



M Cultural Geography
Campus Fryslân Leeuwarden
University of Groningen

© 2025 Academion

www.academion.nl
info@academion.nl

Project code P2405

Contents

- Summary 4
- Score table 5
- Procedure..... 6
- Panel 7
- Information on the programme 8
- Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes 10
- Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment..... 14
- Standard 3. Student assessment 20
- Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes 24
- General conclusion 27
- Recommendations 27
- Appendix 2. Programme curriculum..... 30
- Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit..... 31
- Appendix 4. Materials 32

Summary

On 22 May 2025, the Master of Science (MSc) Cultural Geography was assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment WO Sociale Geografie en Planologie (Human Geography and Planning). The programme is offered by the University of Groningen at its faculty Campus Fryslân in Leeuwarden. The panel established that the MSc Cultural Geography meets 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 programme is **positive**.

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The MSc in Cultural Geography (CG) has a clear profile, befitting learning outcomes, and a functional Advisory Board. It adopts a creative and innovative approach to cultural geography, integrating elements of sustainable tourism and climate adaptation. Its specific characteristics stand out in the Dutch and European higher education landscape. The learning outcomes are formulated adequately and reflect the substance, level and orientation of the programme. The end qualifications befit the profile and cover both the scientific and professional requirements of the domain. The Advisory Board monitors the relevance of the learning outcomes and is an important connection to the working field. Since the previous accreditation, several elements have been altered for the better. The panel commends the programme team for its ongoing attention to quality improvement, and the programme stakeholders for their contribution to the quality culture that pervades this MSc CG.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The MSc CG programme operates in a strong teaching-learning environment. The curriculum content is relevant, and the course syllabi and teaching materials are comprehensive, interesting and up-to-date. There is a clear link between the curriculum and the programme profile, and the course learning goals are neatly connected to the programme learning outcomes. Hence, the MSc CG delivers what it sets out to do, while students are in a position to achieve the learning outcomes by following the curriculum. The educational vision of the programme and the faculty is practised effectively in the day-to-day teaching, where students irrespective of their national, cultural, educational or personal background feel safe to contribute to the discussions and become part of the academic community. The teaching staff is a particularly important asset to the programme: they are properly qualified, highly motivated and much appreciated by students who praise their expertise, responsiveness and support. In addition, the programme can rely on a range of educational and health services that make student life easier. Its commitment to inclusiveness and diversity is particularly visible – and effective – in the admission policy and the diverse cohorts that enrol every year. Furthermore, the panel endorses the English name of the MSc CG, as well as the decision to offer the programme in English: its international dimension and orientation enrich the teaching and learning experience for both Dutch and non-Dutch students.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The MSc CG can rely on a robust system of assessment that is embedded in policies and practices of the faculty and the university. The programme's vision on assessment befits the approach to education of both the MSc CG and the faculty. The Assessment Programme safeguards that course learning goals are assessed adequately and cover the programme learning outcomes. There is a good mixture of individual and group assignments, written exams, and formative and summative evaluations that are distributed in a balanced way across the modules and match the diversity of competencies students are expected to acquire. In addition, the quality assurance system for assessment is both comprehensive and effective. The panel commends the Board of Examiners for its expertise and pro-active commitment. The thesis assessment

framework is transparent and relevant. The thesis review showed that the grading by programme assessors aligns in almost all cases with the appraisal of the panel members, and that many evaluation forms are completed in an insightful way.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The learning outcomes of the MSc CG are assessed and demonstrated in a systematic way. The sample of graduation projects the panel reviewed was invariably of sufficient to good quality: research topics were original, creative, and well aligned with the programme's thematic scope; students were capable to formulate research questions, engage critically with literature, apply a range of research methods, analyse their results and address ethical issues. Hence it is fair to conclude that MSc CG students who graduate the programme have effectively acquired all exit qualifications. Moreover, Cultural Geography students are well prepared for employment during the programme as graduates prove to be successful in their professional careers. They find jobs that are commensurate with the domain and the level of their study, and do so in a variety of positions and with a broad range of public, private and non-governmental employers.

Recommendations

In addition to its overall positive judgement, the panel identified a few points for development. It advises the MSc CG programme to:

- reformulate the 'attitude' ILOs in such a way that they are better measurable;
- revisit the organization of the research design course;
- describe the didactical rationale for including in-class participation as an assessment mode;
- organize calibration sessions for thesis assessors;
- involve Advisory Board members in the strategic development of the forthcoming programme and curriculum adjustments.

Score table

The panel assesses the *Master's programme Cultural Geography* as follows:

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
<i>General conclusion</i>	positive

On behalf of the entire peer review panel,

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

M. (Mark) Delmartino MA
Panel secretary

Date: 24 September 2025

Introduction

Procedure

Assessment

On 22 May 2025, the master's programme Cultural Geography was assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment WO Sociale Geografie en Planologie (Human Geography and Planning). This programme is offered by the University of Groningen at its Campus Fryslân in Leeuwarden. Prior to coming to Leeuwarden, a larger panel visited seven bachelor and master programmes at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences in Groningen. The results of that visit are 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 Hildering coordinated the entire assignment, while Mark Delmartino acted as panel secretary for the programme assessments in Leeuwarden and Groningen. Both coordinator and secretary are certified and registered by the NVAO.

Panel composition

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

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

Preparation

Preparing for the external assessment, the programme team in Leeuwarden produced a self-evaluation report that outlined the key elements of the programme per accreditation standard and included a student chapter and a SWOT-analysis. It also made available an extensive portfolio of programme-specific and faculty-wide documents on a dedicated online drive. Moreover, the panel reviewed a sample of graduation projects and their completed evaluation forms as part of its external assessment. The list of materials put at disposition of the panel, as well as details on the thesis review are provided in appendix 4.

The panel members studied the programme information, reviewed the selected theses and sent their first observations to the secretary, who compiled the input. This compilation served as a basis for the preparatory online meeting on 12 May 2025, when the panel identified the key strengths, challenges and questions of the programme. On behalf of the panel, the secretary reported the main outcomes of this meeting to the team in Leeuwarden on 14 May.

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

Site visit

The accreditation team in Leeuwarden composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the coordinator and the panel secretary (see appendix 3). The programme selected representative partners for the various interviews. At the end of the visit, the chair presented the panel considerations and conclusions in a public session to all programme representatives.

A development dialogue was held on site during the visit. The findings from this session did not impact the outcome of the accreditation exercise and have been captured in a separate report.

Report

After the site visit, the secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to the coordinator for peer assessment. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel for feedback. After processing this feedback, the draft report was submitted to the accreditation team in Leeuwarden 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 Campus Fryslân and the University of Groningen.

Panel

The panel assessing the Human Geography and Planning programmes of the University of Groningen consisted of the following members:

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

The panel that assessed the MSc Cultural Geography at Campus Fryslân consisted of:

- 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. M. (Micheline) van Riemsdijk, professor of Human Geography at Uppsala University (Sweden);
- Dr. A.(Ayeshah) Émon, lecturer in Public Health at the Institute for Epidemiology and Public Health of University College London (United Kingdom);

- E. R. (Robin) Pleizier BA, master's student in Urban & Economic Geography at Utrecht University [student member].

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

Initially, Professor Frank Witlox was scheduled to participate in the site visit to Campus Fryslân. Due to unforeseen circumstances, he was not able to attend and was replaced by Professor Micheline van Riemsdijk. This information has been submitted to the NVAO on 22 April 2025 and approved on 14 May 2025.

