academion

B Liberal Arts and Sciences
University College Utrecht
Utrecht University

Contents

Summary

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

UCU is an academic community committed to liberal arts and sciences education, promoting personal growth, professional advancement and active citizenship through an open curriculum and international environment. The bachelor's programme covers disciplines in the humanities, social sciences and sciences. Based on the documentation and interviews, the panel observed continued actions towards strengthening interdisciplinary elements. The panel acknowledges the importance of interprofessional skills for the future and encourages the implementation of the proposed project actions to promote disciplinary reflection, integration and the option of graduating with an interdisciplinary thesis, as outlined in the revised vision on interdisciplinarity.

The panel concludes that the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) meet Standard 1 as they are well aligned with UCU's concept of a liberal arts and sciences programme, meet the requirements of the discipline and correspond with the Dublin descriptors at bachelor's level. The programme demonstrates an above-average level of ambition, seeking both academic breadth and depth, with a strong focus on personal development, international and intercultural orientation, and community engagement, which is consistent with Criterion A of 'small scale and intensive education'.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

UCU offers a well-structured Liberal Arts & Sciences programme with a clear focus on student-centred education, broad learning and critical thinking, in line with the programme's profile and learning outcomes. The degree requirements are designed to ensure academic competence, sufficient disciplinary grounding, and breadth and interdisciplinary exposure. Students are encouraged to design their own course of study in the humanities, social sciences or sciences, with a broad foundation in the first year, followed by in-depth study in the second year and specialization in the third year, including a thesis. This open curriculum allows students to pursue individual academic interests while developing a broad knowledge base with sufficient disciplinary grounding, a wide range of skills and a global perspective. The panel commends UCU for its curriculum renewal projects, with an increased emphasis on interdisciplinarity, community engagement and innovation. For GenAI, the panel suggests a balanced approach and recommends further exploration of its responsible use through pilot projects to ensure it complements academic development.

The small-scale, intensive learning environment is a key strength of UCU. With an average class size of 21 students, the programme fosters close interaction between students and teaching staff, enhancing student engagement and promoting a sense of community. The panel also observed that UCU offers a wide range of teaching formats, including lectures, tutorials, and collaborative group work. Furthermore, UCU's campus provides a suitable setting for a liberal arts education, offering modern classrooms, study areas, and student residences that support both academic and extracurricular activities. The integration of extracurricular activities further enriches the learning environment and supports the holistic development of students.

The UCU teaching staff is well qualified and the teacher-scholar model ensures a clear link between teaching and research, while UU faculty further contribute to the breadth and depth in the disciplines. The panel appreciates how teaching staff are also actively involved in educational innovation, often co-creating the curriculum with students. They are highly regarded by students.

The panel believes that the admissions process and requirements are appropriate for selecting motivated and talented students attracted by the small-scale, intensive learning environment at UCU. The panel notes

that UCU provides robust student support through its tutor system, which offers individualized academic and personal guidance throughout the three-year programme. Additional resources, such as the Connect Centre for student well-being, the Writing and Skills Center, and the Futures Centre for career guidance, are also valued by students. The panel commends UCU's efficient support structure, but is concerned that there is little scope for further reductions in the face of impending budget cuts. Although the panel commends the programme's efforts to address workload pressures and foster a balanced, supportive learning environment, continued attention to this issue is needed. The panel therefore recommends that UCU monitor the impact of the initiatives to improve student well-being, ensuring a healthy balance between academic rigour and well-being, while addressing the pressures of the culture of excellence.

The panel concludes that the programme meets Standard 2: UCU creates a collaborative, vibrant international community of dedicated staff and motivated students, supported by a flexible, student-centred curriculum and a robust student support system. While some areas require continued attention, such as a healthy balance between academic rigour and well-being and GenAI developments, the panel found that UCU provides a high-quality learning environment that supports student success.

Standard 3. Student assessment

On the basis of the documentation and the on-site discussions, the panel concludes that UCU has a comprehensive assessment system, which is embedded in UCU and university-wide provisions and policies, and promotes both summative and formative learning and assessment. The course assignments and exams are varied and appropriate to assess the learning goals, and transparent in terms of requirements, formats and assessment criteria. Continuous assessment requires commitment from staff and students, but the panel agrees that the benefits outweigh the drawbacks and that it promotes student engagement and encourages continuous feedback, which enhances the learning process. The panel noted in its thesis sample quite some variation in the completion of thesis assessment forms, and recommends to ensure that all examiners complete the thesis assessment forms thoroughly. Nevertheless, it is clear to the panel that the programme demonstrates a commitment to transparency and quality in assessment practices. The examination board plays a valuable role in ensuring consistency and rigour across the disciplines through monitoring and collaboration, including the benchmarking of theses. The external member further enhances the oversight of assessment practices across the disciplinary 'tracks'. Overall, the panel concludes that the EB operates effectively with sufficient checks and balances, although with a little more facilitation the EB could more firmly establish its safeguarding role and expand on its course sampling. The programme's assessment practices reflect a thoughtful approach to ensuring academic standards and supporting student success. On the basis of these observations, the panel concludes that the programme meets the requirements of Standard 3.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The panel reviewed a selection of theses and found them to meet the academic standard for a bachelor's degree. On the basis of the documentation, the panel found that UCU graduates are well prepared for further study; most graduates continue their studies in master's programmes, often in highly ranked programmes and about a quarter go on to PhD programmes. Combined with the positive assessment of the programme's success rates discussed under 'Feasibility and success rates' in Standard 2, the panel concludes that UCU graduates achieve the intended learning outcomes of the programme. These findings lead the panel to conclude that the programme meets the criteria for Standard 4.

Score table

The panel assesses the programme as follows:

Bachelor's programme Liberal Arts and Sciences (University College Utrecht)

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 panel assesses the Distinctive Feature Small-scale and Intensive Education of the bachelor's programme Liberal Arts and Sciences (University College Utrecht) as follows:

Criterion A: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Criterion B: Curriculum – contents	meets the standard
Criterion C: Curriculum – learning environment	meets the standard
Criterion D: Intake	meets the standard
Criterion E: Staff	meets the standard
Criterion F: Facilities	meets the standard
Criterion G: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard
General conclusion	positive

Em. prof. dr. Ton van Haaften, panel chair   Dr. Irene Conradie, panel secretary
Date: 16 January 2025

Introduction

Procedure

Assessment

On 17, 18 and 19 September 2024, the bachelor's programme Liberal Arts and Sciences at University College Utrecht, the Faculty of Humanities of Utrecht University, and University College Roosevelt were assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment Liberal Arts and Sciences. The assessment cluster consisted of nine bachelor's programmes, offered by University College Twente (University of Twente), Leiden University College (Leiden University), Amsterdam University College (University of Amsterdam/Vrije University Amsterdam), University College Roosevelt, University College Utrecht and the School of Liberal Arts (Utrecht University), Erasmus University College (Erasmus University Rotterdam), University College Groningen (University of Groningen), University College Maastricht, University College Venlo and the Maastricht Science Programme (Maastricht University) and University College Tilburg (Tilburg University). The assessment followed the procedure and standards of the NVAO Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (valid from 1 April 2024). It also applied the Criteria Pertaining to Distinctive Feature of Small-scale and Intensive Education (also published in the *Uitvoeringsregels Accreditatiestelsel Hoger Onderwijs Nederland*, September 2024).

Quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment upon request of the cluster Liberal Arts and Sciences. Fiona Schouten acted as cluster coordinator and panel secretary. Peter Hildering, Irene Conradie and Adrienne Wieldraaijer-Huijzer also acted as panel secretaries in the cluster assessment. They have all been certified and registered by the NVAO. Irene Conradie acted as panel secretary for the assessment of the programmes of Utrecht University.

The Utrecht University Liberal Arts and Sciences bachelor's programme consists of three separate programmes: Liberal Arts and Sciences at the Faculty of Humanities (LAS), Liberal Arts and Sciences at University College Utrecht (UCU) and Liberal Arts and Sciences at University College Roosevelt (UCR). Each of these is referred to in this report as a separate programme. The focus is here on UCU.

Preparation

Academion composed the peer review panel in cooperation with the institution and the programmes, taking into account the expertise and independence of the members as well as consistency within the cluster. On 9 April 2024, the NVAO approved the composition of the panel. The coordinator instructed the panel chair on his role in the site visit according to the Panel chair profile (NVAO 2016).

