



B Human Geography and Planning
University of Amsterdam

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Project code P2405

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Summary

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The bachelor's programme HGP at the University of Amsterdam has a strong profile, focusing on connecting the local and global level of spatial challenges. The location in Amsterdam offers an excellent background for making these challenges visible in practice, which is successfully exploited by the programme. The intended learning outcomes are formulated at the required academic bachelor's level and reflect the profile of HGP. In addition, the intended learning outcomes are well aligned with the academic and professional field through the domain-specific framework of reference and an external Advisory Board. The recently added international variant is of added value to the programme, allowing students to discuss spatial challenges in an international classroom. The panel recommends the programme to consider the extent to which this reflects a shift toward a more international programme in terms of the contexts studied, and to adjust its profile accordingly.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The panel found that the bachelor's programme HGP offers a clear and coherent curriculum aligned with the intended learning outcomes. It is well-structured with clearly defined objectives per academic year and for the curriculum in general which are consistently communicated, making the curriculum structure very transparent to students. Teaching methods are interactive and varied, including small-scale tutorials and fieldwork, effectively linking theory and practice. The dual-language curriculum (Dutch and English) is well implemented, with careful attention to the language skills of both students and staff. The panel advises the programme management to be aware to differences in level of challenge perceived by students between the two variants, and to ensure that these do not become a self-fulfilling prophecy. A clearer profile for each of the variants could be useful to give each variant a distinctive character.

Student support and guidance are strong, with the mentors and study advisors playing a key role. The programme is attentive to the needs of students with functional impairments, and information provision is of good quality. The panel encourages continued attention to the integration of international students. The curriculum is feasible, with students reporting a manageable workload and most completing the programme with limited delay. The panel considers the teaching staff a major asset of the programme, with staff members being well qualified and engaged with the programme.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The panel found the system of assessment in the bachelor HGP to be well structured. Assessment methods are varied and fit the programme goals, and appropriate measures are taken to promote reliability, validity and transparency of assessment. The Examinations Board functions well and checks the quality of course and thesis assessment. The panel recommends reflecting on the assessment of the first-year courses in the light of student expectations, aiming at mutual understanding between staff and students about the nature and goals of assessment in relation to course content. Thesis assessment is clear and works well in practice, with sufficient feedback and the involvement of two independent examiners. The thesis assessment process could be strengthened by requiring a written assessment of the individual examiners prior to the discussion on the final grade. The panel welcomes the addition of an oral defence to thesis assessment, although it recommends making clear what role this defence exactly takes in determining the final grade. Finally, the panel recommends a formal instruction and professionalization process for external thesis supervisors.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The good level of the bachelor theses and the follow-up master's programmes and careers pursued by graduates demonstrate that students in the bachelor HGP achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Score table

The panel assesses the programme as follows:

Bachelor's programme Human Geography and Planning

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard
General conclusion	positive

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

Prof. dr. E.M. (Ellen) van Bueren (chair)
Date: 10 September 2025

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

Introduction

Procedure

Assessment

On 31 March and 1 April 2025, the bachelor's programme Human Geography and Planning of the University of Amsterdam was assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment WO Sociale Geografie en Planologie (Human Geography and Planning). The assessment cluster consisted of 19 programmes, offered by the Radboud University, University of Amsterdam, University of Groningen and Utrecht University. The assessment followed the procedure and standards of the NVAO Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (April 2024).

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

Preparation

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

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

The programme provided the coordinator with a list of graduates over the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. In consultation with the coordinator, the panel chair selected 15 theses of the programme. They took the diversity of final grades and examiners into account, as well as the specializations. From the specialization Human Geography 8 theses were selected and from the specialization Planning 7 theses were selected. This selection reflected the number of graduates in each particular specialization proportionally. Prior to the site visit, the programme provided the panel with the theses and the accompanying assessment forms. It also provided the panel with the self-evaluation report and additional materials (see appendix 4).

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

Site visit

During the site visit, the panel interviewed various programme representatives (see appendix 3). The panel also offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation

hour. No consultation was requested. The panel used the final part of the site visit to discuss its findings in an internal meeting. Afterwards, the panel chair publicly presented the preliminary findings.

Report

The secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to an Academion colleague for peer assessment. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel for feedback. After processing this feedback, the secretary sent the draft report to the University of Amsterdam in order to have it checked for factual irregularities. The secretary discussed the ensuing comments with the panel chair and changes were implemented accordingly. The panel then finalized the report, and the coordinator sent it to the University of Amsterdam.

