



**Human Geography and Planning**  
**Utrecht University**

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Project code P2405

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## Summary

On 18, 19 and 20 June 2025, the bachelor's programme Human Geography and Planning, the master's programme Urban and Economic Geography, the master's programme Spatial Planning and the master's programme International Development Studies of Utrecht University were assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment WO Sociale Geografie en Planologie (Human Geography and Planning). The panel established that the four programmes 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 four programmes is **positive**.

### Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The programmes each have a clear and carefully delineated profile that aligns with the vision on education of both Utrecht University and its Geosciences faculty. The learning outcomes of the respective programmes are formulated adequately and reflect their substance, level and orientation. Moreover, the end qualifications benefit the programme profile and cover both the scientific and professional requirements of the domain. Each programme has good links with its own professional field: the MSc IDS has taken these contacts to a higher structural level; the MSc SP and the MSc UEG are advised to set up a similar Advisory Board and organize their mandate to also monitor the quality and relevance of education in the BSc SGPL.

### Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The programmes operate in a strong teaching and learning environment, an appreciation that 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 changes to the respective curricula are timely and adjustments are 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 three master's programmes, as well as the decision to offer the MSc IDS, the MSc SP and the MSc UEG in English. While the international dimension enriches the teaching and learning environment for both Dutch and non-Dutch students, it should not refrain the master programmes from paying good attention in class and through assignments to the Dutch dimension of the respective disciplines. As points for attention, programme teams may want to set clear and common expectations for assignments and theses, discuss these with the staff involved, and communicate this to students. Moreover, they should make field trips and excursions physically accessible for students with mobility impairments, as well as financially accessible for all students.

### Standard 3. Student assessment

Each programme can rely on a qualitative system of assessment that is embedded in long-standing policies and practices of the Faculty of Geosciences at Utrecht 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, students appreciate the mixture of individual and group assignments, written exams, and formative and summative evaluations. The quality assurance system for assessment is both comprehensive and effective. The members of the Central Exam Committee, the SGPL Chamber and the Assessment Committee should be commended for their expertise and commitment. Thesis assessment is organized in different steps and contains in-built provisions for an independent judgement of the thesis quality. The thesis review by the panel members demonstrated that both the bachelor and the master thesis evaluation forms are relevant and that the grading by the assessors is in most cases in line with their own appraisal. Moreover, most evaluation forms are completed in an insightful way. As a point for

attention, the master's programmes could add assessment criteria to their thesis evaluation form that establish the disciplinary relevance of the research topic and assess the student handling of ethical aspects in their research.

#### Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes are assessed and demonstrated in a systematic way. The thesis review shows that across programmes most theses are of good quality and nearly every thesis deserves to pass. All students who successfully pass the thesis have effectively achieved the respective programme learning outcomes. Moreover, bachelor graduates are well prepared during their study for a follow-up master programme, while master graduates tend to find a relevant job swiftly. Hence, programme graduates clearly display the competencies mentioned in the respective exit qualifications.

#### BSc Sociale Geografie en Planologie

The Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Sociale Geografie en Planologie (Human Geography and Planning, SGPL) is a three-year full-time degree taught in Dutch that can also be followed in a parttime variant. It stands out for its integrated character, introducing all students to both Human Geography and Spatial Planning. The intended learning outcomes do justice to this broad profile. Its recently revised curriculum is comprehensive, cohesive and customisable, and prepares students for a follow-up professional career or a specialist master's programme in either human geography or planning. The thesis review showed that almost all graduation projects were of sufficient quality and had been assessed in an insightful way. As a specific point for attention, the programme team could provide clear assessment procedures, as well as minimum content expectations, for theses at the lower end of the spectrum.

#### MSc International Development Studies

The Master of Science (MSc) in International Development Studies (IDS) is a one-year full-time English-language degree programme. Its profile, learning outcomes and curriculum have been adjusted over time in an exemplary way. The emphasis on the global interconnected nature of current societal challenges reflects current thinking in the IDS field, moving beyond a binary geographical division in the global North-South. In the curriculum, research skills, methods and techniques take up a central role. The enthusiastic and committed lecturers on the programme constitute an important asset of the IDS programme: they operate as a team with a shared vision, a close eye on global developments, and good contacts with the professional field. The thesis review showed that all graduation projects were of sufficient quality and had been assessed in an insightful way.

#### MSc Spatial Planning

The MSc in Spatial Planning (SP) is a one-year fulltime English-language degree programme that can also be followed in a parttime variant. Its learning outcomes and curriculum have been revised recently. This 'new' MSc SP pays attention to the practice of planning in an increasingly globally oriented (academic) world and in the international classroom. The new learning outcomes reflect both the academic attention to contemporary urban planning challenges and the professional needs to address these challenges. The curriculum is broad and interdisciplinary, embraces an integrated perspective to planning, and prepares students to function as all-round spatial planners. The increased attention to methods and techniques in the curriculum is likely to better prepare students for the master thesis. The programme changes, however, are too recent to already assess their effectiveness. The thesis review showed that all graduation projects were of sufficient quality but that some topics were outside the disciplinary scope of spatial planning. In terms of assessment, the final scores sometimes differed from the panel's opinion and the evaluation forms did not always provide insightful information to motivate the scores. Hence, the programme may want to strengthen its calibration sessions with assessors and remind them about the expectations regarding written

assessment feedback. The panel sees one crucial and urgent point for attention: the MSc SP should reflect on its position towards / within the field of spatial planning, decide in which direction the programme should evolve, and adjust profile, learning outcomes, and curriculum accordingly. While it currently looks like a spatial planning master on paper, the curriculum, the thesis topics and the expertise of newly recruited staff seems to point more towards urban governance.

### MSc Urban and Economic Geography

The MSc Urban and Economic Geography (UEG) is a one-year fulltime English-language programme that can also be followed in a parttime variant. Students choose among two specializations: Urban Geography or Economic Geography. The MSc UEG has a compelling profile integrating on the one hand the domains of urban and economic geography while on the other hand allowing students to customize their study programme and opt for in-depth specialisation. This profile is explicitly addressed in the learning outcomes, which are well aligned with the expectations from academia and the professional field. The UEG programme is feasible and prepares students for the labour market. The staff is fairly diverse and has good research credentials in the domains covered by the specialization courses. The thesis review showed that all graduation projects were of sufficient quality and had been assessed in an insightful way.

### Parttime variants

The BSc SGPL, the MSc SP and the MSc UEG are offered in a fulltime and a parttime variant, with only a small number of students enrolled on the respective parttime variants. The panel established that its findings and considerations on each of the four NVAO standards apply equally to both variants.

### 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 set clear and common expectations for assignment support and thesis supervision, discuss these with the staff involved, and communicate the agreed and common provisions to students;
- to make field trips and excursions physically accessible for students with mobility impairments, as well as financially accessible for all students;

#### *All master's programmes*

- to add a thesis evaluation criterion to assess the disciplinary relevance of the research topic;
- to assess the student's handling of ethics in their (master thesis) research;

#### *Bachelor's programme SGPL*

- to provide clear procedures, as well as minimum expectations, for theses at the lower end of the spectrum;

#### *Master's programme SP*

- to set up a dedicated Advisory Board to monitor the quality and relevance of both the master 's and the bachelor's programme;
- to bring all students up to par in terms of research methods and techniques before they engage in the research internship and thesis;
- to strengthen the calibration sessions with thesis assessors and remind them about the programme expectations regarding written assessment feedback;

- to take position on the disciplinary domain of the master programme, and align learning outcomes, curriculum objectives and master thesis rationale accordingly; and involve the professional field – ideally through the envisaged Advisory Board – in these discussions;

*Master's programme UEG*

- to set up a dedicated Advisory Board to monitor the quality and relevance of both the master's and the bachelor's programme.

## 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	<b>positive</b>

*Master's programme Urban and 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	<b>positive</b>

*Master's programme Spatial 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	<b>positive</b>

*Master's programme International Development 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	<b>positive</b>

On behalf of the entire peer review panel,

Prof. dr. F.J.A. (Frank) Witlox

Panel chair

Date: 15 September 2025

M. (Mark) Delmartino

Panel secretary

# Introduction

## Procedure

### Assessment

On 18, 19 and 20 June 2025, the bachelor's programme Human Geography and Planning, the master's programme Urban and Economic Geography, the master's programme Spatial Planning and the master's programme International Development Studies of Utrecht University were assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment WO Sociale Geografie en Planologie (Human Geography and Planning). During these days, the panel also assessed a fifth – joint – programme (MSc Geographical Information Management and Applications), which will be addressed in a separate report.

The cluster consists 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 external assessment of all programmes at all institutions. On behalf of Academion, Peter Hilderling coordinated the entire assignment, while Mark Delmartino acted as panel secretary for the programme assessments in Utrecht. 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

On request of the faculty management at UU, it was agreed that the assessment visit would take a development-oriented approach. Hence the accreditation team at UU complemented the “visitation dossier” outlining the key elements per programme with an extensive portfolio of programme-specific and faculty-wide documents. The materials put at disposition of the panel have been listed in appendix 4.

As part of its external assessment, the panel reviewed for every programme a sample of graduation projects. In the run-up to the site visit, the accreditation team provided the panel secretary with lists of students who graduated in the academic years 2022-2023 and/or 2023-2024. The panel chair then selected 15 theses per programme. All thesis samples took into account the diversity of final scores, the variety of thesis supervisors, and where applicable the different programme variants and/or tracks. Details on the composition of the thesis samples 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 13 June 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 UU accreditation team on 16 June.

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

In view of the development-oriented character of the assessment, the development dialogue was integrated in the set-up of the site visit programme through three thematic sessions. The development related components of these sessions have been captured in a separate report.

#### Site visit

The accreditation team at UU composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the coordinator and the panel secretary (see appendix 3). The programmes 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 considerations and conclusions of the panel in a public session to all programme representatives.

#### Report

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 at UU 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 Geosciences and Utrecht University.

#### Panel

The panel assessing the four Human Geography and Planning programmes at Utrecht University consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. F.J.A. (Frank) Witlox, professor in Economic Geography at Ghent University (Belgium) [chair];
- Dr. M.(Melika) Levelt, senior lecturer and researcher in Logistics at the Faculty of Technology of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences;
- Prof. dr. J. (Jaap) Boter, associate professor in Marketing at the School of Business and Economics of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and special chair Book Trade of the Koninklijke Boekverkoopersbond at the University of Amsterdam;
- Dr. R.B.C. (Roy) Huijsmans, associate professor in Childhood & Youth Studies at the International Institute of Social Studies of the Erasmus University Rotterdam;
- Dr. ir. W. W. (Willem) Buunk, managing consultant for the physical environment at Berenschot;
- M. (Maayke) Bouwhuis, bachelor student Geography, Spatial Planning and Environment at the Radboud University [student member].

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

## Information on the programmes

Name of the institution:	Utrecht University
BRIN-number:	21PD
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Programme name:	B Sociale Geografie en Planologie (B Human Geography and Planning)
ISAT number:	56838
Orientation of the programme:	Academic
Level of the programme:	Bachelor (NLQF 6)
Number of credits:	180 EC
Language of instruction:	Dutch
Location:	Utrecht
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime, parttime
Educational minor:	Applicable (Aardrijkskunde)
Awarded degree:	BSc.
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2025
Programme name:	M Urban and Economic Geography
ISAT number:	66620
Orientation of the programme:	Academic
Level of the programme:	Master (NLQF7)
Number of credits:	60 EC
Language of instruction:	English
Specializations or tracks:	Urban Geography Economic Geography
Location:	Utrecht
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime, parttime
Awarded degree:	MSc.
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2025
Programme name:	M Spatial Planning
ISAT number:	66622
Orientation of the programme:	Academic
Level of the programme:	Master (NLQF7)
Number of credits:	60 EC
Language of instruction:	English
Location:	Utrecht
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime, parttime
Awarded degree:	MSc.
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2025
Programme name:	M International Development Studies
ISAT number:	60731
Orientation of the programme:	Academic

Level of the programme:	Master (NLQF7)
Number of credits:	60 EC
Language of instruction:	English
Location:	Utrecht
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Awarded degree:	MSc.
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2025

## Description of the assessment

### Organization

This report covers four degree programmes offered by the Department of Human Geography and Spatial Planning (SGPL) at the Faculty of Geosciences, one of seven faculties at Utrecht University (UU). As head of the faculty, the Dean is assisted by a management team featuring two vice-deans for education and research, a faculty director, and a student assessor. Many of the powers regarding organization, coordination and quality assurance of teaching are conferred on the Directors of Education at the respective departments. The SGPL department is led by a department chair and managed by a team including the department chair, the directors of education and research, and the department manager.

Decisions regarding the content and structure of the degree programmes under review are taken by the Director of Education in consultation with the respective programme coordinators and the Education Coordination Team. This team consists of the director of education, the bachelor and master directors, and two education coordinators.

Furthermore, the department has three Degree Programme Committees: one for its bachelor's programme, one for the three master's programmes under review, and one DPC for the joint MSc GIMA. Each committee includes both student and teaching staff delegates.

The Exam Committee is organized at faculty level and safeguards the quality of assessment for all degree programmes offered by the faculty of Geosciences. The Central Exam Committee (CEC) has delegated part of its responsibilities to three Chambers who independently execute the assessment policy set by the CEC. The four degree programmes under review are handled by the Chamber SGPL. A faculty-wide Assessment Committee operates under the wings of the CEC and analyses and advises on the quality of assessment.

