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MSc Business Administration full-time

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Advisory report of the assessment of the existing programme  
Site visit: 12 – 14 November 2024

## Colophon

### Institution and programme

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam  
Amsterdam  
Institutional Audit: yes

Programme: MSc Business Administration  
Site: Amsterdam  
Mode: full-time  
ISAT-number: 60644

### Assessment panel

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## Summary

From 12 to 14 November 2024 an assessment panel of AeQui visited the School of Business and Economics (SBE) at VU Amsterdam to perform a quality assessment of eight degree programmes in Business Administration. 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 Master of Science (MSc) in Business Administration (BA) according to the NVAO framework for limited programme assessment. The panel's overall judgement of the programme is **positive**.

### Intended learning outcomes

The master BA is a one-year full-time 60 EC programme offered in English. It is open to bachelor graduates with a wide range of disciplinary, cultural and geographical backgrounds, who enrol in one of five specialisations: Strategic Human Resource Management, International Management, Leadership and Change Management, Management Consulting, and Strategy and Organisation. The fulltime master BA has a clear and distinctive profile, features proper learning outcomes, and is well connected to the professional field. Its profile and learning goals are very much in line with the mission and educational vision of the university and the school. Since the previous accreditation, the programme emphasised its specific set-up combining five similarly structured niche specialisations with an underlying business administration core, and communicated this effectively to (prospective) students. The formulation of the intended learning outcomes is adequate and does justice to the level, orientation and domain of the programme specialisations. The MSc BA involves the professional field in different ways, thereby enhancing the learning experience of its students and maintaining the relevance of its profile and (learning) objectives. Moreover, the contacts with the dedicated alumni network and the Advisory Board ensure a structural connection to the world of work. The panel concludes that the programme **meets** this standard.

### Teaching-learning environment

The fulltime master BA has a strong teaching-learning environment featuring a coherent curriculum, a befitting didactic concept, and well-qualified teaching staff. The panel endorses the decision of the school to offer the programme in English, and approves of its English-language title. The geographical, cultural, and disciplinary diversity of the cohorts constitutes a distinctive feature of the programme as well as a value added for both students and staff. The panel thinks highly of the organisational structure of the programme and the opportunities for students to carve their own pathway. The MSc BA course objectives in the curriculum are clearly aligned with the learning outcomes at the level of both programme and specialisations. About one third of the students and more than 40% of the staff is international. Since the previous accreditation, the intake has been fluctuating between 450 and 700 students; in September 2024, 507 students enrolled in the MSc BA. The mixture of didactic approaches is suitable for the programme and the diverse student body, while the teaching staff is well qualified to apply these educational principles to the substance of their courses, the different teaching formats and the student groups. The admission criteria are inclusive to attract the envisaged audience. Students are satisfied with a programme that meets their expectations and complete the study in a reasonable timeframe. The MSc BA programme has a positive vibe: the programme manage-

ment functions as a real team, while five heterogeneous student communities are taught and supported by an equally diverse, competent and enthusiastic staff team. The panel concludes that the programme **meets** this standard.

#### Student assessment

The fulltime master BA can rely on a robust system of assessment. Both course and thesis assessments are embedded in well-established policies and frameworks at the level of the university and the school, while the MSc BA assessment plan safeguards that course learning goals are assessed adequately and cover the programme objectives. Course and thesis assessments have changed since the previous accreditation, and these adjustments are for the better. The Examination Board has the capacity and competency to assume a variety of assessment tasks and safeguards the assessment quality of the master BA. The thesis review demonstrated that the newly designed evaluation form is relevant, the scoring is appropriate and the written feedback insightful. The panel concludes that the programme **meets** this standard.

#### Achieved learning outcomes

Students who graduate from the fulltime master BA have effectively acquired all intended

learning outcomes. The selected and reviewed BA theses are of good quality and meet the expectations for a final project of academic orientation at master level. Moreover, the programme, its different specialisations and the career services prepare the master students well for the labour market. Hence, BA graduates quickly find suitable employment in a wide variety of positions that are in line with the level and domain of their studies. The panel concludes that the programme **meets** this standard.

#### Recommendations

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

- embed the portfolio stronger in the curriculum, and turn it into a credit-bearing activity;
- describe the deliverables and their respective assessment formats for the Research in Business Administration course and the Thesis;
- archive both the individual grading sheets and the consolidated thesis evaluation form;
- tighten the cooperation with the study association.

