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BSc Business and Consumer Studies

Wageningen University

Advisory report of the assessment of the existing programme
11 December 2024

Colophon

Institution and programme

Wageningen University
Wageningen
Institutional Audit: yes

Programme: BSc Bedrijfs- en Consumentenwetenschappen (Business and Consumer Studies)

Site: Wageningen

Mode: fulltime

ISAT-number: 56836

Assessment panel

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Summary

On 11 December 2024 an assessment panel of AeQui visited the University of Wageningen (WU) to perform a quality assessment of two degree programmes. This external assessment is part of a broader cluster evaluation of wo-bedrijfskunde programmes in the Netherlands. The underlying document reports on the panel assessment of the Bachelor of Science in Business and Consumer Studies (BBC) according to the NVAO framework for limited programme assessment. The panel's overall judgement of the programme quality is **positive**.

Intended learning outcomes

The *Bachelor Bedrijfs- en Consumentenwetenschappen* is a three-year full-time programme taught in Dutch. BBC is a social science programme embedded in a life science context, and aims to provide students with a solid theoretical base in business and consumer studies, with methodological, academic and professional skills, and with an academic and professional attitude. The programme addresses the chain of fast moving consumer goods. In the second year, students opt for either Business Studies or Consumer Studies. The latter specialisation is unique in the Netherlands. The BBC programme has a clear and distinctive profile, features proper learning outcomes, and is well connected to the professional field. Its profile aligns well with the mission and vision of the university. The intended learning outcomes strike a good balance between general statements and specific operationalisations, and their formulation does justice to the domain, level and orientation of the programme. The dynamic interaction with the professional field, and in particular the systematic involvement of the External Advisory Committee, allows to review and update the learning outcomes and the curriculum contents, strengthens the relevance and impact of the programme, and enhances the employability of its graduates. According to the panel, the conscientious efforts of the programme team to address the recommendations from the previous accreditation report are indicative of a broader and widely shared quality culture that

is based on continuous development. The panel thus concludes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Teaching-learning environment

The BBC programme has a strong teaching and learning environment featuring a coherent curriculum, a befitting didactic concept, a diverse student audience and well-qualified teaching staff. The curriculum is coherent with course learning goals being clearly aligned to the programme learning outcomes. The combination of common courses, major courses and free-space courses does justice to the unique profile of the programme, and is highly appreciated by students. In line with the educational vision of the university, the didactic approach includes a variety of teaching methods and a combination of tutorials and plenary lectures. BBC students benefit of the small-scale education, the student support services of the university, and the study advisers of the programme. The teaching staff is well qualified to apply the programme's educational principles to the substance of their courses and the different teaching formats. The panel noticed a positive vibe in the BBC programme: the management functions as a real team, students form a community, and the teaching and support staff are competent and enthusiastic. The panel thus concludes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Student assessment

The BBC programme can rely on a robust system of assessment. Both course and thesis assessments are embedded in well-established university-wide assessment policies and frameworks, while the curriculum matrix and the course assessment plans safeguard that course learning goals are assessed adequately and cover the programme learning outcomes. Course assessment is carefully designed, varied, and well aligned with the learning objectives. The transparent information on assessment, and the increased use of formative assessment and peer feedback ensure that students are adequately and fairly assessed throughout their study. The thesis review demonstrated that the evaluation form is relevant and that the scoring is consistent. The panel thinks highly of the quality assurance system for assessment, which is comprehensive and effective, and commends the Examination Board Social Sciences for its expertise, pro-active approach, commitment, and meticulous reporting. The panel thus concludes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Achieved learning outcomes

Students who graduate from the BBC programme have effectively acquired all intended learning outcomes. The selected and reviewed theses meet the quality expectations for a final

project of academic orientation at bachelor level. By the time they graduate, BBC students are well prepared for a follow-up master programme and find suitable employment (afterwards). The panel thus concludes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Recommendations

With an eye on the future, the panel offers the following points for development:

- intensify the communication on (the distinctive character of) the BBC programme with a view to attract / recruit more secondary school students;
- ensure that each thesis evaluation form is completed in an insightful way by both supervisor and second assessor;
- consider whether the current weights allocated to the thesis process and the research work are balanced;
- consider whether the bachelor thesis should cover all learning outcomes at end level, or become part of a 'final proof of BBC competence'.
- consider whether the current terms of reference of the bachelor thesis are feasible in view of the size of the 'thesis course' and the short timeframe at disposition.

All standards of the NVAO framework have been positively assessed. On this basis, the panel provides a **positive recommendation** regarding the accreditation of the BSc Business and Consumer Studies.

On behalf of the entire site visit panel,
Utrecht, April 2025

Eric Dooms
Chair

Mark Delmartino
Secretary

Introduction

Institution

Wageningen University (WU) consists of one Faculty of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences offering 20 bachelor and 31 master degree programmes. The Rector Magnificus is also the Dean of the Faculty. The Board of Education is the governing body of all degree programmes. Academic teaching staff are hosted by one of the university's ninety Chair Groups, which in turn belong to one of five Science Groups at WUR: Agrotechnology & Food, Animal Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Plant Sciences, and Social Sciences.

Each degree programme has a Programme Committee (PC) consisting of an equal number of students and staff members appointed by the Board of Education. The Board of Education oversees that the programme director and the PC develop and update bachelor's and master's curricula and align with the Chair Group(s) on whether new courses and specialisations are needed and/or existing courses or thesis specialisations have to be enhanced.

There is one Programme Committee (consisting of six staff and six students) and one Programme Director covering the two programmes under review. To safeguard the quality of student assessment, WU has four Examining Boards. The BBC programme falls under the Examining Board of the Social Sciences (EBSS).

Programme

The *Bachelor Bedrijfs- en Consumentenwetenschappen* (BBC) is a three-year full-time programme taught in Dutch. BBC is a social science programme embedded in a life science context, and aims to provide students with a solid theoretical base in business and consumer studies, with methodological, academic and profes-

sional skills, and with an academic and professional attitude. The programme addresses the chain of fast moving consumer goods (FMCG): the production, processing, trading, distribution and consumption of food and other fast moving consumer goods, including the linkages, actors and transactions involved. During their study, students combine insights from both social sciences and life sciences, and acquire knowledge of the functioning and the organisation of production and consumption systems and their interactions.

In the second year, BBC students opt for either Business Studies or Consumer Studies. The Business Studies major focuses on decision-making processes within businesses, managerial and financial issues, and relations between the different actors involved in a chain. The Consumer Studies majors addresses decision-making processes within households, purchasing and consuming behaviour of individual consumers, consumer lifestyles, communication, and consumer centred technology development. The latter major makes the BBC unique in the Netherlands as it constitutes the only BSc programme specialising in consumer studies.

Assessment

The external assessment of this programme is part of a wider wo-Bedrijfskunde cluster visit involving 20 degree programmes at eight higher education institutions in the Netherlands. Wageningen University & Research has commissioned AeQui to carry out the assessment of its bachelor and master programme in this cluster.