Information on the programme

Name of the institution:	University of Groningen
BRIN-number:	21PC
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Programme name:	M Cultural Geography
ISAT number:	60656
Orientation of the programme:	wo
Level of the programme:	Master (NLQF7)
Number of credits:	60 EC
Language of instruction:	English
Specializations or tracks:	Climate Adaptation Governance Sustainable Tourism and Society
Location:	Campus Fryslân, Leeuwarden
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Awarded degree:	MSc.
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2025

Description of the assessment

Organization

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

At the previous accreditation visit in 2019, the MSc Cultural Geography was already offered in Leeuwarden but still part of the programme portfolio of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences. In September 2021, the programme was formally transferred to Campus Fryslân, the eleventh and most recent faculty of UG.

Campus Fryslân (CF) is led by the Faculty Board (FB), which consists of the Dean, the Vice-Dean and the Managing Director, and includes a Student Assessor. The FB oversees all (currently five) degree programmes on offer. As the official representative body of CF, the Faculty Council has a hold among others on teaching and education, research, budget, and staffing policy. A faculty-wide Board of Examiners is responsible for the examination and assessment quality of all degree programmes. The board fulfils all legal obligations in an independent way and consists of six members across all programmes.

At programme level, the Programme Director is responsible among others for strategic development, curriculum coherence and the assessment programme of the MSc Cultural Geography. A dedicated Programme Committee, comprising two academic staff members and two students, advises on academic matters. The Board of Advisors provides insights on how the programme curriculum can be aligned with the needs of the labour market at regional, national and international level.

At the time of the site visit in Spring 2025, the MSc Cultural Geography consisted of two tracks – one on Sustainable Tourism and Society, and one on Climate Governance and Adaptation. This set-up differs from the previous accreditation, when there was one track, and will change again in September 2026 when the tracks will be integrated as elective options in an integrated programme curriculum with a new name, Sustainable Futures.

Recommendations previous panel

In the previous accreditation round, the then panel issued a positive conclusion on the MSc Cultural Geography, highlighting several strengths under each standard as well as some recommendations. The current panel noticed that Campus Fryslân and the programme team have not only considered these suggestions, but also integrated these in the development of the master's programme. These modifications have been highlighted in the written materials, were discussed during the sessions on site, and 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 Master of Science (MSc) in Cultural Geography (CG) examines how contemporary global and local challenges shape - and are shaped by - people, culture, identity, tourism, and climate change. In the CG programme and its tracks on Climate Adaptation Governance (CAG) and Sustainable Tourism and Society (STS), students explore the intersection of cultural geography, sustainable tourism, and climate adaptation. In this way, they acquire the competencies to navigate local and global processes of cultural and environmental change in society.

According to the panel, the MSc CG offers an interesting, creative and innovative approach to cultural geography. The vision of the programme is clearly formulated and its aims are relevant from both academic and societal perspectives. Its profile is reflected in the selection and design of the course content, research foci, and teaching and learning practices, which are people-centred, place-based, and interdisciplinary. The panel finds that the MSc CG profile successfully integrates cultural geography with sustainable tourism and climate adaptation.

The MSc CG has a number of distinguishing features: it is research-based, has an interdisciplinary approach, focuses on sustainability and critical thinking, and examines how power dynamics affect tourism and climate issues. The programme builds bridges between conceptual thinking, practical experiences, and policy issues as students tackle issues of regional and community development and landscape, tourism and heritage management. It teaches how local and global power dynamics, including globalisation, migration or gendered and racialized relations interact with cultural practices and the daily experiences of individuals within their social and geographical contexts. Students learn to contextualize their knowledge in the disciplines and theories of sustainable tourism and climate adaptation, and acquire the skills to conduct both qualitative and quantitative research at master level.

The panel recognizes that taken together, these features make the MSc CG stand out in the Dutch and European higher education landscape: it offers specialized contents in sustainability and the socio-cultural dimensions that influence and are affected by tourism or climate change; it foregrounds an ethics of care, and emphasizes the importance of community, identity, memory, and histories within narratives of space and place; and it raises an awareness of decolonial and post-colonial theory, intersectional analysis, and ethically responsible, culturally sensitive, and socially just approaches to issues of local and global concern around climate, tourism, governance and sustainability.

Furthermore, the panel noticed that the programme profile - and its curriculum, see next standard - underwent significant changes since its establishment. In 2019, when the programme was still offered by the Faculty of Spatial Sciences, the previous panel “encountered a programme with the geography of place and identity as the core of the profile”. In the meantime, the programme has been integrated properly in Campus Fryslân. According to the current panel, the programme’s approach towards transformative, interdisciplinary and socially impactful education is well aligned with the educational vision of this new faculty. The panel commends the programme team for this endeavour. Moreover, by fostering critical thinking, interdisciplinary skills and responsible attitudes - and by integrating these skills in new and intersectional

courses in the curriculum - the programme has taken on board the suggestions of both the previous accreditation visit and the mid-term review.

In the current academic year 2024-2025, the MSc CG consists of a long-standing 'tourism' (STS) and a relatively recent 'climate' (CAG) track. In view of the UG-internal provision that 'geography' programmes can only be offered by the Faculty of Spatial Sciences, the CG programme has applied for a name change, which was approved by NVAO in Spring 2025 and will enter into force in September 2026. The new name, Sustainable Futures, aligns very well with the current portfolio of CF, which includes among others a bachelor Global Responsibility and Leadership and a master Sustainable Entrepreneurship. In view of the student intake in the past few years, the CG programme team decided to remove the tracks. Hence, as of September 2026 the MSc CG will bear a different name, Sustainable Futures, and consist of one integrated programme where students can among others opt for pockets of electives that correspond to the current STS and CAG tracks.

The panel gathered from the discussions on site that at the time of the site visit, the programme profile aligns very well with the current programme curriculum and with the approach to education of CF in Leeuwarden. Hence, the panel establishes that the CG has a relevant and befitting profile. Moreover, the panel endorses the decision to move away from a formal track structure and allow students more flexibility to customise their study through elective pathways. According to the panel, the envisaged shift towards integrated electives rather than tracks will maintain the thematic focus yet offer more flexibility to students in pursuing their interests.

Notwithstanding these positive aspects, the panel noticed that the current profile is less geography-driven than it was six years ago. And while the envisaged changes are well argued for, the programme attention to geography is likely to further diminish in the future. In view of the next accreditation cycle, the programme and faculty management may want to establish which assessment cluster befits best the disciplinary domain of the forthcoming Sustainable Futures programme. The panel thinks that the new programme title is attractive as it combines two highly relevant themes - sustainability and the future of society - but is vague in terms of discipline. Hence, the narrative for the new programme title and its curriculum contents needs to be made explicit. This, in turn, requires good marketing and communication efforts to ensure that potential students become aware of what the Sustainable Futures programme entails.

Intended learning outcomes

The MSc CG has a broad and extensive set of intended learning outcomes (ILOs), which are listed in Appendix 1 to this report. A total of 28 learning outcomes is clustered in six domains. They reflect the five categories of the Dublin Descriptors and include a dedicated set of three ILOs outcomes on attitude. The panel was informed that the current learning outcomes reflect the provisions of the domain specific reference framework (DSRF), as well as the framework of the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP).