Panel

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

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

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

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

Information on the programme

Name of the institution:	University of Amsterdam
Address:	Spui 21, 1012 WX Amsterdam
Website:	http://www.uva.nl
BRIN-number:	21PK
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Programme name:	Sociale Geografie en Planologie (international name: Human Geography and Planning)
ISAT number:	56838
Level:	Bachelor (NLQF 6)
Orientation:	Academic

Number of credits:	180 EC
Professional requirements:	no
Specializations:	Human Geography Planning
Location:	Amsterdam
Educational minor:	Applicable (Aardrijkskunde)
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Language of instruction:	Dutch, English
Assessment group:	Sociale Geografie en Planologie
Awarded degree:	BSc
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2025

Description of the assessment

Organization

The BSc Human Geography and Planning (HGP) is offered by the College of Social Sciences and staffed by the Department of Human Geography, Planning and International Development Studies of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences (FMG) of the University of Amsterdam (UvA). Each programme is headed by a programme director who is responsible for the set-up, organization, execution and quality of the programme. The programme director is assisted by a programme coordinator, a support staff member who is concerned with administration, scheduling, and information provision to staff and students (together with the two study advisors, see below). The BSc Human Geography and Planning, the MSc Human Geography and the MSc Urban and Regional Planning share an Examinations Board. The BSc has its own Programme Committee, which often collaborates with the related Programme Committee that covers both master's programmes.

Recommendations previous panel

The previous accreditation panel provided several suggestions for improvement, such as increasing attention to quantitative methods, better distinguishing between the first and second examiner in thesis assessment, and strengthening the spatial character of the curriculum. The panel found that these recommendations have been considered carefully, leading to further improvement of the programme. See for further discussion the respective sections in the report on these topics.

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

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

Findings

Profile and aims

The BSc HGP aims to train students to use a spatial approach to study the relationship between people and their environment. Graduates should be able to use this approach to understand and address social and governance processes and challenges related to the use of space, such as urbanization, housing, sustainability, transport and mobility. The programme aims to study these processes and challenges at both the local and global level. On the global level, it provides students with an integrative understanding of the interconnectedness of social, economic and environmental issues on a global scale. On the local level, the programme is rooted in the Dutch local professional and social context. Graduates should be able to use their knowledge and understanding to navigate Dutch institutional contexts of human geography and planning. HGP emphasizes research-based teaching: students are provided with hands-on research experience and real-world research projects. The programme is grounded in the social sciences, drawing on theories and methods from sociology, anthropology, and political science. Students should be able to combine theory and empirical research from these fields to study societal challenges in human geography and planning.

The programme has two specializations. After a first year dedicated to a general understanding of how a social-spatial scientist views the world, the second year is dedicated to exploring and a further deepening of theories in either human geography or planning, depending on the student's choice. The *Human Geography* specializations explores geography and the related sub-disciplines of economic, urban, political and

environmental geography, and teaches students to critically analyse and address socio-spatial issues from different scales and perspectives. The *Planning* specialization provides students with a broad understanding of the theory, analysis and practical approaches involved in planning interventions. Relevant planning disciplines include real estate, mobility and environmental planning. In addition to these two specializations, students can further specialize in sub-disciplines such as urban geography, mobility planning, or international development studies through thematic electives and specialization courses. In addition to choosing a specialization, since 2023-2024 students can also choose between a Dutch and an international variant (English) of the programme. The curriculum for both variants is the same but differs in the language used in tutorials and assignments. Furthermore, the international variant features an international classroom combining Dutch and international students.

The panel was impressed with the profile and goals of the bachelor HGP, particularly its focus on the local and global levels and their interrelationship. The programme makes excellent use of its location in Amsterdam, where both the local and global levels of spatial challenges are highly visible. Through examples, fieldwork, and assignments, students engage with their environment in Amsterdam, resulting in an engaging, societally relevant connection between theory and practice. The panel also appreciated the combination of geography and planning, with students obtaining a comprehensive overview of the disciplines and their interconnectedness before choosing to specialize in one of the domains through the two specializations.

The addition of an international variant to the bachelor's programme is considered by the panel to be of added value, allowing students to discuss spatial challenges in an international classroom. At the same time, the panel noted that this shift seems to lead to a different positioning of the two variants which is not explicitly addressed in the current profile of the programme. It challenges the programme to consider whether the addition of the international variant also reflects a shift towards a more internationally oriented programme with a looser emphasis on the specific Dutch spatial context, or whether the international variant is an opportunity for Dutch and international students to study the Dutch spatial context in an international classroom. The panel believes that making the extent of the international character of HGP more explicit, if necessary, with more differentiation in the profiling of the two variants, would allow the programme to make more explicit use of the Dutch and international contexts. This could also allow students to choose a variant based on content rather than educational context, which is now sometimes the case (see Standard 2).

