in water, environmental and infrastructure planning are diverse, interconnected and changeable, and that understanding these challenges requires contextualizing them in a contemporary, ever-changing and complex reality.
- D. Compare and reflect upon advanced theories, concepts and methods on governance and policy design for spatial change. Discern which to use to conduct research in specific contexts.

2. Applying Knowledge and Understanding

- A. Analyse water, environmental and infrastructure planning problems, drawing on the latest academic debates on complex planning issues and considering their spatial, social and institutional consequences.
- B. Employ (international) comparative analysis: Compare and reflect upon planning institutions, actor-networks and decision-making processes related to water, environmental and infrastructure issues across cities, regions and nation states.
- C. Propose adaptive and responsive policy solutions that build on acquired knowledge and problem-solving abilities in relation to complex and dynamic planning issues.
- D. Select appropriate theories and methods to use for policy transfer and the assessment of designed planning policy solutions.
- E. Identify the specific strengths and limitations of different planning approaches. Debate and reflect these aspects both with regard to research and planning practice.

3. Forming Judgments

- A. Critique how planning interventions and decision-making processes affect the interests, well-being and safety of people. Scrutinize ethical and normative aspects of spatial problems and potential solutions.

- B. Judge and position your own work within the current international planning debate
- C. Provide constructive and critical feedback on analyses and solutions proposed by others. Perceive different ways of reasoning, arguments and points of view.

4. Communication

- A. Show sensitivity and respect for experiences and opinions in working with commissioners, respondents and informants. Handle conflicting statements while withholding personal judgment.
- B. Acquire Intercultural communication skills: Ability to work in diversified teams with different views on water, environment and infrastructure developments and on societal issues.
- C. Convincing and captivating presentation: Present clearly and straightforwardly ideas and findings to specialist and non-specialist audiences, both in oral and written form.

5. Learning Skills

- A. Discern relevant information: Differentiate and classify arguments from both theoretical texts and policy documents within water, environmental and infrastructure planning.
- B. Quickly acquire solid base-knowledge on specific domains of water, environmental and infrastructure planning, following the developments within the field in an independent and critical manner.
- C. Carry out largely self-directed research on global and local water, environmental and infrastructure planning issues, with the aim to formulate potential solutions.
- D. Scrutinize planning problems devising institutional and policy innovation through collaborative reflection.

6. Attitudes

- A. Engage with new ideas and new developments within the field of planning with an open and reflexive attitude.
- B. Work with a scientific attitude: use theoretical knowledge, critical thinking and comparative insight to work professionally in relevant social and academic positions and as a basis for leadership in the field.
- C. Sensitivity for socio-cultural diversity: Handle planning issues and underlying values, interests and opinions with sensitivity to personal and cultural differences.

Master's programme Population Studies

The Master degree programme trains students in analysing societally-relevant population issues like ageing, migration and family formation. Its learning objectives are:

1. Knowledge and Understanding

Graduates know of and understand:

- A. important population issues that societies are facing nowadays, like ageing, integration of migrants, health inequalities and population decline, using a life-course approach;
- B. how migration is related to changes in: family situation, household composition, labour markets and broader welfare regimes;
- C. the interactions between population, health and place at both the macro (=population) and the micro (=individual) level;
- D. how demographic behaviour is influenced by the different societal, geographical, cultural, economic, and institutional contexts, and how it impacts societies and their wellbeing across the globe;
- E. important demographic theories, approaches, concepts and measures of population distribution, population growth, fertility, mortality, and migration;
- F. the ways of obtaining and appraising demographic data, either through existing demographic data sources or through own data collection;
- G. important qualitative research methods;

- H. the most important analytical demographic methods and techniques for analysing quantitative demographic data at the macro and micro level, including life table analysis, population projections and advanced survey/register data analysis;
- I. the research process in all its facets;
- J. how research is embedded in policy and can be used to design, monitor and evaluate (intervention) programmes.

2. Applying Knowledge and Understanding

Graduates are able to:

- A. design a suitable and relevant research proposal or plan for a complex societal demographic issue, in an independent manner;
- B. perform independent research within the field, involving formulating the research proposal, formulating theoretical frameworks, obtaining data, applying relevant methods to the analysis of the data, interpreting the results, and formulating recommendations for further research and/or action, while being aware of ethical considerations.