A site visit schedule was prepared by representatives of each programme in consultation with the coordinator (see Appendix 3). The programmes selected representative partners for the various interviews. They also decided that the development dialogue would be made part of the site visit in the form of thematic sessions. A separate development report was prepared on the basis of this dialogue. The programmes prepared individual information files.

The programme management at University College Utrecht provided the cluster coordinator with a list of graduates for the period July 2022 – August 2023. In consultation with the cluster coordinator, the chair of the panel selected 15 theses from the programme. They took into account the diversity of final grades and examiners as well as the different majors in the programme. Two theses were selected from the Humanities major, three theses from the Science major, six theses from the Social Science major, and four theses with a

double or combined major. The selection included two theses from students with a double degree. Prior to the site visit, the programme provided the panel with the theses and the associated assessment forms. It also provided the panel with an information file and additional materials (see Appendix 4).

The panel members studied the information and sent their findings to the secretary. The student member did not study the theses. The secretary summarized the panel's questions and comments in a document and shared it with the panel members. In a preliminary meeting, the panel discussed the initial findings on the information file and the theses, as well as the division of tasks during the site visit. The panel was also briefed on the assessment frameworks, the working method and the planning of the site visits and reports.

Site visit

During the site visit, the panel interviewed various representatives of the three programmes (see Appendix 3). The panel also offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour. There was one request for the UCU consultation hour and the panel had an online meeting with this person prior to the site visit. 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

Following the site visit, the secretary wrote a draft report for each programme based on the panel's findings. These reports are structured according to the four NVAO standards, and for the programmes at University College Roosevelt and University College Utrecht, the seven criteria of the Small-Scale and Intensive Education distinctive feature are also included in the discussion of the respective standards for the bachelor programme. The Liberal Arts and Sciences programme of the Faculty of Humanities does not have a distinctive feature Small-Scale and Intensive Education, so that its report only discusses the four NVAO standards.

The full and combined report was first submitted to the cluster coordinator at Academion for peer assessment and then to the panel for feedback. After processing this feedback, the cluster coordinator sent the draft report to the programmes in order to check for factual irregularities. The secretary discussed the comments received with the panel chair and changes were made accordingly. The panel then finalized the report, and the coordinator sent it to the Faculty of Humanities, University College Roosevelt and University College Utrecht and Utrecht University.

Panel

The following panel members were involved in the cluster assessment:

- Em. prof. dr. T. (Ton) van Haaften, professor emeritus at the Leiden University Centre for Linguistics of Leiden University [panel chair];
- Em. prof. dr. L. (Laurent) Boetsch, professor emeritus in Romance Languages at Washington and Lee University in Virginia (United States) and founding executive co-director and president emeritus of the European Consortium of Liberal Arts and Sciences (ECOLAS) [panel chair Leiden University];
- Dr. S. (Samuel) Abraham, rector/president of and professor in Political Science at the Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts (Slovakia);
- Prof. dr. M.K. (Marlies) Van Bael, professor in Chemistry at Hasselt University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. S.B. (Stéphanie) Balme, director of the Center for International Studies (CERI) of the research university Sciences Po (France);
- Prof. dr. W.J.P. (Wim) Beenakker, professor in High Energy Physics at Radboud University;
- Prof. dr. H. (Helen) Brookman, professor of Liberal Arts & Interdisciplinary Education at King's College London (United Kingdom);
- Em. prof. dr. G. (Gerda) Croiset, professor emeritus and former dean of Education and Training in Health and Life Sciences at the University of Groningen;
- Dr. M.M.T.E. (Maud) Huynen, assistant professor at the Maastricht Sustainability Institute of Maastricht University;
- Dr. W.D.B.H.M. (Wim) Lambrechts, associate professor at the Faculty of Management of the Open University;
- Dr. B. (Bente) Nørgaard, associate professor at the Center for Problem-based Learning in Engineering Science and Sustainability of Aalborg University (Denmark);
- Em. prof. dr. J. (Janneke) Plantenga, professor emeritus in Economics of Public Welfare at Utrecht University;
- Dr. Ing. S. (Sabine) Sané, lecturer in Earth and Environmental Sciences at University College Freiburg (Germany);
- Prof. dr. J. (Jenny) Slatman, professor in Medical & Health Humanities at Tilburg University;
- Prof. mr. dr. H.S. (Sanne) Taekema, professor in Jurisprudence at the Erasmus University Rotterdam;
- Prof. dr. J. (Jolanda) Vanderwal Taylor, professor in Dutch and German at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (United States);
- Prof. UAS. dr. J.I.A. (Irene) Visscher-Voerman, professor of applied sciences in Innovative and Effective Education at Saxion University of Applied Sciences;
- Prof. dr. H. (Henrik) von Wehrden, professor of Normativity of Methods at Leuphana University Lueneburg (Germany);
- N.B. (Nara) Coutinho, bachelor's student Liberal Arts and Sciences at University College Venlo (Maastricht University) [student member];
- M. (Milan) Gomes BSc, master's student Educational Science and Technology at University of Twente [student member].
- B.L. (Borbála Lucy) Karvalits, bachelor's student Liberal Arts and Sciences at Erasmus University College (Erasmus University Rotterdam) [student member];
- J.G. (Jamie) Wolvekamp, bachelor's student Liberal Arts and Sciences at University College Tilburg (Tilburg University) [student member].

The panel assessing the bachelor's programme Liberal Arts and Sciences at University College Utrecht of Utrecht University consisted of the following members:

- Em. prof. dr. T. (Ton) van Haaften, professor emeritus at the Leiden University Centre for Linguistics of Leiden University [panel chair];
- Em. prof. dr. G. (Gerda) Croiset, professor emeritus and former dean of Education and Training in Health and Life Sciences at the University of Groningen;
- Prof. dr. J. (Jolanda) Vanderwal Taylor, professor in Dutch and German at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (United States);
- Prof. UAS. dr. J.I.A. (Irene) Visscher-Voerman, professor of applied sciences in Innovative and Effective Education at Saxion University of Applied Sciences;
- M. (Milan) Gomes BSc, master's student Educational Science and Technology at University of Twente [student member].

All panel members, the secretary and the institution have signed a statement on impartiality and can confirm that the assessment was carried out in complete independence.

Information on the programme

Name of the institution:	Utrecht University
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Programme name:	Liberal Arts and Sciences
CROHO number:	50393
Level:	Bachelor
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	180 EC
Location:	University College Utrecht, Utrecht
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Language of instruction:	English
Submission date NVAO:	1 May 2025

Description of the assessment

Organization

Utrecht University (UU) offers its Liberal Arts and Sciences programme in three separate formats; two honours colleges taught in English (University College Utrecht and University College Roosevelt) and a non-selective, university-wide Liberal Arts and Sciences programme, taught in Dutch.

University College Utrecht (UCU) is a residential liberal arts and sciences college based in Utrecht. The Dean oversees the organization, strategy and educational policy. The management team, consisting of the Dean, the Managing Director, the Director of Education and the Student Assessor, makes key decisions on policy, finance and performance. The Managing Director manages administration, support staff and policy implementation, while the Director of Education oversees curriculum development and quality, working with the Cluster Chairs. UCU's five clusters, led by Cluster Chairs, facilitate collaboration across disciplines.

Fellows responsible for specific academic disciplines work with Cluster Chairs on curriculum innovation. The Board of Studies, chaired by the Director of Education, advises on the curriculum and reviews courses. The Head Tutor oversees the tutorial system and the UCU Council represents the interests of the College, students and staff. The Exam Board consists of five academic members from UCU, each representing a different discipline and cluster, a sixth external member and a secretary. The Advisory Board and Diversity Committee provide additional guidance.

Recommendations previous accreditation panel

The panel found that UCU has generally addressed the recommendations of the previous NVAO panel. These included bringing the role of interdisciplinarity in the programme to the fore, reducing student workload, communicating tutor guidelines clearly from the outset, improving accessibility of buildings, and considering social diversity in various aspects, including admissions. UCU has been working closely with Utrecht University to explore possible long-term solutions for offering laboratory courses off-campus for short periods only. Although these efforts have not yet produced a practical outcome (see below under Standard 2), the panel appreciates UCU's commitment and recognizes that the constraints involved make a solution difficult to achieve. The panel noted that UCU has developed new interdisciplinary level 3 courses, emphasized integration in these courses and offers students the opportunity to write interdisciplinary theses with supervisors from two fields. In addressing student workload, UCU has introduced a new 'credit banking' policy to allow students more flexibility in their planning, and has improved communication about support resources. Furthermore, UCU has improved wheelchair access to buildings and introduced electronic keycard access. In terms of social diversity, UCU has continued its efforts to increase the diversity of its intake and has implemented measures to address unconscious bias in the selection process. These matters are discussed further under Standard 2.