During the site visit, the panel met with representatives of all executive and quality assurance bodies. The discussions have demonstrated convincingly to the panel that the degree programmes at SGPL are embedded in a relevant organizational environment. Moreover, the panel gathered from the written materials, and got ample confirmation during the discussions on site, that the degree programmes have many commonalities in addition to their own very specific rationale. Hence the panel's decision to structure this advisory report in a similar way, i.e. by organizing its findings and considerations per NVAO standard, thereby paying attention to both common features and programme-specific elements.

### Recommendations of the previous panel

In the previous accreditation round, the then panel issued a positive conclusion on the four degree programmes under review. The panel did make some recommendations that applied to one or more programmes. The current panel noticed that the SGPL department and the programme teams have not only considered these suggestions, but also integrated these in the respective programmes. These developments and adjustments will be reported in the respective standards.

## 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 faculty-wide information materials that Geography at Utrecht University goes back a long time: in 1908 the Geographical Institute was established and students could enrol for Social or Physical Geography as self-standing programmes as of 1921. Also the study association V.U.G.S. exists already for more than a century. Currently, geography is part of the Faculty of Geosciences, featuring Human Geography and Planning as a dedicated department. Through research and education, this SGPL department wants to contribute to a more sustainable society by training future generations of researchers, policy makers, advisers and teachers to think about possible futures by adopting an integral view, paying attention to context, different dimensions and developments beyond their own discipline.

The four degree programmes under review are all structured according to the Utrecht model of education, featuring the following basic principles: a clear distinction between bachelor's and master's programmes; flexibility and freedom of choice; and personal and interactive teaching provided by lecturers who can improve and innovate their teaching. Moreover, a particular characteristic of all Geosciences programmes is that students work on authentic practical situations, and are challenged to think about these situations abstractly and theoretically. This in turn enables them to contribute to resolving social issues during their study and by doing so, to prepare effectively for a career after their study.

The panel noticed in the materials but even more so in the discussions on site that each of the four programmes adhere to the educational principles and features of both university and faculty. The panel is particularly positive about the way programmes pay attention to continuous evaluation and improvement, which is demonstrated among others by the systematic consideration and concrete follow-up of the recommendations of the previous accreditation panel. Moreover, the bachelor's programme constitutes a good preparation for one of the follow-up master's programmes under review, including the joint MSc degree, while the master's programmes prepare indeed for an academic or professional career.

#### *Intended learning outcomes*

The panel has studied the intended learning outcomes for each of the four programmes under review, which are presented in Appendix 1 to this report. Each 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 SGPL programmes in the Netherlands.

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 programmes under review consider the work field as a sparring partner, whose input is sought after and valued. Moreover, the programmes follow up their graduates to collect information on their current labour market position, and to monitor their careers over time. By repeating this exercise regularly, programmes

keep track of their actual labour market potential and the career opportunities of 'their' geographers and spatial planners.

On the basis of the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel established that all programmes actively seek the input of the professional field through co-creation on education, research and valorisation. While the professional field also has a structural role in monitoring and assuring the quality of education of the MSc International Development Studies through a dedicated Advisory Board, this is not yet the case for the other three programmes. Acknowledging their recent efforts in this regard, the panel suggests to bring the many existing contacts in these programmes up to a higher systemic level, as well. In view of the fast pace of current developments in society, as well as in the SGPL-discipline, the panel subscribes to the statement in the materials that it is important enhancing the alignment between programme offers and working field needs. The other master's programmes may want to set up a similar Advisory Board, and organize their mandate in such a way that the respective boards for SP and UEG also monitor the quality and relevance of education in the bachelor SGPL.

#### *BSc Sociale Geografie en Planologie*

The Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Sociale Geografie en Planologie (Human Geography and Planning, SGPL) is a three-year full-time degree taught in Dutch that can also be followed in a parttime variant. It prepares students to become academically trained individuals who are committed to society, think critically and contribute to analysing, understanding and solving spatial questions. During their study, they are expected to acquire an inquisitive attitude, an ethical awareness, and the capacity to combine theory and practice. The bachelor degree in Utrecht stands out for its integrated character: all students are introduced to both Human Geography and Spatial Planning because it is deemed important that they have a foundational knowledge of both disciplines to understand complex social spatial questions and devise solutions. The written materials and the discussions on site have convinced the panel that this programme is about both human geography *and* spatial planning, not human geography *or* spatial planning. It endorses this rationale and recognizes that the breadth of the BSc SGPL aligns with the educational vision of Utrecht University.

The intended learning outcomes of the BSc SGPL do justice to the profile of the programme and prepare students for a follow-up professional career or a specialist master's programme. They are aligned with the domain-specific reference framework and lead to acquiring three key competencies: insight in geographical and planning developments, an inquisitive attitude, and the execution of social-spatial research in a responsible way. According to the panel, the learning outcomes are in line with the requirements for bachelor programmes as described in NLQF level 6 and their formulation reflect the substance (human geography and spatial planning), the level (bachelor) and orientation (academic) of the programme. The panel furthermore noticed with satisfaction that the programme objective to look with a spatial lens, and a feeling for scale and place to SGPL-questions is embedded in the learning outcomes.

#### *MSc International Development Studies*

The MSc in International Development Studies (IDS) is a one-year full-time English-language degree programme. The MSc IDS is rooted in the departmental research strategy and educates critically thinking, (self-)reflective and engaged international development professionals who co-create positive change, think beyond the traditional global South-North divide, and are attentive to power inequalities. Students learn to understand empirically and conceptually the local implications of changing global flows and challenges from a human perspective. They are guided to think critically about the way policy makers, businesses, NGOs and other actors foster conditions for equitable and sustainable development.

The IDS programme has continuously adapted to a changing world: the global interconnected nature of current societal challenges is now integrated more strongly throughout the curriculum, in conjunction with the changing role of traditional development cooperation. This adaptation is also reflected in reformulated learning goals which emphasize the rapidly changing global societal challenges and transformations, and pay more attention to co-creation and ethical sensitivity. The panel was informed that these reformulated learning goals will be reflected in adjusted programme learning outcomes as of 2025-2026. The panel endorses this shift in rationale, and approves of the way the adjusted programme profile has been translated in more concrete learning goals.

The current set of 16 programme learning outcomes follows the structure of the Dublin Descriptors, is aligned with the domain-specific reference framework and takes into account the core curriculum definitions of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI). According to the panel, the intended learning outcomes are in line with the requirements for master programmes as described in NLQF level 7 and their formulation reflects properly the substance (international development studies), the level (master) and orientation (academic) of the programme. It welcomes the envisaged adaptation of the learning outcomes and encourages the programme team to incorporate more explicitly the programme's central objective to "educate students in such a way that they will be able to make a substantial contribution to the building of a sustainable and inclusive society".

Furthermore, the panel noticed with satisfaction that programme team is keeping a close eye on global developments, and is doing so in connection with the professional field. The MSc IDS has a dedicated Advisory Board, which is called upon regularly to inform the programme team about current developments in the IDS domain and discuss the continued relevance of the curriculum and its course contents. If anything, the panel found the composition of the Advisory Board rather local (most members are Dutch) while the scope of the programme is undoubtedly global.

#### *MSc Spatial Planning*

The MSc in Spatial Planning (SP) is a one-year fulltime English-language degree programme that can also be followed in a parttime variant. At Utrecht University, spatial planning is understood as any legitimate intervention in the future allocation and distribution of land and other spatial resources in and for cities and regions. The MSc SP offers no specializations; its broad and interdisciplinary curriculum embraces an integrated perspective to planning and prepares students to function as all-round spatial planners. It is designed as a research-oriented, practice-informed and international programme that is driven among others by departmental research performed by a growing number of international staff. The panel endorses the rationale for the MSc SP programme, which aligns with the university's vision on broad education degrees. Moreover, the panel noticed that the BSc SGPL constitutes a particularly fitting introduction to this master's degree.

The previous accreditation panel noticed that the international aspirations of the programme can be challenging as international students face difficulties in finding internships and jobs on the Dutch labour market. The current panel was informed that the programme has been renewed since. It took on board developments in the field of spatial planning, including the revision of the core curriculum guidelines of the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP), and responded to the changing pedagogical and knowledge needs of the (international) student population. The revision was implemented for the first time in the current academic year 2024-2025 and combines a renewed attention to the practice of planning in an increasingly globally oriented (academic) world and international classroom. While it was too early to assess the effectiveness, impact or success of the revision at the time of the site visit, the panel subscribes to the rationale underlying the changes. However, the panel is not yet convinced whether the change in the

programme profile will effectively lead to the desired effect in the delivery of the curriculum. This will be further discussed in standard 2.

The panel has studied the programme learning outcomes, which were revised together with the adjustment of the curriculum. The new set of learning outcomes reflects both the academic attention to contemporary urban planning challenges and the professional needs to address these challenges. Attention was paid in their formulation to abide by the domain-specific reference framework, the Dublin Descriptors, and AESOP's core curriculum requirements. The panel noticed that the intended learning outcomes are in line with the requirements for master programmes as described in NLQF level 7 and fit with the demands of the labour market and the standards of the academic planning community. Hence, their formulation reflects properly the substance (spatial planning), level (master) and orientation (academic) of the programme.

Further to what was mentioned in the visitation dossier – as a result of the deliberate strategy to educate planners with a broad perspective, SP graduates have relatively limited technical or applied knowledge about the Dutch planning system and how it has evolved – the panel discussed with several stakeholders on site if there is enough attention to the history and features of the Dutch planning system, as well as to the developments in the spatial planning work field. While acknowledging that the revised learning outcomes (as of 2024-2025) apply to a somewhat different curriculum reality than what was shown in the thesis review (2023-2024), the panel wondered to what extent the programme plans (expressed through the ILOs) correspond with the programme reality (in the curriculum courses). This point will be taken up more extensively under the standards 2 (teaching-learning environment) and 4 (achieved learning outcomes). The panel noticed that while the programme is described on paper as spatial planning, its profile has shifted in recent years towards a more urban governance type of programme. This development is of some concern to the panel as it may do away with a long-standing tradition of spatial planning education in Utrecht and weaken the overall position of spatial planning in Dutch higher education. In so far as the intended learning outcomes are concerned, the panel noticed that the formulation of certain ILO statements is unclear, as they refer to seemingly differently concepts as 'spatial problems', 'planning practice', and 'spatial planning (problems)'. The panel recommends the programme team to revisit the formulation and adjust where it seems fit. According to the panel, a programme that prepares students to solve spatial problems will have a different focus than a curriculum aiming to deliver spatial planners.

#### *MSc Urban and Economic Geography*

The MSc Urban and Economic Geography (UEG) is a one-year fulltime English-language programme that can also be followed in a parttime variant. Students enrolling on the MSc UEG choose among two specializations: Urban Geography or Economic Geography. Since the previous accreditation, the MSc UEG has been renewed: students now study the city and its social, cultural and economic developments from various academic perspectives and thematic angles, with an interdisciplinary approach. Compared to similar programmes in the Netherlands, the MSc UEG in Utrecht stands out for its integration of urban and economic geography. This integration is customizable: both students who aim for deep specialization as urban or economic geographers and those who want to graduate as all-round (human) geographers can tailor their study programme to their interest. This asset of the programme was clearly recognized – and appreciated – by the students the panel met on site. The panel endorses the rationale for the MSc UEG programme, which aligns with the university's vision on broad education degrees. Moreover, the panel noticed that the BSc SGPL constitutes a particularly fitting introduction to (both specializations in) this master degree.

The panel studied the programme learning outcomes, which were revised in conjunction with the curriculum adjustment. The current set of 22 programme learning outcomes is organized along five clusters: knowledge, methodology, societal application, communication, and critical academic attitude. Their formulation does

justice to the Dublin Descriptors and is aligned with the domain-specific reference framework. According to the panel, the intended learning outcomes are in line with the requirements for master programmes as described in NLQF level 7 and their formulation reflects properly the substance (urban and economic geography), the level (master) and orientation (academic) of the programme. Furthermore, the panel noticed that key elements of the (renewed) UEG profile are explicitly addressed in the learning outcomes, such as its international and intercultural dimension, the disciplinary context, the policy intervention component, the scientific and societal aspects of ethics. Moreover, the learning outcomes pay extensive attention to acquiring research competencies and a critical academic attitude. According to the panel, the ILOs are well aligned with the expectations from both academia and the professional field.

### Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the four SGPL-programmes under review each have a clear and carefully delineated profile that aligns with the vision on education of both Utrecht University and its Geosciences faculty.

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

The panel appreciates the links of each programme with ‘their’ professional field, and welcomes in particular the efforts of the MSc IDS in taking this input to a higher structural level. The panel therefore recommends the other master’s programmes to consider setting up a similar Advisory Board, and organize their mandate in such a way that they also monitor the quality and relevance of education in the bachelor SGPL.

The BSc SGPL, the MSc SP and the MSc UEG are offered in a fulltime and a parttime variant, with only a small number of students enrolled on the respective parttime variants. The panel establishes that for these programmes the above findings and considerations on profile and learning outcomes apply equally to both variants.

The panel considers that the BSc SGPL bachelor stands out for its integrated character, introducing all students to both Human Geography and Spatial Planning. The intended learning outcomes do justice to this broad profile and prepare students for a follow-up professional career or a specialist master’s programme, notably but not exclusively at UU.