The panel noticed that the ILOs cover the six domains of knowledge, application, judgment, communication, learning skills, and attitude as stated in the Teaching and Examination Regulation and the Assessment Programme. They are carefully developed, reflect the programme's overall vision and aims, and are strategically aligned with the Dublin Descriptors, the Dutch DSRF and the AESOP Core Curriculum. Hence, it is fair to state according to the panel that the ILOs are in line with the requirements for master programmes as described in NLQF level 7 and that their formulation reflects the substance (cultural geography), level (master) and orientation (academic) of the programme.

The panel was informed that the formulation of the learning outcomes has not changed since the previous accreditation visit, with the exception that references to the then single track on tourism are now extended to encompass both sustainable tourism and society/climate adaptation. Hence, the ILOs for the current programme with two tracks build on the overall programme outcomes, encompassing knowledge, application, and communication of academic insights in cultural geography on the one hand, and sustainable tourism or climate adaptation on the other.

The panel noticed furthermore that the ILOs are examined regularly by various bodies (programme team, Board of Examiners, Advisory Board) and in different ways, for instance when preparing the Teaching and Examination Regulations, when new courses are introduced, or at internal self-evaluation audits. While most reviews confirmed until now that the ILOs continue to befit an academically-oriented master programme in cultural geography, the most recent internal mid-term audit indicated that some ILOs could be reformulated in such a way that they emphasize more explicitly the respective tracks. While the panel subscribes to this suggestion, it also endorses the decision of the programme team not to implement the changes in view of the forthcoming integrated master programme without tracks. At that moment, the programme will adjust the learning outcomes to befit the new title, focus and profile of the programme.

The panel welcomes the formal integration of 'attitude' as a domain in the ILOs which emphasizes ethical reflection and cultural sensitivity as important graduate attributes. These attributes align with the AESOP Core Curriculum that calls for graduates who are committed to stewardship, democracy, and planetary responsibility. The attention for attitude also aligns with CF's vision on education, notably in so far as ethical reflexivity and engaged citizenship are concerned. Hence, by including attitude as an element of the ILOs, the programme shows good ambition to transform the students' mindset, values and skills by not only equipping them for the labour market but also making them socially responsible global citizens.

Nonetheless, the panel sees room for improvement in so far as the formulation of the attitude ILOs is concerned. In line with the findings of the internal mid-term audit, the panel suggests to formulate these three learning outcomes in a more operational way. Currently, it is not clear from their formulation how an investigative, critical and/or academic attitude is different from skills such as professionalism and critical thinking, and how the three attitude ILOs differ from some of the other ILO statements under judgement and learning skills. Hence, the panel advises the programme to establish what skills, behaviours and outputs are expected from CG students, to integrate the result of this exercise in the respective attitude learning outcomes, and to finetune the ILO formulations in such a way that the demonstration of the attitude can effectively be assessed.

Professional field

Just as any other degree programme at CF, the MSc CG has a dedicated Advisory Board. This body safeguards the relevance of the programme learning outcomes to the evolving nature of cultural geography, sustainable tourism and climate adaptation in the professional field. The panel was informed that the membership of the board has changed over the years, reflecting the disciplinary domain(s) covered by the programme.

Since its transfer to CF, the programme links with local stakeholders (including companies, public bodies and non-governmental organizations) have increased and intensified, leading to new and additional partnerships in the city of Leeuwarden and the wider region of Fryslân. The panel was informed that the Programme Director has been instrumental in strengthening both the connection to local stakeholders and the involvement of the Advisory Board. With regard to the latter, her efforts have resulted among others in two alumni – one from each track – joining the Advisory Board.

The panel spoke to several Advisory Board members on site and noticed that their input is important for the strategic development of the CG programme and its connection to stakeholders in the city and the region. In this way, the Advisory Board fulfils a double role: by discussing the profile, learning outcomes and curriculum of the CG programme, it monitors and safeguards the programme's relevance from an employer / professional perspective. Moreover, as the individual board members are closely connected to the sustainability aspects of tourism and climate governance locally and regionally, they provide the programme with contextually relevant practical case studies and create collaboration opportunities for Dutch – and international – students during and after the programme.

The panel established that the ILOs are aligned with the expectations from both the academic and the professional field, and that the programme has an appropriate system in place to safeguard the relevance of the ILOs from both an academic and an employer perspective. Welcoming the efforts of the programme to set-up an Advisory Board that is representative for the disciplinary domain, the panel suggests to involve the board even more explicitly in the forthcoming programme and curriculum adjustments. In fact, the programme may want to extend the board membership with some senior professionals to help shape the Sustainable Futures narrative and act as its Ambassador. Moreover, the Advisory Board could provide insights into skills that are needed in the labour market.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the MSc Cultural Geography has a clear yet specific profile, befitting learning outcomes, and a functional Advisory Board.

According to the panel, the programme adopts a creative and innovative approach to cultural geography, integrating elements of sustainable tourism and climate adaptation. The specific characteristics of this master programme make it stand out in the Dutch and European higher education landscape. The learning outcomes are formulated adequately and reflect the substance, level and orientation of the MSc CG. The end qualifications befit the programme profile and cover both the scientific and professional requirements of the domain. The current programme team is making good use of the Advisory Board to ensure the continued relevance of the learning outcomes and to enhance the connections to the working field.

In addition to these considerations that altogether warrant a positive judgement on this standard, the panel offers the following suggestions to the MSc CG programme:

- to reformulate the 'attitude' ILOs in such a way that they can be assessed;
- to involve the Advisory Board members in the strategic development and narrative of the forthcoming programme and curriculum adjustments.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the MSc Cultural Geography **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 MSc CG is offered as a one-year full-time 60 EC programme taught in English. The curriculum, which is presented in appendix 2 to this report, consists of core courses (25 EC), intersectional courses (10 EC), track-specific courses (10 EC) and a master thesis (15 EC). The intersectional courses are taken by all students and link cultural geography to tourism and climate. The study load is spread equally over four blocks of 10 weeks each. The content courses are taught in the first three blocks, while the final block is dedicated to the master thesis. To give students sufficient time to execute the thesis research, the research proposal as well as the literature review and the methodology section have recently been rescheduled and are now part of the research design course in the second block.

Taken altogether, the courses present students with knowledge of the core cultural geography domain, and connect this to sustainable tourism and society, as well as climate adaptation governance. Moreover, several courses explore the interplay between tourism and climate adaptation, focusing on how human activities influence and are influenced by cultural and environmental dynamics. This connection between culture, geography and sustainability reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the programme. In addition, CG students participate in educational events and activities, and have plenty of opportunities to meet and network with professionals and researchers. In view of the forthcoming curriculum changes, the panel encourages the programme team to think of preserving a certain geographical lens in the programme in relation to the disciplinary positioning of the new programme.

Overall, the panel found that the content and structure of the curriculum are well designed, providing students with the necessary foundations in core concepts before progressing to research and thesis writing. The curriculum content is built around relevant and timely topics pertaining to climate adaptation governance, tourism and sustainability, cultural heritage, urban innovation, and gendered geographies. Throughout the courses, students build skills such as writing policy briefs, conducting literature reviews, creating surveys, etc. Stakeholder perspectives, fieldwork and case studies are integrated well into the content. While most courses are mandatory, students customize their study through elective pathways, assignments and the master thesis. The topics in the coursework and theses are international in scope, reflect real-world relevance and allow students to develop a breadth of knowledge on current issues in cultural geography. In sum, the curriculum offers a lot of highly relevant content for a one-year master programme, while the balance between thesis and coursework is appropriate.