Intended learning outcomes

The profile and aims of the programme have been translated into a set of five intended learning outcomes (ILOs, see appendix 1), structured according to the five Dublin descriptors for academic bachelor's programmes. Each learning outcome is split into several elements describing knowledge, skills and competencies relevant for a HGP graduate. Amongst others, these include the basic theories and principles of the discipline, the use of research methodology and concepts, critical reflection and communication skills and the ability to work in an academic and professional environment.

The ILOs are aligned with the academic field through the domain-specific framework of reference which was jointly composed by the Dutch programmes in human geography and planning. This framework lists the content and ILOs that are deemed essential for bachelor's and master's programmes in the field. In an overview shared with the panel, the programme has demonstrated how the ILOs are aligned with this framework. To align the ILOs with the professional field, the programme uses the input of an external advisory board. The College, together with the Graduate School of Social Science, has an Advisory Board consisting of external experts, many of whom are alumni, who advise the programmes upon request or upon

their own initiative regarding the quality of the programme in relation to society and the labour market. This Board convenes twice per year, and meets with staff, students and programme directors to gather input.

After studying the ILOs of the programme, the panel found that these are appropriate for an academic bachelor's programme. They reflect the bachelor's level as formulated in the Dublin descriptors and the Dutch Qualification Framework (NLQF 6). The ILOs are clearly formulated, and echo the strong focus on research methods, theoretical reflection and application of knowledge, describing the knowledge and skills relevant to pursue this. The alignment with the domain-specific framework of reference and the frequent interaction with the professional field through guest lecturers, research (in practice), and the Advisory Board keeps the ILOs aligned with the requirements from the academic and professional field.

During the site visit, the panel learnt that the programme is planning to update its intended learning outcomes after having already developed a new set of learning pathways (academic skills, research methods, human geography, and planning) with associated course-overarching goals. During one of the thematic sessions, the panel and programme coordinators discussed the design of the new learning outcomes and the learning pathways. While the panel found the proposed ILOs rather broad, it noted that the learning pathways have more specific goals associated with the four pathways. It suggests the programme investigating whether the learning pathway goals could be integrated in the new intended learning outcomes to make these more specific.

Considerations

The bachelor's programme HGP at the University of Amsterdam has a strong profile, focusing on connecting the local and global level of spatial challenges. The location in Amsterdam offers an excellent background for making these challenges visible in practice, which is successfully exploited by the programme. The intended learning outcomes are formulated at the required academic bachelor's level and reflect the profile of HGP. In addition, the intended learning outcomes are well aligned with the academic and professional field through the domain-specific framework of reference and an external Advisory Board. The recently added international variant is of added value to the programme, allowing students to discuss spatial challenges in an international classroom. The panel recommends the programme to consider the extent to which this reflects a shift toward a more international programme in terms of the contexts studied, and to adjust its profile accordingly.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 1.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

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

Findings

Curriculum

The Dutch and international variant share the same curriculum. They jointly follow lectures but split off in different English or Dutch-language tutorial and project groups depending on the variant. This applies to all core curriculum elements, including specialization-specific courses, but excluding electives. The 180 EC curriculum is divided into six semesters. Each semester consists of three periods of 8-8-4 weeks each. Courses are typically 6 or 12 EC: students take two parallel 12 EC courses during the long periods and one 6

EC course during the short period. The 12 EC courses are usually content-oriented courses, while the 6 EC course is a research project where students pursue an integrative project related to a specific societal issue relevant to the topics of the previous courses. The basic philosophy of the curriculum is that students familiarize themselves with the field in the first year, explore the geographical and planning perspective in the second year, and develop their own perspective in the third year. The *first year* is the same for all students and is dedicated to understanding how socio-spatial scientists view the world. They learn the key concepts and theories, including the core themes and research methodologies. At the end of the first year, students choose between a focus on human geography or planning. This choice determines the content focus of the *second year*. Students follow the core courses relevant to their specialization, complemented with specialization-specific thematic electives. The thematic electives reflect the central subdisciplines of the field, whereas the specialization courses are small-scale (10-20 students) courses in which students jointly delve into a specific sub-theme. In the third year, students build their own profile, focus on a specific area of interest, and either broaden or deepen their view on the field. Students have 30 EC of elective space which they can use for elective courses, studying abroad, completing an internship or following the educational minor for secondary-school teacher in Geography (*aardrijkskunde*). They also follow an additional course-specific and restricted-choice thematic elective (12 EC) and prepare for and execute their bachelor thesis (12 EC).

