



**M Human Geography
University of Amsterdam**

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Project code P2405

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Summary

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The panel found the profile and goals of the master Human Geography (HG) at the University of Amsterdam to be appropriate. Students learn to understand global socio-spatial challenges in four relevant focus areas in economic, environmental, political and urban geography, allowing them to connect theory and practice. The location in Amsterdam offers an excellent background for making these challenges visible in practice, which is successfully exploited by the programme. The intended learning outcomes are formulated at the required academic master's level and reflect the profile of HG. In addition, the intended learning outcomes are well aligned with the academic and professional field through the domain-specific framework of reference, contacts with the field and an external Advisory Board.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

According to the panel, the curriculum of the master HG is well-structured and coherent for each of four tracks. The core courses and learning pathways offer students a solid basis in human geography and the associated skills, whereas the tracks, elective and master thesis project allows for specialization. Teaching methods are varied, with small-scale and interactive sessions and group projects, including external projects and field work. The admission requirements are broad, fitting the multidisciplinary character of the programme. Aligning the research methodology courses and making these useful for all students is a challenge for the programme with this heterogeneous intake. The panel suggests investigating whether this can be addressed by adding additional elements regarding research methods in the knowledge expected of incoming students, and refer students with deficiencies to supplementary materials. Furthermore, the panel thinks that it is worthwhile to investigate whether the methodological courses can be more closely aligned with the thesis trajectory to maximize added value.

The choice for English as language of instruction is well substantiated and relevant considering the focus on global challenges and the use of an international classroom. Student support and guidance are strong, with the study advisors playing a key role. The programme is attentive to the needs of students with functional impairments, and information provision is of good quality. The panel encourages continued attention to the integration of international students. The curriculum is feasible, with most students completing the programme within one year. The panel considers the teaching staff a major asset of the programme, with staff members being well qualified and engaged with the programme.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The panel found the system of assessment in the master HG to be well structured. Assessment methods are varied and fit the programme goals, and appropriate measures are taken to promote reliability, validity and transparency of assessment. The Examinations Board functions well and checks the quality of course and thesis assessment. Thesis assessment is clear and works well in practice, with sufficient feedback and the involvement of two independent examiners. The thesis assessment process could be strengthened by requiring a written assessment of the individual examiners prior to the discussion on the final grade, and by making clear what role the oral defence exactly takes in determining the final grade. Finally, the panel recommends a formal instruction and professionalization process for external thesis supervisors.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The good level of the master theses and the careers of graduates in relevant jobs in a wide variety of sectors demonstrate that students in the master HG achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Score table

The panel assesses the programme as follows:

Master's programme Human Geography

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

meets the standard

Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment

meets the standard

Standard 3: Student assessment

meets the standard

Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

meets the standard

General conclusion

positive

The assessment panel has reviewed the report and agrees with its contents. On behalf of the panel,

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

P.A. (Peter) Hilderling MSc. (secretary)

Date: 10 September 2025

Introduction

Procedure

Assessment

On 31 March and 1 April 2025, the master's programme Sociale Geografie (which will be referred to by the international name Human Geography or HG in short in the remainder of this report) of the University of Amsterdam was assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment WO Sociale Geografie en Planologie (Human Geography and Planning). The assessment cluster consisted of 19 programmes, offered by the Radboud University, University of Amsterdam, University of Groningen and Utrecht University. The assessment followed the procedure and standards of the NVAO Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (April 2024).

Quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment upon request of the cluster WO Sociale Geografie en Planologie. Peter Hildering acted as coordinator and panel secretary. Jessica van Rossum and Mark Delmartino also acted as panel secretaries in the cluster assessment. They have all been certified and registered by the NVAO. Peter Hildering acted as panel secretary for the assessment of the programmes of the University of Amsterdam.

Preparation

Academion composed the peer review panel in cooperation with the institutions and taking into account the expertise and independence of the members as well as consistency within the cluster. On 4 February 2025, the NVAO approved the composition of the panel. The coordinator instructed the panel chair on her role in the site visit according to the Panel chair profile (NVAO 2016).

The programme composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the coordinator (see appendix 3). The programme selected representative partners for the various interviews. It also determined that the development dialogue would be made part of the site visit. A separate development report was made based on this dialogue.

The programme provided the coordinator with a list of graduates over the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. In consultation with the coordinator, the panel chair selected 15 theses of the programme. They took the diversity of final grades and examiners into account, as well as the specializations. From the specialization Economic Geography two theses were selected; from the specialization Political Geography three theses were selected; from the specialization Spatial Sustainability Studies 5 theses were selected; and from the specialization Urban Geography three theses were selected. The final two theses were from the discontinued track in Environmental Geography. This selection reflected the number of graduates in each particular specialization proportionally. Prior to the site visit, the programme provided the panel with the theses and the accompanying assessment forms. It also provided the panel with the self-evaluation report and additional materials (see appendix 4).