3. Forming Judgments

Graduates are able to:

- A. judge the quality of research being undertaken in the field of demography and population studies;
- B. take into account the ethical aspects of the conduct of social science research;
- C. judge quality issues when collecting and/or using demographic data;
- D. reflect on how (their) research results can be used for policy making and/or interventions.

4. Communication

Graduates are able to:

- A. provide constructive feedback on research and analyses produced by their fellow students and others in the field;
- B. present and write papers and thesis on topics and research in Population Studies and Demography in a clear, convincing and scientific manner ;
- C. reflect and argue about their research in a scientific manner;
- D. discuss and debate ideas and developments within the field;
- E. communicate about topics and research in Population Studies and Demography to various audiences, including policymakers and/or practitioners.

5. Learning Skills

Graduates are able to:

- A. assess which literature, theory, research questions and research methodology to use for societal demographic issues;
- B. independently position their own work and work by others within the ongoing scientific debates and changing policy context;
- C. independently and critically evaluate new developments in the field of Population Studies.

6. Attitudes

Graduates:

- A. develop a critical, independent, creative, pro-active and resourceful attitude;
- B. develop a scientific and methodological rigour of doing research;
- C. are able to work together in multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural settings;
- D. are able to work with deadlines and with feedback.

Master's programme Real Estate Studies

1. Knowledge and Understanding

- A. Are able to summarize and explain, using international academic literature, the historical development as well as current insights and societal challenges in fields that impact the real estate industry where special attention is paid to economic, financial, geographical, and planning perspectives.
- B. Are able to describe the theoretical foundations of real estate finance, economics and geography in general and in particular where it concerns the link of micro-level behaviour by firms, people and policy, and its implications for (international) real estate markets.
- C. Are able to explain and compare the state-of-the-art methods and techniques used in social sciences where special attention is paid to real estate finance, economics and geography.
- D. Are able to describe the local context and spatial processes relating to land and real estate markets. This includes knowledge and understanding about institutions and its spatial planning, land use and governance structures at various regional levels, property rights, regulations and sustainability goals.
- E. Are able to describe the professional and ethical standards that are relevant in the globalized real estate industry and in its research.

2. Applying Knowledge and Understanding

- A. Are able to develop new insights and solutions for complex societal challenges in fields that impact the real estate industry, both individually and in a team of professionals with different expertise.
- B. Are able to apply the state-of-the-art methods and techniques used in social sciences where special attention is paid to real estate finance, economics and geography.
- C. Are able to individually design an original research proposal for a complex societal challenge where they combine the knowledge and skills learnt during their bachelor and master programmes.
- D. Are able to conduct a research project with a minimum of supervision. This includes integrating theoretical knowledge, reviewing international academic literature, collecting and processing data, explaining the choice for and applying academic research methods and techniques, analysing and interpreting data, discussing its implications and limitations, and formulating conclusions.

3. Making Judgments

- A. Are able to draw practical implications from their research, after selecting and applying relevant methods and techniques, and reflect on those implications.
- B. Are able to formulate a critical assessment of the interrelationships between real estate practice, theoretical foundations, methods and techniques, and empirical findings.
- C. Are able to critically reflect on real estate practice in terms of corporate responsibility, transparency, the functioning of (international) market institutions and real estate fundamentals.

4. Communication

- A. Are able to communicate in written and spoken language the motivation, theoretical considerations, methods and techniques, results and discussion of their research projects with groups in society for which their research has implications or is relevant.
- B. Are able to participate in academic and societal debates and dialogues on the basis of critical arguments and communicate their analysis convincingly.
- C. Have a professional attitude and are able to listen, use, integrate, and reproduce complex and unfamiliar arguments given by any relevant person or group in society.
- D. Are able to integrate the communicative actions by different stakeholders in complex societal challenges, and play a role in linking these to each other. They are able to play a mediating role between actors with competing goals by stimulating the exchange of ideas.

E. Are aware of cultural differences in communication, norms and values, and cooperation in a (interdisciplinary and international) team and they can adapt accordingly to effectively work together and communicate research findings.