In the run-up to the visit, a preparatory meeting was held with representatives of WU to exchange information and plan the dates and programme of the site visit. In collaboration with

the programmes, AeQui assembled an independent and knowledgeable panel (see Attachment 1). The panel explicitly oriented itself to the cluster in which the programme is placed. The visit was carried out on 11 December 2024 according to the programme presented in Attachment 2.

The assessment was conducted based on the Accreditation Framework for Higher Education in the Netherlands. WU has a positive institutional audit decision, and therefore the panel assessed four standards of the framework. During the previous accreditation round, the then panel made recommendations for further development. The actions taken in response by the programme are listed in Attachment 3. The panel has integrated this follow-up into its considerations for the current assessment.

The BBC programme put at disposition many materials, which served as background information before and during the visit. An overview of these materials is listed in Attachment 4. In the run-up to the site visit, the panel studied the programme's self-evaluation report and re-

viewed a sample of 15 bachelor theses. Their first impressions on the report and the thesis (evaluations) formed the basis for discussion during an online preparatory meeting on 9 December, and guided the panel's questions during the visit.

An Open Consultation Hour for students, teaching and support staff was organised in connection with the preparatory meeting; eventually, three people signed up and spoke individually and confidentially with the panel. At the initiative of WU, a Development Dialogue took place at the end of the site visit. The results of this meeting did not affect the assessment presented in this report.

The panel conducted the assessment independently. At the end of the visit, the chair informed the programme and institutional representatives about the panel findings, considerations and conclusions. A draft version of the underlying report was sent to the programme, whose response was incorporated into this final version of the report.

Intended learning outcomes

Standard 1: The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

Findings

Profile

The *Bachelor Bedrijfs- en Consumentenwetenschappen* (BBC) is a three-year full-time programme taught in Dutch. BBC is embedded in the social sciences domain and has a multidisciplinary profile that combines elements from business studies, consumer studies, and life sciences. The programme is situated in the context of Wageningen's mission "to explore the potential of nature to improve the quality of life," and prepares students to analyse and contribute to solutions for complex problems in the field of food, consumption, and business, particularly within the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) domain. In the framework of the BBC programme, FMCG is defined as the production, processing, trading, distribution and consumption of food and other fast moving consumer goods, including the linkages, actors and transactions involved.

The BBC programme responds to the growing demand for academically trained professionals who can understand and navigate the dynamic and interconnected relationships between producers, retailers, consumers, and regulators in the food system. It focuses on the entire food value chain, commonly referred to as "from farm to fork," and emphasises topics such as sustainability, food safety, consumer health, ethical production, and biodiversity. These topics are approached from both business and consumer perspectives, reflecting the programme's dual

focus. Hence, during their study, students combine insights from both social sciences and life sciences, and acquire knowledge of the functioning and the organisation of production and consumption systems and their interactions.

The academic orientation of the programme is evident in its commitment to theoretical rigour, research-based teaching, and the development of critical analytical skills. It provides students with the tools to reflect on the functioning and governance of the food and consumer goods systems, to understand theoretical frameworks in the social sciences, and to engage in empirical research. Moreover, the curriculum fosters professional competencies such as communication, teamwork, and ethical reasoning.

The multidisciplinary character of the programme is reflected in the involvement of different Chair Groups¹, which contribute their disciplinary expertise to the curriculum. In this way, students are exposed to different perspectives and methodologies, learn to integrate knowledge and apply it to real-world problems.

The panel acknowledges that the profile of the BBC programme is unique in the Dutch academic landscape as it focuses on consumer studies, on the (agri-food) chain of fast moving consumer goods, and on food and nutrition. It is the only bachelor's programme in the Netherlands that allows students to specialise in consumer studies within a broader social science framework, while also offering a robust

¹ Business economics, Food quality and design, Information technology, Operations research and logistics, Marketing

and consumer behaviour, Business management and organisations, Consumption and Healthy Lifestyles, Urban economics, Communication philosophy and technology

business-oriented track. The panel gathered from the discussions on site with management, staff and students that this unique profile may be known to the inner circle of WU stakeholders, but has not yet reached the outside world. The programme indicated that there is work to do in terms of branding and communication, that they have the message but still need to do the missionary work. The panel welcomes the plans and encourages the programme to start disseminating and communicating broadly – as well very specifically in secondary schools - that WU is also an equally relevant destination as Rotterdam, Tilburg or Amsterdam for students who want to pursue academic studies in social sciences – and the only place to go for BBC/consumer studies.

Intended learning outcomes

The BBC programme features twelve intended learning outcomes (ILOs), which are clustered in four categories: one overarching domain-specific outcome, three outcomes related to theory and interpretation, four outcomes on academic research methods, and four outcomes addressing professional skills and academic attitude. Together, these ILOs articulate what BBC graduates are expected to know, understand, and be able to do upon completion of the programme. According to the panel, this set of ILOs is logical as they align with the main focus of the programme, FMCG, as well as with the combination of business and consumer specialisations.

The ILOs are explicitly linked to the five Dublin descriptors for bachelor programmes, ensuring that the degree meets the recognised academic standards at European level. The panel noted that the ILOs are not only well aligned with the Dublin descriptors but also with international subject-specific disciplinary expectations. In this regard, the BBC programme uses the EQUAL Guidelines for Undergraduate Degrees in

General Business & Management as a benchmark. According to this domain-specific reference framework, Business & Management graduates “will be able to demonstrate relevant knowledge and understanding of organisations, the external environment in which they operate, and how they are managed.” The panel noted that this is exactly what the BBC programme is about, and what its intended learning outcomes set out to achieve.

Furthermore, the panel established that the ILOs are formulated clearly and strike a good balance between general statements and programme/major-specific operationalisations. It also appreciates the explicit attention in the learning outcomes to multidisciplinary, sustainability, pro-social aspects and ethical issues. This, in turn, reflects the programme’s responsiveness to (emerging) societal challenges and developments, and enhances the relevance and currency of the programme. According to the panel, the programme clearly delivered on the recommendation of the previous panel to include the pro-social orientation of the programme in the learning outcomes.

Professional Field

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the BBC programme adopts different mechanisms to ensure that its ILOs remain aligned with the needs and expectations of the professional field. In addition to informal and one-off encounters with guest lecturers, internship providers and external thesis research partners, the most important formal body is the External Advisory Committee (EAC).

The EAC consists of 17 representatives from various sectors, including industry, government, consultancy, and research organisations. The panel noticed from the materials that both the

individuals on the committee and the organisations they represent are highly resourceful and cover the breadth of the BBC programme. In this way, the programme definitely lived up to the recommendations of the previous accreditation panel to diversify the composition of the advisory committee.

The committee meets at regular intervals with the Programme Committee and provides advice and feedback on the relevance and applicability of the programme's objectives and content, on trends in the labour market, on the required competencies for graduates, and on opportunities for curriculum innovation. In this way, the EAC plays an important role in bridging the gap between academic education and professional practice.

The panel established that the EAC takes its role seriously – and its advice is also taken seriously by the programme. The self-evaluation and the discussions on site highlighted several examples of how the EAC has influenced the development of the ILOs and the curriculum. In its most recent meetings, for instance, the committee confirmed the value of multidisciplinary knowledge and research skills because employers appreciate that graduates can work across disciplinary boundaries and apply analytical thinking to complex problems. The EAC also identified areas for improvement, such as the need to strengthen student confidence in presenting themselves in the labour market, and the growing importance of data literacy and digital competencies. A third suggestion was to continue embedding ethical and sustainability considerations in the programme learning outcomes and courses.

