

Assessment report

Master programme Development Studies

Erasmus University Rotterdam



Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation



The European Consortium for
Accreditation in Higher Education

Assessment report

Master Programme Development Studies

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European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education



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Glossary

| | |
|------|---|
| EC | European Credit |
| ECA | European Consortium for Accreditation |
| HE | Higher education |
| ISS | International Institute of Social Studies |
| MA | Master of Arts |
| MADS | Master in Development Studies |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| NVAO | Nederlands Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie |



1. Executive summary

The master in Development Studies (MADS) was assessed by the NVAO and is applying for CeQuint registration. The NVAO convened an assessment panel which studied the self-evaluation report and undertook a site visit on July 16 in The Hague. The programme has applied for initial accreditation of the 60 EC programme. This programme is a reworking of the existing 88 EC master in Development Studies that is currently taught at ISS. This unique situation has made it possible for the panel to inspect both the present situation, including current students and alumni, and assessed 16 theses and its assessment forms of the previous 88 EC programme.

The panel concludes that the master programme in Development Studies at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) has a very strong international profile that is firmly anchored in its mission, curriculum, staff and student population. Internationalisation is not merely an ambition but is thoroughly embedded in the daily reality of teaching, supervision and community life at ISS. The panel therefore recommends awarding the programme the Distinctive Quality Feature for Internationalisation.

Standard 1. Vision (Judgement: Satisfactory)

Internationalisation is part of the historic identity of the programme and deeply integrated in their ethos and mission. The vision is shared by staff, students, alumni and external stakeholders. However, because this vision is so implicitly understood, it is not always made explicit in strategic documents or measurable objectives. The panel encourages the programme to define their internationalisation goals more clearly, in order to make progress more visible and monitorable over time.

Standard 2. Intended Learning Outcomes (Judgement: Good)

The learning outcomes include a strong international and intercultural component and encourage students to position themselves within global debates and development discourse. Students can integrate their own background and professional context into coursework and the thesis. Learning outcomes are appropriate and achieved, but their international and intercultural components could be stated more explicitly in assessment rubrics. The panel observed that not all outcomes linked to intercultural competence are made visible formally, although they are clearly present in practice.

Standard 3. Teaching & Learning (Judgement: Excellent)



The panel was highly impressed with the international classroom and the way the diversity of students and staff is used as an active pedagogical tool. Group assignments, class discussions and thesis supervision all make use of diverse backgrounds and perspectives to enrich learning. The staff-student ratio is very strong and allows for intensive guidance. The international environment is not only present, but actively leveraged didactically. The panel views this learning environment as an example of best practice in internationalisation.

Standard 4. Staff (Judgement: Excellent)

The teaching staff are highly international, both in composition and in professional experience. Staff members originate from multiple regions, including the Global South, which greatly benefits the programme. The staff combines academic expertise with experience in international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and policy institutions. This contributes to the international and intercultural relevance of the curriculum. Staff members are active in doing research and bring contemporary global issues directly into teaching. The panel finds the staff composition to be exemplary for an international development programme.

Standard 5. Students (Judgement: Excellent)

The student group is very diverse in terms of nationality, professional background and disciplinary training. This diversity is strongly valued by both students and staff and is essential to the programme's educational practice. Students report transformative intercultural learning experiences and feel well prepared for international careers. Alumni consistently work in global contexts, and prospective employers confirmed the added value of the programme. The panel considers the international student experience to be of outstanding quality.

The master programme in Development Studies demonstrates a deeply embedded international character and excels in both their international classroom and staff composition. The panel observes that much of this strength remains implicit rather than formalised. The programme could improve by making their vision and concrete goals for internationalisation more explicit and measurable, and by translating their strong intercultural ambitions more clearly into documented learning outcomes and assessment rubrics. In addition, as the redesigned curriculum increases flexibility and introduces new tracks, there is a renewed need to align courses horizontally and embed behavioural science elements more consistently across them. Lastly, while international competences are clearly achieved in practice, the programme is encouraged to document graduate outcomes and learning achievements in a more systematic and visible manner.



2. The assessment procedure

The assessment procedure was organised as laid down in the Frameworks for the Assessment of Quality in Internationalisation (Frameworks) published by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA).

A panel of experts was convened and consisted of the following members:

- Frederik De Decker (chair), Manager Functional Domain Internationalisation, University Service Education and Research, Ghent University (Belgium)
- Prof. dr. Bereket Kebede (member), Professor in Behavioural Economics, School of Global Development University of East Anglia (United Kingdom)
- Dr. Mieke Lopes Cardozo (member), Associate Professor in Regenerative Education and Development, International Development Studies/Governance of Inclusive Development University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)
- Ellemijn Egberink (Student member), Student bachelor International Business Maastricht University (The Netherlands)

The composition of the panel reflects the expertise deemed necessary by the Framework. The individual panel members' expertise and experience can be found in [Annex 1: Composition of the assessment panel](#). All panel members signed a statement of independence and confidentiality. These signed statements are available from the NVAO upon simple request. The procedure was coordinated by Anne Klaas Schilder from the NVAO.

The assessment panel studied the self-evaluation report and annexed documentation provided by the programme before the site visit, see [Annex 2: Documents reviewed](#). The panel organised a preparatory meeting on July 1st, 2025. The site visit took place on July 16th, 2025 at ISS in The Hague, see [Annex 3: Site visit programme](#).

The panel formulated their preliminary assessments per standards immediately after the site visit. These were based on the findings of the site visit which built upon the review of the self-evaluation report and annexed documentation.

The panel finalised the draft report on September 19th. It was then sent to the ISS to review the report for factual mistakes.