The panel members studied the information and sent their findings to the secretary. The secretary collected the panel's questions and remarks in a document and shared this with the panel members. In a preliminary meeting, the panel discussed the initial findings on the self-evaluation report and the theses, as well as the division of tasks during the site visit. The panel was also informed on the assessment framework, the working method and the planning of the site visit and reports.

Site visit

During the site visit, the panel interviewed various programme representatives (see appendix 3). The panel also offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour. No consultation was requested. The panel used the final part of the site visit to discuss its findings in an internal meeting. Afterwards, the panel chair publicly presented the preliminary findings.

Report

The secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to an Academion colleague for peer assessment. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel for feedback. After processing this feedback, the secretary sent the draft report to the University of Amsterdam in order to have it checked for factual irregularities. 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 University of Amsterdam.

Panel

The panel assessing the master's programme Human Geography at the University of Amsterdam consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. E.M. (Ellen) van Bueren, professor in Urban Development Management at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment of the TU Delft [panel chair];
- Prof. dr. F.J.A. (Frank) Witlox, senior full professor of Economic Geography at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. S. (Susan) Moore, professor of Urban Studies and Planning at the Bartlett School of Planning of University College London (United Kingdom);
- Prof. dr. M. (Mari) Vaattovaara, professor in Urban Geography at the University of Helsinki (Finland)
- M. (Maayke) Bouwhuis, bachelor's student Geography, Spatial Planning and Environment at the Radboud University [student member].

Each panel member and the panel secretary has filled out the Statement of Impartiality and non disclosure, as required by the NVAO.

Due to last-minute unforeseen circumstances, Prof. Susan Moore was not able to attend the site visit in person. She participated in all sessions of the site visit through video conferencing. Also due to last-minute unforeseen circumstances, Prof. Frank Witlox participated in person on the first day, and through video conferencing on the second day. This set-up was agreed upon prior to the site visit by both the panel and programmes.

Information on the programme

Name of the institution:	University of Amsterdam
Address:	Spui 21, 1012 WX Amsterdam
Website:	http://www.uva.nl
BRIN-number:	21PK
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Programme name:	M Sociale Geografie
ISAT number:	66620

Level:	Master (NLQF 7)
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Professional requirements:	no
Specializations or tracks:	Economic Geography Political Geography Spatial Sustainability Studies Urban Geography
Location:	Amsterdam
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Language of instruction:	English
Assessment group:	Sociale Geografie en Planologie
Awarded degree:	MSc
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2025

Description of the assessment

Organization

The MSc Human Geography (HG) is offered by the Graduate School of Social Sciences and staffed by the Department of Human Geography, Planning and International Development Studies of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences (FMG) of the University of Amsterdam (UvA). Each programme is headed by a programme director who is responsible for the set-up, organization, execution and quality of the programme. The programme director is assisted by a programme manager, a support staff member that is concerned with administration, scheduling, and information provision to staff and students (together with the study advisor, see below). The BSc Human Geography and Planning, the MSc Human Geography and the MSc Urban and Regional Planning share a Examinations Board. Both master's programmes share a Programme Committee, which often shares forces with the related Programme Committee that covers the bachelor's programme. The programme admits an average of 55 students per year, 80% of which is from the Netherlands, 12% from other EU countries and 8% from non-EU countries.

Recommendations previous panel

The previous accreditation panel provided several suggestions for improvement, such as addressing the differences in methodological skills background of students, creating more opportunities for electives and better distinguishing between the first and second examiner in thesis assessment. The panel found that these recommendations have been considered carefully, leading to further improvement of the programme. See for further discussion the respective sections in the report on these topics.

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 MSc HG aims to equip students with the skills necessary to become experts in understanding socio-spatial developments. It is situated in the domain of social sciences, revolving around the spatial organization of societies worldwide and associated issues such as urban social inequality, uneven development, political and geopolitical conflicts and identities, depletion of national resources, environmental justice and climate change. The programme has a strong emphasis on the applicability of skills and knowledge that students learn.

The field is inherently multidisciplinary, focusing on economic, environmental, political and urban geography. These four subdisciplines are the basis of four tracks in the programme:

- *(Digital) Economic Geography* studies the spatial implications of digitalization and new technologies in a globalized economy, such as platform economics, and how they affect the lives of people in different parts of the world.
- *Political Geography* explores how geography shapes politics, and understanding these forces provides a perspective on how geographical factors drive global political dynamics.
- *Urban Geography* equips students with tools to tackle global and local issues of inequality and quality of life in cities, focused on shaping a better future for urban communities worldwide.

- *Spatial Sustainability Studies* is offered in collaboration with the MSc Urban and Regional Planning, and covers sustainability issues in geography and planning. It takes a spatial-temporal perspective to understand the interlinkages between environmental and social challenges, identify the main drivers, and develop interventions to address them.

Next to knowledge of theoretical and conceptual debates in one of those domains, the programme aims to equip students with methodological and transferable skills. This includes the skills to work using a multidisciplinary and integrative approach, GIS (Geographic information Systems) training and either quantitative or qualitative research skills, often based on the thesis topic.