5. Learning Skills

A. Are able to independently keep up with developments and societal challenges in fields that impact the real estate industry, and they are able to analyse, debate and reflect on those developments and societal challenges using international (academic) literature.

B. Are able to continue and reflect on their learning process, professional skills and attitude in a self-directed or autonomous and ethical manner. This includes that they qualify for a third cycle (PhD) project and for entry to RICS membership.

C. Are able to continue to deliver original contributions in fields that impact the real estate industry in an academic as well as a professional environment.

D. Are able to continue to independently collect, process, analyse, and report on real estate data using computer skills (e.g. searching and finding relevant literature, Excel, GIS, Powerpoint, STATA, and Word).

Master's programme Society, Sustainability and Planning

1. Knowledge and Understanding

A. Explain issues in specific administrative and social contexts by acquiring knowledge on the spatial changes in neighbourhoods, cities and regions and their significance for society and sustainability (place analysis).

B. Examine planning institutions, actor-networks and power relations within dynamic contexts, in order to develop effective coalitions and institutional arrangements (actor and institutional analysis).

C. Identify conflicting visions and interests in the nexus between economy, environment and equity.

D. Contribute actively to knowledge development (theories, concepts and methods) from a societal and planning perspective focusing on the human factor.

2. Applying Knowledge and Understanding

A. Examine the impact of socio-spatial planning problems and interventions on particular places while drawing on the latest international academic debates on sustainability and society.

B. Critically and constructively engage with (new) ideas and developments within the international field of spatial planning.

C. Develop and conduct theory-informed empirical research using appropriate research methodology, methods and techniques, and critically evaluate the results.

D. Apply own academic research designs in specific cases and stakeholder settings by employing gained knowledge on the forces that shape places.

E. Propose well-argued and realistic policy solutions for liveable, sustainable, just and inclusive places, that build on acquired knowledge and problem-solving abilities.

3. Forming Judgments

A. Examine the (inter)subjective nature of spatial planning in potential solutions, especially by using power, justice, diversity and human capacity perspectives.

B. Critically assess analyses, spatial representations and visualizations, research strategies and planning interventions proposed by others.

C. Reflect on how future spatial interventions and decision-making processes might affect people's interests, equality, social and environmental justice.

D. Formulate ethical judgements by reflecting on normative underlying assumptions and values within the current international planning debate.

E. Discuss and develop context-specific judgments and policy solutions for responsible and active agents in spatial transformation as a basis for leadership in the field of planning in a globalizing world.

4. Communication

A. Present ideas and findings both in oral and written form and through different means of digital and face-to-face communication, adjusted to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.

B. Collaborate in diverse student teams to analyse complex spatial and sustainability problems.

C. Engage with differences in experiences, arguments and opinions in multi-stakeholder settings.

D. Show sensitivity in communication with fellow students and in local communities, especially regarding diverse social and cultural backgrounds.

5. Learning Skills

A. Differentiate and classify information and arguments from different sources, such as academic texts, policy documents and popular media.

B. Carry out largely self-directed research on socio-spatial issues in new contexts, aiming to formulate sustainable solutions and address potential actors and means of implementation.

C. Debate and reflect on a repertoire of planning roles to facilitate multi-stakeholder settings, mediating between various opinions, interests and values.

Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

Bachelor's programme Human Geography and Planning

Human Geography and Planning (2024-2025)			
Bachelor 1			
Term 1A	Term 1B	Term 2A	Term 2B
Urbanism and Planning (10 EC)	Economic Geography (10 EC)	Population Geographies (10 EC)	GIS (10 EC)
Reflecting on HG and SP (5 EC)	Statistics 1 (5 EC)	IAR (5 EC)	Rural Geography (5 EC)
Bachelor 2			
Term 1A	Term 1B	Term 2A	Term 2B
Migration and Development (10 EC)	People, Place & Culture (10 EC)	Governance Dynamics (5 EC)	Applied Statistical Research Methods (5 EC)
		Physical Geography (5 EC)	Philosophy (5 EC)
Introduction to Qualitative Research (5 EC)	Bound elective (5 EC) Healthy Ageing; Real Estate Principles; Population & Development; Geographies of the US	Statistics 2 (5 EC)	Landscapes (5 EC)
Bachelor 3			
Term 1A	Term 1B	Term 2A	Term 2B
Minor / Optional Courses (30 EC)		Planning Dynamics (5 EC)	Fieldwork Abroad (5 EC)
		Geography, Planning & the EU (5 EC)	
		Bachelor's Project (15 EC)	