The panel approved the final version of the report on 24 September 2025.



3. Basic information

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Qualification: | Master in Development Studies (Master of Arts) |
| Number of credits: | 60 EC |
| Specialisations (if any): | Environment Track, Development Economics Track, Social Justice Track, Politics & Governance Track, Social Innovation Track |
| ISCED field(s) of study: | 0314 Sociology and cultural studies 0319 Social and behavioural sciences, not elsewhere classified |
| Institution: | Erasmus University Rotterdam |
| Type of institution: | University (publicly funded institution) |
| Status: | Accredited by NVAO: Positive decision on 06-04-2018. |
| QA / accreditation agency: | NVAO |
| Status period: | 22 October 2026 |



4. Assessment scale

The assessment scale relates to the conclusions of the assessment panel at the level of the standards and is based on the definitions given below. Through the underlying criteria, each of the standards describes the level of quality or attainment required for a satisfactory assessment. The starting point of the assessment scale is however not threshold quality but generic quality. Generic quality is defined as *the quality that can reasonably be expected from an international perspective*.

Unsatisfactory

The programme does not meet the current generic quality for this standard.

The programme does not attain an acceptable level across the standard's entire spectrum. One or more of the underlying criteria shows a meaningful shortcoming.

Satisfactory

The programme meets the current generic quality for this standard.

The programme shows an acceptable level of attainment across the standard's entire spectrum. If any of the underlying criteria show a shortcoming, that shortcoming is not meaningful.

Good

The programme surpasses the current generic quality for this standard.

The programme clearly goes beyond the acceptable level of attainment across the standard's entire spectrum. None of the underlying criteria have any shortcomings.

Excellent

The programme systematically and substantially surpasses the current generic quality for this standard.

The programme excels across the standard's entire spectrum. This extraordinary level of attainment is explicitly demonstrated through exemplary or good practices in all the underlying criteria. The programme can be regarded as an international example for this standard.



5. Assessment criteria

Standard 1: Intended internationalisation

Criterion 1a: Supported goals

The internationalisation goals for the programme are documented and these are shared and supported by stakeholders within and outside the programme.

Internationalisation goals at programme level

The master programme in Development Studies aims to promote inclusive development, social justice, equity, and intercultural collaboration as core elements of students' learning experience. The goals include: creating and maintaining a diverse international classroom; integrating Global South perspectives and decolonial approaches throughout the curriculum; preparing students for international careers with a strong sense of ethical responsibility. The field of development studies is inherently international and benefits from comparative analyses, exchange of experiences, and international and intercultural exchanges. The internationalisation goals are articulated in the programme proposal for initial accreditation.

The goals address international content, cultural diversity, and global engagement. The goals clarify that internationalisation is not only about having students from different countries, but also about critically learning from those different epistemologies and promoting equitable knowledge production. The ambition to integrate inclusivity and decoloniality structurally into teaching and assessment goes beyond diversity in numbers. It requires constant adaptation of curriculum, training of staff, and monitoring of learning outcomes. Given global inequalities in student recruitment (e.g. fewer scholarships for students from the Global South), maintaining the diversity in the student population is increasingly challenging. The improved programme with shorter duration, now 60 EC instead of 88 EC, is intended to welcome more students to join the programme because a shorter study period requires less funding. ISS as an institute has always focused on international education, but the MA programme tailors these broader goals specifically to development studies by including thematic global content and offering regionally embedded case studies within courses and thesis work.

Stakeholders within and outside the programme

Stakeholders include academic staff, current students, alumni, the Board of Examiners, international and national NGOs, policy organisations in The Hague and beyond, and scholarship providers. These stakeholders were identified via institutional partnerships and alumni involvement. Input from alumni surveys, employers, and external examiners fed into the formulation of programme goals. External stakeholders provided feedback during curriculum redesign. Annual reflection loops, meetings with external examiners, and alumni tracer studies demonstrate that stakeholders support the programme goals.

Conclusion and recommendations

The panel concludes that the internationalisation goals for the programme are documented and are clearly shared and supported by stakeholders both within and outside the programme.



However, the formulation of these goals is often implicit because internationalisation is perceived as self-evident. The panel recommends formulating the internationalisation goals more explicitly so progress can be monitored and shared more systematically.

The panel concludes that the internationalisation goals for the programme are documented but could be documented more thoroughly. This will help formalise the internationalisation goals and help outsiders to easily see the large role internationalisation plays in the programme.

Criterion 1b: Verifiable objectives

Verifiable objectives have been formulated that allow monitoring the achievement of the programme's internationalisation goals.

Internationalisation objectives

Internationalisation is at the heart of the ISS and their education and other activities. The verifiable objectives of the programme's internationalisation goals are therefore not formulated as separate goals, but they are an integral part of the programme and underlying policies. Objectives include maintaining a highly international student body, recruiting and maintaining staff from the Global South, embedding intercultural communication throughout the curriculum, and ensuring that each cohort reflects multiple regions and professional backgrounds. These objectives are referred to in the programme proposal and internal ISS strategic plans, but are not yet systematically listed in a central document linked to measurable indicators.

Most objectives are verifiable. Some indicators exist informally (e.g. annual student diversity data, staff origin data, tracer study results), but they are not systematically formulated as formal benchmarks. The programme monitors diversity trends and thesis topics, but would benefit from more formalised indicators. For example, "maintaining at least 60% non-European students per cohort" or "ensuring annual external examiner review of intercultural learning." The objectives are challenging given the changing scholarship landscape and geopolitical shifts, keeping Global South enrolment and staff recruitment at high levels is challenging but appropriate.