The panel appreciated the profile and goals of the master HG, particularly its focus on the relationship between humans and their environment in the context of global socio-spatial challenges. The programme makes excellent use of its location in Amsterdam, where such challenges are highly visible in both local and the global contexts. Through examples, fieldwork, and assignments, students engage with their environment in Amsterdam, resulting in an engaging, societally relevant connection between theory and practice. The four tracks offer relevant multidisciplinary focus areas in which socio-spatial challenges can be studied. The recent addition of the Spatial Sustainability Studies track and the reshaping of Economic Geography into Digital Economic Geography as per 2025/26 reflect the importance of climate responsiveness and digital literacy, showing the adaptability of the programme in response to developments in the field.

Intended learning outcomes

The profile and aims of the programme have been translated into a set of five intended learning outcomes (ILOs, see appendix 1), structured according to the five Dublin descriptors for academic master's programmes. Each learning outcome is split into several elements describing knowledge, skills and competencies relevant for an HG graduate. Amongst others, these include: knowledge and understanding of theoretical approaches and concepts within human geography, critical reflection, recognizing geographical problems and analysing these using theoretical knowledge and empirical data, and skills and qualifications to work inside and outside academia, including communication, debating and reflexive skills. The ILOs are identical for each of the four tracks with one addition specific for each of the tracks in the knowledge and understanding section.

The ILOs are aligned with the academic field through the domain-specific framework of reference which was jointly composed by the Dutch programmes in human geography and planning. This framework lists the content and learning outcomes that are deemed essential for bachelor's and master's programmes in the field. In an overview shared with the panel, the programme has demonstrated how the ILOs are aligned with this framework. To align the ILOs with the professional field, the programme uses the input of an external advisory board. The Graduate School, together with the College of Social Sciences, has an Advisory Board consisting of external experts, many of whom are alumni, that advise the programmes upon request or upon their own initiative regarding the quality of the programme in relation to society and the labour market. This Board convenes twice per year, and meets with staff, students and programme directors to gather input.

After studying the ILOs of the programme, the panel found that these are appropriate for an academic master's programme. They reflect the master's level as formulated in the Dublin descriptors and the Dutch Qualification Framework (NLQF 7). The ILOs are clearly formulated, and echo the strong focus on the application of theoretical concepts on practical situations and on transferable skills. This emphasis on 'doing geography' ensures that students not only acquire theoretical knowledge but also learn to apply it in practical situations. The alignment with the domain-specific framework of reference and the frequent

interaction with the professional field through guest lecturers, research (in practice), and the Advisory Board keeps the ILOs aligned with the requirements from the academic and professional field.

Considerations

The panel found the profile and goals of the master Human Geography at the University of Amsterdam to be appropriate. Students learn to understand global socio-spatial challenges in four relevant focus areas in economic, environmental, political and urban geography, allowing them to connect theory and practice. The location in Amsterdam offers an excellent background for making these challenges visible in practice, which is successfully exploited by the programme. The intended learning outcomes are formulated at the required academic master's level and reflect the profile of HG. In addition, the intended learning outcomes are well aligned with the academic and professional field through the domain-specific framework of reference, contacts with the field and an external Advisory Board.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets 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

Curriculum

The 60 EC curriculum consists of core courses (18 EC), a track-specific course (12 EC), a restricted-choice elective (6 EC) and the master thesis project (24 EC).

- The *core courses* are followed by students from all four tracks. These include a general course on Geographical Perspectives (6 EC), a fieldwork excursion (6 EC) and two research methodology courses (3 EC each). The Geographical Perspective course provides students with a shared knowledge base in the field of human geography, and allows students from different tracks to connect at the start of the curriculum. The fieldwork excursion (Geo Focus) is a group project where students work on a geographical research problem in an international location (Barcelona in 2024-2025). After preparation and research design in the second period, students visit the location to collect data in January, and analyse and present their results back in the Netherlands. Students in the Spatial Sustainability Studies track can also opt to replace Geo Focus with the Future Society Lab course, where they work in groups on projects with a societal focus. The research methodology courses cover quantitative or qualitative research methods (first course – students choose a focus based on their planned thesis topic, and GIS training (second course). These courses are shared with students from the MSc Urban and Regional Planning
- The *track-specific course* is a large, 12 EC course unique to each track that provides thematic specialization and foundational knowledge in the field of choice, as well as professional skills. Due to the small number of students in each track (5-20 students depending on the track), these courses are offered in a small-scale setting with intensive and interactive sessions. Students read research papers and newspaper articles, write essays, present their work and debate and reflect on current themes and academic debates in their subdiscipline.
- The *restricted choice elective* was recently added to the curriculum, based on both student's requests as well as a recommendation from the previous accreditation panel. Students choose from

a list of courses offered within the department with a focus on either geography, international development studies or planning.