Next to the two learning pathways in human geography and planning (the two disciplinary specializations), the programme defines two general learning pathways throughout the curriculum. These are academic skills and research methods. The *academic skills pathway* aims to develop the professional and academic skills of students, including written and oral reporting of research findings for different audiences, as well as understanding and working with ethical guidelines. For the international variant, the academic skills pathway also covers cross-cultural communication in the international classroom. The *research methods pathway* includes several research methods courses that teach students quantitative and qualitative research methods, including the collection and analysing of data. This includes an introduction to Geographical Information Systems (GIS). Students interested in GIS can follow an additional thematic elective. The bachelor thesis is also considered to be part of the research methods pathway and is the capstone in which students demonstrate that they can apply the acquired methods and techniques in a real-world context, including empirical fieldwork. The thesis is an individual research project where students go through the entire empirical research cycle. The programme offers various thesis projects for which students can apply. These projects usually involve data collection, analysis and reporting. Students are supervised in small groups of students working on similar topics with the same supervisor. Students have weekly group meetings during which they work towards their individual research proposal. After approval of their research proposal, they work individually with feedback from their supervisor on their project. The bachelor thesis is completed with a written report and a thesis defence.

The panel studied the curriculum overview and discussed this with staff and students. It concludes that the curriculum is clear and well aligned with the intended learning outcomes. The curriculum is carefully structured with well-defined objectives per academic year and for the curriculum in general, which are consistently used in all communication. This coherence ensures that the aims are easily identifiable and integrated, making the curriculum structure very transparent to students. The panel also valued the connection between research and practice in the curriculum through the incorporation of several research projects on local, regional and national scales. Furthermore, the curriculum offers students ample opportunity to practice academic and research skills, leading up to the bachelor thesis where they work on an individual research project under supervision of a researcher of the department. The panel noted with appreciation that attention to spatial elements and quantitative methods has been strengthened based on

the recommendations during the previous accreditation, including attention to GIS methodology and data analysis, and explicit supervision and assessment of spatial elements in the bachelor thesis.

Teaching methods and language of instruction

The programme offers a wide range of teaching methods, combining large-scale (lectures) and small-scale education (tutorials, projects). In the programme's vision, students should learn by doing and relate to the world around them. Fieldwork therefore plays an important role in the curriculum. In several courses, students are required to participate in activities outside the university, such as assignments in the streets of Amsterdam, excursions and interviews with local experts. In the first year, students build their fundamental knowledge and skills mainly through lectures and tutorials. In the second year, lectures evolve into seminars, where students discuss material under guidance of a lecturer. They engage in discussions and peer review and learn to take and critically approach different positions. The third year is focused on electives, which can use many different teaching methods, and small-scale specialization courses. The latter are shaped as tutorials, where students delve into a topic through classroom discussions and presentations. Most semesters are concluded with a larger research project, where students work on an integrative group project studying an authentic case for which they analyse and develop solutions based on the course content from the previous periods. These projects usually result in a product such as a written report, a graphical product (map), a presentation or a poster.

The programme is offered as a dual-language curriculum. Students attend lectures together in English but attend tutorials and assessments in either Dutch (Dutch variant) or English (international variant). This allows for an international classroom without requiring Dutch students to follow the entire curriculum in English and keeping the connection to the local context. Before participating in fieldwork, international students follow a crash course in Dutch language as part of the curriculum. They can follow additional Dutch language training through the study association if they wish. Several electives are offered fully in Dutch, which are typically the courses focusing on the local Dutch context. Before switching from Dutch to bilingual, the programme assessed the English proficiency of the staff and addressed any identified gaps through training. New teachers are required to demonstrate an adequate command of English as part of the hiring requirements.

According to the panel, the teaching methods are varied, interactive and reflect the goals of the programme. Particularly the fieldwork, which is often offered in collaboration with external stakeholders in the Amsterdam region, allows students to connect research and practice and study real-world spatial challenges. The panel understood that tutorial groups are intentionally kept small to allow for small-scale and interactive education, which it appreciates. The panel considers that the choice for an optional international English language variant is beneficial for students interested in studying in an international context. The panel notes that the dual-language curriculum has been carefully implemented, taking into account the language skills of both students and staff and informing students in advance of the dual-language nature of the education. Interviews with various groups of students indicate that the teething problems of the initial phase of the dual curriculum have largely been overcome within the first year. International students mentioned to the panel that they would welcome more support for opportunities to learn Dutch, as they feel this would be beneficial for operating in the Dutch context. The panel asks the programme to reflect on the extent to which Dutch language skills are important for international students and, if so, to expand opportunities for them. This also relates to the intended goals of the international variant (see Standard 1) and the extent to which this variant should be linked to the Dutch spatial context.