Conclusion and recommendations

The panel concludes that the programme has formulated internationalisation objectives, but these are not yet sufficiently explicitly verifiable in a systematic manner. They provide direction, but do not yet fully allow monitoring the achievement of the programme's goals. The panel recommends defining concrete, measurable objectives (both quantitative and qualitative) that correspond clearly with the internationalisation goals, to support long-term monitoring.

Criterion 1c: Impact on education

The internationalisation goals explicitly include measures that contribute to the overall quality of teaching and learning.

Measures on impact



The internationalisation goals directly translate into curriculum design, staff composition, and learning environment: use of international case studies, team-teaching by international staff, globally diverse reading lists, inclusion of decolonial and non-Western scholarship, and assessments that require reflection on students' own contexts. The small-scale nature of the education, the interactive pedagogy, and regular emphasis on collective learning (primarily through group work) contribute greatly to the overall quality of the internationally oriented teaching and learning at ISS.

These measures result in a high degree of critical intercultural learning, peer-to-peer global exchange, and deeper understanding of international development practice. The panel met with students who repeatedly stated that the international classroom has changed their worldview. The staff-student ratio and accessibility of lecturers reinforce this. The programme's definition of quality in teaching includes inclusivity, reflexivity, and relevance to the field of international development.

Contribution to quality

Internationalisation clearly contributes to the quality of teaching and learning. However, because these contributions are not always explicitly named as such in evaluation documents, the connection between the internationalisation goals and their effects could be made more visible for quality assurance.

Conclusion and recommendations

The panel concludes that the internationalisation goals relate to teaching and learning and that the measures included do contribute to the quality of education. Still, greater transparency in how that impact is monitored would strengthen the system.

The panel recommends to systematically document how internationalisation measures improve teaching quality, for example via explicit inclusion in course evaluations and learning outcome reviews.

Overall conclusion regarding Standard 1. Intended internationalisation

The panel found that internationalisation is deeply embedded in the programme's vision and educational practice. However, the underlying goals and objectives are partly implicit and not always formulated in a measurable way. The panel deems all three underlying criteria to be met but recommends formalising the goals and objectives more clearly for monitoring purposes.

The panel therefore assesses Standard 1 Intended Internationalisation as: Satisfactory.



Standard 2: International and intercultural learning

Criterion 2a: Intended learning outcomes

The intended international and intercultural learning outcomes defined by the programme are a clear reflection of its internationalisation goals.

Intended international and intercultural learning outcomes

The programme formulates clear international and intercultural learning outcomes across the domains of knowledge, analysis, communication, and reflexivity. These include the ability to critically analyse development from multiple non-Western perspectives, communicate effectively in diverse settings, recognise positionality and power relations, and collaborate in multicultural teams. Group work within the master programme in Development Studies is by definition multicultural and international. Students work collaboratively within a multidisciplinary and multicultural context and communicate ideas and effective solutions or interventions in this context. Students are invited to reflect on their own positionality, identify their own biases and opinions, and reflect on the strengths and limitations of their own perspectives while appreciating the value of varied and opposing perspectives. This includes an awareness of cultural opportunities, limitations and restrictions

The learning outcomes are formally listed in the programme's full Intended Learning Outcomes document (Annex to the accreditation file) and integrated into the overarching MA learning outcomes tied to the Dublin descriptors. The panel confirms that the international and intercultural components are not separate add-ons, but embedded within the general outcomes (e.g., students should "work collaboratively within the international and interdisciplinary classroom" and "identify their own biases and reflect on context").

The international/intercultural learning outcomes correspond with the programme's internationalisation goals because they emphasise inclusivity, equity and analytical engagement with global diversity, which are all core to the programme mission. The panel observes that while this correspondence clearly exists, it is mostly implicit and not always distinguished recognisable in documentation or rubrics.



MA Intended Learning Outcomes

| Dublin Descriptors | Intended Learning Outcomes Students who successfully complete the ISS MA in Development Studies programme will independently be able to: |
|--|---|
| <i>Knowledge and understanding</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. define development as a dynamic and interdisciplinary field of study and practice with diverse historical origins, and shaped by multiple actors and interests; b. analyze historical and current topics in development from various methodological and theoretical perspectives and in relation to diverse social realities; c. examine the processes of social transformation related to development, industrialization, globalization, and climate change in addressing inequities (e.g. in access to resources) within a dynamic international context; d. assess policies and intervention strategies in international development studies, considering their interaction with theories and practices of various stakeholders; e. identify various epistemologies in relation to the study of development and associated methodological approaches; |
| <i>Application of knowledge and understanding - analysis</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> f. apply specific development theories and analytical tools to analyze, critique, examine, contrast and explore a development practice or social, political and/or economic phenomena pertaining to development; |
| <i>Application of analysis – making judgments</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> g. adapt appropriate research methods for specific queries and/or fields and justify their selection; h. assess strategic solutions, specific interventions or tailored recommendations to improve or mitigate development practices or social, political and/or economic phenomena; |
| <i>Communication</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. work collaboratively within the international and interdisciplinary classroom; j. communicate ideas, recommended solutions or interventions and strategies effectively, whether orally or in writing to diverse audiences, including academics, practitioners and stakeholders both individually and within groups; |
| <i>Study Attitudes</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> k. identify their own biases and opinions, and reflect on the strengths and limitations of their perspectives; l. recognize the value of diverse and critical perspectives, understanding the significance of context, including the advantages and privileges as well as the disadvantages and limitations inherent in various social, economic and national settings; and m. design and implement a personalized learning path that incorporates continuous reflection — both individually and in collaboration with peers — on personal knowledge, skills, and attitudes, while actively steering their self-directed study and learning process. |

Table 1. An overview of the Intended Learning Outcomes of the master programme in Development Studies as mapped to the Dublin Descriptors.