Studying the programme's Assessment Plan (AP), which explains the assessment and evaluation of the MSc CG curriculum, the panel noticed that there is a clear link between the curriculum and the programme profile (for the latter, see the previous standard). The AP contains among others an overview, as well as a matrix, bringing together the programme learning outcomes and their connection to the learning goals of the individual courses. From these documents, the panel establishes that the learning goals of the respective courses are neatly connected to the learning outcomes at programme level. Furthermore, the panel was informed that the programme team regularly reviews the connection between the course learning goals and the programme learning outcomes, thereby modifying the learning goals where needed. Moreover, the course syllabi which the panel studied prior to the visit are comprehensive, interesting and up-to-date. The course materials show that the ILOs are translated in advanced knowledge, skills and attitudes pertaining to

governance, identity, regional development, and intersectional sustainability. Hence, it is fair to state that the programme delivers what it sets out to do and that students are in the position to achieve the learning outcomes by following the curriculum.

During the site visit, and following its review of the self-evaluation report and the student chapter, the panel discussed in particular four curriculum-related elements: fieldwork, research design, master thesis, and the opportunity for internships. According to the student chapter, the Field Work and Community Engagement course, offered in the first block, is often disliked because students have different levels of experience with research methods. Several students indicated that they were not learning how to do research; the tourism students in particular thought that the cooperation with the external stakeholder, Planbureau Fryslân, was less useful for them. The panel was informed that the programme team acknowledges the concerns of the students and is currently looking into making this course relevant for all students, irrespective of the track they follow and the amount of research experience they bring from their previous study.

The Research Design course is offered to both CF students and master students of the Sustainable Entrepreneurship programme, with the course coordinator having no background in cultural geography. CF students indicated in their course evaluations – and in the student chapter and the site visit session with the panel – that there is a big difference in the backgrounds and interests of the two student groups, as well as in the research approaches for both disciplines. Moreover, there were complaints regarding the (sometimes contradictory) communication by the teaching staff, on the big size of the class, and the sometimes overlapping schedules. The course offers a wide variety of quantitative research workshops, while the offer of qualitative research methods is more limited. Also in this case, the panel was informed that the programme team – and the faculty management – acknowledges the concern of the students. The panel understands that for budgetary reasons, a common course may be necessary; however, the course content should be such that all students benefit from the training and are in a position to acquire both quantitative and qualitative research skills. The panel therefore advises the programme team to revisit the content and organisation of the research design course.

The one-year full-time MSc CF programme is very intensive and culminates in the master thesis, which is scheduled in the fourth and final curriculum block. However, students indicated that they are expected to think about the master thesis right from the very start of the programme and do not always have a good idea of what this entails and how much needs to be done prior to the fourth block. Hence, students suggested in the student chapter that a dedicated information session at the start of the academic year would be helpful. This session could announce what exactly is/will be expected of students, and by when. Given that in the past students were sometimes given contradictory information by supervisors, it is suggested that supervisors are present at the start-up meeting and/or agree to the overall planning arrangements. The panel was informed that the programme team has been looking into this master thesis ‘issue’ and eventually moved the research design course to the second block, starting in the current academic year 2024-2025. In this way, students are informed in time about the master thesis expectations, process and deadlines. The panel welcomes this initiative and calls upon the programme management to evaluate the new set-up as soon as possible.

Although the curriculum does not offer a credit-bearing internship component, students are encouraged to accept opportunities if and when they arise. The panel was informed that until now, students have sometimes joined a company, public body or NGO to work on their master thesis. The panel understands that the current one-year curriculum offers very little room to add a credit-bearing internship. However, the reliance on instructor networks may create unevenness in the student experience as some teaching staff/thesis supervisors are better connected than others. Moreover, students who wish to undertake a

research internship abroad have to pay this from their own expenses. Further to the discussions with staff and management on site, the panel encourages the programme team to continue its efforts in developing standards and guidelines for internships, ensuring that internships are more standardized for students conducting their master's thesis at an external organization.

The panel was informed that the programme curriculum in 2024-2025 differed somewhat from the set-up in previous years and will again change in September 2026. Moreover, every year, individual course contents are revised and adjusted following updates and feedback from students, staff and/or the faculty education monitor. Similarly, the panel noticed that (earlier versions of) the curriculum had been adjusted following the recommendations of the previous accreditation panel and the internal self-evaluation audit. According to the panel, this attention to quality improvement is very much present among programme stakeholders and constitutes an element of quality culture that is shared by faculty and programme management, staff and students.

Language of instruction

The MSc Cultural Geography is taught in English. The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the programme initially also had a Dutch RIO name, but that its language of instruction had always been English. Since 2020, the title of the programme is also only in English.

By offering the programme in English, the MSc CG aligns with the other programmes at CF and the faculty's internationalization policies to have English as language of instruction in all classes and programmes. In this way, all (bachelor and master) programmes at CF attract a diverse cohort of students from various countries who bring unique perspectives shaped by their cultural and contextual backgrounds, enriching peer learning and enabling discussions on both local and global challenges. This diversity in turn fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills, helping students understand how issues are perceived and addressed worldwide. Studying CG in English enhances the knowledge base of students as they gain access to expertise from non-Dutch professionals, scholars and stakeholders. Students, moreover, are better prepared for job positions in an international environment and with a multicultural workforce. The panel was informed that also regional stakeholders recognize the value of an English-taught programme: the presence of international students enhances information exchange and knowledge creation, which in turn is positive for regional growth.

The panel endorses the English name of the Cultural Geography programme, as well as the motivation provided to use English as language of instruction. According to the panel, this choice is appropriate given that the MSc CG is an internationally oriented programme targeting a broad range of international and domestic students, and covering issues of global relevance and interest. The international orientation makes the programme accessible to both Dutch and international students, and allows for greater research opportunities and wider stakeholder collaborations.

Learning environment

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the MSc CG offers interdisciplinary, research-driven, student-centred education with an on-site, community-oriented and international focus. The panel noticed that these features are prominently present throughout the curriculum and align with the teaching philosophy of both university and faculty. The educational vision of the faculty indeed aims to equip learners with the competencies to become globally engaged citizens who lead sustainable transitions. In all its degree programmes – including the MSc CG under review – CF promotes transformative learning for social impact, fosters a diverse and inclusive environment, and actively engages with societal partners.

The panel noticed that all teaching is provided in-person and uses approaches that reflect the small-scale character of the programme. Teaching methods include interactive lectures, student-led sessions, and (online) guest lectures by national and international experts. Active learning takes place through projects and collaborations, visits to stakeholders, and peer feedback.

The discussions on site with staff, students and alumni demonstrated that the educational vision is not a mere paper document, but is effectively practised in day-to-day teaching. Moreover, students and alumni emphasized that the programme manages to create an inclusive and safe environment for all students irrespective of their geographical, cultural and/or educational backgrounds. In this environment students become part of the academic community as they build close connections with their lecturers.

According to the panel, the programme overall features a good mixture of lectures and seminars, while its teaching methods are effectively student-centred, focused on real world issues, and aligned with programme objectives that encourage critical thinking, ethical consciousness, academic independence and originality among students. If anything, the panel found that in relation to the course learning goals and outcomes, the didactic rationale for selecting certain formats of instruction could be better motivated in the course materials.