- The *master thesis project* is an individual thesis, organized thematically in supervision groups. Groups of 5-6 students work under one supervisor on a specific theme related to the student's track. The project is divided into a research proposal, data collection and thesis writing. A master thesis coordinator oversees the organization of the projects, including student assignment to projects, supervisor instruction and mediating supervision issues. The written thesis is submitted in June, and completed with an oral defence where the supervisor and a second examiner are present.

The programme defines two learning pathways throughout the curriculum, namely a theoretical pathway and a skills learning pathway. These are not directly connected to courses, but consist of content covered throughout the courses, which makes it insightful to staff and students where the relevant content to these pathways is covered in the curriculum.

The panel found the curriculum of the master HG and the associated four tracks to be well-structured and aligned with the intended learning outcomes. The core courses in conjunction with the two learning pathways provide students from each track with the required core knowledge and skills as formulated in the ILOs, whereas the specialization opportunities offered in the tracks, the elective and the thesis project allow students to tailor the curriculum to their own interests. In response to the previous accreditation, the programme added elective space to the curriculum, which was welcomed by students. The teaching methods are varied, and often of a small-scale and interactive character. This is particularly the case in the track-specific courses, which constitute of a series of small-scale sessions, and the fieldwork excursion in which students study a geographical research problem in project groups on location. Other courses regularly use real-world challenges and examples, often inspired by the direct environment in the city of Amsterdam. This aligns well with the connection between research and practice embraced by the programme.

One possible area for improvement mentioned by students is that they would like more opportunities for connecting the thesis to a research internship at an external organization. The panel heard that the programme is open to this in principle, and that it has been done in the past, but that the additional arrangements and supervision required to ensure the academic quality of the projects made it too time-consuming, especially compared to the group supervision for internal projects. The panel understands these considerations but also encourages the programme to remain open to this possibility, especially when students come with their own ideas and suggestions. It believes that, given the programme's focus on linking research and practice, additional investment in this area would be worthwhile.

During the interviews, the panel and programme representatives discussed the research methods courses related to the master thesis project. In response to the recommendation of the previous accreditation panel to address differences in the level of methodological skills of admitted students, the programme has introduced more differentiation in methodological courses. It offers differentiated levels of instruction in the qualitative course and provides two levels of teaching in the quantitative and GIS courses, offering more challenge to students with pre-knowledge in methodology. The panel appreciates this change. At the same time, it has learned that despite these changes, students still have different experiences in these courses. Some find them very useful, while others find them superfluous. Students also mentioned that the parallel scheduling of the research methods course with the preparation phase of the master thesis project sometimes causes misalignment, since the choice of research design and methodology for the thesis must be made before the course is completed. The panel recognizes that heterogeneity of the student population is partly unavoidable in a one-year, multidisciplinary master's programme. On the other hand, it feels that there is room for improvement through additional adjustments to the courses. The panel recommends

investigating this. Possible directions to explore include adding research methodology to the admissions requirements (see below) and more closely linking the research methodology courses to the thesis trajectory, for instance by reshaping it into a thesis preparation course.

Language of instruction

The programme is offered in English. The programme aims for an international classroom in which experiences and insights from different countries and cultures can be discussed, adding to the contextual reflection that is crucial to the field of human geography. In addition, many graduates can be expected to work in internationally oriented organizations, both in professional and academic careers. The majority of the teaching staff has been teaching and working in an English-speaking environment for many years. Furthermore, the English proficiency of the staff has been assessed recently as part of the shift to a bilingual bachelor's programme in the department, and any identified language proficiency gaps were addressed through training. New teachers are required to demonstrate an adequate command of English as part of the hiring requirements.

The panel agrees with the programme's rationale for using English as the language of instruction and believes that this is consistent with the international nature of the programme, as well as the expected labour market position of graduates. English language proficiency of staff is well monitored and included in hiring requirements. The internationally diverse classroom is an asset of the programme, and the international orientation is also visible in the challenges studied, including in the fieldwork excursion. The current percentage of international students in the programme is approximately 20%; the panel learnt that the programme would welcome additional intake of international students to strengthen the international classroom, which it finds understandable regarding the associated goals.

Admission

Students are admissible to the programme after following the BSc Human Geography and Planning at the UvA or a similar programme at another university. Students from related fields can also enter the programme provided they can demonstrate sufficient geography and social research methodology courses. If they do not meet this requirement, they can follow a minor in human geography at the UvA prior to enrolment to remedy this. Students with a bachelor's degree from a university of applied sciences (hbo) can follow a 60 EC premaster's programme focused on the HG master's programme. International students with a geography degree from a foreign academic institution can register after approval from the programme, if necessary, after a crash course in the summer or a pre-approved online course in the case of a small deficiency in research methods skills.