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

On behalf of the entire site visit panel,

Utrecht, April 2025

Eric Dooms  
Chair

Mark Delmartino  
Secretary

## Introduction

### Institution

Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam is a university with nine faculties. Since its foundation in 1880, VU Amsterdam has stood for scientific and value-driven education, research, and knowledge transfer. Its education and research are closely linked and have a strong social orientation. All education is provided on one campus in the heart of the Zuidas Knowledge District.

The School of Business and Economics (SBE) is one of VU's faculties and offers five BSc, ten MSc, and 15 postgraduate programmes in economics and business administration. Since its establishment in 1948, SBE has evolved into a school with over 9,000 students and over 500 academic and non-academic staff members.

The school is governed by the SBE faculty board under the leadership of the dean. The academic staff is divided in departments; each head of department assigns the teaching, research, and administrative tasks. SBE has a well-established system of quality assurance of teaching and assessment, which is based on the VU Manual for Quality Assurance of Teaching and Learning and to which all programmes adhere. SBE has three examination boards: one governing all government-funded programmes, one for accredited postgraduate programmes, and one joint board with the University of Amsterdam for the master Entrepreneurship. Since the last accreditation in 2018-2019, the school obtained both AACSB and EQUIS accreditation, which has further improved the quality assurance process.

Each degree programme has a dedicated programme director who is responsible for content, organisation and quality assurance. The director ensures that the curriculum is adjusted to the intended learning outcomes and that the

learning environment meets the quality requirements of SBE. In the MSc BA programme, five programme coordinators, one per track, assist the director. Each degree programme has a programme committee comprising of an equal number of students and lecturers, appointed by the SBE faculty board.

### Programme

The Master of Science (MSc) in Business Administration (BA) is a one-year full-time 60 EC programme taught in English. It offers a multidisciplinary and contemporary perspective on business management and aims to build bridges between research and practice. In this way the MSc BA trains future professionals to have solid theoretical knowledge and state-of-the-art research skills and to apply these competencies analytically and critically to solve actual business challenges. The programme is open to bachelor students with a wide range of disciplinary, cultural and geographical backgrounds, who enrol in one of five specialisations: Strategic Human Resource Management, International Management, Leadership and Change Management, Management Consulting, and Strategy and Organisation. About one third of the students and more than 40% of the staff is international. Since the previous accreditation, the intake has been fluctuating between 450 and 700 students. This fluctuation is largely due to the fact that three specialisations are no longer part of the programme. In September 2024, 507 students enrolled in the MSc BA.

### 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. VU Amsterdam has commissioned AeQui to carry

out the assessment. At VU, the cluster assessment features eight bachelor, master and post-experience (executive) master programmes.

In the run-up to the visit, a preparatory meeting was held with representatives of SBE to exchange information and plan the dates and programme of the site visit. In collaboration with the programme, 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 from 12 until 14 November 2024 according to the programme presented in Attachment 2.

The assessment was conducted based on the Accreditation Framework for Higher Education in the Netherlands. VU Amsterdam 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 MSc BA programme put at disposition many relevant 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 reviewed a sample of 15 theses. Their first impressions on the report and the thesis (evaluations) formed the basis for discussion during an online preparatory meeting on 7 November 2024, 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, nobody used the opportunity to speak individually and confidentially with the panel. At the initiative of VU Amsterdam, a Development Dialogue will take place in Spring 2025. The results of this meeting will 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 MSc Business Administration offers a multi-disciplinary and contemporary perspective on business management and aims to build bridges between research and practice. Future professionals acquire solid theoretical knowledge and state-of-the-art research skills and learn to apply these competencies analytically and critically to solve business challenges. Because successful managers need a thorough and holistic understanding of the dynamic market environment, the impact of globalisation, sustainability issues, and complex change processes is studied in project teams. Moreover, the programme offers multiple research philosophies, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, using scientific literature, practical cases, and empirical data to learn about managing today's businesses.