The panel appreciates the follow-up the programme has given to these pieces of advice and that topics such as corporate social respon-

sibility, sustainable business practices, and consumer ethics are now integral components of the curriculum.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the BBC programme has a clear and distinctive profile, features proper learning outcomes, and is well connected to the professional field.

The panel establishes that the profile of the BBC programme aligns well with the mission and vision of the university. The combination of two majors (business and consumer studies) and its attention to two disciplines (social and life sciences) make the programme not only relevant but also stand out in the Dutch higher education landscape. In addition, the coverage of actual topics and the opportunities for specialisation allow students to prepare for further academic study and for a wide range of relevant positions on the labour market.

The panel considers that the intended learning outcomes do justice to the domain, level and orientation of the BBC programme, as well as to its distinctive profile. Moreover, the learning outcomes strike a good balance between general statements and programme/major-specific operationalisations. In this way they constitute a strong basis for the design of the curriculum and the assessment of student learning.

The panel thinks highly of the programme's connections with the professional field. The systematic and structural involvement of the External Advisory Committee is a useful and effective way to review and update both the intended learning outcomes and the curriculum contents. Moreover, this dynamic interaction with the professional field strengthens the relevance and

impact of the programme and enhances the employability of its graduates.

The panel also commends the programme team for addressing – and delivering on – the recommendations from the previous accreditation report. These conscientious efforts do not only contribute to a better quality profile, ILOs and advisory committee, but are part of a broader and widely shared quality culture that is based on continuous development.

In addition to all these positive considerations, the panel sees room for improvement in so far as the branding of, and communication on, the programme is concerned. The BBC programme features several interesting building blocks that together add up to a unique profile. According to the panel – and the programme team confir-

med during the visit that it agreed to this analysis - there is much unused potential for communicating this distinctive character to the outside world. A key audience that should be informed and convinced is the group of secondary school students who are about to decide what and where to study. The panel understands from the various insights that the WU message is as follows: WU is a relevant destination for students who want to pursue academic studies in social sciences, and it is the only place to go for BBC/consumer studies.

Taking these considerations into account, the panel assesses that the programme **meets** this standard.

Teaching-learning environment

Standard 2: The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Findings

Programme

The BBC programme lasts three years, with each year consisting of 60 EC spread over six periods of 12 EC or 6 EC. The combination of two longer periods and one short period aligns with the two-semester system that is often used at other universities, and allows students to go on a study period abroad or follow courses at other (Dutch) universities. Right from the start, BBC students are introduced to the multidisciplinary nature of the FMCG domain. They learn to approach challenges from both a business and consumer perspective and are trained to critically assess the functioning of production and consumption chains. In the common part, students are exposed to fundamental theories, methodological training, and introductory courses in both business and consumer studies. In the second year, students choose a major - either Business Studies or Consumer Studies - which consists of coursework and the bachelor thesis. Students also complete a free-choice component, usually during the fifth or the sixth semester, which takes the form of a minor, an individual set of electives, or a study period abroad. In order to ensure coherence with the rest of the curriculum and make them the owners of their study path, students have to provide a written motivation for their free choice part, which is eventually checked by the study advisor and validated by the Examining Board.

The curriculum addresses key topics such as supply chains, sustainability, consumer behaviour, decision-making, marketing, and accounting. It also includes courses in methodology and

statistics. The panel understood from the materials and the discussions that this combination of domain-specific theory and methodological competence is a core strength of the programme. Moreover, the panel acknowledges that the focus on the FMCG chain in the context of societal challenges constitutes a unique element of the BBC programme. Courses such as "Business and Consumer Perspectives on Food Quality" and "Research Topics on Food and Society" integrate social and life sciences, which in turn align well with the profile and mission of the university. Finally, the curriculum includes a variety of academic and professional skills training, such as group collaboration, presentation, academic writing, and communication to different audiences.

The panel noticed that the programme has an academic orientation, emphasising analytical thinking, methodological training, and scientific reflection. Hence the extensive attention in the curriculum for theory development, for research skills, and for critical engagement with contemporary societal issues such as sustainability, food ethics, and responsible consumption. The academic orientation is also visible in the bachelor thesis where all students design and conduct independently a small-scale research project. The individual bachelor thesis serves as a capstone experience: students formulate a research question, apply relevant theories and methods, and reflect on their findings. Through the thesis, students demonstrate the full range of academic and methodological skills they have acquired throughout the programme and prepare for further academic study or professional engagement.

The panel gathered from the written materials that the intended learning outcomes are operationalised throughout the curriculum, which is designed in such a way that students develop their knowledge and skills gradually over three years. Each course contributes to one or more of the ILOs, and the mapping between courses (and their learning goals) and overall learning outcomes at programme level is made explicit in the curriculum matrix. The panel studied this matrix and established that all ILOs are systematically addressed and that students have multiple opportunities to develop and demonstrate the required competencies.

Further to a similar finding on standard one, the panel noticed that the BBC programme has considered all teaching-learning related recommendations from the previous accreditation report. The programme integrated several suggestions, notably with regard to the sequence, content and structure of the data science courses, the increase of guest lectures in courses, and the (communication on) opportunities for students to take part in honours education. Moreover, it took on board the advice of the External Advisory Committee to introduce in year two the so-called Bachelor Assessment, a personal development assessment that includes self-assessment and guided group discussions. This component helps students become more aware of their strengths and articulate their unique profile as BBC graduates. According to the panel, these initiatives confirm the quality culture in the programme and the openness of all stakeholders to continuous development.

The panel gathered from the interesting student chapter and the discussion with BBC students on site that they are overall satisfied with the content, quality and organisation of the curriculum. Students like in particular the different options of the programme: flexibility in the form

of electives, minors, and the option to study abroad, enabling students to tailor their study path to their interests and their career perspectives. Students also appreciate the breadth of the programme, and in particular the variety of courses: the curriculum offers not only domain-specific knowledge in business and/or consumer studies, but also academic and professional skills training, and practical courses like accounting. In addition, the many academic contacts of WU allow students a wide choice of destinations when they study abroad. Students approaching the bachelor thesis trajectory can look for inspiration to many Chair Groups, about five per major, when deciding on the domain and topic of their thesis. Also prior to the thesis, students are often at liberty to choose the subject of their course assignments. Moreover, the programme schedule allows for variation in course sequences, as well as for extra-curricular personal/professional development opportunities. All these options enable students to explore their interests and to create their own unique study programme.

When they were asked what can be improved, students indicated they would like to work more on real business problems earlier on in the programme. Adding a bit of practice/real life situations to more courses would definitely make these courses more fun. They would also like more contact hours, and call upon teachers to make these contact hours more attractive, e.g. through more interaction and more attention for the application of theories. After all, students get their study motivation in class, hence it is of paramount importance that these contact hours are indeed boosting this motivation. Furthermore, students indicated that they do not like the organisation of the four-week courses: they do not last long enough to allow for an in-depth coverage of a topic, let alone that teaching staff can address real-life/practice situations in class.