The panel assessed the admission requirements and found them to be appropriate to the goals of the master HG. They are formulated in an open and broad way, allowing students from different social science backgrounds to participate. This reflects the multidisciplinary nature of the field and the challenges being studied. At the same time, the panel appreciates the requirement to demonstrate sufficient prior knowledge of geography, which it feels is necessary to keep the programme focused on geography. As discussed above, the broad intake of students presents the programme with challenges related to the heterogeneity of the student population. Some students feel that the research methods courses could be more challenging if the entry level of students were at a more comparable level. The panel suggests investigating whether additional elements regarding research methods could be included in the knowledge expected of incoming students. Students with deficiencies could be referred to supplementary materials, such as an additional course, compulsory reading or online courses.

Guidance and support

During the programme, master's students are supported by a study advisor and a programme manager shared with the URP programme. The study advisor maintains regular contact with students to discuss academic progress, curriculum choices and personal matters, both on the study advisor's initiative and upon student request. For the thesis project, students choose a project from a list of themes and supervisors communicated by the programme in the first semester, and are guided both in a group and in an individual setting by their supervisor. The programme manager and study advisor also provide students with all necessary information relevant to the curriculum. The main information channel is the Canvas digital learning environment. The study advisor is also the first point of contact for students with functional impairments. In consultation with the programme director and/or the Examinations Board, solutions are found on a case-by-case basis, such as recording of lectures or providing a student buddy. Specialized GIS facilities are available to all students in the form of a computer lab with high performance computers and staff to assist students as needed.

Based on the information provided and the discussions during the site visit, the panel is impressed by the strong student guidance in the master HG. Information provision prior to and throughout the programme is up to standard. The study advisors help with making curriculum choices, planning, career choice and other issues. The panel found the supervision process of the thesis to be well-organized, with clear expectations, regular feedback moments, and structured deadlines. Students feel well supported in finding an appropriate thesis project, and are positive on the guidance they receive during the thesis trajectory. Furthermore, there is sufficient attention to students with functional impairments through tailored solutions depending on the situation. The panel also appreciates the GIS facilities available to students. A point of attention that arose from the discussions during the site visit is to keep onboarding and integration of international students on the agenda, as some students mentioned that this could be improved. The programme is very aware of the challenges of mixing the Dutch and international student groups into a coherent student population. There are already several initiatives, such as the student association explicitly focusing on attracting international students to its activities. The panel advises to keep paying attention to this and create further opportunities for mixing Dutch and international student groups wherever possible.

Feasibility

The design of the curriculum aims to promote feasibility. The programme uses relatively large courses of 6 and 12 EC to prevent fragmentation: students usually follow only one or two courses at the same time. Furthermore, the final week of the eight-week periods (after the exams in week 7) is focused on resits of the previous period; this gives students a full week to either focus on their repairs or enjoy an education-free week to focus on non-study related activities. Furthermore, the study advisor is available for counselling on study progress and any issues that might hinder this. The average study duration over the past cohorts is slightly more than one year (14 months), with approximately 70% of students graduating in one year, and around 90% within two years.

Based on the discussions during the site visit and the high and steady success, the panel concludes that the curriculum is feasible. A commendable percentage of students finish the curriculum within one year. The curriculum design with larger courses and room for resits promotes timely completion. Students mention that study delay is often associated with taking extra courses, or pursuing extra-curricular activities.

Teaching staff

The teaching staff of HG is predominantly employed by the Department of Human Geography, Planning and International Development Studies. Currently, 36 staff members are involved in HG, either as course coordinator, lecturer or thesis supervisor. The large majority of teaching staff members is tenured or in a

tenure track, of which 100% hold a PhD and 90% has a University Teaching Qualification (UTQ) or is in the process of acquiring this. For professionalization of all staff members, the department organizes four departmental meetings per year focused on development in education, such as generative AI or innovative teaching methods. The programme aims for a strong connection between research and teaching. All staff members are active researchers and bring this into the classroom, most prominently in the interactive small-scale track-specific courses and the thesis projects, but also in the other courses.

The panel considers the teaching staff to be a strength of the master HG. Students appreciate the expertise of their teachers, and their close involvement and engagement with the programme. The panel found the programme to be well organized with attention to coherence and collaboration between teaching staff members. The teaching staff includes many senior academics involved in current research in urban, political, environmental, and economic geography, fitting the core areas of the programme very well. The team is balanced with a mix of junior, mid-career and senior staff. All have a PhD and almost all an UTQ, and there is sufficient attention to ongoing professionalization. One point of attention that the panel noted during the discussion is that all elements of the programme are so well thought out by the teaching team that students sometimes feel that the points for improvement they raise are explained away. The panel is sure that this comes from a well-intentioned belief in the rationale behind the curricular decisions, but advises that this should not lead to overlooking potential points for improvement. The panel was also reassured to learn that students usually find and use sufficient opportunities to provide feedback, and that the programme is open to receiving it.

Considerations

According to the panel, the curriculum of the master HG is well-structured and coherent for each of four tracks. The core courses and learning pathways offer students a solid basis in human geography and the associated skills, whereas the tracks, elective and master thesis project allows for specialization. Teaching methods are varied, with small-scale and interactive sessions and group projects, including external projects and field work. The admission requirements are broad, fitting the multidisciplinary character of the programme. Aligning the research methodology courses and making these useful for all students is a challenge for the programme with this heterogeneous intake. The panel suggests investigating whether this can be addressed by adding additional elements regarding research methods in the knowledge expected of incoming students, and refer students with deficiencies to supplementary materials. Furthermore, the panel thinks that it is worthwhile to investigate whether the methodological courses can be more closely aligned with the thesis trajectory to maximize added value.