The panel gathered from the written materials that the aspirations of the MSc BA programme are directly derived from the educational vision of both VU and SBE. This vision is formulated along two axes: the (1) behavioural component is firmly embedded in the core values Responsible, Personal and Open of the VU; and (2) the content component consists of the roles Academic, Professional, and Citizen. During the discussions on site, the panel noticed that these components are not mere theoretical constructs on paper, but are effectively underpinning the profile, design and implementation of the MSc BA programme. Hence, the panel endorses that integrating the academic, professional and citizen roles with the behavioural components

responsible, personal and open creates a unique profile for both SBE and for the master students that graduate from the BA programme.

The panel noticed that the MSc BA team has worked on the recommendations of the previous accreditation team: it strengthened the programme articulation emphasising the connection between business and science, as well as the shared focus in each of the five specialisations on bridging science and practice. Moreover, it clarified the multidisciplinary nature of the programme and linked this to the freedom students have to craft their own study programme: while all specialisations cover multidisciplinary insights, students can decide through their choice of elective courses, including an interdisciplinary elective, to what extent they engage with multi-disciplinarity. Furthermore, the programme communicated clearly about this approach to current and prospective students and rewrote the information on the website and in programme flyers on the specialisations, the freedom to carve a personal (multi/inter) disciplinary path, and the admission criteria.

Regarding the latter point, the panel was informed that in line with the focus of the university and the school on diversity and inclusion, the MSc BA programme has deliberately chosen to open the programme to as many different perspectives and backgrounds as possible. Prospective students are therefore encouraged to apply if they meet a certain set of standard criteria, such as having a predefined amount of EC in content-related matters, research methods and statistics.

Furthermore, the panel gathered from the benchmark section in the report that several Dutch universities offer an MSc BA programme but their range of specialisations is either much smaller than at VU, or very different. This also applies to benchmark universities in Europe, whose MSc BA programmes do not tend to have specialisations. While most Dutch and international MSc BA programmes have a similar focus, the programme at VU stands out for its specialisation opportunities.

The panel acknowledges the efforts of the MSc BA programme team with regard to programme articulation and communication, which have been quite effective. In fact, the panel noticed in the written materials and during the discussions on site that the profile of the MSc BA programme is well known to students. In their dedicated section of the report, students mentioned that they chose for the programme at VU because of its reputation, comprehensive campus, welcoming atmosphere and accessibility. Content-wise, students appreciate the clear admission requirements, the correct information on the website and in the course manuals, the balanced and often combined attention to academic skills and practical application in the courses, and the opportunity to tailor the study programme to their own interest.

During the visit, the panel discussed in several sessions (the rationale for) the outlook of this MSc BA programme because it wondered to what extent the programme is a genuine MSc BA programme or rather five different specialist MSc programmes under one administrative roof. The programme management informed the panel that several options were considered at the time of the programme revision, and it was eventually decided to go for a business administration degree with specific niche specialisations. This was a conscious decision taken at

faculty level and providing the team with the room and the flexibility to design five specialisations with a common character. The common character is an important criterion, and explains for instance why the master programmes in Digital and Business Innovation and in Transport and Supply Chain Management are stand-alone degrees that went/go through separate (initial) accreditations. The revision resulted in a MSc BA programme with a common core and five specialisations with a similar structure. Each specialisation has its own coordinator, as well as a dedicated thesis coordinator, but there is a common understanding among these coordinators that underneath their specialisations there is a business administration core. Given the size of the programme, it is possible to differentiate and offer several stand-alone specialisations that are in themselves big enough to split further in small-scale teaching units. The panel understood from the discussions that this small-scale character of the specialisations within a big degree programme works nicely for both students and staff.

### **Intended learning outcomes**

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that SBE has developed a single – and according to the panel relevant – framework to guide the formulation of the learning outcomes of its degree programmes. The intended learning outcomes of the master BA consist of learning goals and learning objectives: the goals refer to what graduates are or have and are set SBE-wide; the objectives refer to what graduates can do or make and are specific to the BA programme. The panel observed that there is a direct link between the respective goals and objectives, and that both goals and objectives are clustered around five dimensions: academic and research skills, bridging theory and practice, social and

professional skills, broadening your horizon, and self-awareness.