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

UCU aims to provide a rigorous, multidisciplinary education within an international residential community that fosters both academic and personal growth. It offers a three-year bachelor's programme that spans the

humanities, social sciences and sciences, in line with the three majors within the curriculum. The programme encourages students to discover their talents and design their own educational pathways, combining broad exploration with academic depth. In keeping with the liberal arts philosophy, UCU seeks to prepare students for active citizenship. The aim is to equip graduates with the skills and knowledge to address complex global challenges and make meaningful contributions in diverse societal contexts. The mission of UCU is thus aligned with that of Utrecht University.

The panel finds that the core of the programme's vision is clearly reflected in the intended learning outcomes (ILOs). The 16 ILOs, grouped into 9 categories, cover a wide range of knowledge and skills, reflecting well the broad approach of the programme. The ILOs aim to equip graduates with both in-depth disciplinary knowledge and skills as well as 'broad knowledge and interdisciplinary orientation', enabling them to apply theories to academic and societal problems. They also learn critical thinking, research, communication and learning skills. In addition, graduates are trained to be internationally minded, culturally aware and collaborative. They also demonstrate the ability to reflect on their values and make informed decisions after graduation.

The panel notes that UCU's vision and ILOs are a strong reflection of the domain-specific frame of reference, combining academic versatility with personal and social responsibility, with a strong emphasis on learning from multiple disciplines and an international orientation. The links between the ILOs and the Dublin descriptors are convincingly demonstrated in the matrix included in the documentation.

During the visit, the panel discussed with the management the intended level of interdisciplinarity in the programme, also considering the transition from a multidisciplinary to a more interdisciplinary approach. This intended level is referred to as 'interdisciplinary orientation' in the ILOs and further described in a project report on interdisciplinary education at UCU. Based on these discussions, the panel understands the programme's decision to strengthen interdisciplinary elements without defining a stricter learning outcome on interdisciplinarity. It appreciates the programme's focus on disciplinary reflection and integration, recognizing that interprofessional skills, which emphasize collaboration between professionals from different disciplines, as crucial for future success. The panel therefore encourages the continued implementation of the actions towards strengthening interdisciplinary elements described in the project report. The panel commends the programme for its emphasis on future-ready skills, as reflected in the themes raised during the development dialogues, which highlighted the need to adapt the curriculum to address societal challenges and incorporate considerations related to Generative AI. Important issues include the promotion of critical intercultural skills and the balance between integrating Generative AI and maintaining core academic skills, thereby aligning with professional needs while enhancing student learning.

Considerations

UCU is an academic community committed to liberal arts and sciences education, promoting personal growth, professional advancement and active citizenship through an open curriculum and international environment. The bachelor's programme covers disciplines in the humanities, social sciences and sciences. Based on the documentation and interviews, the panel observed continued actions towards strengthening interdisciplinary elements. The panel acknowledges the importance of interprofessional skills for the future and encourages the implementation of the proposed project actions to promote disciplinary reflection, integration and the option of graduating with an interdisciplinary thesis, as outlined in the revised vision on interdisciplinarity.

The panel concludes that the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) are well aligned with UCU's concept of a liberal arts and sciences programme, meet the requirements of the discipline and correspond with the Dublin descriptors at bachelor's level. The programme demonstrates an above-average level of ambition, seeking both academic breadth and depth, with a strong focus on personal development, international and intercultural orientation, and community engagement, which is consistent with Criterion A of 'small scale and intensive education'.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets Standard 1 of the NVAO framework.

The panel concludes that the programme meets Criterion A of the framework for the distinctive feature of "small-scale and intensive education".

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
UCU's Liberal Arts & Sciences programme is a three-year full-time programme, taught in English. The academic year consists of two semesters, a 15-week Fall semester around a one-week Fall break and a 15-week Spring semester around a one-week Spring break. Fall and Spring courses are 7.5 EC courses and students take four courses per semester. Students can also take courses or do internships during the shorter Winter and Summer terms, when a selection of 2.5 EC lab modules as well as 7.5 EC courses are offered.

UCU's educational vision emphasizes broad learning, academic freedom and critical thinking. Students design their own study paths across the humanities, social sciences and sciences. The programme promotes a global perspective to prepare students to approach complex issues from different perspectives. It values close interaction between students and faculty, offering small class sizes and discussion-based learning to encourage student engagement and personal growth.

The first year is about exploration and building a foundation. The mandatory Research in Context course introduces students to key methodological approaches in the humanities, social sciences and sciences, as well as the principles of evidence and argumentation, while developing practical skills in conducting research and presenting their findings both orally and in writing. In addition, students explore the breadth of the curriculum by taking at least one course in each of the three academic domains: Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities (see Appendix 2 for an overview of the disciplines). In the second year, knowledge and skills are deepened. At the beginning of their second year, students declare their major within one of the three academic domains. Within each major there are seven to nine disciplines. Students are expected to take at least one introductory (level 1), one in-depth (level 2) and one advanced (level 3) course from two academic disciplines or 'tracks' within their chosen major. This allows them to focus on their chosen area of study, including the completion of the required methods courses. In addition, students may choose to take interdisciplinary or community-engaged courses to broaden their perspective and gain practical experience. The third year focuses on completing advanced level 3 courses and the 15 EC research thesis, which is written within one of the disciplinary tracks of their major. In addition to the required major-specific level 3

courses, students must take at least two level 3 electives. Many choose to take a level 3 course with an emphasis on interdisciplinarity or community engagement.

The thesis process begins with students discussing the timetable with their tutor, especially if they are planning an exchange. They submit a research proposal, find a supervisor with the help of the track fellow of their chosen academic discipline and develop a detailed research plan. Throughout the thesis process, students will receive guidance from their supervisor, who will provide feedback on the research proposal, plan and overall progress. The thesis consists of an approved research proposal, progress reports and a final research paper.

The panel appreciates how UCU's emphasis on personal development and student-centred learning is evident in its largely open curriculum, which allows students a high degree of flexibility in shaping their own learning pathways. Students start with a broad foundation that focuses on the development of general knowledge and skills. After reviewing a sample of courses across the three majors, the panel concluded that they were relevant, academically challenging and of a high standard. Courses use a variety of formats including lectures, tutorials and group work to encourage collaborative learning and critical discussion. In the Advanced Molecular Cell Biology course, for example, the panel saw an engaging format in which students work in groups to design three experimental projects that together form the basis of a formal grant proposal following standard rules. At the end of the course, the proposal is presented and defended to a panel of experts in the field. The panel values the variety of instructional options, including the growing number of community-engaged courses. Community Engaged Learning (CEL) at UCU emphasizes societal issues through direct interaction with external partners such as disadvantaged groups, NGOs, and public organizations. It promotes creative, disciplinary cross-fertilization with a focus on marginalized groups, international orientation and student leadership. The panel appreciates how CEL strengthens students' social responsibility while building a variety of social and professional skills and enhancing the university's connection with the community. Another example of a rich educational experience is the UCU East Africa programme, which offers an immersive international learning journey. It includes preparatory studies, a summer field course in Kenya and Tanzania, and professional internships throughout East Africa. Student testimonies indicate that it is a transformative experience that engages students in critical reflection on development, globalization and justice. The panel is also positive about the structure and guidance of the thesis process.

With over 200 courses a year, including courses at different levels, the range of courses is wide and varied. Courses are clearly grouped into levels 1, 2 and 3, enabling students to build their academic programme progressively. Resources such as the Course Planner and the Course Catalogue provide clear guidance on how each course relates to previous courses, the level of the course and its connection to majors and tracks. The tutor system plays a central role in supporting students with both academic and extra-curricular choices (see under *Guidance and support*). The panel notes that sufficient depth is ensured by two requirements: students must complete at least 45 EC at level 3, of which at least 30 EC must be in their major, including the thesis, and they must complete at least 75 EC in the academic domain of their major. The latter also increases students' chances of progressing to a master's programme in a specific field.