The panel noticed – and students confirmed during the site visit - that the information provision on the curriculum is well catered for at all stages of the programme: from the open days during the admission process to the introduction day and the research pitch day where students learn about the master thesis process and the thesis supervisors. However, the communication between teaching staff, and from teaching staff to students has not always been flawless. The panel therefore suggests that staff within – and across - courses first agree on deadlines and approaches, and then pass on identical messages to students.

In so far as student wellbeing is concerned, the panel was informed that CG students 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 practical information guide and on the faculty and university websites. The study adviser has a good overview of the services on offer and constitutes the first point of contact for students. She presents the available opportunities, invites students with functional impairments to inform her about any learning or evaluation accommodations they need, and reminds all students again during the first semester of the support that is available.

During the site visit, both staff and students indicated that the programme pays careful attention to the different backgrounds of students, as well as to their specific learning needs. The discussion with students revealed that they know how to reach out to the relevant services in case of personal needs. Hence, it is fair to conclude that the special needs of CG students are taken on board.

The panel gathered from the written materials, including the student chapter, that students sometimes struggle with completing assignments from multiple modules as many deadlines converge around the same moment. Another bottleneck appears at the end of the master thesis process when students have to hand in their thesis. Discussions with students, staff and management indicated that the programme team is aware of the situation and has started to address both bottlenecks. Under the guidance of the programme director, course coordinators are now aligning the deadlines for their respective assignments. Since 2024-2025, the master thesis process starts earlier with students selecting a topic and working on the preparatory phase of the thesis in the second period, i.e. towards the end of the first semester. Students indicated that these recent modifications are likely to mitigate the workload peaks in the respective blocks. The panel welcomes

the attention the programme team is paying to the feasibility of courses and programme, and encourages them to continue on this path.

Admission, intake and success rate

Students enrolling in the MSc CG are diverse in terms of their academic, professional and cultural background. The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that this situation is the result of a conscious policy of the programme team: in addition to students with a domain-specific bachelor's degree (such as Spatial Planning and Design, or Human Geography and Planning), the programme explicitly welcomes students with a comparable or different degree. According to the programme website, direct admission is possible for bachelor graduates with at least 10 EC in statistics and research methods, along with background knowledge in geography. Applicants with other degrees may qualify through an eligibility assessment by the Admission Board, and may be required to complete (elements of) the pre-master to address deficiencies. In all cases, (proof of) English proficiency is required. The MSc CG also attracts a good number of students with a professional bachelor's degree, who are admitted after successfully completing the full pre-master programme. In this regard, there is a fruitful collaboration with the Tourism Management programme at NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences in Leeuwarden, which includes a minor that grants access to the MSc CG.

The panel was informed that the eligibility assessment is taken very seriously by the Admission Board, who decides for each applicant on a tailored pre-master package. Until now, applicants took courses from the pre-master programme at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences in Groningen. Applicants who want to enrol as of September 2025 can follow the recently developed pre-master programme of Campus Fryslân. On explicit request of the panel, the programme team provided more information on this new pre-master after the visit. The materials indicated that the new pre-master focuses on research methods (research questions, theoretical foundations, and research methods) and includes three courses: Statistical Inference, Climate Data, and Qualitative Methods. According to the panel, the pre-master courses seem relevant to prepare a diverse range of applicants for the MSc CG.

The panel endorses the decision of the programme team to target a diverse student body, and is satisfied to notice that this policy is effective as every intake consists of students from a wide range of countries with different educational backgrounds. According to the panel, this shows a genuine commitment on the part of the programme to be inclusive. Moreover, students who are eventually invited to enrol, seem to do well in the programme. This means that the pre-requisites for admission are appropriate, and that the Admissions Board is taking relevant decisions. The additional information on the pre-master programme furthermore gave substance – and confidence – to the preparatory package applicants may have to follow in order to be fully prepared for the MSc CG.

Compared to the previous accreditation, when CG consisted of one track and was still offered by the Faculty of Spatial Sciences, the yearly intake has increased from 9 students in 2019 to an average 17 students in the following years when two tracks were offered. The panel gathered from the discussions on site that such student numbers allow for small-scale teaching and individual thesis supervision, but are too low for structurally maintaining two separate tracks. Hence the decision of the programme team to offer one integrated curriculum with electives as of 2026-2027.

The share of students graduating within the nominal duration of one year differs considerably across the years, ranging from 54% in 2022-2023 to 79% in 2021-2022. Compared to other programmes at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences, these completion rates are quite high. The differences in success rates per year can in part be explained by the relatively low student numbers: in 2022-2023 for instance, 7 out of 13 students

graduated nominally, while four students decided to spread the study over a longer period to combine it with another master or with an internship. The panel was informed that in some cases, the thesis project has led to study delay. As mentioned before, the programme team has adjusted the thesis timeline and supervisors are now paying explicit attention to thesis planning in order to ensure that students start thinking at an earlier stage in the programme about the thesis topic and the deadlines.

Staff

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the MSc CG can rely on a small but diverse and dedicated team of teaching and supervisory staff members. The eight MSc CG staff members have a PhD and are engaged with ongoing research at local, regional or international level, and supervise PhD researchers and master theses. Altogether, teaching staff have extensive education and research expertise in fields such as tourism, climate change, ecology and biodiversity, history and cultural studies, migration, and gender studies. Moreover, five staff hold a University Teaching Qualification, while three are in the process of obtaining the UTQ. The Programme Director is about to obtain a Senior Teaching Qualification.

According to the panel, the diverse research interests, skills and backgrounds of the teaching staff are clearly an asset to the programme. They are actively publishing in fields aligned with the programme and many staff have strong professional networks. Syllabi and course reading lists show that staff successfully integrate current debates and literature into their teaching, which is a clear indicator that teaching is performed on evidence-based research. Moreover, the teaching staff have proper didactical skills as they implement participatory teaching methods, such as student-led discussions, applied case studies, and reflective assignments.

The discussions with students and alumni on site, moreover, confirmed the positive elements that students had already presented in their student chapter: what students like about the programme is that the teaching staff is approachable, supportive and responsive. They greatly appreciate the accessibility of the professors, and the expertise they bring. Moreover, the safe class environment with mutual respect and place for open discussions and active interaction is a great strength. Students like the small yet international classes, the feeling that they are genuinely listened to by peers and professors, and that their opinion is valued. Class discussions are motivational because every student brings in new things based on their individual backgrounds. Students from both tracks moreover emphasised that the track-specific courses are interesting, well-designed and cover a wide range of subjects.

In sum, it is fair to state according to the panel that the teaching staff is properly qualified, motivated, and a very important and much appreciated component of the student journey.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the MSc CG programme operates in a strong teaching-learning environment. This appreciation applies to the relevant curriculum, the befitting learning environment, the appropriate admission criteria, the support services and information provision, and the expertise of the teaching staff on the programme.

The panel endorses the English name of the MSc CG, as well as the decision to offer the master programme in English. The international dimension and orientation of the programme enriches the teaching and learning environment for both Dutch and non-Dutch students.

The panel thinks highly of the curriculum content, and welcomes the changes that have resulted in the current set-up. The syllabi and teaching materials are comprehensive, interesting and up-to-date. There is a clear link between the curriculum and the programme profile, and the learning goals of the respective courses are neatly connected to the learning outcomes at programme level. Hence, the programme delivers what it sets out to do, while students are in a position to achieve the learning outcomes by following the curriculum.

The panel considers that the educational vision of the programme and the faculty is practised effectively in the day-to-day teaching, where students irrespective of their national, cultural, educational or personal background feel safe to contribute to the discussions and become part of the academic community.