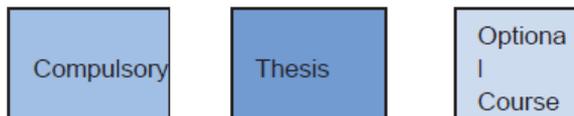
Bachelor's programme Spatial Planning and Design

Year 1			
Period 1A	Period 1B	Period 2A	Period 2B
Urbanism and Planning (10 EC)	Economic Geography (10 EC)	Spatial Design Atelier (10 EC)	Geographic Information Systems (10 EC)
Power of Design (5 EC)	Statistics 1 (5 EC)	Introduction to Academic Research (5 EC)	Spatial Design Standards and Conditions (5 EC)
Year 2			
Period 1A	Period 1B	Period 2A	Period 2B
Mobility and Infrastructure Planning (10 EC)	Water and Planning (10 EC)	Governance Dynamics (5 EC)	Applied Statistical Research Methods (5 EC)
		Physical Geography (5 EC)	Landscapes (5 EC)
Introduction to Qualitative Research (5 EC)	Urbanism Atelier (5 EC)	Statistics 2 (5 EC)	Philosophy of Social Science (5 EC)
Year 3			
Period 1A	Period 1B	Period 2A	Period 2B
Minor/Optional Courses (30 EC)		Environment and Engineering (5 EC)	Environment and Planning (5 EC)
		Planning Dynamics (5 EC)	Bachelor Project (15 EC)
Learning Pathway SD // Spatial Design (SD)			
Learning Pathway SP // Spatial Planning (SP)			
Learning Pathway WIE // Water-Infrastructure-Environment (WIE)			
Learning Pathway AR // Academic Research (AR)			

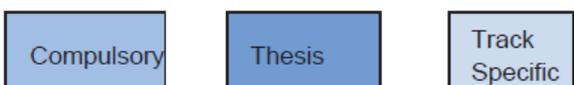
Master's programme Economic Geography

The tables below summarize the core Economic Geography programme (Global Transformations Local Impacts) and the specialising tracks Regional Competitiveness and Trade (RCT) and Sustainable Rural Futures (SRF). Note that each box represents a 5 EC course.

Economic Geography: Global Transformations, Local Impacts			
<i>Term 1A</i>	<i>Term 1B</i>	<i>Term 2A</i>	<i>Term 2B</i>
Economic Geography: Theory and Practice	Global Transformations and Local Impacts	Regional Labour Market Dynamics	Transport Geography
Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Regional Development	Optional Course (5 EC)	Advanced Statistical Analysis OR Advanced Qualitative Research Methods	
Optional course	Thesis (20 EC)		



Economic Geography: Regional Competitiveness and Trade			
<i>Term 1A</i>	<i>Term 1B</i>	<i>Term 2A</i>	<i>Term 2B</i>
Economic Geography: Theory and Practice	Global Transformations and Local Impacts	Regional Labour Market Dynamics	Transport Geography
Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Regional Development	Spatial and Network Interactions	FEB: Economic Geography	
FEB: Sustainable Economic Development	Thesis (20 EC)		



Economic Geography: Sustainable Rural Futures			
<i>Term 1A</i>	<i>Term 1B</i>	<i>Term 2A</i>	<i>Term 2B</i>
Economic Geography: Theory and Practice	Global Transformations and Local Impacts	Regional Labour Market Dynamics	Transport Geography
Rural Communities in Transition	Nature, Landscape and Heritage	Advanced Statistical Analysis OR Advanced Qualitative Research Methods	
Social Impact Assessment	Thesis (20 EC)		

Compulsory	Thesis	Track Specific
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Master's programme Environmental and Infrastructure Planning

Regular programme

Period 1a	Period 1b	Period 2a	Period 2b
Dilemmas in Infrastructure Planning (5 EC)	Comparative Research and Planning Practice (5 EC)	Transitions in Water Management (5 EC)	Elective (5 EC)
EIP Interactive workshop (5 EC)	Elective (5 EC)	Reinventing Environmental Planning (5 EC)	Thesis (10 EC)
Planning Theory (5 EC)	Thesis (5 EC)	Thesis (5 EC)	