In the programme, different types of knowledge and skills are integrated and offered as part of a coherent educational experience. The panel notes that there is enough focus in courses and projects on developing academic and professional skills and also saw this reflected in the learning objectives of the courses. Efforts are made within the programme to ensure that the learning objectives of individual courses are consistent with the overall programme level outcomes. This is checked, for example, at the level of tracks. In addition, the relationship between the learning objectives of specific courses and the ILOs is outlined in the end-of-term matrix indicating which learning outcomes are addressed and assessed in all UCU courses. During the

site visit, the programme management indicated that the programme is continuously refined to ensure alignment with its ILOs, supporting students to achieve high academic standards and to contribute to society in a variety of roles.

The panel noted with satisfaction that UCU continues to update, refine and improve the programme. In particular, UCU's Strategic Plan 2020-2025 has driven significant curriculum renewal through an annual call for proposals, encouraging projects that focus on community engagement, interdisciplinarity and innovative knowledge production. In addition, UCU's revised vision on interdisciplinary education stresses the importance of exposing students to interdisciplinary work, especially integrative learning, through research courses, disciplinary awareness, and advanced interdisciplinary courses that combine knowledge and methods from multiple disciplines. This process has led to the introduction of courses such as Engaged Citizenship and Nature, Biodiversity and Health, and fosters a culture of continuous innovation. Initiatives are led by UCU faculty, and supported by UCU educational advisors. For instance, a Comenius grant was used to launch a project to introduce inclusive co-creation practices, adapt them to the UCU learning community and develop practical methods to benefit other institutions.
One of the development sessions focused on Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), an important topic for curriculum renewal. The panel and the programme concluded that a balanced approach is needed: while embracing the potential of AI, the UCU programme must also ensure that students continue to develop core academic skills. The panel recommends that the responsible use of GenAI should continue to be explored through concrete GenAI pilot projects, in close consultation with relevant stakeholders. Given the significant impact of GenAI on education, these pilots will provide valuable insights into best practices for integrating these tools into the curriculum, ensuring that they enhance rather than detract from students' academic development.

Learning environment
Teaching occurs in small groups, with an average class size of 21. A review of course enrolments confirms that the maximum number of students per course group is 28. Some courses, particularly specialized courses, have low enrolments, but the panel notes with appreciation that hardly any courses are cancelled.

The panel found that at UCU the curriculum and extra-curricular activities are closely integrated to support the holistic development of students. Those seeking greater academic challenge can take part in UCU's Curriculum Enrichment Options or in a UU honours programme, interdisciplinary projects or apply for competitive scholarships. Opportunities include study abroad, summer schools, conferences, research projects, double degrees in Law and in Physics, and additional courses at Utrecht University. Academic and non-academic internships through the Futures Centre, student-led courses and 2.5 EC research assistantships further enhance personal development.

UCU has two independent, affiliated student organizations: the University College Student Council and the University College Student Association (UCSA). The UC Student Council is an elected body that represents student opinion on academic matters. The student representatives indicated that they raise issues that could possibly be changed and that they feel they can put items on the agenda. In some cases, issues cannot be addressed; for example, laboratory modules at UU only take place in the short summer and winter periods. As UCU does not have its own laboratory facilities, scheduling is dependent on the availability of UU laboratories and alignment with UCU's academic calendar. Despite UCU's best efforts, these are the only possible times. Student representatives make sure that this limitation is clearly communicated so that the issue is not raised every year. The panel recognizes that short-term laboratory courses, while not ideal, are an acceptable solution in the current circumstances, as confirmed in the interviews. The panel appreciates the way in which students and management work together in this regard.

The UCSA aims to enrich students' extra-curricular lives through social and cultural activities. It has 42 committees and clubs offering activities, workshops, performances, parties and excursions throughout the year. These activities, often co-organized by students and faculty, complement UCU's learning outcomes. They promote the broad range of skills outlined in the intended learning outcomes and ensure that students engage in a rich academic and social environment that fosters personal development, social engagement, creativity and community building. Students also said in interviews that they value living in halls of residence for the sense of community, shared experiences and exposure to different perspectives. While the UCU 'bubble' can feel overwhelming, students learn to navigate it and give each other space, fostering openness and sociability.

Through documentation, interviews and a tour of the campus, the panel clearly saw a vibrant student community at UCU, collectively demonstrating an impressive level of engagement and diversity of activity. The panel also observed that current events resonate within the UCU community as well. The panel commends both UCU staff and students for actively engaging in open dialogue with one another, even on polarizing topics. This openness in conversation is not only crucial for maintaining a strong sense of community but also represents a socially valuable skill.

UCU is located on the former Kromhout Kazerne, a historic military base close to the Utrecht Science Park. During a tour, the panel observed that UCU's campus offers extensive facilities for small-scale, intensive education, including modern small-scale classrooms, seminar rooms and study areas designed for personalized learning. The campus includes on-site student residences with guaranteed housing, which foster a close-knit community. For extra-curricular activities, there are common areas, such as the Dining Hall Café and UCU College Bar, sports facilities and student-run organizations that promote academic, social and cultural engagement. These facilities support both the academic rigour and vibrant, international community life that are integral to UCU's liberal arts and sciences programme. In addition, students have access to the facilities of Utrecht University.

Guidance and support
The panel observes that UCU provides a robust and well-structured student support system. Each student has a personal tutor who provides individual academic and pastoral guidance. The tutor is in contact with the student throughout the three years. The panel found that the tutor system at UCU is a key component of the student-centred approach, providing ongoing guidance over the three years to help students navigate academic and extra-curricular choices, reflect on their achievements, and offer support when faced with challenges. The Connect Centre also provides comprehensive support for student well-being, including mental health services and counselling. In addition, the Futures Centre provides students with careers advice and professional development tools to prepare them for life after UCU. Students confirmed that tutors and support staff were very valuable in helping them to plan their curriculum and future. Information sources such as tutor guidance, the student portal, the Connect Centre and the course catalogue ensure that students are kept adequately informed about their studies and other important matters. The panel believes that this mix of academic, personal, and career support demonstrates a strong commitment to fostering student achievement.

In addition, the panel found that the design of UCU's learning environment is being improved to further enhance accessibility and feasibility, particularly for students with disabilities, by extending Learning Accommodation Agreements (LAAs), recognizing non-diagnosable needs, informing tutors of accommodations, and establishing an LAA Review Group to monitor progress. During the tour, the panel saw

that all the buildings are wheelchair accessible, with the exception of the main building, which cannot be adapted due to its heritage status, but here too, solutions have been found.

The panel found that while UCU offers a rigorous academic environment that motivates students to excel, it also generates pressure to achieve top grades, fostering a culture of perfectionism. From the cover letter and on-site discussions, the panel noted that efforts to reduce workload, performance anxiety and improve well-being have been introduced following recommendations from the previous assessment panel and an ad hoc committee in 2022-23. The panel commends the programme for undertaking a comprehensive assessment of workload pressures and for identifying how adjustments to admissions, culture, learning, guidance and assessment could improve the situation. For example, the 'principled spaces' approach promotes clarity of expectations between students and teachers. This approach encourages participants to co-create principles of interaction that promote safety, respect and openness, and encourages student reflection, inclusivity and engagement. In addition, student-initiated support systems such as peer networks and meditation rooms have been implemented to further enhance well-being. The panel acknowledges the significant efforts made to address the culture of excellence and related workload concerns, but notes that this remains a pressing issue that requires continued attention. The panel therefore recommends that UCU continues its efforts to address the pressures associated with the culture of excellence and workload by expanding current initiatives to improve student well-being. However, the panel's reiteration of a recommendation does not imply that the previous panel's recommendation has been disregarded or neglected in the eyes of the current panel. Progress has clearly been made, but maintaining a balance between excellence and well-being remains a challenge inherent in UCU's model of liberal arts education.