The panel thinks positively on the way the profile and the learning goals of the MSc IDS have been adjusted over time. The emphasis on the global interconnected nature of current societal challenges reflects current thinking in the IDS field, moving beyond a binary geographical division in the global North-South. The programme team is driven by a clear vision and keeps a close eye on global developments, and does so in connection with the professional field.

The panel welcomes the recent revision of the MSc SP programme. Embracing an integrated perspective to planning and preparing students to function as all-round spatial planners, the ‘new’ MSc SP combines attention to the practice of planning in an increasingly globally oriented (academic) world and in the international classroom. The new set of learning outcomes reflects both the academic attention to contemporary urban planning challenges and the professional needs to address these challenges. Nonetheless, the panel noticed that certain ILO statements are unclear and invites the programme team to revisit the formulation regarding ‘spatial problems’, ‘planning practice’, and ‘spatial planning (problems)’. These formulations are important as they indicate in which direction the SP programme wants to move in

the future: either concentrate on its long-standing core business of spatial planning, or rather shift in the direction of urban governance.

The panel considers that the MSc UEG has a compelling profile integrating on the one hand the domains of urban and economic geography while on the other hand allowing students to customize their study programme and opt for in-depth specialisation. Moreover, this renewed profile is explicitly addressed in the programme learning outcomes, which the panel found to be well aligned with the expectations from academia and the professional field.

### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the BSc SGPL, the MSc IDS, the MSc SP and the MSc UEG all **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 four 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 four 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 and meticulously 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.

The previous accreditation panel issued several recommendations that pertained in particular to the teaching-learning environment of the degree programmes under review. The current panel noticed with satisfaction that the SPGL department and the programme teams have not only considered these 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.

Each programme has its own Assessment Plan, which includes among other a specific overview on the link between course objectives and programme learning outcomes. 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 three programmes under review – the BSc SGPL, the MSc SP and the MSc UEG – also offer a part-time variant. Part-time students follow the same curriculum, taking their courses together with full-time students, produce the same assignments, and take the same exams but spread their study load over a longer period of time than their full-time colleagues. The panel noticed that only a small number of students (less than 5% of the cohorts) enrol on the part-time variant. During the site visit, part-time students indicated that they are satisfied with the offer, that they have similar positive and less positive study experiences as their full-time peers, and that they complete the same programme. Asked whether it makes sense to maintain part-time variants for such small numbers and shares of students, both faculty and programme management mentioned that the inclusion of part-time students does not require much additional effort in providing and delivering education. Moreover, part-time students tend to be somewhat older and often bring professional experience to the class, which enhances the diversity of the student audience and enriches the learning – and teaching – experience of students and teachers.

#### *Language of instruction*

While the bachelor's programme is offered in Dutch, the master's programmes have an English name and are delivered in English. The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the choice for Dutch/English was made already a long time ago and its relevance was confirmed during the previous accreditation. Moreover, the choices made for each of the programmes were confirmed in the UU Taalbeleid (language policy) document in 2022. In this policy document, UU presents itself as a bilingual university where Dutch and English are used next to one another. Its bilingual approach reportedly reflects best the reality of the 21st century, with a world that is increasingly connected.

Within this policy framework, the BSc SGPL aligns with the provision that all bachelor's programmes at Utrecht University use Dutch as language of instruction, but offers curriculum components in English because it prepares for follow-up master's programmes in English. Similarly, the three master's programmes abide by the wish of the university to offer internationally competitive education that reflects the (international) research efforts of the university and attracts both national and international talent.

Students and recent alumni indicated that the respective language of instruction was one of the arguments that guided their decision to study the bachelor and/or a master's programme in Utrecht. International master students mentioned they were happy to study in the Netherlands and Dutch students appreciated in particular the exchanges with non-Dutch peers in formal and informal educational settings. Nonetheless, both groups informed the panel that comprehension of the Dutch language is indispensable if graduates want to join the labour market in the Netherlands.

Furthermore, the panel discussed during the visit to what extent the English language of instruction in the master's programmes prevents Dutch and international students from studying 'the Dutch situation' and address topics of local, regional or national importance in course assignments and thesis research. After all, several students are likely to find a job position upon graduation for which knowledge of the local situation is useful if not necessary. Both teaching staff and students indicated that Dutch topics tend to be studied in the bachelor's programme, but can be picked up and elaborated on in electives and course assignments in the master's programmes, as well as in the internship and the thesis. The management confirmed that students who wish to do so, can tailor their study programme to include 'Dutch' topics. Moreover, graduates do not seem to experience any problems in finding employment in a 'Dutch' environment.

In sum, the panel endorses the choices of the programme – and the policy of the university – and acknowledges that each programme is offered in the language that is most suited for the level, the disciplinary domain, and the outlook of the labour market. With regard to the latter point, the panel suggests

to pay more attention in class and through assignments to the Dutch dimension of the respective disciplines. While this suggestion is rooted in the findings from the thesis review on the MSc Spatial Planning (see standard 4), it equally applies to the MSc Urban and Economic Geography and to some extent also to the MSc International Development Studies. According to the panel, this national dimension is particularly important in the MSc SP, as the spatial planning discipline is strongly rooted in Dutch society. Students – Dutch and non-Dutch alike – risk missing out part of the disciplinary identity of spatial planning in the Netherlands when the programme would focus too strongly on the international component.

#### *Learning environment*

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the four degree programmes under review share many features of their learning environment. This commonality is caused by the fact that all programmes are structured according to the Utrecht model. In each programme curriculum, teaching and research are integrated and interlinked, courses are increasingly complex in terms of learning tasks and student responsibility, and education is delivered in an interactive way. Students learn in an environment that stimulates active participation in acquiring and applying knowledge and skills. Moreover, all education in the Geosciences programmes involves work in authentic practical situations. Students are challenged to think about these situations in an abstract and theoretical way. This enables them to contribute not only to resolving social issues during their study but prepares them effectively for a professional career afterwards.

In so far as the master's programmes are concerned, the panel noticed that their structure reflects the principle of increasing independence in learning. In the first semester, courses tend to combine lectures or seminars with diverse forms of interactive teaching methods, such as practical assignments or field trips, tutorials and groups assignments on contemporary topics. In the second semester, the number of contact hours is much more restricted as students often pursue an internship and/or work on their master thesis, which requires a considerable degree of independence. In fact, most of the contact hours in the second semester are devoted to one-to-one supervision of the student by a senior staff member.

Education in the master's programmes, moreover, is designed to build both academic and professional competences. In line with its tradition of applied empirical research, the Utrecht programmes emphasize thesis research projects, in most cases combined with an internship to give the future graduate a thorough preparation for the labour market. This combination of teaching and research – the main thrust of academic education – comes to fruition through tailor-made supervision trajectories as the internship and thesis are supervised by lecturers with particular expertise in the specific field.

Furthermore, the panel was informed that all SGPL programmes want to create – each in their own way – a community of students and staff. The revised bachelor curriculum even explicitly strives for a study culture that is both 'betrokken' (involved) and 'nieuwsgierig' (curious), and in which students and staff form a community together: teaching staff is involved with each other and the students, while students and staff share a curiosity about the world and an involvement with the great and complex issues that are at hand in the world. To enhance the relations among and between staff and students, the programmes organize different activities often in close co-operation with the study association. Students and staff indicated that there is indeed a feeling / culture of involvement and curiosity, that field trips contribute hugely to community building, but that this togetherness is not a given but requires active work from all participants. It may well be a sign of the times, but community building seems less of a priority with staff and students nowadays. Staff for instance indicated that it is difficult to reach students outside class hours as they often do not live in the city. Students from their side mentioned that staff often does not participate in activities organized by the study association. The panel acknowledges that 'building a strong academic community with self-regulated learners' is an important goal for the faculty and the four programmes under review as it

was one of the development themes addressed during the thematic sessions at the end of the site visit. The thematic session confirmed according to the panel what it already noticed during the programme sessions, i.e. that all stakeholders agree on the elements of the study culture as well as on the aim to produce a community of students and staff, but that there is (much) room for concrete action to facilitate and establish such community. Given that the faculty building is organised in such a way that students cannot visit staff in their offices, the panel suggests to enhance the visibility and the use of the 'common room', which was put at disposition as an alternative meeting place of students and staff.

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the emphasis on involvement and curiosity leads to a student-centred educational approach in which students take increasing responsibility for their own learning and pace of study. In order to promote and stimulate self-regulation, the faculty offers tutoring to first-year bachelor students and organizes information sessions on important study milestones across the entire bachelor study. Study advisers play an important role in these plenary sessions and are available for individual sessions with students. In addition, study advisers are the eyes and ears of the programme team in so far as the feasibility of the curriculum is concerned. Their involvement starts already prior to enrolment when students do a compulsory but not binding matching exercise to check whether they qualify for the programme. During the first year they guide students in their study progress and can advise students on relevant study alternatives. During the site visit, students acknowledged the efforts of the bachelor's programme in this regard and emphasized that they make use of the student support and guidance offer. However, several students indicated that the visibility of the study advisers could be enhanced, while their agenda tends to be packed during peak moments. The panel understood from talking to students and study advisers that there is a high demand for individual sessions right after plenary information sessions. Given that all stakeholders are aware of the situation, the panel is confident that the issue can be accommodated rather easily, e.g. by advancing the information moments, ensuring sufficient advisory capacity at peak moments, and/or actively inviting students to book a timeslot.

In the master's programmes, the student-centred approach is noticeable among others in the emphasis on progressive learning and in collecting regular input from students through an informal study board. This committee consists of the Programme Coordinator, a Programme Committee representative, and a few students representing their cohort. It meets every course period to exchange concerns and feedback on the programme and the courses. Students and staff appreciate the existence of this platform because it allows to monitor quickly and regularly the 'temperature' in the international student groups, identify possible issues and obstacles, and look for solutions in an informal way. According to the panel, it is a useful tool that complements in a hands-on way the more formal route of course evaluations and follow-up by the Programme Committee.

In so far as student wellbeing is concerned, the panel was informed that students on all four programmes can rely on a series of services and initiatives at both faculty and university level. These services are communicated at the start of the academic year and are mentioned in the respective study guides and on the university website. Study advisers have a good overview of the services on offer and are the first point of contact for students. Similarly, the panel noticed that the university and the faculty have a range of facilities and provisions in place for students with functional impairments. During the site visit, the panel gathered from the discussions with students that in case of personal issues, they know how to reach out to the relevant services. If anything, students indicated that this offer could be somewhat more articulated for international students. Moreover, study advisers are less well placed to support students who experience personal issues while they are abroad on field research/internships. According to the panel, this issue requires further attention from faculty, department and programme management.

While everything seems to be well in place in terms of education and assessment, the panel was informed of individual cases of field trips and assignments in the neighbourhood where students with mobility issues experienced considerable problems and sometimes were not in a position to participate. The panel calls upon the programmes to consider these practical issues in advance and look for ways to accommodate the participation of all students in these curriculum-related external activities.

Furthermore, students from several programmes indicated to the panel that study visits are a regular component of each programme but come at an additional financial cost. The amount of this cost is not always announced before, can sometimes be relatively high and is often difficult to budget precisely. Every year several students do not join the trip because they cannot afford the additional cost. Given that the visit is an integral part of the curriculum, these students are offered alternative assignments and tasks. The panel thinks this approach is undesirable as it creates unequal opportunities depending on the financial situation of students. It therefore suggests the respective programmes to choose their destinations wisely from a financial point of view and to announce well in advance – even prior to enrolment – the envisaged study trips and their estimated cost. Moreover, it advises the programmes / department to investigate whether it is possible to set aside some budget to support financially those students who cannot afford the additional cost. In case of the MSc International Development Studies, the additional cost of the field trip can be considerable and tends to differ per region (Asia, Latin-America, Africa, Europe). The panel subscribes to the suggestion of one of the IDS students to provide on the programme website a precise calculation and cost range of the field trip per region. The panel acknowledges, moreover, that by advancing the decision on / approval of the field trip, students can buy cheaper flight tickets. This, however, is only possible if there is clarity/agreement on key parts of the research proposal. If not, it is the destination which decides on the research, not the other way around.

In sum, the panel established that each of the four degree programmes can rely on a learning environment that is rooted in the vision and policies of the university and the faculty. The educational principles underlying the respective curricula are relevant. The faculty-wide provisions on student guidance and support are adequate, and this also applies to the services for students with a functional impairment. As a point for attention, the panel advises all programmes under review to make field trips and excursions physically accessible for students with mobility impairments, as well as financially accessible for all students.

#### *Staff*

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that all four programmes can rely on teaching staff who is highly qualified in the disciplinary field, has good research expertise, is didactically qualified, and very often reflects the above-mentioned study culture values involvement and curiosity. The education tasks of the 115 SGPL teaching staff listed on the overview document amounts altogether to almost 32 FTE for a staff-student ratio of 1 on 28.5. The overview showed that many staff teach at least in two programmes, usually the bachelor and one master's programme.

The panel also observed that the university, faculty and department pay good attention to the professional development of the teaching staff. While almost all staff members obtained a university teaching qualification, or are currently taking the training, several teaching staff also obtained a senior teaching qualification and/or followed a leadership trajectory. The panel was informed that several innovative approaches to teaching have been tried and tested in the framework of these training programmes.