Designing Spatial Transformations track programme

Period 1a	Period 1b	Period 2a	Period 2b
Dilemmas in Infrastructure Planning (5 EC)	Co-design Methods and Methodology (5 EC)	Transitions in Water Management (5 EC)	Transformative Design Approaches (5 EC)
EIP Interactive workshop (5 EC)	Elective (5 EC)	Reinventing Environmental Planning (5 EC)	Thesis (with a design component) (10 EC)
Design and Planning Theory (5 EC)	Thesis (with a design component) (5 EC)	Thesis (with a design component) (5 EC)	

Master's programme Population Studies

Population Studies			
Term 1A	Term 1B	Term 2A	Term 2B
Qualitative Research for Policy and Practice (5 EC)	Migration, Families and Households (5 EC)	Advanced Statistical Analysis (EG/PS) (5 EC)	
Population, Health and Place (5 EC)	Population Projections and Sustainability (5 EC)	Optional course / internship / Population Research Training (5 EC)	
Demographic Data and Analysis (5 EC)	Optional course / internship / Population Research Training (5 EC)	Thesis (20 EC)	

Compulsory	Thesis	Optional Course
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Master's programme Real Estate Studies

Real Estate Studies			
Term 1A	Term 1B	Term 2A	Term 2B
Finance for Real Estate (REF) (5 EC)	Real Estate Investment (REI) (5 EC)	Real Estate Research (RER) - Modelling and Forecasting (5 EC)	Real Estate Development (RED) - Planning & Development of Sustainable Cities (5 EC)
Real Estate and Land Supply (RELS) - Connecting Public and Private Valuation (5 EC)	International Real Estate Markets (IREM) (5 EC)	Optional course / internship (5 EC)	
Optional course / internship (5 EC)	Thesis (20 EC)		

Compulsory	Thesis	Optional Course
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Master's programme Society, Sustainability and Planning

Society, Sustainability and Planning			
<i>Term 1A</i>	<i>Term 1B</i>	<i>Term 2A</i>	<i>Term 2B</i>
Interaction, Society and Space (5 EC)	Engaging Society in Spatial Transformation (5 EC)	Revitalising Neighbourhoods (5 EC)	Living Lab Sustainable Places (5 EC)
Planning Theory (5 EC)	Elective Course (5 EC)	Elective Course (5 EC)	
City Matters: Urban Inequality and Social Justice (5 EC)	Thesis (20 EC)		

Compulsory

Thesis

Elective Course

Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

Monday 19 May 2025: GRONINGEN

14.30 – 15.30	Panel arrival and preparation
15.30 – 16.00	Welcome & Informal Meeting with all participants
16.00 – 16.45	Tour of the facilities
16.45 – 17.45	Meeting with Faculty management
17.45 – 18.15	Internal wrap-up panel

Tuesday 20 May 2025: GRONINGEN (SPATIAL PLANNING)

08.30 – 09.00	Panel arrival and preparation
09.00 – 10.00	Meeting with programme coordinators of the study programmes of the day
10.00 – 10.15	Break
10.15 - 11.00	Meeting with students BSc Spatial Planning and Design
11.00 – 11.45	Meeting with lecturers BSc Spatial Planning and Design
11.45 - 12.00	Break
12.00 - 12.30	Meeting with students and alumni MSc Population Studies
12.30 – 13.00	Meeting with lecturers MSc Population Studies
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch + internal meeting panel
14.00 – 14.45	Meeting with students and alumni MSc Society, Sustainability and Planning / MSc Environmental and Infrastructure Planning
14.45 – 15.30	Meeting with lecturers MSc Society, Sustainability and Planning / MSc Environmental and Infrastructure Planning
15.30 – 16.00	Break
16.00 - 16.45	Thematic session Spatial Planning & Population Studies
16.45 – 18.00	Internal deliberations
18.00 – 18.30	Outstanding issues and oral feedback on study programmes of the day

Wednesday 21 May 2025: GRONINGEN (HUMAN GEOGRAPHY)