During the site visit, the panel found that students perceive the Dutch and international variants as different in more than just the language of instruction. Although the curriculum is the same, students feel that the

international variant attracts relatively more motivated and engaged students. Some Dutch students choose to switch from the Dutch to the international variant for this reason. The panel advises the programme management to be aware of this dynamic and to ensure that this perceived difference between the two variants does not become a self-fulfilling prophecy. A clearer profile for each of the variants (see Standard 1) could be useful to give each variant a distinctive character, allowing students to choose a variant based on content rather than educational context.

Guidance and support

Prospective students with a qualifying diploma for entering a university are admissible to the programme. International students must also provide proof of English language proficiency. Before the start of the curriculum, prospective students can attend information sessions organized by the programme to give them a good idea of the curriculum content and prospects, and to promote a good match with the programme. During the programme, students are supported by the programme team, which consists of the programme coordinator, two study advisors and an assistant. The coordinator and assistant work together to organize the programme and, together with the advisors, ensure that all students are informed about the curriculum and developments within the programme. The main information channel is the Canvas digital learning environment. Study advisors provide individual counselling on issues such as student well-being, academic progress, and curriculum choices. They also organize general information sessions for all students (e.g., about choosing a specialization or electives).

Furthermore, the programme recently introduced a mentoring system where junior lecturers provide one-on-one guidance to help students get acquainted with the programme and studying in general. These are usually the teachers that are involved in the small-scale tutorial classes in the first year. The mentors have a signalling function in identifying personal and group issues and are crucial in early reporting to the study advisors and the programme director. The study advisors are also the first point of contact for students with functional impairments. In consultation with the programme director and/or the Examinations Board, solutions are found on a case-by-case basis, such as recording of lectures or providing a student buddy. Specialized GIS facilities are available to all students in the form of a computer lab with high performance computers and staff to assist students as needed.

Based on the information provided and the discussions during the site visit, the panel is impressed by the strong student guidance in the bachelor HGP. The mentoring system is very helpful in supporting and guiding students during their first year, and the study advisors help with student planning, career choice and other issues. Information provision prior to and throughout the programme is up to standard, and there is sufficient attention to students with functional impairments through tailored solutions depending on the situation. The panel also appreciates the GIS facilities available to students. A point of attention that arose from the discussions during the site visit is to keep onboarding and integration of international students on the agenda, as some students mentioned that this could be improved. The programme is very aware of the challenges of mixing the Dutch and international student groups into a coherent student population, especially in between the two variants. There are already several initiatives, such as the student association explicitly focusing on attracting international students to its activities. The panel advises to keep paying attention to this and create further opportunities for mixing Dutch and international student groups wherever possible.

Feasibility

The design of the curriculum aims to promote feasibility. The programme has chosen for relatively large courses of 6 and 12 EC to prevent fragmentation: student usually follow only one or two courses at the same time. Furthermore, the final week of the eight-week periods (after the exams in week 7) is focused on resits of

the previous period; this gives students a full week to either focus on their repairs or enjoy an education-free week to focus on non-study related activities. Study advisors regularly schedule progress meetings with students, particularly in the first two years, to ensure that students remain on track and get the support that they need. Not counting dropouts (which are around 30% over the entire programme), the average study duration over the past cohorts is slightly less than four years (45 months), with 77% of students graduating within four years. According to the programme, study delay is often associated with taking extra courses, minor delays related to re-sits and personal circumstances. The panel notes that the design of the curriculum promotes feasibility, and that there is sufficient support to keep students on track. The average study duration shows that most students finish the programme with a relatively modest delay of one year maximum. Students reported that the study load is generally manageable. Overall, the panel concludes that the curriculum is feasible.

Teaching staff

The teaching staff of HGP is predominantly employed by the Department of Human Geography, Planning and International Development Studies. Currently, 73 staff members are involved in HGP, either as course coordinator, lecturer or thesis supervisor. 49 of these staff members are tenured or in a tenure track; all hold a PhD and 92% a University Teaching Qualification (UTQ). The other 24 staff members are junior lecturers or PhDs, who are mainly involved in tutorial teaching and mentoring of students. They typically do not follow the full UTQ but take didactic and mentor training specifically focused on their role. For professionalization of all staff members, the department organizes four departmental meetings per year focused on development in education, such as generative AI or innovative teaching methods. The programme aims for a strong connection between research and teaching. Most staff members are active researchers and bring this into the classroom, for instance through research projects and demonstrating the value of research in real-life situations. The larger 12 EC courses usually use co-teaching with two staff members with a different disciplinary background, highlighting different disciplines and approaches.