Students indicated in their chapters and during the discussions that they highly value the disciplinary knowledge of the teachers, as well as the didactical skills of most staff. While emphasizing that many teachers are very committed to the programme, there is a minority of teachers who is less involved and less

approachable to students. This results in different levels of support for individual students, in sometimes missed course evaluations, and in relatively low scores for certain teaching staff categories in the NSE (national student inquiry). This difference is mainly visible, according to students, in the way staff is engaged in the follow-up of assignments and the supervision of theses. The panel heard several great stories of super-committed supervisors, but also understood from the testimonies that some students are more lucky than others with the level, amount and timeliness of support/supervision for their assignments/thesis. The panel therefore invites all programme teams to set clear and common expectations for assignments and theses, discuss these with the staff involved, and communicate these to all students.

### *BSc Sociale Geografie & Planologie*

The BSc SGPL amounts to 180 EC, which are spread over three components: common compulsory courses (75 EC), track-specific courses and electives (45 EC) and thesis (15 EC), and free profiling courses (45 EC). Courses belong to four learning lines: writing and argumentation, research methods and techniques, field work, and conceptual and philosophy of science. The curriculum, which is presented in Appendix 2 to this report, was revised considerably since the previous accreditation. It has been rolled-out year by year since September 2021, which means that the first cohort on the new curriculum graduated in summer 2024. The SGPL programme is open to all students with a Dutch vwo diploma or equivalent.

The panel noticed that the curriculum has a clear structure, which integrates human geography and spatial planning. This integrated approach means that all students acquire foundational knowledge of both disciplines. Several courses in fact have teaching teams that consist of experts from both disciplines. All students follow the same common compulsory courses in the first year; in the second and third year students deepen their knowledge by choosing one of four ‘tracks’ (a set of compulsory courses around a common theme) and widen their viewpoint through electives and the minor period. The tracks are a novelty in the curriculum and coincide with the research agenda of the staff: inclusive cities, migration and global development, innovative and sustainable regions, and planning for sustainable cities. The panel appreciates that the new curriculum has been designed in such a way that irrespective of the choices made in years two and three, all SGPL graduates can pursue a master’s programme in either domain. In this way, the bachelor’s programme is really about human geography and spatial planning.

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the programme team has made clear choices in designing the new curriculum: its integrated character, its focus on (contributing to analysing and solving) SGPL issues at different levels of scale, its attention to ethics taking into account different perspectives from different stakeholders and deciding on their own positionality.

In order to achieve all these elements, the programme has designed its learning environment in such a way that students often go outside of the classroom for different forms of experience-driven and authentic forms of learning. Students indicated in their chapter and during the site visit that they think highly of the integrated character of the curriculum and its focus on experience-based learning. If anything, they would appreciate more attention to acquiring practical skills and to more time to learn/practice statistics throughout the curriculum. Sharing these concerns with the teachers and the programme team, the panel was informed that these issues are known to the programme and can be accommodated.

With the caveat that at the time of the site visit, the entire curriculum was running for the second year, the panel gathered from the written materials and the discussion on site that overall the study load is manageable, that there are no individual course ‘obstacles’, and that therefore the entire curriculum is feasible.

Teachers from their side emphasized that the integrated approach allows for team teaching and thus for more cooperation, involvement and curiosity towards ‘the other side’, be it human geography or spatial planning. Moreover, the panel was informed that the programme recruited a number of new and relatively young staff members, who all pass through an onboarding process which leads to a shared understanding of the educational vision, course structure and assessment approach.

In sum, the panel welcomes both the rationale for and the initial delivery results of the new curriculum, which the panel finds comprehensive and varied. Students can shape their study by specializing in the domain of their interest. The track structure aligns with the programme profile and results in a cohesive curriculum-build up. The joint and meticulous approach to revising the curriculum is to be commended. Moreover, the panel appreciates the attention by the programme team to monitoring the course evaluations of the initial rounds of course delivery and their openness to changes and adjustments for the better.

#### *MSc International Development Studies*

The MSc IDS is a one-year full-time master’s programme of 60 EC. Its curriculum is presented in Appendix 2 to this report. IDS students start with two mandatory courses (15 EC) followed by an advanced methods and techniques course (10 EC) and a free elective course (5 EC). The latter half of the programme consists of a research-oriented internship (the so-called fieldwork component) in which students prepare for the master thesis (30 EC). In this internship/master thesis course students conduct a substantial, independent and fieldwork-based research on a chosen topic related to international development. Students are expected to find their own fieldwork organisation using the extensive list of IDS partner organisations across the world.

Since the previous accreditation, the IDS curriculum has been adjusted, notably regarding its course contents. The programme continues to stand out for its focus on empirical fieldwork through mixed research methods, includes different creative and participatory methods, and pays attention to inter-cultural competences. Newly recruited staff have brought additional thematic, theoretical and methodological expertise, while staff research has a strong societal engagement and an actor-oriented approach. It focuses on the links between flows of capital, flows of people and trans-local development. Students can choose from many long-term, fair and reciprocal research internship collaborations with organizations worldwide, and are prepared even better than before to address ethical issues, reflect and take position.

The panel welcomes the changes to the curriculum, which have been discussed extensively before they were implemented. The revised curriculum, moreover, aligns very well with the profile of the programme. The panel also noticed that the teaching staff forms a close-knit team that meets regularly, is aware of the curriculum developments, and follows the developments in the professional field. Notwithstanding the inter/multidisciplinary character of the programme, the panel wondered about the relative absence of economics in the curriculum given the impact of the discipline in mainstream development thinking. While the panel notices that students are equipped with technical statistical skills as part of the advanced methods and techniques courses, it suggests to provide students with a foundational knowledge of relevant economical concepts, too, that will allow them to position themselves even better in their research and within the interdisciplinary field of development studies.

Students indicated in their chapter and during the discussions on site that they are satisfied with a programme that meets, and even exceeds, their expectations. Students come in with different educational (and sometimes cultural) backgrounds and enrolled for this programme mainly because of the international fieldwork component. They appreciate the competencies of the teaching staff as well as their activist attitude towards the discipline, which in turn encourages students to position themselves, as well. As points for attention, students mentioned that the first two study blocks have an uneven study load: there is too

much workload and pressure at the very start, when students are still settling in and coming to terms with linking the field of development studies to their own educational background. Moreover, there is no common information point, which sometimes leads to contradictory information being spread among students. Students would also appreciate an earlier decision on their fieldwork destination, which allows for better planning and less expensive tickets (see discussion in the general section of standard 2). Finally, some students found that the programme prepares very well for an academic career, but pays less attention to what it takes as an IDS student to be professionally successful on the labour market. Sharing these concerns with the teachers and the programme team, the panel was informed that these issues are known to the programme and can be accommodated.

The panel noticed that IDS has built up a stable student inflow, with yearly cohorts between 45 and 65 students. The programme attracts Dutch and international students with a bachelor degree, academic and research skills, and specific knowledge and insight on development geography at a level that is comparable to the BSc SGPL. The panel noticed that the admission requirements are clear and appropriate, and allow for a wide diversity of students. The panel agrees that this diversity constitutes both an opportunity and an added value for interdisciplinary learning on global issues. Moreover, the geographical diversity allows all students to benefit substantively from being taught in an international classroom.

In sum, the panel commends the programme for its clear and well-motivated curriculum that offers plenty of room to customize the study plan to the interest of the individual students. The panel also likes the programme structure with a central role for deepening research skills in between theoretical knowledge and thesis research. Anticipating its findings on standard four, the thesis review demonstrated that students are very well trained in methods and techniques. Both the discussions on site and the acknowledgement sections in the master theses demonstrate that the enthusiasm and commitment of the teaching staff constitute a very important asset of the IDS programme. Finally, the panel is impressed by the level of internal dialogue among the programme staff, and by the strong culture within the team striving for education quality.

#### *MSc Spatial Planning*

The MSc SP is a master's programme of 60 EC. Its renewed curriculum, which was rolled out in the current academic year 2024-2025, is presented in Appendix 2 to this report. It follows a rationale of progressive learning, from theories and themes to methods to conducting independent research. Compared to the previous curriculum, the current one pays more attention to research methods (13 EC) and allocates less credits to the master thesis (22.5 ECTS). The first semester consists of five courses, including the new Graduate Planning Studio where students apply their knowledge in groups to a real-life assignment, and an elective course to specialize in the graduation topic of their interest. The second semester is dominated by the master thesis, which is ideally combined with a research-supportive internship, and features a new International Field Trip module. The panel was informed that students do not have to do a (research-driven) internship but that this component is strongly recommended in combination with the master thesis.

The programme attracts Dutch and international students with a bachelor degree, academic and research skills, and good knowledge and insight of planning at a level that is comparable to the BSc SGPL. The panel noticed that the admission requirements are clear and appropriate, yet allow for relatively heterogeneous cohorts. About half of the students studied the BSc SGPL, one quarter came from another Dutch research university, and the remaining quarter has an international degree or entered the programme through a premaster. The vast majority of students is Dutch; at most 30% of the yearly intake is international.

At the time of the site visit, the new curriculum was nearing completion of its first cohort. The programme has been closely assessing relevance and effectiveness of the curriculum during the first year. The panel appreciates the close monitoring of the first course evaluation results by the programme team and their attention and openness to continuous quality improvement. In this regard, the evaluation results from the first semester reveal that students experience the workload as high. The panel was informed that this will be taken into consideration when finetuning the next run of the curriculum.

Anticipating its findings on the thesis review, the panel welcomes in particular the increased attention to research methods in the new curriculum. Similarly, the panel appreciates the focus on professionalization and reflection: in line with the Utrecht educational model, self-awareness and reflexivity/reflection are important skills for students to develop personal leadership and agency as professionals.

The panel spoke to MSc SP students who followed either the 'old' or the 'new' curriculum. In both cases they appreciated the open atmosphere in the programme, the quality of the teaching staff and the opportunity to tailor their study, including their master thesis research, in a very broad way to benefit their personal interest. Moreover, students seemed to have expected a more practical approach to the topic of spatial planning and were struck by the level and amount of planning theories that were offered. They also indicated that more attention could be paid to the Dutch spatial planning system, which is now an optional rather than a compulsory part of the curriculum.

Sharing these concerns with the teachers and the programme team, the panel was informed that these issues are known to the programme and can be accommodated to some extent. However, a curriculum of 60 EC cannot contain all elements and choices had to be made. Given that it is a deliberate strategy to educate planners with a broad perspective, MSc SP graduates have relatively limited technical or applied knowledge about the Dutch planning system and how it has evolved. Similarly, there are no courses on 'typical planning matters' such as planning law, statutory decision-making processes, or urban design aspects. The panel understood from the discussions that some of these choices have been made in view of the research expertise of newly recruited staff members who teach on the MSc SP.

The written materials, the reviewed theses (see standard 4) and the discussions on site have led the panel to share a major point of discussion with the programme team: the vision on the field of spatial planning and how this is translated into the content of the previous and current MSc SP curriculum. While the programme documentation points to a spatial planning programme, the discussions with the teaching staff about the course contents and the variety of thesis topics (see also standard four) seem to point to a programme that goes more into the direction of urban governance. This direction can be valid, but it is not in line with the current title of the programme nor with what is commonly understood to be covered by spatial planning. Even though a master degree in spatial planning is not a recognized professional qualification such as architecture, the panel understood among others from the alumni it spoke to on site that (Dutch) employers who are looking for graduates with a spatial planning degree do have certain expectations with regard to the knowledge and skills of MSc SP graduates, which some of the graduates do not seem to possess or at least do not (have to) demonstrate during their study.

The panel therefore recommends the programme to (i) map the current learning outcomes, the curriculum objectives and the breadth of master thesis topics in the light of the programme's vision on the field of spatial planning, (ii) take a decision in which direction the programme should evolve, and (iii) align learning outcomes, curriculum objectives and master thesis rationale. In case the programme decides to remain within spatial planning, then the panel recommends to (a) pay more attention in the curriculum contents and assignments to the Dutch planning system and (b) ensure that all master theses contain a spatial

planning component. The panel, moreover, suggests to actively involve the professional field in these discussions, possibly through a dedicated Advisory Board which the programme is envisaging and whose establishment the panel strongly supports.

#### *MSc Urban and Economic Geography*

The MSc UEG is a master's programme of 60 EC with two specializations: Urban Geography and Economic Geography. The programme curriculum is presented in Appendix 2 to this report. Compared to the previous accreditation, the curriculum has changed: an important novelty is that the programme is built around two specializations (instead of four) with some common courses (7.5 EC), at least two specialisation courses (10 EC) and one elective (5 EC) that can be taken from the other specialization. In this way, the programme caters for students who either want to become an in-depth specialist in urban or economic geography or prefer to become an all-round (human) geographer. The latter half of the curriculum is dedicated to a fieldtrip, a specialist methods and techniques course, and a master thesis with research internship (25 EC). The specialization courses reflect the research interests of the staff involved in the MSc UEG. The panel was informed that most master thesis projects involve or can be combined with an internship at a private or public organisation, where students focus on gathering data and writing their thesis.

The programme attracts Dutch and international students with a bachelor degree, academic and research skills, and good knowledge and insight of either Human Geography or Spatial Planning at a level that is comparable to the BSc SGPL. The panel noticed that the admission requirements are clear and appropriate, yet allow for relatively heterogeneous cohorts. This diverse intake is an asset for the programme in many ways, but also constitutes a challenge in training research/specialist methods and techniques.

Furthermore, the panel noticed that the programme emphasizes its international character, which is visible in the content, literature, assignments, and classroom. However, it proves difficult to attract more than a dozen international students per year (around 15%). The majority of the intake comes from BSc SGPL, while the remaining students enter via a pre-master or with a relevant degree from another Dutch university.