According to the panel, the MSc GC can rely on a range of educational and health services that make student life easier. Its commitment to inclusiveness and diversity is particularly visible – and effective - in the admission policy and the diverse cohorts that enrol every year.

The panel considers that the teaching staff is a particularly important asset to the programme: they are properly qualified, highly motivated and much appreciated by students who praise their expertise, responsiveness and support.

Noticing that several elements in the teaching-learning environment have been altered since the previous accreditation, or are on the radar of the current programme team, it is fair to commend the team for their ongoing attention to quality improvement, and all programme stakeholders for their contribution to the quality culture that pervades this MSc CG.

In addition to these considerations that altogether warrant a positive judgement on this standard, the panel offers following suggestions to the MSc CG programme:

- to revisit the organization of the research design course;
- to evaluate and where necessary finetune the recently revised master thesis process;
- to develop standards and guidelines for students who conduct their thesis at an external organization;
- to motivate the didactic rationale for selecting certain instruction formats;
- to agree on common and clear procedures and deadlines among staff within and across courses, and ensure thereupon that identical messages are communicated to students.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the MSc Cultural Geography **meets** 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 that the MSc CG is well embedded in the assessment policies and procedures at Campus Fryslân and the University of Groningen. The panel looked into the assessment documents that were put at disposition by the programme and found these to be comprehensive and relevant. The Assessment Programme in particular is a useful document that links the programme learning

outcomes to the course learning goals, and lists the different assessment modes and their weight per course. The combination of assessment formats per course is chosen in relation to the type of course learning goals that need to be demonstrated. The overall rationale is that assessments serve to evaluate that students achieve the course learning goals and ultimately the programme learning outcomes.

The programme's vision on student assessment consists of creating a dynamic and supportive learning environment where students take an active role in their educational journey. During this journey, assessment is not merely a means of evaluation but a tool for learning, critical engagement, and skill development. The programme fosters analytical thinking, encouraging students to learn from mistakes, and promoting academic integrity are essential to achieving meaningful educational outcomes. The panel subscribes to this vision on assessment, which befits the programme's and faculty's approach to education.

In order to realize this vision, the programme integrates both formative and summative assessments to guide and enhance student learning. These assessments are designed to be valid, reliable, transparent, and efficient. In this way, they accurately measure student progress, maintain consistency, provide clear expectations, and optimize learning outcomes. Formative assessments - such as presentations, group activities, and assignments - are embedded throughout courses to track student progress, provide structured feedback from faculty and peers, and support ongoing improvement. Summative assessments take the form of a final assignment at the end of each course and serve as a comprehensive measure of student achievement. By progressively building skills through formative assessments, students gain deeper insights into their learning process and are better equipped to demonstrate their competencies.

The panel gathered from the discussions on site that students are indeed assessed through both formative and summative assessments. However, the assessment materials shared with the panel seem to focus mainly on the summative forms of assessment. While students, alumni and staff pointed to several cases of ungraded formative assessments where students are peer reviewed or receive instructor feedback without the fear and anxiety of losing marks, these instances can be made more explicit in the course syllabi and the Assessment Programme. The panel therefore advises the course coordinators and the programme team to update the respective course/programme documents, where applicable.

Considering the different courses and their assessment modes, the panel established that assessments are varied and distributed in a balanced way across the individual modules and the overall curriculum. The various assessment formats (group work, policy briefs, fieldwork, thesis, presentations, reports and essays) match the diversity of competencies students are expected to acquire at master level. The panel endorses the approach of the programme to use different assessment formats and grading moments within a module rather than putting all the weight in one or two 'heavy' assessments.

During the site visit, the panel discussed among others the rationale for including in-class participation as a method of assessment in certain courses. While the clarification provided by staff and students was informative, the panel found that in several cases the didactical justification for this assessment method, as well as the evaluation criteria to assign a grade, was missing from the programme materials. Hence, the panel advises the course coordinators and the programme team to make this more explicit in the applicable modules. Currently, the syllabus for the Critical Approaches to Cultural Heritage and Identity module provides a good quality rubric as to how in-class participation is graded from minimal to excellent, and could serve as good practice for the other courses as it ranks the level of engagement, feedback quality and contribution to peer learning.

Another topic for discussion was the way the MSc CG programme addresses the (impact of the) developments in Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) on both education and assessment. The programme's approach is based on the UG policy on AI in teaching from December 2023 and stipulates that by default, using GenAI tools such as ChatGPT for substituting work is not allowed. Other forms of usage may be allowed if they comply with the UG policy. Moreover, integrating GenAI assistance in the academic writing process should be guided by the student commitment to transparency and integrity. The panel was informed that currently, the MSc CG programme does not include AI-related teaching. However, this may change due to the increasing application of AI and the evolving research profiles within the faculty and the programme. The critical use of AI is introduced in the syllabi briefly and students are also guided to familiarize themselves with the university wide instructions. In order to ensure consistency in the use of AI, there have been several conversations with the Board of Examiners, where they reviewed, commented and approved the brief instruction that is included in the syllabi.

The panel on the one hand subscribes to the approach of the programme, the faculty and the university. On the other hand, the broader issue of AI in academic writing is a growing concern that needs to be addressed openly. While the university's central AI policy makes it clear that AI cannot substitute a student's own work, the distinction between assistive and generative AI is not always obvious. Hence, the panel suggests the programme and the faculty to consider introducing workshops for students and staff on responsible AI use, and require students to reflect in assignments on why and how they are using AI tools.

Thesis assessment

The MSc CG culminates in a master thesis. Its assessment is the final step to evaluate the achievement of the programme learning outcomes. Every CG thesis is assessed by a first and a second reader who belong to the programme team and perform their assessment individually using the same standard rubric. When both assessors agree that the thesis is of sufficient quality, the student defends the thesis in an oral examination, which is graded separately and counts for 5% of the total grade. The passing grade is 5.5. When the written thesis is judged to be insufficient, students are offered a second opportunity; in this case the successfully repaired thesis is graded with a 6. Students know about the thesis process and its evaluation criteria as these are described extensively in the student thesis handbook.

As part of its external assessment, the panel reviewed a sample of 15 master theses and their completed evaluation forms. The theses were selected among 48 graduation projects submitted in the academic years 2021-2022, 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The quality of the theses will be addressed under the next standard. In so far as the quality of the thesis assessment is concerned, the panel noticed that the master thesis handbook provides a comprehensive guide for the structure of the thesis and its components. Fairness and balance are built into the marking process through the two independent markers, the oral defence, and a second repair opportunity. The thesis assessment form is comprehensive, the evaluation criteria are relevant, the scoring levels self-explanatory, and the weighting of the criteria is appropriate. Moreover, the evaluation form allows for written feedback from both assessors on each criterion. In sum, the panel established that the framework for assessing the master thesis is well in place.

Looking at the completed evaluation forms, the panel reported that it had mixed feelings. On the one hand, the quantitative part in each form had been completed properly and in almost all cases, the panel agreed to the overall score provided by the assessors, as well as to their scores on the respective criteria. On the other hand, the panel members observed quite some variation in the size and the informative quality of the written feedback underpinning the quantitative assessments. In particular the written feedback from the second assessor was sometimes very limited. Moreover, some supervisors seemed to be more generous in their marking than others.

While being overall satisfied with the result of the thesis assessment, the panel sees room for further improvement. According to the panel, there is a lot to be gained with minimal additional effort, for instance by organizing a calibration session. During this session, prospective assessors could agree on a common understanding of the scoring levels and set common expectations with regard to the size and informative quality of their written feedback.