The choice for English as language of instruction is well substantiated and relevant considering the focus on global challenges and the use of an international classroom. Student support and guidance are strong, with the mentors and study advisors playing a key role. The programme is attentive to the needs of students with functional impairments, and information provision is of good quality. The panel encourages continued attention to the integration of international students. The curriculum is feasible, with most students completing the programme within one year. The panel considers the teaching staff a major asset of the programme, with staff members being well qualified and engaged with the programme.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 2.

Standard 3. Student assessment

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

Findings

System of assessment

Assessment of HG is aligned with the central UvA Assessment Policy Framework, which details the assessment philosophy and procedures to be used in each educational programme. This is translated into an assessment plan drafted by the programme director, that includes an overview that maps course assessment to the exit qualifications. The Examinations Board provides guidelines for this, and annually checks the assessment plan. Over the years, the programme has developed several practices to ensure validity, reliability and transparency of assessment. These include communicating assessment criteria to staff and students in advance, a mix of individual and group assessment and the use of answer models to provide students with feedback afterwards.

Most courses use a combination of assessment methods, such as short multiple-choice test to check for understanding of concepts, individual essays and team presentations. Written assignments are the most prevalent assessment method, and include position papers, reflections and research papers. The fieldwork course is assessed through a group presentations of the research design and outcomes.

The Examinations Board (EB) of the programme covers the MSc HG as well as the bachelor's programme Human Geography and Planning, and the master's programme Urban and Regional Planning. The Board evaluates course assessment, advises on assessment procedures, and monitors assessment quality. This includes annual checks of a random selection of theses. Evaluation of course assessment can be initiated by the Board itself, as a result of student feedback or upon request of lecturers of the programme director. The Board organizes the annual test assessment days, where two EB members assisted by an external assessment expert evaluate assessment on programme level as well as on for several specific courses. The findings are discussed with the programme management and at staff meetings. Thesis checks are performed annually, and aimed at ensuring that students have the required exit level and that theses are assessed appropriately.

The panel found the system of assessment to be very well structured and considered. The system had appropriate checks and balances to ensure validity, reliability and transparency of assessment. Assessment methods in the courses and field work project are varied, with attention to the balance between group and individual work, and requiring different types of knowledge and skills from students. Based on the documentation and interview with the Examinations Board, the panel concludes that the Board fulfils its legal duties. The annual test assessment days and the annual course and thesis reviews add to the validity and reliability of assessment in the programme. The Board mentioned during the site visit that one of their main concerns currently is the use of generative AI in assessment for students. The UvA is currently composing policies for the use of generative AI on the level of the university. The panel appreciates that these policies are underway, but at the same time encourages the Board to evaluate potential issues and look for solutions where this is already possible. The panel saw some good examples of this already, such as using real-life challenges for projects and essays in which generative AI is less useful.

Thesis assessment

The master thesis is assessed by the student's supervisor, and a second examiner not otherwise involved in the process. This second reader is appointed by the thesis coordinator based on regulations by the

Examinations Board, such as sufficient assessment experience and limiting recurring couples. Both examiners assess the written thesis prior to the defence on each of the assessment criteria laid down in the assessment form. The defence is a meeting in which the student answers questions and critiques of mainly the second reader, which is also part of the assessment. Both examiners formulate a joint assessment after the defence on each of the five assessment categories (Content and theory, Data, methods and techniques, Argumentation, Presentation and Process). The two examiners jointly agree on a grade based on the performance on the criteria, and substantiate this qualitatively on the assessment form.

In response to the previous accreditation, the programme made a clearer distinction between the first and second examiner. The thesis coordinator makes the teams of first and second examiner, ensuring that there are no hierarchical ties or recurring couples. Furthermore, the second examiner is giving the lead in the discussion with the student during the oral defence. The previous accreditation panel also recommended to make the comments of both examiners more distinguishable. After careful consideration, the programme decided to maintain the joint assessment. Experiences in other programmes showed that separate assessment by both examiners created more conflicts between students and examiners, and between examiners themselves. Instead, the programme focused more on the deliberative process and grading culture, such as calibration sessions between examiners, to address this comment.