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

Considerations

The panel found that the bachelor's programme HGP offers a clear and coherent curriculum aligned with the intended learning outcomes. It is well-structured with clearly defined objectives per academic year and for the curriculum in general which are consistently communicated, making the curriculum structure very transparent to students. Teaching methods are interactive and varied, including small-scale tutorials and fieldwork, effectively linking theory and practice. The dual-language curriculum (Dutch and English) is well implemented, with careful attention to the language skills of both students and staff. The panel advises the programme management to be aware to differences in level of challenge perceived by students between the

two variants, and to ensure that these do not become a self-fulfilling prophecy. A clearer profile for each of the variants could be useful to give each variant a distinctive character.

Student support and guidance are strong, with the mentors and study advisors playing a key role. The programme is attentive to the needs of students with functional impairments, and information provision is of good quality. The panel encourages continued attention to the integration of international students. The curriculum is feasible, with students reporting a manageable workload and most completing the programme with limited delay. The panel considers the teaching staff a major asset of the programme, with staff members being well qualified and engaged with the programme.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 2.

Standard 3. Student assessment

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

Findings

System of assessment

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

The assessment methods used in the courses are aligned with the course learning goals, and the different phases in the curriculum. In the first year, where students are acquiring fundamental knowledge and skills, lectures and seminars are assessed mainly through written exams and assignments. In the second year, these are increasingly accompanied by individual and group papers and presentations, fitting the seminar nature of most courses. In the third year, where students follow small-scale specialization courses, emphasis in assessment shifts to presentations and essay writing. This culminates into the capstone bachelor thesis, where students perform an individual research project and write their thesis.

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

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

The panel noted with appreciation that the programme uses a wide variety of assessment methods, including photo essays and story maps. At the same time, these interactive and creative assessment methods are mainly used in the second and third year, while the first year is more focused on knowledge reproduction. This is a deliberate choice of the programme, as the first year is aimed at the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills in human geography and planning. During the site visit, students expressed their dissatisfaction with the strong focus on replicability in the assessment of first year courses. They felt that that this did not reflect the content of the courses and the knowledge and skills they believed they had gained from the courses. The panel recommends that this issue be reflected upon and adapting either the course content, the course assessment or the communication about course assessment, depending on the issues identified. In any case, the programme should seek mutual understanding between staff and students about the curricular choices made, so that students better understand what is expected of them of them in the assessment of first-year courses.

A minor point of attention concerns the regulations regarding the language of assessment. Some of the teaching staff and students were not sure about whether all assessment in the programme was allowed to be taken in Dutch if the student wishes to do this. The Examinations Board confirmed to the panel that according to the Teaching and Examination Regulations this is indeed the case. Even though this has not led to issues in practice, the panel advises to ensure that staff and students are aware of this.

Thesis assessment

The bachelor thesis is assessed by the student's supervisor, and a second reader not otherwise involved in the process. They both assess the written thesis prior to the defence on each of the assessment criteria laid down in the assessment form and agree upon a joint assessment after the defence. An oral defence was recently introduced to the thesis assessment procedure, amongst others to safeguard the process against the use of generative AI for writing the thesis. Assessment is based on the performance of the student during the project, the written thesis and the oral defence. Assessment criteria are not weighted: the two examiners jointly agree on a grade based on the performance on the criteria and substantiate this qualitatively on the assessment form. To promote consistency of grading between examiners, the thesis coordinator organizes annual calibration sessions where examiners study and compare thesis assessments. In response to the previous accreditation, the programme made a clearer distinction between the first and second examiner. The thesis coordinator makes the teams of first and second examiner, ensuring that there are no hierarchical ties or recurring couples. Furthermore, the second examiner is giving the lead in the discussion with the student during the oral defence. The previous accreditation panel also recommended to make the comments of both examiners more distinguishable. After careful consideration, the programme decided to maintain the joint assessment. Experiences in other programmes showed that separate assessment by both

examiners created more conflicts between students and examiners, and between examiners themselves. Instead, the programme focused more on the deliberative process and grading culture, such as calibration sessions between examiners, to address this comment.

According to the panel, thesis assessment is well-developed and works well in practice. The assessment categories used on the assessment form are comprehensive and sufficiently cover the programme's ILOs. The thesis assessment forms that the panel studied in preparation for the site visit were clear and comprehensive, providing student with sufficient feedback and substantiation of the grade. The involvement of two examiners, with one not being involved in the process, adds to the robustness of the procedure. The panel welcomes the introduction of the oral defence, which it considers to be of added value, and as a safeguard against the use of generative AI. To add to this, the panel thinks that it would be worthwhile to complement the defence with a presentation, making communication and presentation skills an explicit part of the thesis assessment, which is currently not the case.