Quality assurance

The panel gathered from the written materials that a faculty-wide Board of Examiners is safeguarding the assessment quality of the MSc CG. The Board consists of six members, including a chair and an external member, and is supported by an administrative and a formal secretary. The Board representatives indicated to the panel that they feel supported by the Faculty and have the appropriate expertise to fulfil their tasks in an independent way. These tasks are manifold and diverse, including among others supervising course assessments, ensuring compliance with the Teaching and Examination Regulation, appointing examiners, and providing instructions on plagiarism and AI.

During the site visit, the panel spoke to three representatives of the Board of Examiners and noticed that they are indeed well qualified to fulfil their tasks. While being a faculty-wide body, the members were well aware of the specific situation in the MSc CG programme. The Board mentioned to the panel that there is little to report on the performance of the MSc CG programme in so far as potentially problematic issues (e.g. hearings on fraud cases) are concerned. It moreover assured the panel that it is attentively following up on the recent and forthcoming changes to the MSc CG curriculum, and their impact on student assessment and programme learning outcomes.

Based on its preparatory work on the programme materials and the thesis review, the panel raised two issues with the Board of Examiners: the operationalization of the 'attitude' ILOs and the feedback in the thesis evaluation forms. In both cases, the Board of Examiners had come to similar findings and informed the panel that it had addressed these with the programme director prior to the site visit. With regard to the attitude ILOs, the Board had suggested to either drop these programme learning outcomes or to codify these in course learning goals. While the most recent internal thesis review did not give raise to serious concerns, the Board had noticed the variance in written feedback and shared the 'mixed feelings' of the panel. The Board agreed that a calibration session might improve the quality of the thesis evaluation feedback.

In sum, the panel established that the Board of Examiners plays a proactive role in providing quality control and in safeguarding the integrity and standards of the assessment processes, which it does in full agreement with the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act. It has taken appropriate action on academic integrity challenges such as academic misconduct, AI tools, and grade fairness. It evaluated programme courses and advised on the better use of rubrics, adherence to PLOs, transparency in resit procedures for modules, accessibility considerations, and so on. Moreover, the panel welcomes the broad range of disciplinary expertise that is present within the Board of Examiners and facilitates a more contextualised response to module-related challenges in assessments and thesis evaluations. The inclusion of an external member further enhances the independence and impartiality of the Board and contributes to good practice. Hence, the panel is convinced that the assessment quality of the MSc CG is in safe hands with the Board of Examiners.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the MSc CG can rely on a robust system of assessment that is embedded in policies and practices of the faculty and the university. The programme's

vision on assessment befits the approach to education of both the MSc CG and the faculty. The Assessment Programme safeguards that course learning goals are assessed adequately and cover the programme learning outcomes. The panel appreciates the mixture of individual and group assignments, written exams, and formative and summative evaluations that are distributed in a balanced way across the modules and match the diversity of competencies students are expected to acquire.

The panel is very positive about the framework that is currently in place for assessing the MSc CG master thesis. The assessment format is transparent, relevant and the grading by the assessors aligns in almost all cases with the appraisal of the panel members. Many evaluation forms, moreover, are completed in an insightful way and include written feedback motivating the scores.

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

In addition to these considerations that altogether warrant a positive judgement on this standard, the panel offers the following suggestions to the MSc CG programme:

- to describe the didactical rationale for including in-class participation as one of the assessment modes in a given module, and how students are graded on this component;
- to update the course materials and programme documents on instances of ungraded formative assessments;
- to introduce workshops for students and staff on responsible AI use;
- to organize calibration sessions for thesis assessors to agree on the scoring levels and to manage expectations regarding the size and informative quality of their written feedback.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the MSc Cultural Geography **meets** standard 3.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

There are two ways to establish whether the intended learning outcomes have been achieved: by reviewing the quality of the final projects and by looking at the professional whereabouts of the alumni after their graduation. The panel has looked at both elements when assessing the quality of this master programme in Cultural Geography.

Thesis quality

The master thesis (15 EC) is the ultimate “proof of the pudding” through which students demonstrate that they have achieved the programme ILOs. While the master thesis is scheduled in the final curriculum block, CG students start considering their research topic and the thesis preparations early in the academic year. The master thesis handbook plays an important role in guiding students throughout the entire thesis trajectory.

As part of its external assessment, the panel reviewed a sample of 15 CG master theses which were representative for the graduation projects submitted in the academic years 2021-2022, 2022-2023 and 2023-

2024. Overlooking the sample, which contained a healthy spread in final scores, the panel found that each master thesis – including the ones with a lower score – undoubtedly deserved to pass as they met at least the minimum criteria for a final project at academic master level.

Panel members reported that the thesis topics were original, creative, and well aligned with the thematic scope of the programme. While some did better than others, all students demonstrated an ability to formulate research questions, engage critically with literature, apply a range of research methods, and analyse their results. Ethical issues were addressed appropriately. Moreover, all students showed through the thesis a strong thematic engagement with topics like tourism, place attachment, adaptation, identity, or governance.

When students were not very strong in connecting their findings back to the original research questions or were overly descriptive rather than analytical, then assessors rightly marked the thesis down. Moreover, the panel noticed that some theses on the lower end of the spectrum were missing complete abstracts, a clearly articulated conceptual framework, or contained only limited data triangulation.

The panel was informed that some students go on to produce co-authored papers that are based on their master thesis research. The panel is convinced that some of the better quality theses it reviewed certainly qualify for a similar follow-up. Moreover, some of the students in the sample demonstrated the capacity to embark on a PhD trajectory.

Having established that each thesis in the review meets the minimum criteria for a final master project of academic orientation, it is fair to state that students who successfully pass the thesis achieve the MSc CG programme learning outcomes.

Graduate performance

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that MSc CG graduates tend to do very well on the labour market. The employability of graduates and the range of skills they display is evident from the overview of alumni positions the panel studied prior to the visit. In fact, graduates take up various positions and with a wide range of employers, ranging from municipalities over research institutes to international non-governmental organizations. According to the panel, this variety reflects the relevance and applicability of the education students received at the CG programme in Leeuwarden.

The panel furthermore noticed that several graduates have used their master thesis research to contribute to local and regional policy discussions after graduation, such as liveability in Ameland and environmental governance through urban greening. According to the panel, this proves that the programme equips students to translate their academic training into real-world practice that generates impact.

The panel was informed that several alumni remain connected to the programme after their graduation and return from time to time to Campus Fryslân as guest speakers, providers of case studies and internship opportunities, or as members of the Advisory Board. These interactions reveal the warm and supportive long-term relationships between the programme staff and the students/graduates.

Moreover, the programme alumni the panel spoke to during the site visit confirmed the above-mentioned findings. The teaching staff are not only proud of their graduates, but also thankful for the continued engagement of some of its alumni in the programme. The panel learned that the programme team would like to stay in touch with more alumni and involve them more actively in the study of the CG students and the life of the programme. Hence, an alumni reunion is planned in the academic year 2025-2026 and would serve

as a networking opportunity for students, graduates and programme staff. The panel welcomes this initiative and encourages the programme to use this event as a lever for a more elaborate alumni policy.