Finally, students mentioned during the session on site that overall, they feel heard when they raise concerns, and noticed willingness among management and staff to change/improve.

Learning environment

The panel gathered from the written materials that the structure of the curriculum supports progressive learning and the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The structure of the academic year in six long/short periods allows students to focus on one or two courses at a time, which helps avoiding peak loads and supports more in-depth engagement with course content.

Across the curriculum there are various teaching methods, each with their own standards and requirements. The panel was informed that this variety is part of the university-wide education policy to provide intensive teaching by organising tutorials for smaller groups in addition to plenary lectures for all students.

The sequencing of courses has been designed to ensure that students acquire basic knowledge before moving on to more advanced topics. The common part in the first and second years ensures a broad foundation, while the major and the free-choice component offer space for individual learning paths. Similarly, statistics and research methods are introduced early in the curriculum and revisited in more complex forms later on. Integration of knowledge is encouraged through interdisciplinary courses and the bachelor thesis. The panel appreciates the programme's educational approach featuring small groups, the equal distribution of work and study load, and the variety in courses and teaching methods. Students from their side indicated that they value the personal contact with teachers and the relatively small scale of the programme.

Furthermore, the panel read in the materials – and obtained plenty of evidence during the site visit – that the student support system is a very strong point of the BBC programme. In line with university policy, the programme strives to cater to a diverse population of students. Students with functional impairments can reach out to student deans, psychologists, and study advisors for assistance in minimising any potential barriers. Moreover, the information provision for students is well developed from the initial stages prior to enrolment, over the induction phase and all through the curriculum phases when students make choices on their track, electives and future study plans.

In alignment with university policy, the BBC programme has two dedicated study advisers who guide students throughout their study and are their first point of contact for personal or academic issues. The study advisers also play a key role in helping students select courses, majors, and thesis topics, and in facilitating international exchanges or internships. Students meet with their study adviser several times during the programme: early in the first year, students attend plenary and group meetings to reflect on their study attitude and progress. In the second year, the study advisers facilitate the so-called Bachelor Assessment, a structured self-reflection process that includes an online test and group discussions. Study advisers also know the broader offer of central university services and can refer students to student psychologists, academic counsellors, and career services.

Students highly appreciate the personal attention and work passion of the study advisers, as well as the above-mentioned personal professionalisation trajectory and the university-wide student support services. Students rate the support provided by the programme – and in particular by the study advisers - very positively. In

the National Student Survey 2024, the support system received a score of 4.62 for availability and 4.50 for quality. These scores are significantly above average and reflect the effectiveness of the support system. Moreover, the bachelor students the panel spoke to on-site mentioned the quality, availability and individual attention of the study advisers as a major strength of the programme. The panel was happy to speak to the study advisers and noticed that their expertise, enthusiasm and commitment are very high.

Student admission, intake and success rate

The BBC programme attracts students with a pre-university (VWO) diploma including mathematics A or B. The panel observes that the admission requirements are appropriate for the level and content of the programme. Prospective students take an online test to match their interests and expectations with the programme. The result is not binding; study advisers provide additional feedback and guidance in case of a poor match.

The programme has experienced a decline in student enrolment in recent years, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In September 2017 a cohort of 145 students enrolled, while between 2020 and 2021 the intake went down from 134 to 74. In September 2024, this downward evolution seems to have stopped as 83 first-year students enrolled. The panel appreciates that the programme is investigating and analysing possible causes for this decline, and acknowledges that the cancellation of on-campus recruitment activities such as Open Days or Student-for-a-Day events during the pandemic account for (part of) the lower intake. Further to its findings on the previous standard, the panel – and the programme – agree that new and dedicated BBC-specific outreach initiatives are urgently needed, including

high-school workshops for, and campus visits of, secondary school students.

The panel was informed that in comparison to other similar/WU programmes, the drop-out rate of BBC students is relatively low (on average around 10%, in 2023 even less than 5%). Breaking down the figures of second-year students per study domain, the panel noticed that in 2020 and 2021 the consumer studies specialisation attracted twice the number of business studies students. In 2022 and 2023, however, both specialisations attracted a similar number of students. The programme team had made the same observation, but could not explain this development.

While many students move on to the second year, there are not that many students (around 30%) who finish the programme within the nominal duration of three years, while just over 70% of the students do so in four years. The panel understands that this is a long-standing issue as the previous accreditation panel already advised to improve the success rate. As a reaction, the programme increased the attention to study planning in the framework of the study counselling activities. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has frustrated this ambition.

The current panel gathered from the discussions with management, staff and students that the four-year completion rate is in line with WU norms. Moreover, students indicated to the panel that all courses are feasible in their own right although some courses are more difficult than others, that the study programme as a whole is feasible, and that only the bachelor thesis was/is a potential stumbling block. However, many students combine their study with extra-curricular activities, volunteer work in or outside university, and side jobs. This combination often leads to study delay.

In so far as the bachelor thesis is concerned, the panel learned that the programme tightened the organisation of the thesis process, which now follows a strict 8-week format, in order to avoid further delays in the graduation path of students. Several students mentioned to the panel that this structured approach of the bachelor thesis is a good way to maintain their focus during this last, individual and 'lonely' endeavour. The panel is confident that the current thesis efforts will eventually mitigate further graduation delays among BBC students.

Staff

The BBC programme is delivered by a large team of approximately 60 staff members, who are primarily affiliated with the various Chair Groups that contribute to the programme. While BBC students can choose for their bachelor thesis among nine chair groups, the panel gathered from the list of key staff that they belong to 17 different chair groups. This means that during the programme, students are exposed to staff with a wide range of backgrounds, who bring in diverse substantive expertise and research experience, which in turn enhances the academic orientation of the programme. During the visit the panel established that staff dedicated to the BBC programme has good research credentials.

WU requires teaching staff to hold a University Teaching Qualification (UTQ): 68% of the BBC staff has such UTQ, while another 10% is in the process of obtaining the qualification. The remaining group (22%) consists mainly of experienced senior staff members who started teaching before UTQ became mandatory. The panel noticed in the staff overview and the discussions on site that the BBC staff is well qualified to teach this student audience.

Overall, students are quite satisfied with the teaching staff: the appreciation in the most recent National Student Survey was repeated in the student chapter and during the discussion on site. Students like the accessibility, involvement and support of the teaching staff, and think their substantive expertise and didactic skills are fine, too. The panel acknowledges with satisfaction that students feel well supported by the teaching staff and appreciate the quality of education in the programme.

Furthermore, the discussions on site have shown that the programme director, the programme committee, the study advisers and the staff co-operate as a genuine team. Staff indicated to the panel that the programme director is very supportive and goes at lengths to create a team spirit among staff who belong to many different Chair Groups. According to the panel, the BBC programme is doing well because the management is good at facilitating the teaching staff to operate as a team.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the BBC programme has a strong teaching-learning environment featuring a coherent curriculum, a befitting didactic concept, a diverse student audience and well-qualified teaching staff.