Feasibility and success rates
The discussion of workload pressures in the context of the learning environment also relates to the feasibility of the programme. Students may feel overwhelmed by the range of options, although overall there is sufficient support to make challenging but achievable choices. The study load is substantial, with approximately 16 contact hours and 40 hours of self-study per week, partly due to the shorter semester format. To improve study feasibility, UCU has increased flexibility by diversifying summer courses and allowing students to 'bank' credits throughout the academic year. By banking credits, students can balance their academic commitments and potentially reduce stress during peak periods. This approach aims to create a more adaptable academic environment that responds to students' individual needs and schedules. In addition, scholarships funded through the Quality Agreements have extended financial support, enabling more students to manage their studies effectively by reducing financial pressures, contributing to a more diverse student body and enriching the learning environment.

Although the panel could not determine exact percentages from the graph of student success data, nominal completion rates have consistently been around 75% in recent years, with nominal +1 completion rates around 90%. The average dropout rate over the last five years has been around 10%. This is at the top end of what the panel would like to see. These figures are consistent with the panel's perception of a programme that sets high standards and has a strong focus on student success.

Language of instruction
The programme is taught in English and the name of the programme is in English. According to UCU, the use of English as the language of instruction and for the programme name is important to foster an international learning environment. This approach is consistent with the core values of the liberal arts and sciences, promoting social responsibility, civic engagement and intercultural understanding, while preparing students to address global challenges. The rationale for using English as the language of instruction and an English programme name has been reviewed and discussed by the panel. It supports the decision to use English,

which is consistent with the aims and ambitions of the programme. The panel also concludes that sufficient attention is being paid to the English language skills of both staff and students.

Admission
UCU is a selective programme and aims to admit around 250 students per year. Its selective admissions process emphasizes a holistic assessment of candidates, assessing not only academic and English language qualifications, but also personal motivation and extracurricular involvement. Applicants must submit a completed application form, academic transcripts, a personal statement and letters of recommendation.. The panel found that the admissions criteria and emphasis on extracurricular activities are consistent with UCU's goals of fostering a diverse and intellectually vibrant student body. By taking a holistic approach to assessing academic merit, motivation and potential for success in a liberal arts context, UCU ensures that students have the necessary skills and attitudes to thrive in an international, interactive and small-scale educational environment. Personal interviews fit well with UCU's emphasis on close student-faculty interaction and are an appropriate way of determining a candidate's suitability.

Staff
The programme is taught by a team of 51 teachers appointed by UCU. In addition, approximately half of the UCU courses are taught by UU staff. This collaboration enables UCU to offer a wide range of disciplines and ensures that students benefit from the expertise of both UCU and UU faculty. The panel appreciates UCU's provision of a workshop for new teachers in the week prior to each semester, as this contributes to a well-prepared teaching team. Based on the documentation and on-site interviews, the panel found the expertise and didactic skills of the core UCU staff to be more than adequate for the small-scale and intensive teaching of the programme. Of the teaching staff, 92% hold a University Teaching Qualification (UTQ) and 18% a Senior UTQ.

During the visit, the panel was reassured about the link between teaching and research. UCU uses the teacher-scholar model in which staff balance teaching (including tutoring), scholarship and service in a way that involves all three, but may vary over the course of a career. At UCU, teaching staff devote around 20% of their time to research, integrating their findings into courses to enhance student engagement. The teaching staff actively build strong relationships with students by collaborating on curriculum development and innovation. They are keen to involve students in the co-creation process, ensuring that their perspectives are valued. In addition, the work of the teaching staff aligns with the UU's TRIPLE model of recognition and reward, which recognizes a full range of academic contributions, including teaching, research and community engagement. Approximately 50% of the academic work involves basic research, with 15% focused on the scholarship of teaching and learning. The panel is positive about the teaching staff's expertise in open curriculum and community-engaged learning, their contribution to projects across the UU, and their success in attracting teaching grants. UCU teaching staff also have good links with UU research groups.

Students appreciate that lecturers are knowledgeable, passionate about the programme taught at UCU, and both accessible and willing to help. The panel saw this during the tour, where lecturers have offices next to classrooms, and in the course handbooks, which detail how lecturers can be contacted outside of class. The students noted that the only area for improvement was the lack of diversity in the teaching staff, which is predominantly Western European and does not reflect the diversity of the student body. The panel notes that teaching staff already contribute to an inclusive and stimulating learning environment that takes account of different cultural backgrounds and perspectives, and that further increasing diversity can enhance this effect.

The panel is impressed by the effective and efficient support provided by UCU's small administrative staff. However, with cuts in education budgets on the horizon, the panel is concerned that the support structure is already as lean as it can be and that there is little scope for further reductions.

Considerations

UCU offers a well-structured Liberal Arts & Sciences programme with a clear focus on student-centred education, broad learning and critical thinking, in line with the programme's profile and learning outcomes. The degree requirements are designed to ensure academic competence, sufficient disciplinary grounding, and breadth and interdisciplinary exposure. Students are encouraged to design their own course of study in the humanities, social sciences and sciences, with a broad foundation in the first year, followed by in-depth study in the second year and specialization in the third year, including a thesis. This open curriculum allows students to pursue individual academic interests while developing a broad knowledge base with sufficient disciplinary grounding, a wide range of skills and a global perspective. The panel commends UCU for its curriculum renewal projects, with an increased emphasis on interdisciplinarity, community engagement and innovation. For GenAI, the panel suggests a balanced approach and recommends further exploration of its responsible use through pilot projects to ensure it complements academic development.

The small-scale, intensive learning environment is a key strength of UCU. With an average class size of 21 students, the programme fosters close interaction between students and teaching staff, enhancing student engagement and promoting a sense of community. The panel also observed that UCU offers a wide range of teaching formats, including lectures, tutorials, and collaborative group work. Furthermore, UCU's campus provides a suitable setting for a liberal arts education, offering modern classrooms, study areas, and student residences that support both academic and extracurricular activities. The integration of extracurricular activities further enriches the learning environment and supports the holistic development of students.

The UCU teaching staff is well qualified and the teacher-scholar model ensures a clear link between teaching and research, while UU faculty further contribute to the breadth and depth in the disciplines. The panel appreciates how teaching staff are also actively involved in educational innovation, often co-creating the curriculum with students. They are highly regarded by students.

The panel believes that the admissions process and requirements are appropriate for selecting motivated and talented students attracted by the small-scale, intensive learning environment at UCU. The panel notes that UCU provides robust student support through its tutor system, which offers individualized academic and personal guidance throughout the three-year programme. Additional resources, such as the Connect Centre for student well-being, the Writing and Skills Center, and the Futures Centre for career guidance, are also valued by students. The panel commends UCU's efficient support structure, but is concerned that there is little scope for further reductions in the face of impending budget cuts. Although the panel commends the programme's efforts to address workload pressures and foster a balanced, supportive learning environment, continued attention to this issue is needed. The panel therefore recommends that UCU monitor the impact of the initiatives to improve student well-being, ensuring a healthy balance between academic rigour and well-being, while addressing the pressures of the culture of excellence.

The panel concludes that UCU creates a collaborative, vibrant international community of dedicated staff and motivated students, supported by a flexible, student-centred curriculum and a robust student support system. While some areas require continued attention, such as a healthy balance between academic rigour and well-being and GenAI developments, the panel found that UCU provides a high-quality learning environment that supports student success.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets Standard 2 of the NVAO framework.

The panel concludes that the programme meets Criteria B, C, D, E and F of the framework for the distinctive feature of "small-scale and intensive education".

Standard 3. Student assessment

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

Findings

System of assessment

Based on the UCU Assessment Vision and Policy, the panel found that UCU's assessment system is structured to promote and support student learning and is aligned with the programme's intended learning outcomes (ILOs). Assessments are used not only summatively to evaluate whether learning objectives have been achieved (*assessment of learning*), but also formatively to guide and improve future learning (*assessment for learning*) and integrated as learning activities themselves (*assessment as learning*). This multi-faceted approach to assessment is consistent with the UU model of education and follows the principle of constructive alignment, ensuring a coherent relationship between learning objectives, activities and assessment methods.

The Assessment Vision and Policy acts as an overarching framework rather than a fixed assessment plan, setting out criteria that assessments must meet at all three curriculum levels (introduction, intermediate, advanced) in order to align with ILOs across courses. In addition, Section 5 of the Academic Rules and Regulations (ARR) outlines assessment criteria, procedures and the role of the examination board. It underlines the importance of transparency for students about assessment methods and standards, to ensure that they understand what is expected of them. The end-of-term matrix further clarifies the relationship between course assessments and specific ILOs by mapping the extent to which these ILOs are addressed or assessed within each course (see Standard 4). The specific assessments for each course and course learning objectives are documented in the OSIRIS course outlines. Many courses detail which specific learning outcomes are assessed in which assessment formats. The panel saw this reflected in the course assignments and exams, which are transparent in terms of requirements, formats and assessment criteria.