08.30 – 09.00	Panel arrival and preparation
09.00 - 09.45	Meeting with programme coordinators of the study programmes of the day
09.45 – 10.00	Break
10.00 - 10.30	Meeting with students and alumni BSc Human Geography and Planning
10.30 - 11.00	Meeting with lecturers BSc Human Geography and Planning
11.00 – 11.30	Break
11.30 - 12.15	Meeting with students and alumni MSc Economic Geography / MSc Real Estate Studies
12.15 – 13.00	Meeting with lecturers MSc Economic Geography / MSc Real Estate Studies
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch and internal meeting
14.00 – 14.45	Meeting with Board of Examiners
14.45 – 15.00	Break
15.00 – 15.45	Thematic session Human Geography
15.45 – 16.30	Internal deliberations
16.30 - 17.00	Outstanding issues and oral feedback on study programmes of the day
17.00 – 17.30	Final management meeting
17.30 – 18.00	Preparing plenary feedback
18.00 - 18.15	Plenary feedback

Thursday 22 May 2025: LEEUWARDEN (CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY)

08.30 - 09.15	Arrival/Welcome, briefing time panel
09.15 - 10.00	Meeting with Faculty Board & Programme management
10.00 - 10.15	Break
10.15 - 11.00	Showcase student Master's Projects
11.00 - 11.45	Meeting with students
11.45 - 12.00	Break
12.00 - 12.45	Meeting with teaching staff (including PC members) & study advisor
12.45 - 13.30	Break and Lunch
13.30 - 14.15	Meeting with Board of Examiners
14.15 - 15.00	Meeting with alumni and Advisory Board
15.00 - 15.30	Break and Internal Deliberations panel
15.30 - 16.00	Consultation/feedback with management
16.00 - 16.30	Internal Deliberations panel
16.30 - 16.45	Preliminary feedback
16.45 - 17.30	Development dialogue with teaching staff

Appendix 4. Materials

Self-evaluation report – Part I. General information, University of Groningen 2025.

- Self-evaluation report BSc Human Geography and Planning (HGP)
- Self-evaluation report BSc Spatial Planning and Design (SPD)
- Self-evaluation report BSc Environmental and Infrastructure Planning (EIP)
- Self-evaluation report MSc Society, Sustainability and Planning (SSP)
- Self-evaluation report MSc Population Studies (PS)
- Self-evaluation report MSc Economic Geography (EG)
- Self-evaluation report MSc Real Estate Studies (RES)

Faculty-wide and programme-specific appendices, made available online:

- Domain-specific reference framework
- Teaching and Examination Regulations
- Assessment Policy
- Board of Examiners Annual report 2023-2024
- BSc project evaluation form
- Master thesis evaluation form
- Assessment plans
- Quantitative data of teaching-learning environment
- NSE materials
- Curriculum evaluation summaries
- Staff overviews
- Alumni analyses
- Double degree partners
- Reflections on previous accreditation reports

Prior to the site visit, the panel reviewed:

- 15 HGP graduation works among the 129 bachelor theses which had been successfully submitted in the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The sample was representative in terms of final scores and supervisors involved.
- 21 SPD graduation works among the 105 bachelor theses which had been successfully submitted in the academic year 2023-2024. The sample was representative in terms of final scores and supervisors involved.
- 15 EIP graduation works among the 48 master theses which had been successfully submitted in the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The sample was representative in terms of final scores, dual degree variants (2, Renmin & Jakarta), and supervisors involved.
- 15 SSP graduation works among the 33 master theses which had been successfully submitted in the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The sample was representative in terms of final scores, dual degree variants (2, Renmin), and supervisors involved.
- 15 PS graduation works among the 35 master theses which had been successfully submitted in the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The sample was representative in terms of final scores, dual degree variants (Barcelona 3 & Cologne 2), and supervisors involved.
- 15 EG graduation works among the 34 master theses which had been successfully submitted in the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The sample was representative in terms of final scores, track (5, Regional Competitiveness and Trade) and dual degree variants (1, Hannover), and supervisors involved.

- 15 RES graduation works among the 33 master theses which had been successfully submitted in the academic year 2023-2024. The sample was representative in terms of final scores and supervisors involved.

Information on the theses is available from Academion upon request.