The panel thinks highly of the efforts of the programme team to design, adjust where necessary, and implement a curriculum that reflects even better than before the profile of the programme. The curriculum is coherent with course learning goals being clearly aligned to the programme learning outcomes. Moreover, the set-up of the courses is such that students have plenty of opportunities to acquire the individual learning outcomes in an incremental way throughout their three-year study. The combi-

nation of common courses, major courses and free-space courses does justice to the unique profile of the programme. Students from their side are satisfied with the curriculum, its options and its feasibility.

The panel appreciates the variety of teaching methods across the courses as well as the combination of tutorials and plenary lectures. This didactic approach, which the panel deems relevant and appropriate, aligns with the educational vision of the university. BBC students, moreover, benefit very much of the small-scale education, the student support services of the university, and the study advisers of the programme. The latter group is highly valued by students and should be commended for its professionalism and availability. In addition, the teaching staff is well qualified to apply the programme's educational principles to the substance of their courses, the different teaching formats and the group of students.

Furthermore, the panel established that in terms of student data, the admission criteria are appropriate and the drop-out rate is excellent. The intake, however, requires a further boost, while also the success rate is up for some improvement. The panel is confident that the strict bachelor thesis process will limit any further study delay, while the programme needs to step up its dedicated communication efforts to attract more students.

During the site visit, the panel felt a positive vibe among all stakeholders it spoke to. The panel commends the programme management for creating in this programme a community of students with different backgrounds and interests who are taught and supported by an equally competent and enthusiastic staff team.

Taking these considerations into account, the panel assesses that the programme **meets** this standard.

Student assessment

Standard 3: The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

Findings

Assessment system

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the BBC programme operates an assessment system that complies with the university-wide assessment policy. This policy is outlined in the document Education Assessment Policy 2023. The panel has looked into this policy document and found it relevant and comprehensive. The key principles of this assessment policy are validity, reliability, transparency, and efficiency. These principles are reflected in the course assessments, the thesis evaluation, and the functioning of the Examining Board.

Each BBC course has its own assessment plan, which is developed by the course coordinator in collaboration with the Chair Group offering the course. All course assessment plans are approved by the programme director and reviewed for coherence with the learning outcomes of the respective courses and the BBC programme as a whole. Course assessments typically combine multiple forms of evaluation, such as a written exam and a group assignment, or a paper and a presentation. The different assessment components are clearly mentioned, as well as their respective contribution to the final grade. The relationship between teaching content, course learning goals, programme learning outcomes, and assessment methods is clearly documented in the course guide. The panel has looked into several of these course guides and noticed that they contain this relevant information on assessment in a detailed way.

The panel also studied the above-mentioned curriculum matrix, which provides at overall programme level an overview of the programme learning outcomes, the courses and their respective assessment methods per learning outcome. According to the panel, this detailed matrix constitutes a very useful tool for the programme director and the Examining Board to monitor and control the variety of assessment methods and their individual relevance for the course and the learning outcome(s).

The BBC programme applies various assessment methods: three types of written exams – featuring open questions, closed questions and combined open/closed questions; written assignments and reports, presentations, and performances. Most of these methods are adopted for both individual and group assignments. The panel understands that such variety helps to ensure that the different learning outcomes are adequately assessed and that students with different learning styles have fair opportunities to demonstrate their competencies. Moreover, the panel notes that the respective assessment formats are appropriate for the content and level of each course. For example, theoretical courses often include individual written exams to test conceptual understanding, while applied courses may require group projects or case study analyses. Research-oriented courses include assignments that train students in designing research questions, applying methodologies, and interpreting data. Moreover, the panel was satisfied to hear that the programme does not rely very often on multiple choice exams. Hence, the panel establishes that this mixture of assessment methods contributes to the validity and robustness of the overall system.

In addition to summative assessment, formative assessment is increasingly used throughout the programme. Lecturers provide feedback on assignments, drafts, and presentations, and students are encouraged to reflect on their progress. This focus on continuous feedback and self-evaluation supports student learning and aligns with the programme's goal to foster academic and professional development. Similarly, the programme also encourages peer review and self-assessment as part of student development. In some courses, students evaluate each other's contributions to group work or provide comments on each other's drafts. While these forms of assessment usually do not affect the final grade, they promote reflection and responsibility. For the bachelor thesis, the university/programme implemented the so-called "Thesis Ring," in which students provide structured peer feedback during the writing process. This not only enhances the quality of the thesis but also encourages students to reflect critically on the work of others and on their own progress. The panel welcomes the attention to formative assessment and peer feedback and encourages the programme to continue on this path in the future.

The panel was informed that in recent years, the BBC programme has placed increased emphasis on the use of rubrics and standardised assessment forms to improve consistency and transparency. Rubrics are used particularly for written assignments, presentations, and the bachelor thesis. These rubrics specify assessment criteria and performance levels, making the grading process more objective and easier for students to understand. Also this development is worth commending both at the level of course assessment and in bachelor thesis evaluation.

The university's electronic learning environment facilitates the transparent communication of

assessment criteria, formats, deadlines, and grading schemes. Students are informed in advance about the types of assessments they will face, the weighting of different components, and the criteria used for grading. Lecturers are required to provide feedback within ten working days of an exam or assignment, ensuring that students can learn from the assessment process. The panel gathered from the discussions on site with students and staff that the assessment system is transparent, that students are informed well in advance of the assessment format and possibly the evaluation criteria. Very often students can prepare for an exam by completing mock tests, an option they very much appreciate.

During the visit, the panel discussed on several occasions and with different stakeholders the developments in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its impact on course delivery and assessment. The panel was informed that across WU, the use of generative AI (ChatGPT, BARD, DALL-E, Elicit) to create ready-made content, for example in theses, is considered fraud unless this use of AI is explicitly permitted by the supervisor or examiner. Moreover, examiners are advised to use a variety of assessment methods. At the time of the site visit, WU was developing policy and specific guidelines to ensure that AI is used responsibly. Teachers are provided with information, training and education about AI, as well as with examples of correct and incorrect use, and dilemmas. Students indicated that at the initial stages, there was some uncertainty about the use and about the trackability of AI generated texts. This has led to several students being heard by the Examining Board on individual cases of alleged fraud/plagiarism, and the Examining Board often ruling that the student committed an irregularity, which is a lighter form than fraud. Nowadays, the situation as to what is accepted and what not, is much more

clear to both students and staff as it is repeated in each and every course and before each and every exam. This, in turn, has reduced somewhat the number of cases brought before the Examining Board. In addition, teachers and Examining Board members mentioned that the university is working on a comprehensive policy, which is likely to affect the contents of the courses, the delivery of education, and the organisation of assessment.

In sum, the panel found that the BBC programme is addressing issues of (Generative) AI in a mature and appropriate way. Nonetheless, it is clear to the panel – and the programme – that the developments regarding (Generative) AI require ongoing attention not only in terms of thesis writing and assessment, but also in didactics. The panel therefore encourages the university to come up at its earliest convenience with proper guidelines, and implement these widely.