According to the panel, thesis assessment is well-developed and also works well in practice. The assessment categories used on the assessment form are comprehensive and sufficiently cover the programme's ILOs. The thesis assessment forms that the panel studied in preparation for the site visit were clear and comprehensive, providing student with sufficient feedback and substantiation of the grade. The involvement of two examiners, with one not involved in the process, adds to the robustness of the procedure. During the site visit, the panel spoke with programme representative on the choice to not document the separate assessment of both examiners, and the way in which the examiners reach consensus on the thesis grade. The panel appreciates that attention to distinction between the role of the first and second examiner in response to the previous accreditation. At the same time, it feels that further streamlining this process would make it more robust. The panel understood that even though both examiners separately assess the thesis before the defence, only the joint assessment afterwards is stored. It thinks that requiring both examiners to submit a written assessment of the thesis separate from each other beforehand and storing this in the assessment file, would add to the transparency of the process. This safeguards the system against an inappropriately large influence of one of the examiners in determining the final grade, as the underlying individual assessment of both examiners remains available. As is currently the case, the joint assessment form can remain the final version that is presented to the student. Furthermore, the panel recommends making explicit what role the oral defence plays in thesis assessment. At the moment, it is not separately graded but can influence the final grade in the discussion between the examiners in the case of an exceptionally good or poor performance of the student. The panel thinks that the programme should make this explicit to promote consistency between examiners.

The panel learnt that the programme sometimes makes use of external thesis supervisors as first examiner. External supervisors are long-term partners of the programme that are affiliated with external academic or professional organizations, hold a PhD, and have been appointed as examiner by the Examinations Board to add supervision capacity to the department. This usually works well in practice, although the panel noted that these supervisors are less connected to the internal discussions on assessment in the department. The panel recommends investing in a formal instruction and professionalization process that covers both assessment and supervision to safeguard that external supervisors operate in the same way as internal supervisors.

Considerations

The panel found the system of assessment in the master HG to be well structured. Assessment methods are varied and fit the programme goals, and appropriate measures are taken to promote reliability, validity and transparency of assessment. The Examinations Board functions well and checks the quality of course and thesis assessment. Thesis assessment is clear and works well in practice, with sufficient feedback and the involvement of two independent examiners. The thesis assessment process could be strengthened by requiring a written assessment of the individual examiners prior to the discussion on the final grade, and by making clear what role the oral defence exactly takes in determining the final grade. Finally, the panel recommends a formal instruction and professionalization process for external thesis supervisors.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 3.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

Thesis quality

As part of the preparation for the site visit, the panel studied a selection of 15 recent master theses in Human Geography. It concluded that all the theses were of good quality, and covered very topical and interesting topics across the four tracks of the programme. The theses showed sufficient command of research methodology as well as the ability to independently do research. The panel noted that despite the mandatory GIS training in the curriculum, very few theses actually incorporated GIS techniques. It suggests that the programme might investigate why this is the case, and whether additional encouragement or support is needed in the use of these techniques.

Performance of graduates

A recent labour market inventory conducted by the master HG shows that most graduates find jobs either in the private sector (consulting firms, often aimed at advising government organizations) or in a government organization (with municipalities being the most common employer) and as researchers/teachers (within or outside a university). Job titles include project manager, policy advisor or researcher. The panel found the employability of graduates in the field to be a compelling argument for the high exit level of graduates, both in terms of the relevance of the positions and the variety of sectors in which graduates are employed. The panel found this to be an indicator that the skills and knowledge acquired in the programme are applicable to real-world problems in a wide range of professional contexts.

Considerations

The good level of the master theses and the careers of graduates in relevant jobs in a wide variety of sectors demonstrate that students in the master HG achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 4.

General conclusion

The panel's assessment of master's programme Human Geography is positive.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that the research methodology courses are useful for students of all backgrounds. A possible solution could be to investigate whether the methodological courses can be more closely aligned with the thesis trajectory to maximize added value. Furthermore, the programme could include additional elements regarding research methods in the knowledge expected of incoming students, and refer students with deficiencies to supplementary materials.
2. Further streamline the thesis assessment process by requiring a written assessment of the individual examiners prior to the discussion on the final grade, and by making clear which role the oral defence plays in the final grade.
3. Introduce a formal instruction and professionalization process for external thesis supervisors.

Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

Knowledge and understanding (DD1)

1. Knowledge and understanding (DD1)

The graduate has acquired knowledge and understanding:

- a. of scientific and epistemological foundations of human geography.
- b. of qualitative or quantitative and spatial research methods that are relevant for and build on the entrance level to human geographical research.
- c. of key theoretical and policy debates in human geography.
- d. of contemporary theories and empirical approaches [of the chosen track]

Applying knowledge and understanding (DD2)

2. Applying knowledge and understanding (DD2)

The acquired knowledge and/or understanding enables the graduate to apply:

- a. approach, identify and deal with geographical problems from a scientific habitus in a systematic, analytical, reflective, critical and creative manner.
- b. thoroughly analyse human geographical issues, using current theoretical and empirical insights as they pertain to these issues.
- c. trace, collect and analyse primary and secondary data in at least one unfamiliar geographical context.
- d. independently design and execute human geographical research to report systematically on this research and draw scientifically appropriate conclusions.
- e. link the results of human geography research to the theoretical and societal debates on the subject.
- f. make a calculated, well-reasoned choice for research methods and techniques, taking into account the nature of the subject of the human geography research and taking into account ethical considerations of this research.
- g. translate results of human geographical research in a constructive and prospective manner into scientific and societal discussions about the issue in question and to translate this into policy proposals.