In fact, the panel noticed that there is room for a more systematic follow-up of programme alumni. While the programme keeps track of its alumni through a LinkedIn page, current data on alumni is rather sparse and anecdotal. Hence, the panel thinks that the programme would benefit from collecting data on the professional whereabouts of its alumni. Similarly, it could retrieve information on the factors that help or hinder alumni in their job application processes, as well as their first and following employment positions. This information, in turn, is useful to identify employability trends, to diversify alumni guest lectures, and to share with CG students who are preparing for the labour market.

Having established that the programme does a very good job in preparing its students for employment in a variety of fields, it is fair to state that graduates demonstrate the end qualifications of an academic master in Cultural Geography.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the intended learning outcomes are assessed and demonstrated in a systematic way: students who graduate the MSc CG have effectively acquired all intended learning outcomes, while programme graduates find suitable employment at master level and related to the domain of their study.

The thesis review demonstrated that the graduation projects were invariably of sufficient to good quality, and that thesis topics were original, creative and well aligned with the thematic scope of the programme. Moreover, all students showed the ability to formulate research questions, engage critically with literature, apply a range of research methods, analyse their results and address ethical issues.

The panel thinks highly of the employment positions programme alumni take up after graduation. They find jobs that are commensurate with the domain and the level of their study, and do so in a variety of positions and with a broad range of public, private and non-governmental employers. CG students are well prepared for employment, and CG graduates prove to be successful in their professional careers.

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

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the MSc Cultural Geography **meets** standard 4.

General conclusion

The panel established that the MSc Cultural Geography **meets** 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 programme is **positive**.

Recommendations

In addition to its overall positive judgement, the panel identified a few points for development. It recommends the MSc CG programme to:

- reformulate the 'attitude' ILOs in such a way that they are better measurable;
- revisit the organization of the research design course;
- describe the didactical rationale for including in-class participation as an assessment mode;
- organize calibration sessions for thesis assessors;
- involve Advisory Board members in the strategic development of the forthcoming programme and curriculum adjustments.

Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

Knowledge and understanding - Upon completion of the programme, graduates

- A) have acquired sufficient knowledge and understanding in the field of cultural geography so that they can make a substantial and original contribution to the development and/or implementation of ideas, particularly with regard to research.
- B) have knowledge at the level of international academic publications of the theories, methodologies and techniques, and ethical foundations of the field of cultural geography, and that they develop the capacity to interpret this knowledge in context.
- C) are able to form a critical assessment of the relationships between theoretical concepts, research methods and empirical findings in international academic publications in the field of cultural geography; and within the track related to sustainable tourism and society/climate adaptation governance in particular.
- D) are independently able to employ specific research and analysis methods within the field of cultural geography.
- E) are able to make an independent contribution to increasing knowledge for the benefit of the field of cultural geography; and within the track the field of sustainable tourism and society/climate adaptation governance in particular.
- F) are able to recognize paradigms within the discipline as well as the conditions in which these are considered applicable.

Applying knowledge and understanding - Upon completion of the programme, graduates

- A) are able to apply the knowledge and understanding and problem solving abilities they have gained in new or unknown situations within wider contexts related to the field of cultural geography; and within the track related to the field of sustainable tourism and society/climate adaptation governance in particular.
- B) are able to integrate knowledge and understanding and apply them to complex problems.
- C) are able to integrate ethical, normative and expressive ways of thinking in cultural geography into their academic approach.
- D) have an understanding and a view of the application possibilities and limitations of the discipline in general and cultural geography in particular.
- E) are able independently to direct and perform research, whether or not in an interdisciplinary context.
- F) are able to initiate pioneering research.
- G) are able to apply theoretical insights within the field to the analysis of concrete issues in the field of cultural geography.
- H) are able to work across disciplines and thereby translate the contribution of their own discipline to other disciplines.
- I) are able to reason logically and independently formulate and analyse a problem and create a solution-driven synthesis; within the track related to sustainable tourism and society/climate adaptation governance challenges in particular.
- J) are able to reflect on the diversity and complexity of social structures and processes, as well as on interactions with environmental structures and processes.
- K) are able to debate the latest developments within the field and the consequences thereof for society.

Making judgements - Upon completion of the programme, graduates

- A) are able to make judgements based on incomplete or limited information, bearing in mind social and ethical responsibilities.
- B) demonstrate originality when critically reflecting on their personal academic conduct.

- C) are able to critically reflect on ways of reasoning, arguments and points of view.
- D) have learned to evaluate and critically assess the scope of spatial impacts from planning intervention.
- E) have developed an open and critical attitude to new ideas and developments within the field of cultural geography.

Communication - Upon completion of the programme, graduates

- A) are able to clearly and straightforwardly present conclusions as well as the knowledge and motives behind them to specialist and non-specialist audiences, both in oral and written form.

Learning skills - Upon completion of the programme, graduates

- A) have developed the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.
- B. have learned to independently and critically continue to follow the relevant developments within their field after graduation.

Attitude - Upon completion of the programme, graduates

- A) have developed an investigative and critical attitude to content and to new ideas and developments within the field of cultural geography, i.e. graduates will be able to take a stand; and within the track with respect to sustainable tourism and society/climate adaptation governance issues.
- B) have developed an academic attitude in order to be able to work professionally in relevant social and academic positions.
- C) have acquired an attitude that allows them to continue to develop in the field of cultural geography.

Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

Semester	Course unit name	ECTS
1a	Core course: Critical Approaches to Cultural Heritage and Identity	5
1a	Core course: Field Work Community Engagement	5
1a	CAG track: Adaptation Governance	5
1a	STS track: Critical Tourism Studies	5
1b	Core (shared) course: Research Method Course (offered as a shared class together with the master students in Sustainable Entrepreneurship)	5
1b	Intersectional course: Gendered Geographies	5
1b	CAG track: Urban Adaptation and Innovation	5
1b	STS track: Critical Tourism and Regional Planning	5
2a	Intersectional course: Nature Based Solutions	5
2a	Core course: Geographies of Migration	5
2a	Core course: Social Impact Assessment – Data and Representation	5
2b	Thesis	15

Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

Location: Campus Fryslân Leeuwarden

Thursday 22 May 2025

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

Appendix 4. Materials

MSc Cultural Geography. Self-evaluation report, RUG Leeuwarden 2025.

- Introduction
- Intended learning outcomes
- Teaching methods and workload
- Assessment
- Achieved learning outcomes
- Student chapter
- SWOT analysis
- Future developments

Appendices, made available online:

- Alumni information
- Midterm review
- Audit 2019
- Organizational structure of the faculty/organogram
- Teaching and Exam regulations
- Assessment programme
- Advisory Board
- CF vision and strategy documents
- Programme learning outcomes
- Domain specific reference framework
- AESOP framework
- Comparison other CG programmes in the Netherlands
- European level master programmes on sustainable tourism and climate
- Matrix learning outcomes and courses
- Course overview 2024-2025
- CG policy on AI
- Programme design – course descriptors
- Previous education students
- Information and marketing materials
- CG Onderwijskaart
- Overview staff team
- Quality assurance protocols
- Education monitor
- Programme Committee annual report 2023-2024
- Board of Examiners annual report 2023-2024
- Student thesis handbook
- Information on the pre-master programme

Prior to the site visit, the panel reviewed 15 CF graduation works among the 48 master theses which had been successfully submitted in the academic years 2021-2022, 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The sample was representative in terms of final scores and the four tracks on offer during this period: Climate Adaptation Governance (5), Sustainable Tourism and Society (3), Cultural Geography (2), and Geography and Planning (5). Information on the theses is available from Academion upon request.