Thesis assessment

The bachelor thesis forms the final component of the BBC programme. It is a mandatory individual research project, conducted within the student's chosen major (Business Studies or Consumer Studies), and represents the culmination of the student's academic learning. The assessment of the thesis is guided by a standardised university-wide format and procedure. Each thesis is supervised by a staff member from the relevant Chair Group and assessed by the supervisor and an independent second reader. Both assessors are required to use the standard thesis evaluation form, which includes criteria for problem definition, theoretical framework, research design, data analysis, theoretical reflection, and presentation. The final grade is determined jointly, and in case of disagreement, a third examiner may be involved.

As part of its external assessment, the panel reviewed a representative sample of 15 bachelor theses, as well as the corresponding completed evaluation forms. The selected theses were submitted in the academic year 2023-2024. The quality of the BBC theses will be addressed under the next standard. In so far as thesis assessment is concerned, the panel noticed that the evaluation form is relevant featuring a proper rubric, clear criteria and a transparent grading system. However, not every thesis is assessed identically as it is up to the Chair Groups to decide whether there is also a defence and/or public presentation. This means that the weight allocated to thesis process/defence/presentation differs per Chair Group. Irrespective of these differences, the panel found that the weight allocated to the thesis process (between 30% and 40%) is quite extensive. While above-average attention to the thesis process seems logical in view of the learning goals of the bachelor thesis, the panel nonetheless considers that the current weight allocation somewhat downplays the importance of the research work.

In so far as the completed assessment forms are concerned, the panel noticed that the grades are nicely calibrated and that in almost all cases the panel agreed to the final score provided by the assessors. Moreover, while most assessment forms were completed in an insightful way, the panel noticed that a number of forms nonetheless contained varying degrees of written feedback. In these cases, the panel noted that comments could have been more detailed or critical, particularly when explaining high marks. While the overall picture is positive and the panel wants to commend the many assessors who did provide insightful feedback, it is nonetheless an important point for attention (and monitoring in the future), as the previous accreditation panel came to a similar conclusion. In the previous accreditation report, the then panel recommend-

ded to improve the extent to which staff members provide comments and their appreciation of the student's work on the thesis assessment form. The current panel was informed that staff members were urged on several occasions to provide their comments and appreciations, but this encouragement has seemingly not yet reached all assessors. The panel therefore advises the programme to set up a system that controls whether each thesis evaluation form has been completed in an insightful way, and only validates / accepts this form after such review. Furthermore, the panel noticed that in terms of archiving, some of the completed assessment forms put at its disposition consisted only of the consolidated assessment form and contained only supervisor feedback. According to the panel, this is (hopefully) a technical issue that requires attention but can be easily repaired.

Overall, the panel found the bachelor thesis assessment to be thorough, transparent, and aligned with academic standards. The use of independent assessments, standardised rubrics, and quality checks contributes to the reliability of the process and ensures that the thesis truly reflects the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. In general, the assessment forms were completed properly – the recommendation of the previous panel was effective up to a certain degree - with clear justifications for the scores given. The use of rubrics contributed to consistency and transparency. Hence, the overall thesis assessment process is sound and professionally executed.

Quality assurance

As part of the programme's and university's quality assurance system, all courses and its assessment formats are evaluated by students through the university's standard course evaluation system. As part of this process, students

provide feedback on the clarity of the assessment criteria, the fairness of grading, and the usefulness of feedback. These course evaluations are reviewed and its results discussed by the Programme Committee, which includes both staff and student representatives. The feedback the committee provides to lecturers has led to concrete improvements, such as a clearer communication of grading criteria or an increased consistency in group assessments. Lecturers, moreover, are expected to address any concerns or suggestions for improvement. Students indicated that they appreciate this system and that possible weaknesses in individual course assessments are effectively addressed in the committee and followed up by the programme director and the individual examiner/course coordinator.

Furthermore, the panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that across the one-faculty WU, four Examining Boards are safeguarding the quality of assessment for all degree programmes. They execute their tasks independently from the Board of Education. Every year, all four boards produce together one Annual Report on their activities. The Examining Boards reject or approve the individual study programmes of students and award student degrees. They appoint the course examiners and monitor changes to the assessment strategy of interim examinations in the annual education modification cycle. As part of their quality assurance activities, the boards periodically visit Chair Groups to discuss the validity and reliability of the assessments. Moreover, the Examining Board organises thesis review sessions at programme level to assure and enhance the quality of thesis assessment. These checks include a review of the evaluation forms, the use of plagiarism detection software, and the justification for the final grade. Any irregularities are

followed up and may lead to further action or policy adjustments.

In so far as the BBC programme is concerned, the Examining Board Social Sciences (EBSS) is in charge of the assessment quality assurance tasks. The EBSS consists of eight members: a chair, two secretaries, four staff members from the domain, and one external member, in this case an academic from another Dutch university (VU). The Board performs both proactive and reactive duties. Proactively, it reviews the assessment plans of new and revised courses, organises calibration meetings for assessors, and conducts thematic reviews on specific assessment-related issues (e.g. the use of rubrics or group grading). Reactively, it investigates complaints, handles cases of fraud or plagiarism, and decides on exemptions or requests for special arrangements.

During the site visit, the panel spoke to several EBSS representatives, who confirmed that they feel sufficiently autonomous to execute their tasks independently. The individual members the panel spoke to also made a very competent impression and were committed to the university, the programme and their safeguarding tasks. The panel gathered from the discussion that EBSS is in regular contact with the BBC programme committee, the programme director and the educational coordinators of the respective Chair Groups. Once every four years the EBSS meets each of the 20 Chair Groups that contribute to the Social Sciences domain. Every meeting is prepared by reviewing the courses a Chair Group offers, and is complemented by a follow-up meeting after two years. In this way the assessments pertaining to every course on offer in every programme are quality controlled regularly. This is a huge task, according to the panel, and responds to the recommendation of the previous accreditation committee that the

frequency of visits to the Chair Groups should be raised.

The EBSS regularly performs random checks on completed theses to verify the consistency of grading and compliance with assessment procedures. These checks include among others a review of the evaluation forms, and the justification for the final grade. It also ensures that procedures are consistently followed and that the assessment criteria are applied uniformly across Chair Groups. As part of the written materials, the panel was provided with – and attentively studied – the most recent EBSS quality control report of the BBC theses, which took place in October 2023 and had been organised in view of the current accreditation visit. The panel found this EBSS report comprehensive and insightful. Comparing the outcomes of the control session (using a sample of 2021-2022) with its own findings on thesis assessment quality (based on a sample of 2023-2024), the panel found that in the meantime several of the EBSS findings and recommendations had been addressed by the programme / assessors. In this way, the panel's sample contained better quality thesis assessments. For instance, the panel found that all theses with a low pass score contained substantive feedback explaining why the thesis deserved to pass. One element that was reported by EBSS but had not been picked up entirely by the assessors in 2023-2024, was the fact that supervisor and second reader did not always provide separate and individual feedback in the consolidated forms.

In sum, the panel was highly satisfied with the way the EBSS is implementing its different proactive and re-active tasks, notably but not exclusively the detail with which they review the course and thesis assessments. These processes are well organised and described in a very transparent way. The expertise of the EBSS – and

commitment of its members - is reassuring for both the programme and this panel.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the BBC programme can rely on a robust system of assessment. This appreciation is based first and foremost on the fact that both course and thesis assessments are embedded in well-established policies and frameworks at the level of the university. The BBC curriculum matrix and the course assessment plans, moreover, demonstrate that course learning goals are assessed adequately, which in turn ensures that the different learning outcomes at programme level are covered.