The MSc BA programme features five learning goals and six learning objectives. While their formulation essentially remained the same, the intended learning outcomes have been reorganised in view of the initial AACSB accreditation: the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business is a highly reputed accreditation body whose international quality standard SBE managed to obtain in 2022. The panel has studied the intended learning outcomes and found that they are aligned with the Dublin Descriptors, formulated at the appropriate master level and reflect the academic orientation of the programme. Moreover, the panel noticed that the formulation of the learning objectives starts from a common BA core and is then linked to the specific domain of specialisation in so far as the academic and research skills, and the bridging theory and practice dimensions are concerned. It results in five different yet very similar sets of learning outcomes, which according to the panel makes sense in view of the above-mentioned programme profile and set-up.

### **Professional Field**

The panel noticed that all degree programmes under review adopt a similar yet programme-specific approach in their structural connections to the professional world. These contacts invariably serve to improve the learning experience of students, to understand the needs of corporations and organisations, and to enhance the quality and relevance of the respective programmes. The contacts of the MSc BA programme with the professional field have led to the involvement of companies and organisations in several courses through guest lectures, assignments and projects.

Furthermore, the programme has a dedicated Advisory Board, which provides a direct and active connection to the professional world. It consists of six internal members – the programme director and the five specialisation coordinators – and six external members: five recent alumni representing all specialisations and the chair of the board, who holds a senior leadership position in a large firm. Alumni serve on the board for maximum two three-year terms. The Advisory Board functions in two ways: each specialisation coordinator meets with their alumni counterparts at least twice per year to discuss ongoing questions and issues in their specialisation, while the entire board meets once or twice per year to exchange specialist topics and discuss programme-wide issues together. Recent examples of their contributions include the advice to offer more quantitative and analytical skills, as well as more activities to use AI effectively in some of the specialisations. Moreover, the board is currently supporting the redesign of the Management Consulting specialisation. The panel welcomes this active and differentiated use of the Advisory Board as a structural tool to monitor and ensure the continued relevance of the MSc BA programme and its specialisations.

Finally, the panel noticed that the school is conducting systematic research among its alumni, while programme management also keeps track of the professional whereabouts of its graduates. The programme also has a dedicated alumni network, which is invited every year to an event where students connect to alumni and find out how they experienced the transition into the professional world, while staff and coordinators learn from alumni about the latest practical and professional insights and trends. These efforts ensure that there is ample contact between the programme and its alumni, who in

turn provide MSc BA students with a glimpse of their professional future.

### Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel thinks highly of the overarching way in which the mission and educational vision of the university and the school are underpinning the profile and the learning goals of all degree programmes under review. This common approach, which is also visible in the contacts with the professional world, ensures consistency and recognition across programmes.

In this regard, the panel considers that the MSc BA programme has a clear and distinctive profile, features proper learning outcomes, and is well connected to the professional field. The panel welcomes the efforts of the programme team to better articulate the profile of the programme and to communicate this in a professional way to prospective and current students. These efforts have been effective as students know very well what the unique selling propositions of the MSc BA programme at VU are and often decided to come to VU because of these features. Furthermore, the panel acknowledges the rationale of the school and the programme management to offer a master degree with an underlying business administration core and

five similarly structured niche specialisations with a common character.

The panel endorses the way the intended learning outcomes have been adjusted since the previous visit. Their formulation in both learning goals and learning objectives is adequate and reflects the domain (business administration), the level (master) and orientation (academic) of the programme. Moreover, the panel endorses the programme approach to formulate individual yet very similar sets of learning outcomes per specialisation.

The panel appreciates the different ways in which the MSc BA programme is involving the professional field. By doing so, it enhances the learning experience of its students and maintains the relevance of its profile and (learning) objectives. According to the panel, the long-standing Advisory Board and the contacts with the alumni network are important building blocks for the programme to ensure a structural connection to the professional world.

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 MSc Business Administration is a one-year full-time programme. The curriculum of 60 EC is spread equally over the six periods of the academic year at VU. All specialisations follow the same curriculum structure: two specialist courses (12 EC), four restricted and/or interdisciplinary elective courses (24 EC), two common core courses with a specialist angle (9 EC), and a master thesis (15 EC). In the first three periods, students gain state-of-the-art theoretical knowledge and application of that knowledge, while the last three periods focus on research skills, ethical insights, the master thesis and possibly an internship. There is close cooperation between the specialisations as they share the same thesis, internship and portfolio policy, including identical guidelines and assessment formats.