In each 7.5 EC course, continuous assessment includes at least three assessment moments, including one before the mid-term break to provide formative feedback for tutor meetings. No single assessment will count for more than 40% of the final grade. In 2.5 EC modules, a single assessment may determine the final grade. During the visit, the panel explored the impact of continuous assessment on the workload of students and teaching staff. Students interviewed highlighted the benefits of continuous assessment over traditional end-of-year exams, noting that it keeps them engaged, reduces reliance on memorization, and provides ongoing and insightful feedback that encourages growth. The teaching staff acknowledged that although continuous assessment added to the workload for both students and staff, they find it manageable and strive to balance this by coordinating the types of assessment across courses to avoid redundancy. The panel concludes that UCU pays sufficient attention to the impact of continuous assessment on workload and that continuous assessment enables students to demonstrate their understanding in a variety of ways, including through essays, group project work, oral discussions and draft submissions, which helps them to develop their skills iteratively and improves final outcomes.

From the interviews, the panel understood that the programme ensures consistency of assessment across the disciplines through regular evaluation, and oversight by the examination board (EB). The external member of the EB provides an independent review of the disciplinary 'tracks' and monitors whether students have a seamless pathway to master's programmes. Teaching staff discuss grade discrepancies and the Registrar's Office assists in checking for grade inflation. The Registrar's Office is responsible for maintaining student records, overseeing the grading system, ensuring academic integrity, and providing administrative support related to course registration and compliance with institutional policies. The panel agrees with the EB that regular meetings with fellows and track coordinators in the various disciplines and the use of assessment reviews help to safeguard the quality of assessment across the curriculum.

The panel also notes the programme's emphasis on the quality of assessment and grading. In the Registrar and Curriculum annual report, the panel found that UCU students achieve relatively high grades not only within UCU but also on their exchanges - most grades in the A, A- category. This is consistent with a programme that selects for motivated and talented students, but also suggests that these students perform well by external standards.

Thesis assessment
The thesis is assessed by at least two examiners: the supervisor and a second examiner. In the case of a group project, each student will receive an individual assessment based on their individual contributions. A plagiarism check is conducted during the thesis submission phase. The supervisor assesses the final product and the research process, including an approved proposal and midterm evaluation. The second examiner independently assesses the final version of the thesis. In case of disagreement, the examiners will try to reach a consensus; if this is not possible, the track fellow and, if necessary, the EB will intervene. The panel considers the thesis assessment process to be organized in a transparent and meticulous way.

Based on its sample review of 15 theses, the panel found that about a quarter of the thesis assessment forms were not satisfactorily completed by supervisors and/or second readers, resulting in considerable variation. In a few cases, the forms did not clearly indicate the final grade or explain how different examiners had reached their conclusions. The EB had also identified the need for more consistency in thesis feedback and assessment forms. To improve the thesis assessment process, the panel recommends that all examiners be required to complete the thesis assessment forms thoroughly. This will improve clarity and standardisation, also across disciplines, and ensure that all assessments are effectively documented.

Examination board
UCU has its own examination board (EB) consisting of five members of staff representing different disciplines within the programme and one external member. In addition to regular duties such as appointing examiners and dealing with student requests, complaints and cases of plagiarism, the EB monitors the quality of assessment by verifying that exchange courses meet programme standards and by sampling theses. The sampling of theses assesses both the quality and the validity and transparency of the assessment.

The panel reviewed the processes and activities of the EB through interviews and analysis of documentation, and found that the EB carries out its functions effectively. At UCU, learning agreements are required for exchange courses to ensure alignment with degree requirements. The EB, working with the International Office, reviews and approves these agreements to safeguard course quality and academic coherence for students. The external member of the EB provides an independent perspective, assisting in the oversight of the different tracks and facilitating the transition of students to master's programmes. The panel also appreciates the recent benchmarking exercise of theses with UC Groningen and the proactive engagement of the EB with developments in GenAI. However, on the basis of annual reports and interviews, the panel notes

that the EB relies considerably on the overall assessment system to ensure the quality of assessment, with active signalling from track coordinators and tutors. Although the panel has no evidence that this approach is not effective, it believes that, with additional support, the EB could further strengthen its role by paying more attention to the quality of assessment in the courses offered at UCU.

Considerations

On the basis of the documentation and the on-site discussions, the panel concludes that UCU has a comprehensive assessment system, which is embedded in UCU and university-wide provisions and policies, and promotes both summative and formative learning and assessment. The course assignments and exams are varied and appropriate to assess the learning goals, and transparent in terms of requirements, formats and assessment criteria. Continuous assessment requires commitment from staff and students, but the panel agrees that the benefits outweigh the drawbacks and that it promotes student engagement and encourages continuous feedback, which enhances the learning process. The panel noted in its thesis sample quite some variation in the completion of thesis assessment forms, and recommends to ensure that all examiners complete the thesis assessment forms thoroughly. Nevertheless, it is clear to the panel that the programme demonstrates a commitment to transparency and quality in assessment practices. The examination board plays a valuable role in ensuring consistency and rigour across the disciplines through monitoring and collaboration, including the benchmarking of theses. The external member further enhances the oversight of assessment practices across the disciplinary 'tracks'. Overall, the panel concludes that the EB operates effectively with sufficient checks and balances, although with a little more facilitation the EB could more firmly establish its safeguarding role and expand on its course sampling. The programme's assessment practices reflect a thoughtful approach to ensuring academic standards and supporting student success.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets Standard 3 of the NVAO framework.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

> The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

The documentation provided included an end-of-term matrix indicating which learning outcomes are addressed and assessed in all UCU courses. Although this provides a comprehensive overview, it does not explicitly demonstrate whether each individual pathway leads to the achievement of the programme's learning outcomes. The panel found that the Assessment Vision and Policy and end-of-term matrix provide limited insight into how effectively programme learning outcomes are being achieved at the overall programme level. Strengthening these aspects would provide clearer evidence of how well the programme is preparing students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. During the site visit, the panel explored this further and learned that adequate checks and balances are in place. Tutors monitor the progress of individual students and the Registrar's Office carries out a computer check. In cases of uncertainty, the examination board is consulted to assess alignment with the intended learning outcomes. The Academic Rules and Regulations also set out a number of requirements to ensure that students achieve the learning outcomes. Finally, the thesis provides students with a major piece of academic work in which key learning outcomes are assessed.

Thesis quality

In order to assess the final level achieved, the panel reviewed 15 bachelor theses from the 2022-2023 academic year, ensuring a representative sample of final grades, majors and supervisors. Each thesis met at least the minimum standards for a bachelor's degree, and the panel agreed with the grades awarded, noting that higher grades corresponded to better quality. Most of the theses were considered to be more than satisfactory, and several were considered to be good to excellent. The panel members noted the overall high academic quality of the theses, which were well structured, with clear and relevant research questions formulated by the students. The panel did not find much interdisciplinarity in the theses and can envisage and would welcome more interdisciplinary elements in theses with the increased number of interdisciplinary courses in the curriculum.

Performance of graduates

The panel notes that the most recent National Student Survey (Dutch: *NSE*) and the UCU Exit Surveys 2018-2024 show high levels of student satisfaction with the overall quality of education. UCU graduates consistently exceed the 180 EC requirement, averaging 190 EC. They graduate within three years at a rate of 75% and within four years at a rate of 93%, well above the average for UU bachelor's programmes - 36% and 74% respectively. The 2022 Alumni Survey Report shows that over 85% of graduates go on to pursue a master's degree. The panel concludes that UCU graduates achieve high outcomes that compare favourably with other university colleges and outperform standard bachelor's programmes.

The programme's specialized tracks help students meet the criteria for advanced study, including support for disciplines with specific master's entry requirements, such as law and medicine. Collaboration with UCU's selective master's programmes, such as SUMMA and Clinical Psychology, further supports students pursuing specialist careers.