Conclusion and recommendations

The panel concludes that the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes clearly correspond with the programme's internationalisation goals. The panel recommends making these international and intercultural learning outcomes more explicitly visible (e.g., in course syllabi and assessment rubrics) to support systematic assurance and further monitoring.



Criterion 2b: Student assessment

The methods used for the assessment of students are suitable for measuring the achievement of the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes.

Assessment methods

Students are assessed through a variety of essays, critical reflections, case study papers, oral presentations, group work, policy briefs and a master's thesis with an oral defence. These methods are described in the Academic Calendar, programme syllabus, and the assessment section of each course. The great variety of assessment methods used at ISS, ranging from written exams, policy briefs and take-home exams, to essays and project reports, group assignments and poster presentations, ensure that no academic tradition of assessments dominates. This variety also demonstrates the diversity in the students' learning approaches and experiences.

International and intercultural learning outcomes are not assessed separately; rather, they are embedded in regular course assessments. For instance, written assignments ask students to bring in perspectives from their own regions and evaluate development issues through multiple epistemological lenses. Group assignments require intercultural collaboration and communication, and these skills are assessed as part of the group work and presentations. The thesis manual details that students are allowed to choose region-specific research topics and encourages multi-perspective analysis.

The panel considers this approach suitable for capturing the intended outcomes, as these competences are inherently integrated in the programme's academic work. However, the panel notes that these criteria are not always explicitly reflected in the formal assessment forms or rubrics, which makes the evaluation on the aspect less visible.

Conclusion and recommendations

The panel concludes that student assessment methods are suitable for measuring the achievement of the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes. The panel recommends that the programme make the intercultural and international assessment components more explicit in the assessment rubrics, so they can be more transparently evaluated across courses. The panel also recommends making use of more diverse forms of assessment, such as more oral or portfolio assessment. This will allow for richer ways to assess the international and intercultural learning outcomes of the programme.

Criterion 2c: Graduate achievement

The achievement of the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes by the programme's graduates can be demonstrated.

Demonstration of achievement

The achievement of these intended international and intercultural learning outcomes is demonstrated both directly and indirectly. Directly, student theses reviewed by the panel show clear international scope and context sensitivity, confirming that graduates can apply diverse perspectives and conduct culturally aware research. Indirectly, alumni surveys and employer input confirm that graduates are able to work in international environments and appreciate diversity in professional settings.



The quality of the work of the students is checked and assured by the Board of Examiners and by External Examiners who are international experts. Graduates demonstrably achieve international and intercultural learning outcomes. Thesis samples show reflection on positionality, use of non-Western theoretical frameworks, and application to local contexts. Employers mentioned the mature intercultural communication skills of alumni. Even though documentation is less explicit in assessment rubrics, the panel finds the actual achievement level high.

Conclusion and recommendations

The panel concludes that the graduates demonstrably achieve the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes. The panel recommends documenting this achievement more systematically (e.g. with tracer study indicators or structured alumni feedback on international and intercultural competencies) to allow ongoing monitoring.

Overall conclusion regarding Standard 2. International and intercultural learning

The panel found that the programme's international and intercultural learning outcomes are clearly formulated, embedded in the curriculum, assessed in practice, and achieved by students. All three underlying criteria are met. The programme uses diversity in the classroom actively, yet the visibility of these outcomes in documents and rubrics could be improved.

The panel therefore assesses Standard 2. International and intercultural learning as: Good.



Standard 3: Teaching and Learning

Criterion 3a: Curriculum

The content and structure of the curriculum provide the necessary means for achieving the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes.

Structure of the curriculum

The curriculum is structured in four blocks. These consist of compulsory theoretical core courses, research methods, electives, and the MA thesis. This structure is clearly described in the academic calendar, the programme proposal, and the course catalogue. Students can choose from a wide range of electives organised into five thematic tracks which allows them to focus on areas that reflect their personal and regional backgrounds.

| Block 1 15 EC 10 weeks 7 sept – 13 Nov | Block 2 15 EC 10 weeks 16 Nov – 20 Dec 2 weeks break 4 Jan – 5 Feb | Block 3 15 EC 10 weeks 8 Feb – 16 April | Block 4 15 EC 10+weeks 19 April – End of August |
|---|---|--|--|
| General Course 1 | Elective Content Course 1 | Elective Content Course 3 | |
| General Course 2 | Elective Content Course 2 | Elective Content Course 4 ⁶ | Thesis defence |
| Doing Development Research | Elective Research Methods course | Thesis | |

Table 2. A schematic overview of the curriculum of the MADS programme.

International and intercultural learning outcomes in the curriculum

The programme is very explicit in their aim to service an international target group and their intention to build upon the international experience of the students, in terms of regional background, culture and profession. ISS offers all students the opportunity to achieve the intended learning outcomes by ensuring a level playing field, fostering diversity, providing academic counselling and a mentor system, international cohort building, and structuring the programme with exam periods and study recess.

The curriculum consistently integrates global case studies, South–South and North–South perspectives, and critical theoretical frameworks from different regions. In nearly all courses, students are encouraged and often required to draw on their own regional or professional context when discussing assignments. The thesis process also requires students to demonstrate the application of international and intercultural competencies. The panel confirms that all intended international and intercultural learning outcomes are achievable through the curriculum provided.

Conclusion and recommendations

The panel concludes that both the content and the structure of the curriculum provide excellent and sufficient means for achieving the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes. The panel recommends ensuring that these strong curricular elements



continue to be horizontally aligned across courses as the programme moves into the new structure. With this alignment, intercultural and international goals should be explicitly aligned between courses.