Furthermore, the panel establishes that course assessment is carefully designed, varied, and well aligned with the learning objectives. Moreover, the transparent information on assessment, and the increased use of formative assessment and peer feedback ensure that students are adequately and fairly assessed throughout the curriculum.

The panel thinks highly of the quality assurance system for assessment, which is comprehensive and effective. The different players have their own roles, which are well defined and comple-

mentary. Together, they ensure that assessment practices are regularly reviewed, aligned with institutional policy, and continuously improved based on feedback and reflection. In this regard, the panel commends the Examination Board Social Sciences for its expertise, pro-active approach, commitment, and meticulous reporting. The panel is convinced that the assessment quality of the BBC programme is in competent hands with EBSS.

The panel's review of the BBC theses demonstrated that in terms of assessment, the evaluation form is relevant. Moreover, the panel agreed in almost all cases to the thesis scores. However, not all assessors are making optimum use of the form yet: their qualitative feedback varies in size and insightfulness and every individual assessor does not seem to contribute feedback to the consolidated assessment form. Moreover, the panel considers that the current weight allocated to the thesis process somewhat downplays the importance of the research work. Notwithstanding these inaccuracies, the panel is satisfied with the way the overall thesis assessment process is executed in a sound and professional way.

Taking these considerations into account, the panel assesses that the programme **meets** this standard.

Achieved learning outcomes

Standard 4: The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

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

Quality of graduation projects

The graduation process in the BBC programme culminates in an individual bachelor thesis of 12 EC. The thesis is embedded in the major programme of the student - either Business Studies or Consumer Studies – and allows them to demonstrate their ability to integrate knowledge and apply academic research skills in a self-directed manner. Students are guided through the thesis process by a supervisor from one of the contributing Chair Groups. Within their major, students can choose both the Chair Group and their supervisor, in relation to the topic they wish to research. The thesis research project itself consists of a structured 8-week trajectory involving individual and group meetings with the supervisor and fellow students in the so-called thesis ring, where students provide and receive comments on their drafts.

As part of its external review, the panel studied a representative sample of 15 bachelor theses covering both majors, which were submitted and successfully completed in the academic year 2023-2024. Overall, the panel found that each and every thesis fulfilled at least the minimum requirements of a final bachelor product of academic orientation. In several cases the thesis quality was good, the topics were

interesting and altogether students adopted a large diversity of methods and approaches.

As points for attention, the panel wondered to what extent it is reasonable to expect that students work on the entire research cycle if a thesis is produced in a timespan of eight weeks and for a study load of 12 EC. This point for reflection is based on the fact that panel members noticed differences in the theoretical depth and the size of the empirical materials. Some systematic literature reviews were based on 50+ articles while others only had 12; other theses contained four interviews, another one 11, and still another one reported on a survey with 50 respondents. Furthermore, the panel noticed that several literature studies contained relatively old materials, had less attention for recent literature, were not always focused and integrated, and did not lead to a conceptual model. Moreover, the statistical analyses were rather basic and the chosen theories were not always very relevant or actual. These findings in turn triggered the question to what extent thesis expectations differ per Chair Group and how supervisors (are expected by the individual Chair Groups to) assume their supervisory role. In fact the panel found that in several cases, supervisors could/should have spotted errors in analysis and reporting during the trajectory.

Hence, while students successfully demonstrate their competencies at bachelor end level, the panel invites the programme team to reflect on the terms of reference of the bachelor thesis. There seems to be a mismatch between the size/study credits of the thesis, the different components of the thesis report, and the degree to which supervisors (can) support

students in the short timeframe at disposition. The programme team may also want to reflect whether students should go through the entire empirical cycle, or are allowed to do a systematic literature, and what the minimum requirements are for the different variants.

Furthermore, the panel established on the one hand that the bachelor thesis does not address all learning outcomes at end level, but on the other hand that all learning outcomes are covered and assessed throughout the curriculum. Preparing for the site visit, the panel noticed that EBSS had come to the same observation in its control session report on the BBC thesis in October 2023. The panel therefore shares the concern of EBSS that the bachelor thesis is (still) presented as a final project, yet does not cover all programme learning outcomes. It therefore invites the programme team to reflect on this issue and decide in due course whether the thesis is explicitly presented as a course in which a given number of programme learning outcomes are demonstrated at end level (and other learning outcomes not); alternatively, the concept of the (thesis as a) final project could be broadened with the final proof of competence for the BBC programme consisting of a combination of the bachelor thesis and additional course assessments.

Notwithstanding these suggestions, the panel concludes that the quality of the bachelor thesis is always sufficient, and sometimes really good. The thesis review demonstrated that the programme successfully prepares students to conduct academic research and synthesise knowledge in a meaningful way.

Performance of graduates

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that students who graduate the BBC programme are successful in

their further career. Almost all students continue to pursue a master programme: detailed information on the 840 graduates since 2018-2019 shows that 43% pursues the (follow-up) master programme Management, Economics and Consumer Studies at WU, while another 10% stays in Wageningen for another master programme, very often the MSc Food Quality Management. Another 36% moves to another Dutch university, such as Tilburg (9%) or Rotterdam (8%). These students very often leave Wageningen to pursue a specialist disciplinary programme such as Marketing, Strategic Management or a Business Administration specialism. The remaining 11% of the BBC graduates either continued a study abroad or entered the labour market right away. The latter group finds employment in a variety of sectors, including food companies, consultancy, market research, government, and non-profit organisations. The panel was informed that employers value BBC graduates for their analytical skills, multidisciplinary background, and ability to communicate across domains.

Although the panel only spoke to a small group of BBC students, their future career plans are similarly diverse. Students are very happy in Wageningen, are satisfied with the BBC study and appreciate the perspective of a follow-up master programme with even more freedom of choice (five specialisations). Nonetheless, two students mentioned that they are still in doubt whether to continue studying, and will certainly not stay at WU because they do not want to study for another two years, either out of financial reasons or because they cannot wait to enter the labour market.

Furthermore, the panel gathered from alumni and employer feedback – collected through surveys, focus groups and advisory committee meetings – that the academic orientation and

skills focus of the BBC programme are well suited to current professional demands. BBC graduates who enter the labour market after a master study have strong research skills, a reflective attitude, and are able to work in diverse teams.

The panel also understood from the discussions on site that BBC graduates sometimes struggle to articulate their position and value in the workplace because of their broad multidisciplinary profile. In this regard, the panel welcomes the recent inclusion of the above-mentioned Bachelor Assessment in year two. In the light of this finding, it seems logical to the panel that BBC graduates tend to look at specialist master programmes for a follow-up study and in preparation for the labour market.