Formulating judgement (DD3)

3. Formulating judgements (DD3)

Concerning the ability of formulating judgements, the graduate should be able to:

- a. critically assess different theoretical and policy-based sources and analyses on human geographical issues within the chosen specialization, as well as their use in theory building and policy analysis.
- b. bring to the foreground any (hidden) presuppositions and normative positions in theoretical and policy views on human geographical issues.
- c. Formulate an independent opinion and reflect on the nature of, and approach to human geographical issues.

Communicative skills (DD4)

4. Communicative skills (DD4)

The graduate should be able to use the following communicative skills:

- a. the ability to deliver a structured and correctly written presentation at academic level of human geographical problems and research.
- b. the ability to give a professional oral presentation of human geographical problems and research using relevant presentation techniques in English.
- c. the ability to (re)formulate and present arguments, both verbally as well as in written form, to defend these arguments and critically reflect on them.

- d. the ability to participate in and contribute to discussions within the policy and theoretical domain of human geography in a constructive and reflective professional manner.
- e. the ability to do group work.

Competencies/ learning skills (DD5)

5. Learning skills (DD5)

The graduate has acquired the following learning skills:

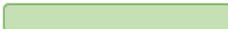
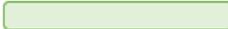
- a. can independently follow and comprehend developments within the discipline of human geography.
- b. can identify societal problems and develop solutions that are based on scientific analysis and reflection.
- c. can work as a fully qualified professional in the field of human geography.
- d. can continue studying at post-master level, including PhD trajectory.

Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

Semester 1			Semester 2		
Period 1 Sept - Oct	Period 2 Nov - Dec	Period 3 Jan	Period 4 Feb - Mar	Period 5 Apr - May	Period 6 Jun
Geographical Perspectives (6 EC)	Restricted-choice elective (6 EC)	Geo Focus: Fieldwork Excursion (6 EC)*	Research Methodologies I (3 EC)		
Track-specific course (12 EC)			Research Methodologies II (3 EC)	GEO track: Master Thesis Project (24 EC)	

* Students in the track Spatial Sustainability Studies can also choose *Future Societies Lab* (6 EC)

Course legend

	Core course
	Track-specific course
	Restricted-choice elective

Track-specific courses (12 EC)

- Advanced Digital Economic Geography (Economic Geography)
- Advanced Political Geography: Geopolitics, Globalisation & Governance (Political Geography)
- Advanced Urban Geography: Global and Local Perspectives on Cities (Urban Geography)
- Spatial Sustainability: Advanced Environmental Geography and Planning (Spatial Sustainability Studies)

Restricted-choice electives

- Critical Development Theory & Social Movements
- Current Debates in Geography
- Rethinking Urban Transportation Planning
- Sustainable and Inclusive Economics
- The Capitalocene: Understanding Unequal Exchange and Environmental Conflict
- Urban Perspectives in Development

Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

Monday 31 March 2025

11.00 - 11.30	Arrival and preparation
11.30 - 12.30	Interview management
12.30 - 13.15	Lunch break
13.15 - 14.00	Interview B SGP students
14.15 - 15.00	Interview B SGP teaching staff
15.00 - 15.30	Internal panel discussion
15.30 - 16.15	Thematic session bachelor
16.15 - 16.30	Break
16.30 - 17.00	Interview Examinations Board
17.00 - 17.30	Internal panel discussion

Tuesday 1 April 2025

08.30 - 09.00	Arrival and preparation
09.00 - 09.45	Interview M SG students and alumni
10.00 - 10.45	Interview M SG teaching staff
10.45 - 11.15	Internal consultation
11.15 - 12.00	Interview M P students and alumni
12.15 - 13.00	Interview M P teaching staff
13.00 - 14.15	Lunch and internal panel discussion
14.15 - 15.00	Thematic session masters
15.00 - 16.00	Internal panel discussion
16.00 - 16.30	Final discussion management
16.30 - 17.15	Internal panel discussion
17.15 - 17.30	Oral feedback

Appendix 4. Materials

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 theses of the master's programme Human Geography. Information on the theses is available from Academion upon request.

The panel also studied other materials, which included:

- Reaction to previous accreditation
- Domain-Specific Framework of Reference
- Dublin Descriptors and Exit Qualifications
- Relations Exit Qualifications to Curriculum (Learning Outcomes Courses)
- Curriculum Overview
- Course Information and a selection of course materials (incl. assessment)
- Teaching and Examination Regulations 2024-2025 (TER)
- Core Staff Overview
- Data on Student Intake, Population and Success Rates
- Lecturer-Student Ratio & Staff Composition
- Research Proposal and Thesis Assessment Forms
- Examination Board reports
- Programme Committee reports
- Memo Quality Assurance 2023
- Ethical Guidelines for Students
- Thesis manual
- Research proposal and assessment forms
- Alumni career inventory