At their enrolment, students choose one of the following specialisations, each with their own narrative and key pillars:

- *International Management* - "Preparing students for launching a successful international career by combining the theoretical foundation for understanding business in today's global environment with the practical experience and skills necessary to work in multinational organisations." The pillars underlying the programme are: 1) academic knowledge about IM and 2) gaining practical skills related to IM.
- *Leadership and Change Management* - "Organisational transformations are adventures where leadership, rather than plans and standard operating procedures, is key to success. The focus on leadership of change will help you discover your compass and social responsibility to navigate yourself and others through uncertainty." Central pillars are 1) Theories of organisational change, 2) Change implementation skills, and 3) Leadership.
- *Management Consulting* - "The MC programme gives students the consultant experiences, skills, and theories that prepare them for a head start in their consulting career." The key pillars are 1) gaining consulting knowledge and 2) training consulting skills.
- *Strategic Human Resource Management* - "The purpose is to mobilise people. To account for critical organisational challenges such as employee development, staffing, performance and diversity, the programme helps students develop skills and competencies to mobilise employees in contemporary organisations." The pillars are: 1) a core HRM content pillar, 2) Staffing, 3) Performance, 4) Development, and 5) Diversity.
- *Strategy and Organisation* - "The programme trains you to become a professional expert in managing strategic and organisational challenges based on profound skills in analytics, critical thinking and reflexivity and the ability to act responsibly and foresightedly in complex and dynamic market environments." The underlying pillars are: 1) a core Strategy pillar, and two content pillars on 2) rethinking and managing firm boundaries and 3) managing increased stakeholder demand for CSR.

The panel gathered from the written materials and the on-site discussions that students can get support from the programme to choose a specialisation, as well as the elective courses. They can tailor their study programme by either specialising (i.e. focus on the chosen discipline) or generalising (i.e. broaden their perspective with other disciplines) within their specialisation. In addition to two restricted electives which students have to choose within the specialisation, they can go for a third elective from another specialisation and take a fourth interdisciplinary elective or perform a work, applied research or thesis internship.

During the discussions on site the panel focused mainly on three aspects: programme coherence, the portfolio, and the thesis trajectory. With regard to the first point, the panel wondered after reading the programme materials how the programme allows for so many individual approaches yet manages to remain coherent. The discussions with students, staff and above all the programme management showed that the fundamental structure of the programme is very strong. At the time of the revision, the curriculum set-up was discussed extensively. This has led to a common structure, where the learning goals of the disciplinary courses and the master thesis together cover the learning objectives of the programme (specialisation). Furthermore, the panel noticed that there is a common understanding among the specialisation coordinators and the programme director about the above-mentioned underlying business administration core. Both this common core and the specialist narratives are discussed regularly among the programme management and within each specialisation between the coordinator and the course leaders and teachers. Following the discussions, the panel was impressed by the organisational structure of the programme and even more so by the common

understanding among, and active engagement of, the programme director and specialisation coordinators.

In so far as the portfolio is concerned, the panel inquired about its format and status as it was presented as a compulsory but non-credited deliverable across all specialisations. The panel was informed that the portfolio serves to bind all learning activities and experiences together in a comprehensive document that enhances self-reflection and broadens the student horizon. There are coaching sessions with students about the portfolio to activate their critical reflection on the learning process. It is also an employability tool involving the SBE career centre to support students in developing their professional identity and prepare for their transition to the labour market. The portfolio is not credited separately but constitutes a complementary and compulsory product in addition to the master thesis; together both deliverables prove the student's academic and professional development. The discussions on site convinced the panel that the portfolio is a potentially strong and relevant tool that certainly befits the profile of the university, the school and the programme. However, the panel found that it requires more investment and a stronger embedding in the curriculum, possibly as a specific learning line that is interwoven in a combination of courses throughout the entire academic year. In this way students will be reminded regularly to add their most recent developments/successes to the portfolio. Moreover, the portfolio should become a credited activity if it wants to have real significance, with proper assessment standards. In this regard, the portfolio could culminate in a reflection chapter/annex in the master thesis.