Criterion 3b: Teaching methods

The teaching methods are suitable for achieving the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes.

Teaching methods

Diversity is at the core of the ISS' didactical concept. The small scale, diverse international classroom at ISS, always including students with relevant work and/or life experience, allows discussions in class to go well beyond textbook approaches and solutions to development issues. The educational vision of ISS is firmly based on notions of critical analysis, diversity and co-creation. The programme uses interactive teaching methods such as small-group seminars, case-study workshops, peer debates, group assignments, simulations, and collaborative presentations. These are described in the course syllabi, the academic calendar and the programme proposal.

Teaching methods rely heavily on peer learning and international group work, which naturally require intercultural communication, negotiation of multiple viewpoints, and reflexive discussion. In class, lecturers actively facilitate exchange between students from different regions. Students confirmed that these methods encourage them to engage with other perspectives. The panel observed that these teaching methods are both suitable and exemplary for achieving the international and intercultural learning outcomes.

Conclusion and recommendations

The panel concludes that the teaching methods are highly suitable for achieving the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes. The panel recommends retaining this interactive pedagogical approach and continuing to train new teaching staff to apply it consistently. Continued training of staff is recommended, also in intercultural teaching methods.

Criterion 3c: Learning environment

The learning environment is suitable for achieving the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes.

Learning environment

The programme takes place at ISS in The Hague, an international campus with a diverse student population and staff from different world regions. The physical learning environment includes small seminar rooms, common study areas and a library specialised in development studies. The broader learning environment extends to local institutions in The Hague such as the International Criminal Court, UN organisations, NGOs, which regularly host visits or guest sessions.

The broad mix of nationalities, professional backgrounds, and lived experience among students creates an international classroom that constitutes a learning method in itself. Students confirmed that this environment allows them to practice intercultural dialogue daily.



The location in The Hague also exposes them to international organisations and policy environments. The panel was impressed by how this learning environment goes beyond the classroom and is actively leveraged for the achievement of intercultural competences.

Conclusion and recommendation

The panel concludes that the learning environment is fully suitable for achieving the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes. The panel recommends making continued use of the external professional environment in The Hague as a structured part of the curriculum, e.g. through formalised guest lecture series or practitioner co-supervision within assessment.

The panel found that the curriculum, teaching methods and overall learning environment work together exceptionally well to deliver intercultural learning. All underlying criteria of this standard are met and to a significant extent surpassed. The active use of student diversity in teaching and the staff-to-student interaction can be regarded as an international best practice.

The panel therefore assesses Standard 3 Teaching and Learning as: Excellent.



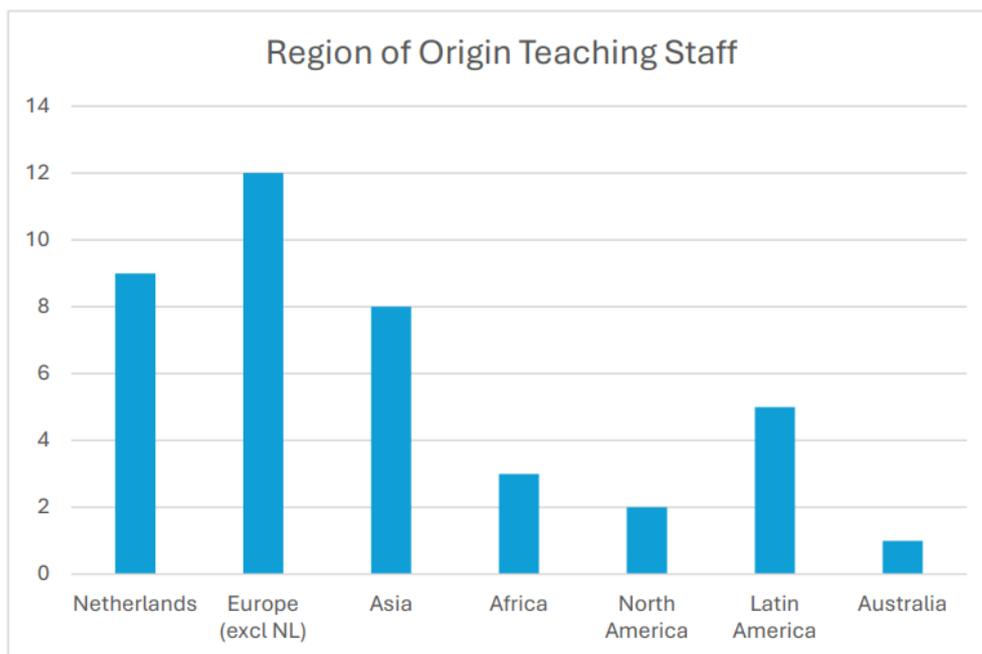
Standard 4: Staff

Criterion 4a: Composition

The composition of the staff (in quality and quantity) facilitates the achievement of the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes.

Staff composition

The teaching staff of the master programme in Development Studies is highly international both in origin and educational background. The total number of academic staff involved in teaching is sufficient to cover the breadth of the curriculum and offers a balanced staff-student ratio. According to the staff list, staff originate from all continents, with representation from Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America and Oceania. Their disciplinary backgrounds range from economics, sociology, anthropology, gender studies, environmental studies, humanitarian studies, political science and law to public policy and development economics. Gender balance within the faculty is also broadly maintained, contributing to a diverse learning environment.



Graph 1. Regional origin of teaching staff in MADS programme.

The staff-student ratio is favourable, enabling individual supervision and mentoring. The deliberate inclusion of scholars from the Global South ensures perspectives that are underrepresented in much of higher education are structurally embedded in teaching and research. This provides a rich and culturally diverse learning environment for the students.