During the site visit, the panel spoke with programme representative on the choice to not document the separate assessment of both examiners, and the way in which the examiners reach consensus on the thesis grade. The panel appreciates the attention to distinguish between the role of the first and second examiner in response to the previous accreditation. At the same time, it feels that further streamlining this process would make it more robust. The panel understood that even though both examiners separately assess the thesis before the defence, only the joint assessment afterwards is stored. It thinks that requiring both examiners to submit a written assessment of the thesis separate from each other beforehand and storing this in the assessment file, would add to the transparency of the process. This safeguards the system against an inappropriately large influence of one of the examiners in determining the final grade, as the underlying individual assessment of both examiners remains available. As is currently the case, the joint assessment form can remain the final version that is presented to the student. Furthermore, the panel recommends making explicit what role the oral defence plays in thesis assessment. At the moment, it is not separately graded but can influence the final grade in the discussion between the examiners in the case of an exceptionally good or poor performance of the student. The panel thinks that the programme should make this explicit to promote consistency between examiners.

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

Considerations

The panel found the system of assessment in the bachelor HGP to be well structured. Assessment methods are varied and fit the programme goals, and appropriate measures are taken to promote reliability, validity and transparency of assessment. The Examinations Board functions well and checks the quality of course and thesis assessment. The panel recommends reflecting on the assessment of the first-year courses in the light of student expectations, aiming at mutual understanding between staff and students about the nature and goals of assessment in relation to course content. Thesis assessment is clear and works well in practice, with sufficient feedback and the involvement of two independent examiners. The thesis assessment process could be strengthened by requiring a written assessment of the individual examiners prior to the discussion

on the final grade. The panel welcomes the addition of an oral defence to thesis assessment, although it recommends making clear what role this defence exactly takes in determining the final grade. Finally, the panel recommends a formal instruction and professionalization process for external thesis supervisors.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 3.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

Thesis quality

In preparation for the site visit, the panel studied a selection of 15 recent bachelor theses from HGP. It concluded that all the theses were of a very high standard, covering academically and socially relevant topics in human geography and planning. They also demonstrated advanced academic and methodological skills. The panel was particularly impressed by the advanced data analysis found in some of the theses. The panel noted that despite the mandatory GIS training in the curriculum, very few theses actually incorporated GIS techniques. It suggests that the programme might investigate why this is the case, and whether additional encouragement or support is needed in the use of these techniques.

Performance of graduates

The BSc connects to a broad spectrum of master's programme. Of those that enroll in a master's programme in the Netherlands (currently 78% of graduates), the vast majority chooses a spatially oriented programme at either the UvA (37%), the University of Utrecht, TU Delft or the University of Groningen. A minority chooses an unrelated master's programme, pursues a master's programme abroad or directly enters the labour market (around 10%). Based on the provided information, the panel concludes that the follow-up master's programmes chosen by students are relevant to the field of human geography and planning, and graduates that enter the job market, either directly or after completion of master's programme, find suitable positions in planning, consultancy or government .

Considerations

The good level of the bachelor theses and the follow-up master's programmes and careers pursued by graduates demonstrate that students in the bachelor HGP achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 4.

General conclusion

The panel's assessment of bachelor's programme Human Geography and Planning is positive.

Recommendations

1. Consider whether the introduction of the dual language programme also means a shift towards a more international programme in terms of the contexts studied and adapt the profile accordingly. A differentiation between the profiles of the Dutch and international variants could be helpful in this respect.
2. Reflect on assessment of first year courses, aiming at mutual understanding between staff and students about the nature and goals of assessment in relation to course content.
3. Further streamline the thesis assessment process by requiring a written assessment of the individual examiners prior to the discussion on the final grade, and by making clear which role the oral defence plays in the final grade.
4. Introduce a formal instruction and professionalization process for external thesis supervisors.

Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

Knowledge and understanding (DD1)

1. *The graduate has acquired knowledge and understanding in:*

- a. The terminology of human geographers and urban and regional planners;
- b. The integrative approach that characterizes spatial sciences and the complexity of relationships between localities and territories at different levels of scale;
- c. The mutual interaction in space and society and their socio-spatial explanations;
- d. The development of human geography and urban and regional planning as academic disciplines in relation to relevant fields of study;
- e. Relevant research methods and epistemological debates within the fields of human geography and urban and regional planning;
- f. Normative and ethical aspects of human geography and urban and regional planning, in particular the role of science in society;
- g. Several Dutch and at least one non-Dutch spatial issue or learning environment based on personal observation and participation;
- h. At least one subfield within the discipline, including its different types of discourses, theoretical perspectives and current (spatial) policy debates.