In sum, the panel welcomes the programme's attentive follow-up of BBC graduates. The data gathered through follow-up surveys indicate that BBC graduates can – and do – pursue a diverse range of master programmes within and outside Wageningen. The discussions with bachelor students and BBC graduates show that the programme prepares them well for a follow-up study and for a position on the labour market. The panel is therefore convinced that students who graduate the BBC programme possess all end level qualifications.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that students who graduate from the BBC programme have effectively

acquired all intended learning outcomes. According to the panel, the selected and reviewed BBC theses meet the quality expectations for a final project of academic orientation at bachelor level. Moreover, BBC graduates are well prepared for a follow-up master programme and find suitable employment that is in line with the level and domain of their studies. Employers consider that the academic orientation and the skills focus of the programme are well suited to the current demands of the professional field, and appreciate the strong research skills of BBC graduates, their reflective attitude and ability to work in diverse teams.

Further to its discussion with the Examining Board on the status of the bachelor thesis as a 'final project', the panel invites the programme team to reflect – and eventually decide – whether the bachelor thesis covers all learning outcomes at end level or, alternatively, that the concept of a 'final project' should be broadened to include the bachelor thesis in combination with additional course assignments as a final proof of BBC competence. As part of these reflections, the panel encourages the team to also consider the terms of reference of the bachelor thesis in its current form as there seems to be a mismatch between the size/study credits of the thesis, the different components of the thesis report, and the degree to which supervisors (can) support students in the short timeframe at disposition.

Taking these considerations into account, the panel assesses that the programme **meets** this standard.

Attachment 1: assessment panel

dr. Eric Dooms, chair

Associate Professor of Strategy-TIAS

prof.dr. Ale Smidts, expert

Professor Marketing Research at Erasmus University Rotterdam

prof.dr. Ed Peelen, expert

Academic director UvA Academy, University of Amsterdam

Karen Taselaar, student-member

Student BSc International Business Administration, University of Twente

The panel was supported by Mark Delmartino MA, certified secretary.

All panel members and the secretary have completed and signed a statement of independence and impartiality, and these have been submitted to NVAO.

Attachment 2: site visit programme

Location: Leeuwenborch, Gebouw 201, Hollandseweg 1, Wageningen

Wednesday 11 December 2024

- 08.45 Arrival panel
- 09.30 Management of programmes
- 10.30 Students Bachelor programme
- 11.15 Teaching staff Bachelor programme
- 12.15 Examining Board and Study advisors
- 13.00 Lunch and internal meeting
- 14.00 Students Master programme and Alumni
- 14.45 Teaching staff Master programme
- 15.45 Final meeting with Management of programmes
- 16.00 Internal panel deliberations
- 17.00 Development dialogue
- 17.45 Preliminary feedback
- 18.00 End of site visit

Attachment 3: Recommendations from previous assessment

In the report of the 2018 visitation of BBC, the panel made a number of recommendations. These recommendations and the follow up actions and developments are as follows.

The panel was positive about both the sustainability and the pro-social character of the programme. While sustainability was already addressed in the learning outcomes, the panel recommended to also make the pro-social orientation of the programme more explicit in the learning outcomes. This has been taken care of now in learning outcome 1 and 2.

The panel recommended to diversify the composition of the advisory council in terms of the study background of the members. This has taken place as can be seen from the composition of the current advisory council.

The panel recommended to develop a more elaborated benchmark. Which benchmark to use is, however, a choice of the cluster of management programmes we are in during the visitation process to create a kind of level playing field. Consequently, for this visitation process we have refrained from developing a benchmark of our own. The EQUAL (European Quality Link) Guidelines for Undergraduate Degrees in General Business & Management (see Appendix 2) have been used as the subject-specific reference framework for BBC. Compared to similar wo-business programmes, BBC: focusses on the chain of fast moving consumer goods, particularly food, from farm to fork; follows a multidisciplinary approach, combining business science theories and consumer science theories with life sciences; addresses dynamic debates regarding e.g. sustainability, food safety, food ethics, and biodiversity; and offers flexibility to build individual learning paths.

The panel recommended to consider whether the balance between agri-food and life sciences reflects current developments in the professional field. Regarding this last recommendation, the panel suggested that an introduction course to life sciences would strengthen the programme and might stimulate more students to further explore the field of life sciences. Over the years we have noticed a decrease in interest of the students in the traditional life sciences (e.g. animal sciences and plant sciences) at the benefit of an increased interest in food sciences. In the past this has led to the inclusion of food science courses in the programme at the cost of an animal and plant sciences introductory course. Choices that students make regarding the content of the elective space in their programme show very little interest in the traditional life sciences while many students are interested in food sciences. This was confirmed by the External Advisory Committee that identified a passion for food as a strength of BBC (and MME) graduates. Consequently, we think that the introductory courses in food sciences fit well in our programme.

The panel recommended to consider the sequence, content, and structure of the data science courses. In the common part of the programme there are three compulsory statistics courses in which students learn to analyse data. Moreover, in the Consumer specialization there is an advanced course on data analysis, entitled Consumer Behaviour, Concepts and Research Methods. This course is now also a

restricted optional course for Business Students. Finally, there are three new optional courses on data use (i.e, Data Driven Supply Chain Management, Supply Chain Design and Planning, and Big Data).

The panel recommended to consider if more exposure to the professional field is useful for improving the extent to which students obtain the learning outcomes. Following this recommendation the number of guest lecturers from the professional field was increased. As the majority of the BBC-students continue with an MSc-study, they will get more options for exposure to the professional field in their MSc-programme.

The panel recommended to consider raising the challenge for students and/or stimulate ambitious students to take part in honours education. Since the previous visitation, Wageningen University has set up an honours programme for BSc-students. Ambitious BBC students are stimulated by their study advisors to participate in this programme. Several BBC students have done that.

The panel recommended to improve the programme's success rate. Attempts to realise this have been undertaken, especially by focussing more on study planning in student counselling. However, the COVID19 pandemic has frustrated this ambition. In the coming years we hope to see positive effects of these attempts.

The panel recommended to raise the frequency of visits from the examination board to the Chair Groups. This is realised. The EBSS performs regular and follow-up visits to each of the Chair Groups contributing to the MME programme every two years.

Finally, the panel recommended to improve the extent to which staff members provide comments and their appreciation of the student's work on the thesis assessment form. Staff members were urged on several occasions to provide their comments and appreciation of the student's work on the assessment form.

Attachment 4: reviewed documents

Self-evaluation Business and Consumer Studies BSc

Annexes to the self-evaluation

- Faculty structure and organisation
- EQUAL Guidelines for Undergraduate Degrees in General Business & Management
- External advisory committee
- Contribution of BBC courses to programme learning outcomes
- Key staff, including qualifications
- Education and Examination Regulations 2024-2025
- Course guide BSc thesis

Additional materials

- Governance structure and the organisation of Wageningen University Degree Programmes
- Framework for Education WUR 2024-2025
- Materials on selected BBC courses
- Data on BBC students
- Overview of BBC graduate destinations
- Annual reports Examining Boards WUR 2022-2023, 2021-2022 and 2020-2021
- Annual reports and year plans Programme Committee 2022-2023, 2021-2022 and 2020-2021
- Assessment policy WUR
- Study advice service level commitment 2023
- Student guidance – find your way 2025

Thesis review

A representative sample of 15 graduation works and their assessment forms, selected among students graduating the bachelor programme Business and Consumer Studies in 2023-2024. Names and student numbers are available with evaluation agency AeQui.