The teaching team consists of senior researchers, associate professors, and lecturers with strong research profiles in relevant fields such as development economics, governance,



gender studies, environmental justice, and migration. Administrative staff also offer support in international procedures, visa applications, intercultural guidance, and student services in English.

The diversity of staff, both in disciplinary and geographical terms, mirrors the international and intercultural learning outcomes. Lecturers are selected on their ability to teach in a global classroom and bring Global South perspectives. The mix of Northern and Southern scholars gives students access to multiple epistemological perspectives and role models. This contributes directly to students' achievement of intercultural competences.

Conclusion and recommendations

The panel concludes that the composition of the staff facilitates the achievement of the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes. The panel recommends continuing to maintain strong representation of Global South scholars and involve new staff in the international classroom pedagogy from the outset, which is one of the distinctive strengths of the programme.

Criterion 4b: Experience

Staff members have sufficient internationalisation experience, intercultural competences and language skills.

International experience & intercultural competences

Staff members have long-standing international experience: many have studied and worked in different countries, and several hold positions in international research networks or NGOs. Intercultural competences are evident in their teaching practices and teamwork during courses. Language skills are strong; English is the working and teaching language at ISS, and all staff members publish and present internationally in English. Through their recruitment policy, ISS deliberately seeks to maintain and, if possible, expand the diversity of academic staff. Considering the composition of the student body and the importance of academically connecting development theory and practice it is especially important to maintain an adequate representation of staff from the Global South.

ISS staff have extensive international teaching and research experience. Many have worked at partner universities abroad (including Uganda, Ethiopia, South Africa, Vietnam, Indonesia, Suriname, Colombia) or in international organisations. They contribute to international curriculum development projects, such as the Erasmus+ funded IGnite project on climate resilience with Sri Lankan universities and the University of Zagreb. Longstanding collaborations include the MA in Public Administration in Suriname (with FHR Institute) and contributions to master's programmes in Vietnam. ISS staff also plays a leading role in the Erasmus Mundus joint degree Mundus MA in Public Policy, partnering with the Central European University, York University and IBEI Barcelona.

Many staff members also have experience teaching at universities in the Global South or working in international development projects, which directly feeds into classroom examples and thesis supervision. These experiences not only expand global networks but also feed directly back into the classroom in The Hague.



Conclusion and recommendations

The panel concludes that staff members have excellent internationalisation experience, intercultural competences and language skills. The panel recommends facilitating continued international exposure and staff exchanges to maintain this high level of international competence.

Criterion 4c: Services

The services provided to the staff (e.g. training, facilities, staff exchanges) are consistent with the staff composition and facilitate international experiences, intercultural competences and language skills.

Services provided to staff

Staff members have access to Erasmus University Rotterdam training opportunities, such as the University Teaching Qualification and Senior Teaching Qualification, intercultural communication workshops, and academic leadership training. Staff at ISS have access to several services that support their international professional development, including Erasmus University Rotterdam training modules in teaching and intercultural communication, Erasmus+ funding for staff mobility and support for international conference participation. ISS also supports incoming and outgoing staff exchanges and actively facilitates visa processes, onboarding, and introduction programmes for international staff members. There are internal seminars on topics such as decolonial pedagogy and inclusive supervision. These seminars further contribute to continued professionalisation for teaching in a multicultural environment. There are possibilities for staff to participate in international conferences funded by ISS. New staff receive onboarding with special attention to the international classroom. Because staff is international and new international lecturers continue to join ISS, the services are relevant and actively used.

Staff are actively engaged in exchanges (e.g. guest lecturing abroad) and are encouraged to participate in international partnerships. Training and seminars support the continued development of intercultural didactic skills. All professional services staff are tested by Erasmus University Rotterdam to ensure that their knowledge of English is at the required level. ISS facilitates participation in language courses offered at Erasmus University for staff (both for English-speaking staff to learn Dutch, and for Dutch-speaking staff to learn English).

Conclusion and recommendations

The panel concludes that the services provided to the staff are consistent with staff composition and adequately facilitate international experiences, intercultural competences and language skills. The panel recommends formalising peer-exchange mechanisms where staff can share best practices on intercultural teaching, as a way to capitalise further on existing strengths.

Overall conclusion regarding Standard 4: Staff

The panel found that all aspects of standard 4 are very strong: the composition of the staff is highly international and well aligned with the programme's vision, staff have extensive international experience and language and intercultural proficiency, and the services provided support continuous development. All underlying criteria are met and, in places, surpass the standard; the composition of staff including Global South scholars and practice-



based expertise can be regarded as an exemplary practice.

The panel therefore assesses Standard 4 Staff as: Excellent.



Standard 5: Students

Criterion 5a: Composition

The composition of the student group (national and cultural backgrounds) is in line with the programme's internationalisation goals.

Composition

The master programme in Development Studies attracts an exceptionally diverse student cohort each year. Students come from more than 50 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East. They bring a variety of professional backgrounds such as NGO experience, civil servants, grassroots activism, journalism, education, public policy, and disciplinary foundations (sociology, economics, law, anthropology, politics, etc.). ISS makes an exerted effort to identify scholarship programmes that make it possible for students from a less wealthy background, and from all continents to study at ISS.

In order to promote diversity and inclusion among the students, the programme also ensures mixing and exchange through group assignments, peer-learning activities, and collaboration in thesis support groups creating additional "virtual mobility" and cross-cultural collaboration within the classroom. Additionally, the programme offers dual degree pathways with partners in Vietnam, Indonesia, Ecuador and South Korea such as with the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City and FLACSO Ecuador, which structurally expand the international composition of student cohorts. Even within The Hague, different groups of regular ISS students and incoming dual degree students are intentionally combined in joint courses and group assignments.