[...] the graduate of the specialisation Human Geography has acquired knowledge and understanding (DD1) in:

- a. The main characteristics of regional and thematic geography;
- b. The characteristics of and explanations for spatial differentiation and specialisation at different levels of scale;
- c. The social context and institutional structure in which human geographical issues arise, become relevant, and in which interventions take place.

[...]the graduate of the specialisation Planning has acquired knowledge and understanding (DD1) in:

- a. the development of key planning approaches, in particular at the intersection of institutional aspects of spatial action and approaches to spatial planning and policymaking;
- b. the fundamentals and methods and techniques of spatial analysis and planning, including the creation of alternatives/scenarios, evaluation methods and spatial impact analysis;
- c. the main analysing models for the critical interpretation and deconstruction of policy/planning processes and policy documents;
- d. the basic principles of the Dutch legal system and Dutch spatial planning law;
- e. conditions at the level of organisations, groups and individuals that promote or impede creative planning.

Applying knowledge and understanding (DD2)

2. *The acquired cognitive and/or professional abilities enable the graduate to:*

- a. Design and carry out human geographical/planning research under professional supervision, to report on the results in a scientifically sound manner, and to derive conclusions from the analysis;
- b. Connect theory and empirics by recognizing, identifying and interpreting human geographical and planning issues from the existing theoretical and policy insights;
- c. Contribute to solving social issues by means of sociospatial policy advice and planning;
- d. Perform spatial analysis and visualizations using cartographic techniques;
- e. Study place in an integrative way.

Formulating judgement (DD3)

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

- a. Take a well-considered position in the (spatial) behaviour of different actors, taking account of social interests and positions;
- b. Critically reflect on sources, analyses and interpretations of socio-spatial issues, as well as on their use in policy and theorizing;
- c. Reflect on one's own position and choices regarding social issues.

Communicative skills (DD4)

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

- a. Dutch language skills at academic level and a passive knowledge of the English language at academic level on completion of the programme. If the student took English seminar groups and/or graduates in the English-language variant, the student is able to use their English language skills at an academic level;
- b. Relevant written, oral and visual presentation techniques;
- c. (Re)formulate and defend own points of view in the field of the profession;
- d. Formulate, receive and adequately process constructive feedback;
- e. Work successfully in a team.

Competencies/ learning skills (DD5)

5. The graduate has acquired the following competencies:

- a. Independently identify, use and critically evaluate source material for scientific and socially relevant purposes;
- b. Read scientific literature and policy documents at an academic level;
- c. Formulate solutions on social issues based on science and creativity;
- d. Hold junior positions for human geographers or planners on the labour market;
- e. Continue their studies in a graduate programme.

Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

Semester 1			Semester 2		
Period 1 Sept - Oct	Period 2 Nov - Dec	Period 3 Jan	Period 4 Feb - Mar	Period 5 Apr - May	Period 6 Jun
Year 1: Encounter					
Introduction to Human Geography (12 EC) 			Urban Dynamics: Amsterdam in Context (12 EC)  		Research Project: Regional (6 EC) 
Introduction to Spatial Planning (12 EC) 			Thinking Spatially (6 EC)  	Research Methods 1 (6 EC) 	
Academic Skills (6 EC) 					
Year 2: Exploration					
Research Methods 2 (12 EC) 		Research Project: The Netherlands (6 EC) 	Restricted-choice thematic elective (12 EC)  		Research Project: Abroad (6 EC) 
1 out of 2 (12 EC): Geographies of Inequality or Theories of Spatial Interventions   			1 out of 2 (6 EC): Human Geography: Theory & Practice or Planning: Theory & Practice  	Restricted-choice specialisation (6 EC)  	
Year 3: Development					
Free-choice electives (up to 30 EC)			Research Methods 3 (6 EC) 		
			Restricted-choice thematic elective (12 EC)  		
			Research Project: Bachelor Thesis (12 EC)    		
Course legend  Joint core course  Specialisation Human Geography or Planning course  Restricted-choice elective  Free-choice elective  Course can be followed in semester 1 or 2			Learning pathway legend  Research Methods  Academic Skills  Planning  Human Geography		

Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

Monday 31 March 2025

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

Tuesday 1 April 2025

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

Appendix 4. Materials

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

The panel also studied other materials, which included:

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