According to the student chapter, UEG students find the curriculum clear and logically structured. The content of the specialization courses is topical and relevant as they directly address urgent urban/economic issues. The elective course further allows them to tailor the study programme to their interest. The small scale of the programme contributes to the student-centred nature of the programme and makes it easier to receive customized support. Students also thought highly of the way the programme prepares them for a position on the labour market.

During the site visit, students furthermore indicated that they chose the programme because they wanted to specialize – mostly in urban geography – and had a clear idea what to expect as they did the BSc SGPL before. Students who joined from other universities, and in particular the international students, had somewhat more difficulties to integrate. Students who moved on from the BSc SGPL mentioned that there was quite some overlap in course content. In line with their colleagues from the other master's programmes under review, UEG students mentioned the unbalanced workload between the first and second period, with the latter being more stressful and demanding than the former. Students were overall satisfied with the disciplinary quality of the teaching staff, but indicated that there could be more alignment among teachers on how they teach, what they expect of assignments and how much effort they dedicate to teaching and thesis supervision. UEG students appreciate the availability of the programme coordinator, whom they see as their first and main point of contact. The panel was informed that if students want to raise an issue with a course/teacher, then the informal route via the coordinator is more effective than the formal way through the programme committee.

Sharing the student concerns with the teachers and the programme team, the panel was informed that these issues are known to the programme and can be accommodated to some extent. The panel recommends the programme team to look in particular into the overlap, workload, and staff involvement issues.

In sum, the panel commends the programme for its integration of urban and economic geography in a curriculum that is customizable for students. The profile is clearly visible in the curriculum structure, which in turn aligns with both academic and professional expectations. The curriculum is feasible as the completion rate is good and relatively stable over time. The academic staff seems fairly diverse in terms of academic seniority, gender, areas of expertise, and nationality. Finally, the panel appreciates the international dimension of the programme and encourages the programme to continue on this pathway.

### Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the four programmes under review operate in a strong 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 three master's programmes, as well as the decision to offer the MSc International Development Studies, the MSc Spatial Planning, and the MSc Urban and Economic Geography in English. The panel found that the international dimension enriches the teaching and learning environment for both Dutch and non-Dutch students. This international orientation, however, should not refrain the master programmes from paying good attention in class and through assignments to the Dutch dimension of the respective disciplines, on the contrary: Dutch and international students often enrolled on these programmes because of the strong disciplinary (research) tradition in the Netherlands.

The BSc SGPL, the MSc SP and the MSc UEG are offered in a fulltime and a parttime variant, with only a small number of students enrolled on the parttime variant. The panel establishes that the findings and considerations on the teaching-learning environment apply equally to both variants.

The panel welcomes the new BSc SGPL curriculum, which is comprehensive, cohesive and customizable. The panel acknowledges that the programme really is about human geography and spatial planning because all bachelor graduates can pursue a master's programme in either domain.

The panel commends the MSc IDS programme for its clear and well-motivated curriculum adjustment with a central role for research skills, methods and techniques. It is also impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of the teaching staff, which operates as a team and in this way constitutes an important asset of the IDS programme.

For the MSc SP, the panel appreciates the new curriculum set-up. It welcomes the clear and relevant admission criteria which allow for heterogeneous student cohorts. The increased attention to methods and techniques in the new curriculum is likely to better prepare students for the master thesis.

The panel thinks highly of the MSc UEG programme which allows students to customize the integrate urban and economic geography curriculum. Overall the programme is feasible and prepares students for the labour

market. The staff is fairly diverse and has very good research credentials in the domains covered by the specialization courses.

In addition to all these positive considerations, the panel invites all programme teams to set clear and common expectations for assignments and theses, discuss these with the staff involved, and communicate these to all students. Moreover, it urges all programmes to make field trips and excursions physically accessible for students with mobility impairments, as well as financially accessible for all students.

In so far as the MSc SP is concerned, the panel feels that the programme should reflect on its position regarding the field of spatial planning. It invites the programme team to map the current learning outcomes, the curriculum objectives and the breadth of the master thesis topics, take a decision in which direction the programme should evolve, and align learning outcomes, curriculum objectives and master thesis rationale with the direction chosen. While it is up to the programme to eventually decide, the panel sees clear advantages in (re-)emphasising the spatial planning focus of the programme with a curriculum that encompasses the unique identity of spatial planning in the Netherlands, and connects this to disciplinary developments around the world.

### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the BSc SGPL, the MSc IDS, the MSc SP and the MSc UEG all **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 four programmes under review is embedded in the assessment principles and policies of the Faculty of Geosciences at Utrecht University. In this set-up, Education and Examination Regulations, as well as programme assessment plans play an important role.

For each programme, the Assessment Plan covers the implementation of the assessment policy at curriculum and course level, and shows the interrelation between the programme, the curriculum courses, and the various types of tests. Similarly, the approach used for testing in each programme aligns with the overall faculty vision on assessment. Key principles of the testing policy include among others a clear relationship between the learning outcomes, course objectives, and types of course tests, the combination of summative and formative types of tests, and a coordinated match of the level and type of tests across all courses. In addition, programmes aim at an authentic assessment of the student attitudes, skills, and knowledge of theory and methods throughout the curriculum. The panel studied the assessment plans and found that the principles described in these documents, as well as the programme-specific overviews on the alignment between learning outcomes, course objectives, and assessment types are not only correctly formulated but also do justice to the way assessment is implemented in the day-to-day reality of each programme.

The main elements of the assessment and grading system are described in the Education and Examination Regulations. The assessment of each course is included in the programme's assessment plan, and is further

elaborated on Blackboard as well as in the study guides per module. All grades are posted on Blackboard and accessible online via the OSIRIS student registration system. During the visit, students and recent alumni indicated that the assessment system is clear and transparent, that they appreciate the combination of individual and group work, as well as the formative feedback they receive on certain assignments.

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. The current situation is aptly described in the SWOT-analysis, according to the panel: “as much as the rise of GenAI provides many interesting opportunities for teaching and learning, it confronts staff and students with significant challenges. We need to find a way to integrate it as a tool or method in our curriculum. For instance, how can we teach our students to use it correctly and in an ethically responsible way, and how can we revise our assessment types so that we can detect malpractices?” This state of play was further elaborated during the site visit when several programme representatives indicated that on the rapid development of GenAI tools poses a threat to the validity of student performance assessment: students may pass the assignment using AI without obtaining the required knowledge and skills. This situation in turn forces course coordinators to frequently review and adapt their assessment provisions. The developments in GenAI, however, also constitute an opportunity to reflect on where and how each programme learning outcome is assessed. It therefore came to no surprise for the panel that one of the three thematic sessions was dedicated to exactly this topic, anticipating the future with (generative) AI in geography and planning. The panel gathered from the discussions and the thematic session that all stakeholders take the topic seriously. While teachers / examiners are adjusting their assessment formats, students are aware that they need to demonstrate the course objectives and the programme learning outcomes autonomously, i.e. without the support of GenAI.

#### *Course assessment*

Each programme curriculum consists of different components and of a different mixture of taught courses, internship and/or a thesis. Every programme foresees several forms and levels of assessment to ensure that students eventually achieve the intended learning outcomes of their programme. The panel gathered from the visitation dossier and the overviews in the respective assessment plans that the types of course assessments align with the programme vision on assessment and grading and that overall there is a fair balance in each programme curriculum between individual and group assignments.

Furthermore, the panel noticed that each bachelor and master course features a course matrix, which is produced by the coordinator/examiner: every matrix lists the goals of a course, if and how each individual goal is tested, and at which level. The panel studied an example of a course matrix and found it comprehensive and relevant. The panel subscribes to the statement of a teacher during the site visit who indicated that producing a course matrix takes time but eventually pays off because it ensures that all course objectives are eventually tested and demonstrated.

The panel was informed that in so far as the BSc Human Geography and Planning is concerned, the number of test moments per course is limited to three, with each exam counting for at least 10% of the grade. Moreover, course coordinators are encouraged to include forms of formative assessment including feedback to support the learning process of students. While course coordinators carefully consider the balance between individual tests and group assignments, essential parts of the learning lines such as academic writing and research methods are preferably assessed on an individual basis. In any case, the final assessment of a bachelor course will never be based solely on group work.

The three master's programmes often use forms of continuous assessment. In line with the overall Utrecht teaching model, continuous assessment enables students to evaluate and improve their work during a course. The final course grade then depends on several and different types of assessments, such as assignments, exams, presentations, group seminars and intermediate tests. The aggregate of all these results then provides a reliable indicator as to whether students have achieved the course objectives and eventually the programme learning outcomes. Moreover, the mixture of individual and group assignments mirrors the job practice. Hence, the weight of group work in courses is substantial because graduates will need to work in teams when they enter the labour market. Finally, the panel was informed that each master's programme is currently striving towards a better assessment coordination. This is all the more necessary considering the challenges and concerns expressed by students and staff that study and teaching loads could be spread better across the one academic year the (fulltime) students have at disposition. Hence, programmes are starting to organize continuous monitoring and exchange between students and staff (in the programme committee), and among staff in section, onboarding and calibration meetings).

In sum, the panel found that across programmes, the assessment system is adequate. 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 objectives. This positive appreciation is shared by students in both their written contribution and during the site visit.

This, however, does not mean that the entire system and all courses are perfect from an evaluation point of view. The panel sees several small points for improvement in all programmes, notably when assessment flaws are caused by delays in corrections or by the unequal division of the (perceived) work load across the academic year. Moreover, IDS students mentioned – and a quick check by the panel confirmed – that certain written exams involved a huge amount of preparation and consisted of reproducing textbook knowledge on less relevant niche aspects. The panel suggests the programme team to verify whether this type of examination effectively contributes to reaching the course objectives and programme learning outcomes.

#### *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 all three master's programmes under review adopt the same approach to thesis assessment, while the bachelor thesis follows its own approach.

As part of its external assessment, the panel reviewed a sample of 16 BSc Human Geography and Planning theses and their completed evaluation forms. The theses were selected among graduation projects submitted in the academic year 2023-2024. The quality of the theses will be addressed under the next standard. The overall grade is divided between the bachelor thesis (90%) and a presentation (10%).

In so far as the quality of thesis assessment is concerned, the panel found that the evaluation forms for both thesis and presentation contained relevant criteria. The evaluation criteria coincide with the thesis 'course' objectives, which are described in the thesis manual for students. Each thesis is assessed by the supervisor and a second reader. Together they fill in the rubrics, while assessors provide an individual motivation for their judgements. The panel found the assessment form a good practice because it contained both closed criteria and room for individual feedback. Moreover, assessors could indicate for each criterion what deserves improvement and what made the product special.

Looking at the individual evaluation forms, the panel agreed in almost all cases to the final score provided by the assessors. However, it was not always easy to understand the final score when looking at the rubrics and reading the motivation in the feedback form. Not all criteria contained a motivation for the chosen

appreciation. Moreover, the evaluation forms did not always indicate how supervisor and second reader came to a joint score. The panel therefore calls upon the programme team to remind bachelor thesis assessors about the expectations in terms of written feedback and monitor that all, not just many, assessors complete the form in an insightful way.

The three master's programmes IDS, SP and UEG use the same evaluation form featuring 11 criteria to assess the quality of the master thesis. The final thesis product counts for 90% in both SP and UEG assessments, with 10% being allocated to the research proposal. The IDS thesis product represents 70% of the final grade because students also produce an interim report (10%), an oral presentation (10%) and a creative communication product about their findings for a non-academic audience (10%). The research work undertaken in the framework of the internship/fieldwork is integrated in the master thesis report. Students are informed about the assessment criteria prior to the thesis trajectory. The thesis coordinator or the supervisor grades and provides written clarification on the research proposal, while the thesis supervisor motivates the score on four thesis criteria clusters, and the second reviewer provides extensive comments on the different parts of the thesis. According to the panel, the evaluation form contains relevant criteria and its set-up allows for detailed feedback on the criteria and the overall work of the student.

The panel was informed during the visit that the master's programmes had agreed to adopt the same thesis assessment process following comments from the previous panel on individual aspects of the respective approaches. The current panel is satisfied with the way all three master's programmes have worked towards a common approach. The new form is relevant, contains detailed rubrics, and allows for written feedback on key aspects of the thesis. Notwithstanding its positive appreciation of the resulting common thesis assessment form, the panel noticed a few points for attention in the future. First, there is little attention in the form to the ethical dimension of the thesis, and also the plagiarism check, which generates a report in Osiris, could be described more extensively on the evaluation form than by just a ticked box. Second, if assessors are positive about individual criteria they can either score good or excellent – not very good. Thirdly, and most importantly, there is no criterion that actually judges the relevance of the topic for the domain/discipline. According to the panel, such criterion would mitigate the concern the panel had following its thesis review (see standard 4) that some thesis topics had seemingly little to do with the core disciplinary domain of the programme. The panel therefore invites the programme teams to consider these elements and integrate them when this seems fit.

This overall positive impression demonstrates according to the panel that the programme teams successfully addressed the recommendation of the previous panel to clearly document the independent thesis assessment procedure, show the individual assessments of the supervisor and reviewer, and enhance the space for written feedback on the assessment form.

As part of its external assessment, the panel reviewed a sample of 15 International Development Studies master theses and their completed evaluation forms produced in the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. Looking at the individual evaluation forms, the panel agreed in all cases to the final score provided by the assessors and found that all but one form was completed in an insightful way. In fact, the panel was impressed by the nice and clean documentation of the final grade, and appreciated the good quality set of rubrics applied in the grading.