One of the core goals of the programme is to create a truly international classroom that reflects global diversity and fosters decolonial and intercultural dialogue. The current student mix is a direct manifestation of that goal. The programme demonstrates this alignment through annual statistics and through feedback from students who refer to the class composition itself as one of the most transformative aspects of the programme.

Conclusion and recommendations

The panel concludes that the student group composition is highly in line with the programme's internationalisation goals. The panel recommends continuing efforts to ensure access for Global South students, particularly given the changing availability of scholarships and to be attentive for the possible change in the student population because of new programme, with a potentially decreasing number of students with work experience.

Criterion 5b: Experience

The internationalisation experience gained by students is adequate and corresponds to the programme's internationalisation goals.

Internationalisation experiences

All students experience a truly international classroom through daily peer interaction, group assignments and reflexive work in multicultural teams. Additional mobility-based experiences are offered through dual degree arrangements and short stays at partner universities (for some thesis projects). Extracurricular learning takes place by means of study visits, external



seminars, and guest lectures involving international practitioners and academics. The inclusion of joint supervision in some dual degree programmes (e.g. in Vietnam) provides further intercultural exchange and academic training across institutional contexts. Some students also undertake voluntary internships or participate in external conferences. Students reported to the panel that these experiences were very valuable in their career development.

The programme's goal to train students in global social justice, critical international analysis, and intercultural cooperation is clearly reflected in what students experience. Students repeatedly indicated during the site visit that the international classroom and diversity of methods fundamentally changed how they understand development. The evaluations by alumni make clear that, also with hindsight, they consider their study at ISS as an international and intercultural experience from which they benefit throughout their professional life.

Conclusion and recommendations

The panel concludes that the internationalisation experience gained by students is excellent and fully corresponds to the programme's goals. The panel recommends documenting these international learning experiences more explicitly in course evaluation forms and including them structurally in quality assurance discussions. The panel recommends formalizing opportunities for students to engage with work-field professionals, for example through conferences.

Criterion 5c: Services

The services provided to the students (e.g. information provision, counselling, guidance, accommodation, Diploma Supplement) are adequate and correspond to the composition of the student group.

Services

Students receive extensive services including visa support, arrival guidance, housing assistance, counselling, intercultural introduction sessions, social events, and academic mentoring. The Student Welfare Office offers workshops, psychological support, and a mandatory introduction module on intercultural communication and unwanted behaviour. Services are offered pro-actively, especially in the early phases of the programme, and are available throughout the year. The programme re-established their relationship with the JJ/WorldBank Graduate Scholarship programme. Programme management works on identifying other scholarship programmes in the future that might be open for support for a one-year MA programme, such as the Jean Monnet Scholarship programme. The partial scholarship programmes (the Excellent Student Scholarship with a discount of 40% and the Hardship fund with a discount of 30%) will remain important instruments to keep the programme open for a broad target group.

The Diploma Supplement is issued in English and includes information on the international nature of the curriculum. Students also receive help with accessing Dutch healthcare, legal issues, and academic skill-building workshops. Services explicitly address the fact that most students are internationals living in a new country and learning in a diverse cohort. Feedback from students shows they feel seen and supported. Alumni reported that the academic mentoring and welfare services were crucial for their success in the programme.



Conclusion and recommendations

The panel concludes that the services provided to students are fully adequate and correspond closely to the international student composition and their experiences. The panel recommends maintaining the current high level of student services and ensuring continued accessibility.

Overall conclusion regarding Standard 5: Students

The panel found that the student body is exceptionally diverse, that students gain transformative international and intercultural learning experiences, and that student services are extensive, proactive and highly supportive. The dual-degree and partnership opportunities further enhance the international learning dimension. All underlying criteria are systematically surpassed. The diversity and support structures can be regarded as exemplary practice.

The panel therefore assesses Standard 5 Students as: Excellent.



6. Overview of assessments

| Standard | Criterion | Level of fulfilment for each standard unsatisfactory/satisfactory/good/excellent (see descriptions in chapter 4) |
|---|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. Intended internationalisation | 1a. Supported goals | Satisfactory |
| | 1b. Verifiable objectives | |
| | 1c. Impact on education | |
| 2. International and intercultural learning | 2a. Intended learning outcomes | Good |
| | 2b. Student assessment | |
| | 2c. Graduate achievement | |
| 3. Teaching and learning | 3a. Curriculum | Excellent |
| | 3b. Teaching methods | |
| | 3c. Learning environment | |
| 4. Staff | 4a. Composition | Excellent |
| | 4b. Experience | |
| | 4c. Services | |
| 5. Students | 5a. Composition | Excellent |
| | 5b. Experience | |
| | 5c. Services | |



Annex 1. Composition of the panel

Overview panel requirements

| <i>Panel member</i> | <i>Subject</i> | <i>Internat.</i> | <i>Educat.</i> | <i>QA</i> | <i>Student</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|
| • Frederik de Decker | X | X | X | X | |
| • Bereket Kebede | X | X | X | X | |
| • Mieke Lopes Cardozo | X | X | X | X | |
| • Ellemijn Egberink | | | | X | X |

- Subject: Subject- or discipline-specific expertise;
Internat.: International expertise, preferably expertise in internationalisation;
Educat.: Relevant experience in teaching or educational development;
QA: Relevant experience in quality assurance or auditing; or experience as student auditor;
Student: Student with international or internationalisation experience;

Chair: Frederik de Decker, Manager Functional Domain Internationalisation, University Service Education and Research, Ghent University (Belgium)

Frederik started his professional career in internationalisation at Ghent University, more than 30 years ago, triggered by his own study abroad experiences in The Netherlands and Poland. Previously he had different responsibilities related to internationalisation and educational policy in various Belgian higher education institutions, including head of the Office for educational development and internationalisation at Artevelde UAS (2000-2006) and senior advisor educational policy at the umbrella organisation Ghent University Association (2006-2014).