Considerations

The panel reviewed a selection of theses and found them to meet the academic standard for a bachelor's degree. On the basis of the documentation, the panel found that UCU graduates are well prepared for further study; most graduates continue their studies in master's programmes, often in highly ranked programmes and about a quarter go on to PhD programmes. Combined with the positive assessment of the programme's success rates discussed under 'Feasibility and success rates' in Standard 2, the panel concludes that UCU graduates achieve the intended learning outcomes of the programme.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets Standard 4 of the NVAO framework.

The panel concludes that the programme meets Criterion G of the framework for the distinctive feature of "small-scale and intensive education".

Recommendations

1. Monitor the impact of the initiatives to improve student well-being, ensuring a healthy balance between academic rigour and well-being, while addressing the pressures of the culture of excellence.
2. Further explore the responsible use of Generative AI through pilot projects and ensure that it complements academic development.
3. Ensure that all examiners complete the thesis assessment forms thoroughly.

General conclusion NVAO Framework

The panel has established that the bachelor's programme Liberal Arts and Sciences at University College Utrecht meets all four NVAO standards under consideration: intended learning outcomes, teaching-learning environment, assessment, and achieved learning outcomes.

The panel has established that the bachelor's programme Liberal Arts and Sciences at University College Roosevelt meets all four NVAO standards under consideration: intended learning outcomes, teaching-learning environment, assessment, and achieved learning outcomes.

The panel has established that the bachelor's programme Liberal Arts and Sciences at the Faculty of Humanities of Utrecht University meets all four NVAO standards under consideration: intended learning outcomes, teaching-learning environment, assessment, and achieved learning outcomes.

As a result, the panel's overall assessment of the quality of the bachelor's programme Liberal Arts and Sciences at University Utrecht is positive.

General conclusion Distinctive Feature Small-scale and Intensive Education

The bachelor's programme Liberal Arts and Sciences at University College Utrecht obtained the distinctive feature of "small-scale and intensive education" in 2012. Six years later, the panel performing the practice-based assessment considered that further progress had been made in relation to the evaluation criteria and the points of attention raised by the first assessment panel. A further six years later, in 2024, the bachelor's programme and its distinctive feature are up for re-accreditation. The current assessment panel has examined whether the programme still meets the conditions for granting the distinctive feature. In accordance with the NVAO Guidelines, the panel checked whether the small-scale and intensive education has developed into a quintessential feature of the bachelor's programme. In the core part of this report, the panel has taken into account the criteria of the distinctive feature when assessing the quality of the bachelor's programme. In this section, the panel brings together its specific findings and considerations on these criteria and indicates whether an extension of the distinctive feature of "small-scale and intensive education" is justified.

Criterion A. Intended learning outcomes
The panel found that UCU's intended learning outcomes (ILOs) effectively require students to demonstrate both advanced disciplinary expertise (ILOs 1-2) and the ability to apply this knowledge across a range of fields through critical and creative approaches (ILO 3). In addition to research skills (ILO 10), UCU emphasizes personal and academic skills that go beyond academic achievement. For example, ILOs 4-9 encourage the development of critical thinking, effective communication and self-reflective practice. The programme's ILOs also focus on fostering professional and personal attitudes that promote collaboration, intercultural competence and societal engagement (ILOs 11-16). These are essential for academic and professional contexts and prepare students for the demands of both further education and diverse professional roles. The panel concludes that UCU meets Criterion A, as these ILOs are effective in producing well-rounded graduates who combine advanced disciplinary knowledge with a broad range of versatile, transferable skills.

Criterion B. Curriculum: contents
The panel concludes that UCU meets Criterion B by successfully integrating its curriculum with extra-curricular activities, creating a coherent educational experience that supports its ILOs. The curriculum covers the full range of humanities, social sciences and sciences, providing students with a well-rounded foundation

across disciplines, while Utrecht University's specialized courses provide optional, additional depth in specific areas. The panel appreciates how community-engaged learning projects encourage students to apply academic knowledge in practical, socially relevant contexts, thus bridging the gap between theory and practice. The active role of the UCU student association in organizing and implementing extra-curricular activities enriches the student experience and cultivates leadership skills. By encouraging close collaboration between students and staff, UCU ensures that extra-curricular activities enhance academic content and contribute to the holistic development of students. These activities contribute significantly to personal growth, social responsibility and community building, which are integral to the programme's vision of liberal arts and sciences.

Criterion C. Curriculum: learning environment

The panel concludes that UCU's stimulating, small-scale 'learning community' meets Criterion C, where students and staff are more engaged than in regular bachelor programmes. With an average class size of 21 and a maximum of 28, the programme structure ensures individual attention and meaningful interaction, particularly through collaborative, discussion-based formats that actively engage students. Weekly assignments, continuous feedback and intensive projects promote a learning experience that is both challenging and accessible, encouraging students to participate fully while managing an above-average workload. While the balance between academic rigour and well-being is an ongoing concern, the panel notes that hard work is being done to combine them into a challenging and rewarding learning experience. The panel saw the inextricable link between the curriculum and the social context most clearly in discussions with the students, who gave many examples of how learning took place not only in the classroom, but also in activities on campus and in their living rooms. Those seeking an extra academic challenge can take part in honours programmes, interdisciplinary projects or apply for competitive scholarships.

Criterion D. Intake

UCU's selective admissions process meets Criterion D by demonstrating that it is well aligned with its academic goals and learning environment. The selection process emphasizes academic qualifications, motivation and extra-curricular involvement. Applicants must submit a completed application form, academic transcripts, a personal statement and letters of recommendation. A holistic approach ensures that students not only meet the academic criteria, but also demonstrate the drive and interpersonal skills required for UCU's interactive, small-scale, intensive educational format. Personal interviews are particularly valued as they effectively assess applicants' suitability for the programme's interactive and community-based approach.

Criterion E. Staff

Based on the documentation and on-site discussions, the panel concludes that UCU meets Criterion E. The panel found UCU's core teaching staff well qualified to provide small-scale and intensive classes, strong student-faculty interaction and individual attention. The collaboration with Utrecht University broadens the disciplinary scope of the programme and allows students to benefit from UU's extensive academic resources. New lecturers are thoroughly prepared through semester workshops, and students report a high level of accessibility and commitment from lecturers. The panel commends UCU's efficient support structure, but is concerned that there is little scope for further reductions in the face of impending budget cuts.

Criterion F. Facilities

Based on the documentation, the campus visit, and the discussions, the panel is of the opinion that the UCU infrastructure fulfils Criterion F. UCU is located on the former Kromhout Kazerne, a historic military base close to the Utrecht Science Park. This residential campus environment provides a distinct educational environment with all the associated small-scale educational facilities. It supports community building, with

permanent mixed-year housing, dedicated spaces for collaborative study and relaxation, and peer-led initiatives that balance academic and social activities. These facilities and resources demonstrate the programme's commitment to a supportive and engaging learning environment, providing ample space for student accommodation, academic and extra-curricular activities.

Criterion G. Achieved learning outcomes

The panel notes that UCU meets Criterion G by demonstrating that its graduates show strong academic performance in line with the programme's intended learning outcomes. Feedback from graduates and external surveys show a high level of satisfaction with the quality of education, while thesis reviews confirm solid academic standards. Although interdisciplinarity in theses is limited, the increasing availability of interdisciplinary courses supports further integration. Graduation rates are high, with 75% of students graduating within three years and 93% within four years, exceeding the general bachelor rates at Utrecht University. Most graduates go on to pursue advanced degrees, with tailored tracks and collaborative initiatives facilitating successful admission to specialized master's programmes.

The panel has established that the bachelor's programme Liberal Arts and Sciences at University College Utrecht meets all seven criteria of the distinctive feature Small-Scale and Intensive Education: intended learning outcomes, programme content, learning environment, intake, staff, material facilities, and achieved learning outcomes. It considers that small-scale and intensive education is an integral part of the bachelor programme.

As a result, the panel's overall assessment of the distinctive feature of "small-scale and intensive education" in the bachelor's programme Liberal Arts and Sciences at University College Utrecht is positive.

Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

Disciplinary depth
1. Graduates can demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant questions, theories, and conventions of the domain and its embedding
2. Graduates can use the domain knowledge, and apply the concepts and theories to concrete problems

Broad knowledge and interdisciplinary orientation
3. Graduates can apply disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge and skills obtained in different disciplines to an academic problem

Thinking skills
4. Graduates can demonstrate a cohesive, consistent, and logical reasoning
5. Graduates have a critical approach to problems
6. Graduates can demonstrate a reflective and self-critical attitude

Communication skills
7. Graduates can communicate efficiently following proper conventions for the discipline

Learning skills
8. Graduates know how and where to search for material and assess the relevance of resources
9. Graduates can demonstrate metacognitive skills such as time management, monitor their progress, and reflect on this

Research skills
10. Under supervision, graduates can formulate a relevant research question, translate this to a research plan; conduct the study, analyse, interpret and report in the results following proper conventions

International and intercultural orientation
11. Graduates can communicate in multiple languages
12. Graduates understand and can reflect on cultural differences
13. Graduates reflect on their own value system in relation to that of others

Societal orientation
14. Graduates are able to apply knowledge and skills towards solutions for societal issues

Other skills
15. Graduates can collaborate professionally with others and provide and receive constructive feedback
16. Graduates can make well-informed choices for their future plans after graduation

Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

At UCU, each of the three years of study has a different focus. In a nutshell:

1. **First year: exploration and foundation.** The 1st year focuses on exploring academic disciplines in the domains. All students take Research in Context, which provides a foundation for academic skills used in all academic domains (e.g., writing, using sources, presenting) and highlights differences between academic domains. Students are required to complete level-1 introduction courses in disciplines in each of the three domains (Humanities, Sciences, and Social Sciences)[1], and at least one Language and Culture course.
2. **Second year: expanding knowledge in the major.** At the start of the 2nd year, students declare a major in the domain of their choice: humanities, social sciences, or sciences. A major requires at least eight courses in the major domain, including at least two completed disciplinary 'tracks' (1-2-3: introduction level-1, intermediate level-2, and advanced level-3) and a total of at least three level-3 courses. In addition, students complete major-related methods and skills courses at level 1 and 2[2].
3. **Third year: completing the level-3 courses and the research thesis.** The 3rd year includes the required 15EC research thesis, written in one of the disciplinary 'tracks' of the major. Alongside major-related electives and the level 3 courses required for the major, students complete at least two level 3 elective courses that complement their major. Most complete one level 3 course with focus on interdisciplinarity or community-engagement.

Majors and Disciplines

Students can select courses (all at 7.5EC) from more than 20 academic disciplines, organized in three major domains: the Humanities, Sciences, and Social Sciences. These are the disciplines offered per major domain:

Majors	Humanities	Sciences	Social Sciences
Disciplines	Art History & Museum Studies Chinese Language & Culture History Linguistics Literature & Classics Media Studies Performance Studies Philosophy Religious Studies	Biology Chemistry Earth & Environment Mathematics Medical Science Cognitive Neuroscience Physics	Anthropology Economics Human Geography Law Political Science Psychology Sociology

Schematic Overview of a Typical Curriculum

We depict a version of the most typical curriculum below:

Year 1 60EC	Research in Context	Humanities Level-1	Sciences Level-1	Social Sciences Level-1
	Language and Culture	Major Track 1 Level-1	Major Track 2 Level-1	*Elective*
Year 2 60EC	Major-Related M&S Level-1	Major Track 1 Level-2	Major Track 2 Level-2	*Elective*
	Major-Related M&S Level-2	Major Track 1 Level-3	Major Track 2 Level-3	*Elective*
Year 3 60EC	Major Track 1 or 2 Level-3	*Major-Related Elective*	*Elective*	*Elective*
	Thesis in Major, written in Track 1 or 2 (15EC)		*Completion Elective e.g. INT Level-3*	*Completion Elective e.g. CEL Level-3*

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[1] Note that one of these level-1's will become part of the major (declared in year 2), often as a 'track starter'.
[2] Detailed graduation requirements are described in the Academic Rules and Regulations (ARR) section 3.6.

Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

17 September 2024: University College Utrecht

08.30-09.00	Walk-in with student presentations and coffee/tea (optional)
09.00-09.15	Welcome
09.15-10.00	Interview with programme management
10.00-10.30	Panel discussion
10.30-11.15	Interview with students
11.15-12.00	Interview with teaching staff
12.00-13.00	Lunch & panel discussion
13.00-13.30	Interview with Exam Board
13.30-14.15	Tour of the facilities
14.15-14.30	Panel discussion
14.30-15.30	Two thematic sessions on the development themes
15.30-16.30	Panel discussion
16.30-17.00	Concluding interview with programme management
17.00-17.45	Concluding panel discussion
17.45-18.15	Oral feedback
18.15-19.00	Drinks (optional)

18 September 2024: Liberal Arts and Sciences

08.00-08.30	Welcome & panel preparation
08.30-09.00	Interview with programme management
09.00-09.05	Panel discussion
09.05-09.50	Interview with LAS studenten
09.50-10.00	Panel discussion
10.00-10.30	Interview with LAS docenten
10.30-11.00	Interview with Examencommissie
11.00-11.10	Panel discussion
11.10-11.55	Thematic session I
11.55-12.30	Lunch & panel discussion
12.30-13.15	Thematic session II
13.15-13.45	Panel discussion
13.45-14.30	Concluding interview with programme management
14.30-15.30	Concluding panel discussion
15.30-16.00	Oral feedback (drinks afterwards)

19 September 2024: University College Roosevelt

09.00-09.15	Welcome
09.15-10.00	Interview with programme management UCR
10.00-10.30	Panel discussion
10.30-11.15	Interview with UCR students
11.15-12.00	Interview with UCR teaching staff
12.00-13.00	Lunch & panel discussion
13.00-13.30	Interview with Board of Examiners
13.30-14.15	Student-led tour of the facilities

14.15-14.30	Panel discussion
14.30-15.30	Thematic sessions
15.30-16.30	Panel discussion
16.30-17.00	Concluding session with programme management
17.00-17.45	Concluding panel session
17.45-18.15	Oral feedback

Appendix 4. Materials

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 theses of the bachelor's programme Liberal Arts and Sciences of University College Utrecht (see section *Procedure*). Further information on the theses is available from Academion upon request.

The panel reviewed a selection of 'need to know' materials, including:
- o Administrative data
- o Response to Previous Panel (incl. Panel Report 2019)
- o UCU governance structure (website)
- o About us (website)
- o LAS at UCU (website)
- o Strategic plan 2025 (website)
- o Domain Specific Reference Framework 2023
- o Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
- o End term matrix 2024
- o Academic Rules and Regulations 2023-2024
- o Interdisciplinary education at UCU (project 2022-2024)
- o One-Page Curriculum Overview UCU
- o Admissions report
- o Academic disciplines in HUM, SCI and SSC (website)
- o Internships (website)
- o UCU teacher-scholar model
- o Staff expertise and UTQ guidelines
- o Choice of English language policy
- o Tutoring system (website)
- o Student support (wellbeing, facilities, etc.) (website)
- o Writing and Skills Centre (website)
- o Course catalogue and course descriptions ** (website)
- o Selected UCU courses
- o Thesis Procedure and Documents (sub-folder)
- o Exit Survey Results 2018-2024
- o UCU Council Annual Report 2023-2024
- o Assessment Vision and Policy
- o Exam Board annual reports 2021-2022 and 2022-2023
- o UU Exam Board Regulations
- o Thesis Benchmarking Exercise Exam Boards UCU-UCG
- o Education Quality Assessment Report, June 2024 (EQAR)
- o Education Quality Assessment Plan 2023-2024 (EQAP)
- o NSE (Nationale Studenten Enquete) May 2024
- o Registry and Curriculum annual report 2022-2023
- o Alumni Survey Report 2022
- o UCU Onderwijskaart (graduation statistics)

The panel also reviewed a selection of 'nice to know' materials, including:
- o 2023 Comenius Senior Fellow project description SPiCE
- o After studying at UCU and alumni stories (website)
- o Curriculum planning – making your own story

- Diversity Committee report 2023
- Double degree programmes in Law and in Physics (website)
- Exemplar Board of Studies call for proposals 2022
- Field research Aruba programme (website)
- Non-Academic Internships - summary
- Principled Spaces Session
- Report research assistantship (2.5EC)
- Student journey videos Huub, Aditya, & Irene (website)
- Tutor video 'curriculum planning at UCU'
- UCU Community Engaged Learning report
- UCU East-Africa programme (website)
- UCU Honours annual report 2023-2024
- Student work pressure report and recommendations
- Work pressure report and recommendations