In so far as the MSc Spatial Planning is concerned, the panel reviewed 15 master theses and their completed evaluation forms produced in the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. Looking at the individual evaluation forms, the panel concludes that a majority of forms had been completed in an insightful way. At the same time, even though all theses were of sufficient quality, the panel did not always agree with the final

grade, and would have sometimes given a higher or lower grade based on the quality of the work. When there was a difference of opinion, the panel often did not understand how the written feedback of the assessors was related to the final score. Sometimes panel and assessors agreed on the comments, but arrived at a different score; in other cases, the panel had a different view on the quality of the thesis (criteria). The panel therefore calls upon the programme team to organize calibration sessions to bring all thesis assessors on the same page and use this session to remind them about the expectations in terms of written feedback. Finally, and anticipating the next standard, the panel found it difficult in a few cases to establish the quality of the master thesis as a final deliverable in spatial planning.

The panel also reviewed 15 Urban and Economic Geography master theses and their completed evaluation forms produced in the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. Looking at the individual evaluation forms, the panel agreed to almost all scores and found that almost all forms had been completed in an insightful way. The panel noticed that a thesis assessment calibration exercise had taken place, which obviously had a positive impact on the quality of thesis assessment.

#### *Quality assurance*

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the assessment quality of each programme under review is safeguarded by a dedicated SGPL Exam Committee Chamber within the Central Exam Committee (CEC) of the UU Faculty of Geosciences. The faculty-wide Central Exam Committee safeguards the quality of assessment for all degree programmes at the faculty of Geosciences and has delegated part of its responsibilities to three Chambers who independently execute their tasks within the framework set by CEC. The four programmes under review fall within the remit of the SGPL Chamber. In addition, a faculty-wide Assessment Committee operates under the wings of the CEC and analyses and advises on the quality of assessment.

During the site visit, the panel spoke to representatives of the CEC, the Assessment Committee and the SGPL Chamber. The representatives indicated amongst others how they safeguard the quality of course assessments by taking regular samples of course and thesis evaluations. The panel discussed the feasibility/operationalization of the assessment plans, as each programme features many programme learning outcomes and even more course objectives. According to the panel, the 'kruisjestabellen' seem to be overdone: less is more. While course matrices are certainly helpful in maintaining the overview and in ensuring that all learning objectives are tested, the number of assessment points seems exaggerated on the basis of the overviews. The CEC indicated that this point is on their radar, has been discussed with the programme coordinators, will be addressed again, and adjusted when the assessment plans are revised.

Furthermore, the panel shared its finding/concern from the thesis review (see also standard 4) that certain thesis topics and their operationalization seem quite distant from the scope and profile of the programme. This was particularly the case in the MSc SP, where several final products were not directly related to spatial planning and could just as well have been submitted in programmes such as IDS or Urban Governance. In this regard, the panel informed the CEC that the master thesis evaluation form only contained criteria to assess the quality and level of the research work, and suggested to consider adding a criterion on the disciplinary relevance of the topic. As a third point, the panel wondered why the master thesis evaluation forms only contain a tick box on ethics, rather than a criterion to assess the student approach to, and handling of, ethical aspects. The CEC and Chamber representatives welcomed these comments and indicated they would take this up internally and with the respective programme teams.

In sum, the panel found that the members of the CEC, SGPL Chamber and Assessment Committee are highly competent and very committed to their quality assurance tasks. The assurance of assessment quality is in good hands with these bodies.

### Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that each of the four programmes under review can rely on qualitative system of assessment that is embedded in long-standing policies and practices of the Faculty of Geosciences at Utrecht 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 way thesis assessment is organized in different steps and contains in-built provisions for an independent judgement of the thesis quality. The thesis review by the panel members demonstrated that both the bachelor and the master thesis evaluation forms are relevant and that the grading by the assessors is in most cases in line with their own appraisal. Moreover, most evaluation forms are completed in an insightful way. While the MSc IDS and the MSc UEG do very well on these points, the panel invites notably the MSc SP to hold calibration sessions with their assessors and remind them about the programme expectations regarding written assessment feedback.

Furthermore, the panel considers that the quality assurance system for assessment is both comprehensive and effective. It commends the CEC, the SPGL Chamber and the SBE Assessment Committee for their expertise and commitment.

The BSc SGPL, the MSc SP and the MSc UEG are offered in a fulltime and a parttime variant, with only a small number of students enrolled on the respective parttime variants. The panel establishes that for these programmes the above findings and considerations on assessment apply equally to both variants.

In addition to these positive considerations, the panel recommends all master's programmes to adding thesis evaluation criteria to their evaluation form that assess the student handling of ethical aspects in their research and establish the disciplinary relevance of the research topic. The latter point will be further discussed in standard 4.

### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the BSc SGPL, the MSc IDS, the MSc SP and the MSc UEG all **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 four programmes under review.

### *BSc Sociale Geografie en Planologie*

The BSc SGPL programme culminates in the bachelor thesis. Students prepare their research in the course Research Design (5 EC) and execute this in the Bachelor Thesis (15 EC), which is also organized as a course. They collect data, analyse the data, and report on the outcomes in an individual thesis. As part of its external assessment, the panel reviewed a sample of 16 bachelor theses selected among graduation projects submitted in the academic year 2023-2024, i.e. the first batch of bachelor theses that were produced under the revised curriculum. Moreover, the sample included one thesis submitted earlier by a parttime student.

In general theses are of more than sufficient quality for a final product at bachelor level and of academic orientation. The panel established that students who successfully pass the bachelor thesis, have effectively achieved the learning outcomes and are well prepared for a follow-up master's programme or a job at bachelor level in the domain of human geography and spatial planning.

As a point for attention in the future, the programme team may want to set clear expectations and/or procedures for theses on the lower end of the spectrum. In fact the panel found that one admittedly weak thesis could have done with a repair period while another was of marginally sufficient quality yet received a somewhat higher score.

Recent and less recent alumni indicated during the site visit that the BSc SGPL prepared them well for a follow-up master study and eventually a position on the labour market. The panel was informed that most SGPL bachelor graduates move on directly to a master's programme. In recent years, however, a small but growing group chooses to first acquire work experience in the domain of SGP, e.g. through an internship or a temporary employment agency, before continuing their studies.

Overseeing the labour market data from the programme and the testimonies of alumni, the panel is convinced that studying the BSc SGPL at Utrecht University constitutes a very good lever for a follow-up study or meaningful employment.

### *MSc International Development Studies*

The MSc IDS programme culminates in the master thesis. During the latter half of the programme students conduct fieldwork research in the form of a research internship, which is used as a basis for the master thesis. In addition to their research report (70%), students produce an interim report (10%), an oral presentation (10%) and a creative communication product about their findings for a non-academic audience (10%).

As part of its external assessment, the panel reviewed a sample of 15 IDS master theses which were representative for the graduation projects submitted in the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. In general theses were of more than sufficient quality for a final product at master level and of academic orientation. The panel established that students who successfully pass the master thesis, have effectively achieved the learning outcomes of the IDS programme.

Furthermore, the panel noticed that the programme team implemented the recommendation from the previous accreditation panel regarding the preparation of IDS students for the job market. The data provided by the programme and the discussions on site with recent and less recent alumni demonstrated according to the panel that the labour market position of IDS graduates has improved considerably. The programme has enhanced training on professional and transferable skills for students to prepare for the labour market; a dedicated journal co-created by students and recent graduates provides opportunities for publication; and the IDS Advisory Board ensures that the programme and its students remain up to speed with the latest

developments in a changing labour market. As a result, IDS graduates continue to find employment at public and private development-related bodies, but also - and increasingly - end up more with Dutch, European and international organisations working on sustainability, energy, poverty and inequality.

In sum, the panel welcomes the quality of the IDS master theses and thinks positively about the professional whereabouts of the IDS graduates.

#### *MSc Spatial Planning*

The master thesis (22.5 EC) in the MSc SP is the final 'proof of competence' before students complete the programme. As part of the thesis research work, students pursue an internship either at an external organization or with a research unit at the faculty. As part of its external assessment, the panel reviewed a sample of 15 SP master theses which were representative for the graduation projects submitted in the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The sample included one thesis submitted by a parttime student. In general theses were of sufficient quality for a final product at master level and of academic orientation. Moreover, the panel noticed that students are at liberty to pursue research in a very broad domain of their interest.

Having established that each thesis met these minimum requirements and thus that students who pass the thesis deserve to graduate, the panel identified two major elements that require further attention of the programme. First, the panel felt that overall the quality of several theses could have been improved, as individual research projects showed one or more of the following flaws: (too) much attention to theory, unclear link between theory and research design, poorly formulated research questions, and a limited operationalization of the research concepts. Secondly, several theses had little or no connection to the subject of spatial planning: spatial questions were often not operationalized in terms of planning issues but as societal or geographical topics. Presenting these findings to the programme management and the SP teaching staff, the panel noticed that some interlocutors had a different opinion on the concept of spatial planning, which for them seemed close to urban governance. Moreover, the programme explicitly targets an international audience and has recently recruited international staff, who are less inclined to work on topics with a Dutch/local dimension. The panel therefore suggests the programme team to be more explicit on the definition of spatial planning in the programme and to monitor that thesis topics fall within the boundaries of this definition. Moreover, the programme may want to revise the Advanced Methods and Techniques course in order to ensure that it brings the diverse student audience up to par before they engage in the research internship and thesis. Finally, the panel suggests to regularly check with the professional field in the Netherlands as to what competences they expect of Utrecht graduates in spatial planning, and then to review internally whether this is what the 'new' SP programme delivers. This is all the more important according to the panel as it had the impression that students are currently allowed to specialize in directions that fall outside the scope of what is traditionally considered to be 'planologie' in the Dutch professional field.

Notwithstanding the above findings on the master thesis, recent graduates (continue to) do fine on the (international) labour market: most students find a job soon after graduation because they have built their own network during the internship. According to the most recent bi-annual Employment Monitor, the job hunt of most MSc SP graduates is usually very short. Recent and less recent alumni, moreover, confirmed these findings during the site visit.

#### *MSc Urban and Economic Geography*

The thesis in the MSc UEG is executed mostly in combination with an internship: together it represents a study load of 25 EC. The thesis report takes up 90% of the final grade, while the research proposal accounts

for 10%. Very often the results of the thesis and the internship are integrated in one report. The choice of graduation subject and the accompanying research internship provides a good opportunity for students to present themselves to future employers.

As part of its external assessment, the panel reviewed a sample of 15 UEG master theses which was representative for the graduation projects submitted in the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The sample included one thesis submitted by a parttime student. In general theses were of good quality for a final product at master level and of academic orientation. In one case the panel found that a thesis on the very low end of the spectrum could have done with a repair period. The panel noticed furthermore that students are at liberty to pursue research in a very broad domain of their interest. Taking all elements together, the panel established that students who successfully pass the master thesis, have effectively achieved the UEG learning outcomes.

The panel was informed that since its curriculum review, UEG has been formalising a series of labour market-oriented activities to enhance the professional competences of UEG students prior to graduation. These activities take place in courses, fieldtrips and through a compulsory module-based programme. Some initiatives are organized in cooperation with the faculty's career officers and the study association VUGS. Both students and alumni confirmed to the panel that the programme pays good attention to professional competencies. These efforts seem to pay off as most students find a job soon after graduation.

In sum, the panel welcomes the quality of the UEG master theses and thinks positively about the professional whereabouts of the UEG graduates.

### 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 most theses are of good quality and nearly every thesis deserves 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 SGPL graduates are well prepared during their study for a follow-up career. It is therefore convinced that also the programme graduates demonstrate the knowledge, skills and attitudes mentioned in the programme learning outcomes.

The BSc SGPL, the MSc SP and the MSc UEG are offered in a fulltime and a parttime variant, with only a small number of students enrolled on the parttime variant. The panel establishes that the above findings and considerations on achieved learning outcomes apply equally to both variants.

Notwithstanding this overall praise, the panel recommends the SP programme team to define spatial planning and monitor that thesis topics fall within the boundaries of this definition. It also recommends to revise the Advanced Methods and Techniques course in order to ensure that it brings all students up to par before they engage in the research internship and thesis.

### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the BSc SGPL, the MSc IDS, the MSc SP and the MSc UEG all **meet** standard 4.

## General conclusion

The panel established that the four 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 Sociale Geografie en Planologie, the MSc International Development Studies, the MSc Social Planning and the MSc Urban and Economic Geography 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 set clear and common expectations for assignment support and thesis supervision, discuss these with the staff involved, and communicate the agreed and common provisions to students;
- to make field trips and excursions physically accessible for students with mobility impairments, as well as financially accessible for all students;

### *All master's programmes*

- to add a thesis evaluation criterion to assess the disciplinary relevance of the research topic;
- to assess the student's handling of ethics in their (master thesis) research;

### *Bachelor's programme SGPL*

- to provide clear procedures, as well as minimum expectations, for theses at the lower end of the spectrum;

### *Master's programme UEG*

- to set up a dedicated Advisory Board to monitor the quality and relevance of both the master's and the bachelor's programme;

### *Master's programme SP*

- to set up a dedicated Advisory Board to monitor the quality and relevance of both the master's and the bachelor's programme;
- to bring all students up to par in terms of research methods and techniques before they engage in the research internship and thesis;
- to hold calibration sessions with thesis assessors and remind them about the programme expectations regarding written assessment feedback;
- to take position on the disciplinary domain of the master programme, and align learning outcomes, curriculum objectives and master thesis rationale accordingly; and involve the professional field – ideally through the envisaged Advisory Board – in these discussions.

# Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

## ***Bachelor's programme Human Geography and Planning***

### 1. Kennis vakgebied

De afgestudeerde heeft kennis van en inzicht in het vakgebied Sociale Geografie en Planologie:

- a. beheerst de basisbegrippen, kernideeën en toonaangevende 'denkers' van de sociale geografie en planologie;
- b. heeft inzicht in de theoretische, wetenschapsfilosofische en methodologische grondslagen van de sociale geografie en planologie;
- c. heeft inzicht in (actuele) ruimtelijke vraagstukken en duurzaamheidsopgaven;
- d. kan concrete ruimtelijke ontwikkelingen in verband brengen met algemene ruimtelijke processen, lokale omstandigheden, bestuurlijke contexten en theoretische inzichten;
- e. bestudeert en beoordeelt ruimtelijke ontwikkelingen en vraagstukken vanuit sociaal ruimtelijk perspectief (schalen en relaties tussen schaalniveaus, tijd-ruimte perspectief, mens-omgevingsrelaties, integratie van verschillende dimensies en multi-perspectiviteit, actoren en structuren, netwerken, instituties).

### 2. Kennis van betekenis vakgebied

- a. De afgestudeerde is in staat om het vakgebied in een bredere wetenschappelijke context te plaatsen (inclusief de veranderende relaties met andere disciplines en inter/multidisciplinariteit) en daarop te reflecteren.
- b. De afgestudeerde is in staat om de planologische en de sociaalgeografische component in maatschappelijke vraagstukken te benoemen en daarop te reflecteren.

### 3. Academische houding

- a. De afgestudeerde beschikt over academische (dat wil zeggen onderzoekende en kritische) houding.
- b. De afgestudeerde is zich bewust van de ethische aspecten die behoren bij het doen van wetenschappelijk onderzoek en het plagen van interventies in de sociaal ruimtelijke context.

### 4. Onderzoeksvaardigheden

De afgestudeerde is in staat een praktijk- en beleidsvraag of probleem in het vakgebied te onderzoeken door:

- a. een duidelijke en onderzoekbare probleemstelling te formuleren;
- b. de daarin vervatte begrippen op adequate wijze te operationaliseren;
- c. zich in de specifieke context te verdiepen;
- d. een onderwerp zowel theoretisch als empirisch (in onderlinge samenhang) te bestuderen;
- e. daartoe gebruik te maken van algemene en vakspecifieke methoden om (bestaande) data te verzamelen en te analyseren;
- f. het resultaat weer te geven in een coherent betoog met een heldere, synthetiserende conclusie;
- g. de resultaten te gebruiken voor het beantwoorden van de vraag en op die manier bij te dragen aan verheldering en zo mogelijk oplossing van het probleem en het denken over wenselijke toekomst.

### 5. Communicatievaardigheden

De afgestudeerde is in staat kennis, ideeën en oplossingen die voortkomen uit wetenschappelijke en professionele activiteiten in het vakgebied over te brengen op een publiek bestaande uit specialisten of niet-specialisten.

### 6. Oordeelsvorming

- a. De afgestudeerde is in staat een beargumenteerd oordeel te vormen over ruimtelijke vraagstukken gebaseerd op het afwegen van relevante maatschappelijke, wetenschappelijke en ethische aspecten.
- b. de afgestudeerde is in staat om te denken in mogelijke en wenselijke toekomst gebaseerd op het afwegen van relevante maatschappelijke, wetenschappelijke en ethische aspecten.

#### 7. Sociale vaardigheden

- a. De afgestudeerde is in staat om op een zelfstandige en actieve wijze en in samenwerking met anderen projecten over ruimtelijke vraagstukken uit te voeren.
- b. De afgestudeerde is in staat om in de praktijk onderzoek te doen en zich daarbij bewust te verhouden tot opdrachtgevers, belanghebbenden, en onderzoekspopulaties.

#### 8. Leervaardigheden

De afgestudeerde is in staat het eigen leerproces te sturen, en te leren van eigen ervaringen en van feedback. De opleiding is zodanig ingericht dat de student in staat is zodanige kennis en vaardigheden met betrekking tot Engelse taalvaardigheid te verwerven dat de student bij het afronden van de bachelor voldoet aan de toelatingseisen met betrekking tot Engelse taalvaardigheid van een masteropleiding in Nederland.

### ***Master's programme Urban and Economic Geography***

A. KNOWLEDGE; To assist students in developing an advanced academic knowledge and understanding that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context

1. SOCIO-SPATIAL ISSUES Have advanced knowledge and understanding of complexity, variation, dynamics and interdependence of socio-spatial structures, processes and behaviours in society
2. CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES Have advanced knowledge and understanding of the conditions for, the mechanisms underlying, and the effects of dynamic and interdependent spatial structures, processes, and behaviours
3. INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT Have knowledge about the international and intercultural aspects of socio-spatial issues
4. DISCIPLINARY CONTEXT Have advanced knowledge and understanding of the theory, nature, history, and methodology of Urban and Economic Geography
5. POLICY INTERVENTIONS Have advanced knowledge and understanding of the interdependency between academic research and (policy) interventions and of the methods to critically assess research outcomes and (policy) interventions

B. METHODOLOGY; To teach students how to 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;

1. DEVELOP RESEARCH PROPOSAL Are able to independently and individually develop an original research proposal about a current complex societal or scientific problem related to the master, based on solid theoretical, practical, and societal arguments
2. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH Have the skills to both independently and in a team, organize and conduct an empirical research based on primary and secondary data collection, applying appropriate social and spatial research methodology, (design) methods and techniques
3. CONCLUSIONS Are able to validly interpret both data and research outcomes and to formulate conclusions and (policy) recommendations

4. SOLUTIONS Are able to apply knowledge by developing solutions to the research or societal problem studied both individually and in a (multidisciplinary) team of professionals with different expertise, and students with different international cultures and expertise

C. SOCIETAL APPLICATION; To teach students the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgments with incomplete or limited information, including reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgments;

1. INTEGRATE KNOWLEDGE AND HANDLE COMPLEXITY Can integrate knowledge of the sub disciplines of Human Geography and relevant other disciplines and apply this in research and projects

2. MAKING JUDGEMENTS Based on the outcome of research or project work can make scientific judgements

3. ETHICS (SCIENCE) Work and act according to the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the Code of Conduct Utrecht University

ETHICS (SOCIETY) Understand the ethical issues faced in geography

4. SOCIETAL IMPLICATIONS Can indicate the societal and ethical implications of academic research and feel the need and responsibility to translate academic research in policy recommendations and to participate in public debates

5. ACADEMIC ATTITUDE Take on a critical academic stance and attitude in reflecting on both general and their peers' and own academic behaviour

D. COMMUNICATION; To teach students how to communicate their conclusions to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously;

1. PRESENTATION AND COMMUNICATION Are able to clearly communicate the results of academic research of the analysis of both academic literature and empirical research in written and spoken manner to relevant societal actors, stakeholders or in a design project for a wider audience (citizens)

2. TARGET AUDIENCE Are able to appropriately address the audiences in presenting academic research findings or design, taking into account the interests and backgrounds of the audience members

3. ARGUMENTATION AND DISCUSSION Are able to critically discuss (preliminary) research findings or design of others (peers) and formulate positive peer-feedback (forward) based on sound arguments

4. PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION Are able to clearly communicate and convincingly defend both proposal, actions and results of research or design, with peers and with different stakeholders in a professional setting

E. CRITICAL ACADEMIC ATTITUDE; To provide students with learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous

1. UPDATE KNOWLEDGE Are capable of independently recognizing and following both current societal and scientific developments related to the master

2. INDEPENDENT AND CRITICAL Are able to independently plan, organize and conduct academic research and iteratively critically reflect on the choices made, the research process, progress and outcomes and makes changes accordingly

3. DISCIPLINARY VALUE Can work in both small and larger teams of (interdisciplinary) international students/scholars, and recognize and communicate the contribution of (interdisciplinary) knowledge and skills in the issue studied

4. DISCIPLINARY CULTURE Know about academic research cultures in other disciplines and can relate them to the academic culture in the master

### ***Master's programme Spatial Planning***

A1. Students can understand the governance and management of cities

Students will learn how planning and governance processes in the urban context work. Therefore, different theoretical perspectives on governance in spatial planning are discussed and the role of governance is analyzed in case studies of (inter-)national complex spatial projects. Students learn to:

- a) critically reflect upon current dilemmas and conflicts in scientific and societal debates related to the diverse and complex nature of governance in spatial planning;
- b) enhance skills to collectively design and communicate spatial projects and process management strategies for addressing complex challenges in planning practice.

A2. Students can analyze spatial problems with scientific methods

Students are assisted in developing an advanced academic attitude, knowledge and skills by offering an interactive learning environment inspired by their field of specialization and research activities of lecturers. This entails providing students with:

- a) a critical academic attitude towards knowledge and debates and an awareness of the role and use of planning knowledge in society;
- b) knowledge and understanding of state-of-the-art academic research in spatial planning as well as their applications in society;
- c) research skills (advanced methods and techniques) for carrying out research in spatial planning.

A3. Students can apply existing knowledge and theories to understand planning problems and propose adapted interventions

Students learn how to use planning theory effectively to analyze, develop and support spatial planning in practice and research. Students learn to:

- a) raise and discuss relevant questions in planning (such as the use of knowledge, market mechanisms, ethics) and explore the answers to these questions;
- b) conduct a literature-based and empirical research in the field of spatial planning;
- c) discuss academic arguments and theories to systematically and self-reliantly inquire a certain planning topic;
- d) evaluate existing approaches and develop new or adapted interventions.

A4. Students can critically reflect on spatial planning in the light of sustainable development

Students discuss the sustainable development of cities and regions and develop skills to assess critically the sustainability of spatial development practices. Students learn to:

- a) enhance skills to design and communicate sustainable development and strategies to govern towards sustainable planned cities;
- b) critically reflect upon literature on sustainable planning practices, both orally and in written text.

A5. Students can integrate the academic knowledge and skills acquired to research specific spatial planning problems in an independent and self-responsible way

## ***Master's programme International Development Studies***

### *A. Knowledge and understanding*

A1. Graduates have advanced theoretical and empirical knowledge and understanding of key themes in development studies (in particular: global investment and trade, migration and mobilities, local livelihoods change, climate change and natural resource management, land governance and urbanization, health and gender, with a focus on the situation in Asia, Africa and Latin America).

A2. Graduates are able to analyse development-related issues in a manner that is interdisciplinary, relational (e.g. translocal perspective, with ‘development chains’ and ‘development corridor’ concepts), holistic and systemic (e.g. Theory of Change).

A3. Graduates take a people-centred perspective in approaching development issues.

A4. Graduates are solution-oriented.

#### *B. Applying knowledge*

B1. Graduates are able to design and conduct original research (involving data collection on the ground, fieldwork abroad) in an independent, responsible, reflective and innovative way.

B2. Graduates are able to adapt general methodologies to the requirements of specific contexts.

B3. Graduates have the ability to apply knowledge and appropriate qualitative and quantitative research techniques in data collection, processing, analysis and interpretation.

B4. Graduates have problem-solving competences in contexts that are unfamiliar, international, cross-cultural, multidisciplinary and resource-poorer (with incomplete, scarce or inaccurate data and information).

B5. Graduates are able to work well both independently and in teams.

#### *C. Making judgements*

C1. Graduates can integrate knowledge, handle complexity, and critically reflect on development theories, practices and ways in which development is measured and evaluated.

C2. Graduates are able to apply knowledge and understanding in such a way that they demonstrate professionalism and high ethical standards in their work.

#### *D. Communication*

D1. Graduates are able to communicate their conclusions, as well as the knowledge, reasons and considerations underpinning these conclusions, in different formats (oral, written, ICT, multimedia, in material and virtual media) to a wide range of audiences (specialists and non-specialists), including academics, policymakers, local communities and civil society organisations.

D2. Graduates are able to engage relevant stakeholders in the follow-up to the research and/or actions by, for example, participating in public debates or formulating policy recommendations.

#### *E. Learning skills*

E1. Graduates are able to sustain learning processes in an independent manner.

E2. Graduates keep up with developments in the field and engage with new issues of social relevance.

#### *F. Ready for the future*

F1. Graduates are qualified for PhD studies and jobs as junior professionals in the field of international development.

## Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

### Bachelor's programme Human Geography and Planning

Bacheloropleiding SGPL 180 EC (=24 cursussen van 7,5 EC)			
Major (135 EC)			Profileringsruimte (45 EC)
Verplichte onderdelen (75 EC)	Verplichte keuze (15 EC)	Keuze onderdelen (45 EC) = track (30 EC) + vrije keuze major (15 EC)	
<p>Voor alle SGPL studenten:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stad in beweging (niveau 1)</li> <li>• Strijd om de ruimte (niveau 1)</li> <li>• Globalisering en ontwikkeling (niveau 1)</li> <li>• Ruimtelijk data en geoinformatie (niveau 1)</li> <li>• Duurzame delta (niveau 1)</li> <li>• Grenzen in perspectief (niveau 2)</li> <li>• Fundamenten (niveau 2)</li> <li>• Sociaal-ruimtelijk onderzoek (niveau 2)</li> <li>• Wetenschap en samenleving (5 EC, niveau 3)</li> <li>• Analyse (5 EC, niveau 3)</li> <li>• Onderzoeksonderwerp (5 EC, niveau 3)</li> </ul>	<p>Thesis (15 EC, niveau 3)</p>	<p>Track** (30 EC):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Track cursus 1 – Theory* (niveau 2)</li> <li>• Track cursus 2 – Themes* (niveau 3)</li> <li>• Track cursus 3 – Mixed Methods Onderzoeksproject* (niveau 2)</li> <li>• Track cursus 4 – Praktijkatelier* niveau 3)</li> </ul> <p>Vrije keuze major (15 EC):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cursus uit aanbod SGPL</li> <li>• Cursus uit aanbod SGPL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vrije keuzeruimte (ook extern)</li> <li>• Ten minste 15 EC op ten minste niveau 2</li> <li>• Kan (deels) worden opgevuld met een minor of studeren in buitenland (in de meeste gevallen 30 EC) of stage (15 EC, niveau 2)</li> <li>• N.B.: Studenten SGPL kunnen geen SGPL-minor volgen</li> </ul>

\* student volgt één van de volgende tracks (30 EC) volledig in de verplichte keuzeruimte major: - Migratie en mondiale ontwikkeling - Planning van duurzame steden - Inclusieve steden - Innovatieve en duurzame regio's

\*\* Track bestaat uit 30 EC die verplicht zijn om aaneengesloten gevolgd moeten worden in één collegejaar. Examineis van ten minste 45 EC op niveau 3 wordt in de major ingevuld met de cursussen: Wetenschap en samenleving, Analyse, onderzoeksonderwerp, track cursus 2 Themes, track cursus 4 Praktijkatelier en thesis.

	Periode 1	Periode 2	Periode 3	Periode 4
jaar 1	Stad in beweging [1]	Globalisering en ontwikkeling [1]	Duurzame delta [1]	Grenzen in perspectief [2]
	Strijd om de ruimte [1]	Ruimtelijke data en geo-informatie [1]	Sociaal-ruimtelijk onderzoek [2]	Fundamenten [2]
jaar 2	Track cursus 1 - Theory [2]	Track cursus 2 - Themes [3]	Track cursus 3 - Mixed methods onderzoeksproject [2]	Track cursus 4 - Praktijkatelier [3]
	Elective (major)	Elective (major)	Profileringsruimte	Profileringsruimte
jaar 3	Profileringsruimte Minor, exchange, stage	Profileringsruimte	Analyse [3]    Wetenschap & samenleving [3]	Thesis [3]
	Profileringsruimte	Profileringsruimte	Onderzoeks-ontwerp [3]	

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### Parttime programme

#### Jaar 1

Periode 1	Periode 2	Periode 3	Periode 4
Strijd om de ruimte	Globalisering & ontwikkeling	Duurzame Delta	Fundamenten

#### Jaar 2

Periode 1	Periode 2	Periode 3	Periode 4
Stad in beweging	Ruimtelijke data en geo-informatie	Sociaal ruimtelijk onderzoek	Grenzen in perspectief

#### Jaar 3

Periode 1	Periode 2	Periode 3	Periode 4
Track - theory	Track - themes	Track - Mixed Methods onderzoeksproject	Track - praktijkatelier

#### Jaar 4 (keuze cursus SGPL en profileringsruimte kunnen ook qua periode gewisseld worden)

Periode 1	Periode 2	Periode 3	Periode 4
Keuze cursus SGPL	Keuze cursus SGPL	Profileringsruimte	Profileringsruimte

#### Jaar 5

Periode 1	Periode 2	Periode 3	Periode 4
Profileringsruimte	Profileringsruimte	Analyse (5 EC week 1 t/m 5)	Onderzoeksontwerp*
		Wetenschap en Samenleving (5 EC week 6 t/m 10)	

\*andere periode dan reguliere cursus - maatwerk op individuele basis

#### Jaar 6

Periode 1	Periode 2	Periode 3	Periode 4
Bachelor thesis*	Bachelorthesis*	Profileringsruimte	profileringsruimte

\*andere periode dan reguliere cursus - maatwerk op individuele basis - inschrijving loopt via Student Affairs

**Master's programme Urban and Economic Geography**

<b>Urban and Economic Geography 2024-2025</b>		
	<b>Specialisation Urban Geography</b>	<b>Specialisation Economic Geography</b>
Period 1 (Sept–Nov)	GEO4-3925 Urban Futures (1,5 EC)	GEO4-3925 Urban Futures (1,5 EC)
	GEO4-3926 Advanced Methods & Techniques (6 EC)	GEO4-3926 Advanced Methods & Techniques (6 EC)
	GEO4-3903 Advanced Urban Geography (7,5 EC)	GEO4-3904 Advanced Economic Geography (7,5 EC)
	GEO4-3900 Professional Competences (modules available throughout the year)	
Period 2 (Nov–Jan)	Choose 2 courses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GEO4-3906 Diverse cities and Urban Inequality (5 EC)</li> <li>• GEO4-3907 Mobilities, Travel &amp; Networks (5 EC)</li> <li>• GEO4- 3908 Public Space &amp; Consumption (5 EC)</li> </ul>	Choose 2 courses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GEO4-3908 Spatial Entrepreneurial Strategies (5 EC)</li> <li>• GEO4-3910 Geographies of Multinationals and the City_(5 EC)</li> <li>• GEO4-3923 Geography of Innovation (5 EC)</li> </ul>
	You can choose one elective course (5 EC): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GEO4-3924 Cultures of Sustainability in Global Perspective</li> <li>• GEO4-3519 Migration, Mobilities &amp; Sustainable Futures</li> <li>• GEO4-3316 Neighbourhoods and Crime</li> <li>• GEO4-3917 Real Estate</li> <li>• GEO4-5501 Techniques of Futuring</li> <li>• GEO4-3121 Urban Infrastructures</li> <li>• Other specialization course</li> </ul>	
Period 3 (Feb–April)	GEO4-3920 International Field Trip (3,5 EC) GEO4-3921 M&T Specializations (1,5 EC)	GEO4-3922 Thesis & Research Internship (25 EC)
Period 4 (May–July)	GEO4-3922 Thesis & Research Internship (25 EC)	

### Master's programme Spatial Planning

<b>Spatial Planning</b>			
Period 1 (Sept–Nov)	GEO4-3124 <a href="#">Planning for Sustainable Cities</a> (6 EC)	GEO4-3123 <a href="#">Beyond Planning Theory</a> (6 EC)	GEO4-3127 <a href="#">Graduate Planning Studio</a> (8 EC)
Period 2 (Nov–Jan)	GEO4-3120 <a href="#">Advanced Research Methodology</a> (5 EC)		
	You can choose one elective course (5 EC): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GEO4-3924 <a href="#">Cultures of Sustainability in Global Perspective</a></li> <li>• GEO4-3519 <a href="#">Migration, Mobilities &amp; Sustainable Futures</a></li> <li>• GEO4-3907 <a href="#">Mobilities, Travel &amp; Networks</a></li> <li>• GEO4-3316 <a href="#">Neighbourhoods and Crime</a></li> <li>• GEO4-3917 <a href="#">Real Estate</a></li> <li>• GEO4-5501 <a href="#">Techniques of Futuring: A Mixed Classroom with Policymakers</a></li> <li>• GEO4-3121 <a href="#">Urban Infrastructures</a></li> </ul>		
Period 3 (Feb–April)	GEO4-3119 <a href="#">Urban Governance</a> (5 EC, week 1-9) GEO4-3128 <a href="#">International Fieldtrip</a> (2.5 EC, week 1-3)		
Period 4 (May–July)	GEO4-3125 <a href="#">Master's Thesis / Internship Spatial Planning</a> (22.5 EC) (no timeslot) GEO4-3126 <a href="#">Planning Professionalization</a> (0 EC pass/fail module)		

### Master's programme International Development Studies

<b>International Development Studies 2024-2025</b>		
Period 1 (Sept–Nov)	GEO4-3505 <a href="#">Development Theories</a> (7.5 EC)	GEO4-3510 <a href="#">Development Themes</a> (7.5 EC)
Period 2 (Nov–Jan)	GEO4-3518 <a href="#">Advanced Methods &amp; Techniques</a> (10 EC)	
	You can choose one elective course (5 EC): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GEO4-3924 <a href="#">Cultures of Sustainability in Global Perspective</a></li> <li>• GEO4-3519 <a href="#">Migration, Mobilities &amp; Sustainable Futures</a></li> <li>• GEO4-3907 <a href="#">Mobilities, Travel &amp; Networks</a></li> <li>• GEO4-3316 <a href="#">Neighbourhoods and Crime</a></li> <li>• GEO4-3917 <a href="#">Real Estate</a></li> <li>• GEO4-5501 <a href="#">Techniques of Futuring</a></li> <li>• GEO4-3121 <a href="#">Urban Infrastructures</a></li> </ul>	
Period 3 (Feb–April)		
Period 4 (May–July)	GEO4-3509 <a href="#">Thesis/Internship International Development Studies</a> (30 EC)	

## Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

Location: Faculty Geosciences, Faculteitszaal VMA 0.02

### Wednesday 18 June 2025

10.30	10.40	Arrival and welcome
10.40	11.30	Internal panel meeting
11.30	12.30	Interview faculty and programme management
12.30	13.30	Lunch
13.30	14.00	Interview bachelor students SGPL
14.05	14.35	Interview teaching staff bachelor SGPL
14.35	15.00	Break
15.00	15.30	Interview GIMA Board (including representatives UU, TUD, UT and WUR)
15.35	16.05	Interview master student GIMA
16.10	16.40	Interview teaching staff GIMA
16.40	17.30	Internal panel meeting
17.30	18.15	Feedback day 1

### Thursday 19 June 2025

08.30	09.15	Arrival and preparation
09.15	10.00	Programme management masters IDS, UEG, SP
10.00	10.10	Break
10.10	10.40	Interview master students International Development Studies
10.45	11.20	Interview teaching staff International Development Studies
11.20	11.40	Break
11.40	12.10	Interview master students Spatial Planning
12.15	12.45	Interview teaching staff Spatial Planning
12.45	13.30	Lunch
13.30	14.00	SGPL showcases
14.10	14.40	Interview master students Urban and Economic Geography
14.45	15.15	Interview teaching staff Urban and Economic Geography
15.15	15.45	Break
15.45	16.30	Interview alumni, including labour market community and advisory board members
16.30	17.45	Internal panel meeting
17.45	18.15	Feedback day 2

### Friday 20 June 2025

08.30	09.00	Arrival and preparation
09.00	09.45	Interview Exam Board
09.45	10.00	Internal panel meeting
10.00	10.45	Thematic session 1 - Building a strong academic community with self-regulated learners
10.45	11.00	Break
11.00	11.45	Thematic session 2 - Handling data and people with care

11.45	12.00	Break
12.00	12.45	Thematics session 3 - Anticipating the future with (generative) AI in geography & planning
12.45	14.00	Internal panel meeting and lunch
14.00	14.30	Final interview programme management
14.30	15.00	Internal Deliberations panel
15.00	15.30	Plenary feedback

## Appendix 4. Materials

The assessment visit taking a development-oriented approach, the panel studied a broad variety of materials on the four degree programmes, as well as on the UU Geo Science faculty-wide provisions that apply to these programmes.

The “*Visitatiedossier SGPL*” contained dedicated chapters per programme featuring the respective key developments on the four NVAO standards, a student chapter, and an extensive SWOT-Analysis that also provided insight in the Aspirations of each programme.

The online Surf Drive portal contained following faculty-wide and programme-specific materials :

- Intended learning outcomes
- Curriculum overviews
- Study guides and course information
- Admission requirements
- Teaching staff SGPL
- Data on student intake, throughput, success rate
- Assessment plans
- Course assessment templates
- Course and programme evaluations 2023-2024
- National Student Survey NSE 2024
- Thesis lists
- Thesis course manuals
- Thesis rubric assessment forms
- Thesis calibration sessions
- Recommendations previous accreditation
- Suggested actions based on previous accreditation
- Bachelor Programme Committee – minutes 2023 & 2024
- Master Programme Committee – minutes 2023 & 2024
- Domain specific reference framework
- AESOP core curriculum requirements
- Interne Kwaliteitszorg bij Geowetenschappen
- Education and Examination Regulation 2024-2025
- Nota Toetsbeleid Faculteit Geowetenschappen
- Materials on studying abroad
- Materials on Tutoring, Study counselling and Student wellbeing
- Materials on Advisory Boards
- Materials on alumni meetings and network
- Materials on teacher professionalisation
- Materials on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Materials on Central Exam Committee and Exam Committee Chamber SGPL
- Materials on Assessment Committee
- Annual Report Central Exam Committee 2023-2024
- Labour market orientation
- Alumni research SGPL 2023
- Taalbeleid UU

Prior to the site visit, the panel reviewed:

- 16 SGPL graduation works among the 69 bachelor theses which had been successfully submitted in the academic year 2023-2024. The sample was representative in terms of final scores, full–time (15) and part-time (1) programme variants, and supervisors involved.
- 15 UEG graduation works among the 129 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, full–time (14) and part-time (1) programme variants, and supervisors involved.
- 15 SP graduation works among the 98 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, full–time (14) and part-time (1) programme variants, and supervisors involved.
- 15 IDS graduation works among the 106 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 and supervisors involved.

Information on the theses is available from Academion upon request.