He participates regularly as an expert in international projects, mainly dealing with innovation in internationalisation, educational development, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance. Topics he frequently addresses as an (invited) speaker at conferences and publishes regularly about. He also chairs and participates in various advisory boards re. these themes at the Flemish level, e.g. the Working Groups on internationalisation of the Flemish Education Council (Council for Higher Education), the Flemish Interuniversity Council and the Flemish Council of Universities, Universities of Applied Sciences and Associations. Frederik is a member of the Board of directors of ENLIGHT European University and member of the Executive Committee of the SGroup of European universities. His special interests are the concept of (international/intercultural) learning outcomes/competences; micro-credentials; inclusive mobility and responsible internationalisation.



Prof. dr. Bereket Kebede (member), Professor in Behavioural Economics, School of Global Development University of East Anglia (United Kingdom): Bereket is a development economist with his more recent research focusing on behavioural development economics that combines insights from behavioural economics with development economics and extensively using experimental economics. Bereket finished his undergraduate degree at Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia) with a B.A. in economics with distinction and as winner of the Chancellor gold medal for Social Science College, followed by a master's and PhD/DPhil degrees, both from Oxford University. He has served as lecturer and professor at Addis Ababa and Bath (UK) universities followed by the University of East Anglia (UK). He has extensive experience as external examiner and assessor for different university courses and programmes in Europe and Africa.

Dr. Mieke Lopes Cardozo (member), Associate Professor in Regenerative Education and Development, International Development Studies/Governance of Inclusive Development University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

Mieke is Associate Professor in Regenerative Education and Development at the University of Amsterdam. She has extensive experience in curriculum innovation and higher education transformation, including her role in the EU-funded Erasmus Mundus Master GLOBED on Education Policies for Global Development and her Comenius Teaching Fellowship *Critical Development and Diversity Explorations*, which engaged students and colleagues in decolonial and diversity-oriented learning within International Development Studies. From 2016–2018, she served as an Advisor to the UN Secretary-General on the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security, building on earlier collaborations with UNICEF through international research consortia on education and peacebuilding. Her current projects include leading RISERS (Researching Innovations supporting Education for Regenerative Societies) and coordinating the FRIS (Fair, Resilient, Inclusive Societies) scholarship programme, both focused on educational innovation and action research. She actively contributes to regenerative and decolonial higher education communities in the Netherlands and internationally, and writes about innovative, regenerative, co-creative and decolonial approaches in teaching International Development Studies.

Ellemijn Egberink (Student member), Student bachelor International Business Maastricht University (The Netherlands)

Ellemijn is a Bachelor student in International Business at Maastricht University. She spent a semester studying at the University of Buenos Aires, strengthening her intercultural skills and Spanish proficiency. Alongside her studies she is a consultant with Research Project



Maastricht, where she conducts company-specific research in Mexico and Colombia. She has also been active in student representation and associations at Maastricht University, bringing experience in governance, teamwork and cross-cultural collaboration.

Coordinator: Anne Klaas Schilder MA, NVAO policy advisor and process coordinator, NVAO (The Netherlands)



Annex 2. Documents reviewed

List of documents offered to the panel:

- Self evaluation report
- Annexes to the self evaluation report:
 - o Alumni survey 2024
 - o Benchmark other programmes NL
 - o Benchmark other programmes INT
 - o Domain specific framework Development Studies
 - o Anticipated target group
 - o ILOs in courses
 - o Academic Calendar 2026-2027
 - o Sample Thesis topics
 - o Scholas report
 - o Staff list
 - o Organogram ISS
 - o Student Charter 2026-2027
 - o Thesis Handbook 2026-2027
 - o Assessment forms examples
 - o List of Research Papers
 - o Planning graduation 2026-2027
 - o Note on ISS partnerships
 - o Course example Behavioural Perspectives and Development

Annex 3. Site visit programme

Overview

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Date: | 16 July 2025 |
| Institution: | Erasmus University Rotterdam, International Institute of Social Studies |
| Programme: | Master in Development Studies |
| Location: | Kortenaerkade 12, 2518 AX, The Hague |

Programme

1 July 2025

12.00 – 14.00 Online preparation meeting of the panel

15 July 2025

18.30 - 21.00: Preparatory meeting of the panel and dinner



| 16 July 2025 | |
|---------------------|--|
| 08:45 – 09:00 | Arrival at ISS and welcome members of the panel |
| 09.00 – 09.30 | Preparatory meeting panel |
| 09.30 – 10.15 | Meeting 1: Programme management (including dean), ISS Institute Board, and coordination team |
| 10.15 – 10.30 | Deliberations panel |
| 10.30 – 11.30 | Meeting 2: Teaching staff and MADS development team |
| 11.30 – 11.45 | Deliberations panel |
| 11.45 – 12.15 | Meeting 3: Students and alumni (of the current programme) |
| 12.15– 13.15 | Lunch and deliberations panel |
| 13.15– 13.45 | Meeting 4: Work field representatives |
| 13.45 – 14.00 | Deliberations panel |
| 14.00 – 14.30 | Meeting 5: Teaching and Learning Committee and Board of Examiners |
| 14.30 – 16.00 | Deliberations panel |
| 16.00 – 16.30 | Presentation of preliminary findings by the panel and closing |



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