With respect to the master thesis trajectory, the panel discussed the link between the Research in Business Administration course and the

Thesis, as well as the deliverables that students are expected to produce in both components. In the research course, students learn among others about research methods and prepare for the thesis by practising with a research question, a research design, a literature review, and data analysis. In the Thesis students among others formulate a research problem, study it, and report on the outcomes of the study. Given that both courses seem to address very similar points, the panel wondered what the exact division of work was between the Research course and the Thesis, and to what extent students produce deliverables (research question, literature review) on which they are tested – and receive study credits – twice. The programme team denied that the latter was the case and informed the panel that students learn and practice in the research methods course those skills they need to properly perform the master thesis research afterwards, thereby practising on materials and data they might be using later on in the thesis. In order to avoid any possible misunderstanding, the panel suggests the management to describe very clearly the deliverables and their respective assessment formats for both the Research in Business Administration course and for the Thesis.

Since the previous accreditation, the programme team has also worked hard on the constructive alignment between programme learning outcomes, course learning goals and assessments. The preparations for the initial AACSB accreditation brought along a reorganisation of the intended learning outcomes at programme level, while adjustments to the curriculum entailed changes in the course learning objectives. The curriculum map shows which learning objectives are addressed per course. The curriculum assessment connects the respective courses to the types of assessment. The MSc BA assessment plan brings together all programme,

course and assessment elements, which in turn allows to monitor and evaluate the level of constructive alignment in the programme. Students are informed about this connection / alignment in the course descriptions of their study guides. The materials and discussions demonstrated convincingly, according to the panel, that there is a clear connection between the MSc BA programme learning outcomes and the course objectives at the level of both programme and specialisations. The panel is aware that this is not a straightforward exercise given the particular set-up of the MSc BA programme and wants to commend the programme team for the successful alignment across specialisations.

The panel gathered from the student chapter and the discussion with MSc BA students on site that they are overall satisfied with the curriculum. They felt well informed prior to their enrolment and indicated that the programme/specialisations is/are meeting their expectations. Students are aware that they focus on a particular discipline within the broader domain of business administration, and are happy with this. One of the alumni the panel spoke to had followed the 'old' curriculum and mentioned that overall the course contents are not necessarily different but that the positioning is different now with courses focusing more on the specialisation. Current students also appreciated the opportunities to tailor the study to their interest, including the option of an internship.

When they were asked what could be improved, students indicated that the study association is very active but could operate with more support and in closer connection with the programme, the school and the university. Moreover, students found that some courses uphold very tight schedules, certainly if they require students to find interview subjects for their assignments. Students tend to be satisfied with most

teachers, who are enthusiastic, share their practical experience, adopt innovative teaching methods and are available for questions. Furthermore, students pointed to the need for more recent articles in courses as some materials tend to be outdated. In so far as the portfolio is concerned, students see its (potential) value added but indicated that after the first workshops it hardly gets further attention and is treated by the students as a must-do. Finally, students indicated that they feel heard when they raise concerns, notably in and through the Programme Committee, and noticed that there is willingness among the management and the staff to change/improve.

### **Language of instruction**

The title of the MSc BA programme and its specialisations are in English, and so is the programme's language of instruction. The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that this is an explicit and obvious choice in view of the international orientation of the programme and the future professional careers of the graduates. Content-wise, the MSc BA focuses on international markets, companies and institutions, while it essentially prepares students to operate in a global business community, in which English is the leading language in both academia and the business world. Moreover, many graduates will afterwards join an employer with an international workforce, be it an internationally oriented Dutch firm or an international firm operating in the Netherlands. It is therefore very likely that MSc BA graduates will be working in an environment where English is the default language.

The panel also learned that the programme attracts a considerable number of international students (33%) because it is offered in English. This diversity in turn is critical to deliver on one of the key MSc BA programme objectives as

students encounter people from diverse backgrounds and learn to operate in an international context. Working and learning in diverse teams, moreover, is in line with the university-wide educational model of the 'Mixed Classroom' that builds upon differences to enrich the learning experience for all students. This, in turn, requires a sufficient number of staff with appropriate international and intercultural expertise, as well as good quality language skills. The panel was informed that about 42% of the lecturers on the MSc BA programme is non-Dutch, while it is university-wide policy that lecturers (can follow training to) display English language skills at level C1.

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel endorses the English title of the programme, as well as the extensive motivation that underpins the decision to offer the MSc BA in English.

### **Didactics**

The learning environment of the MSc BA is organised in such a way that it aligns with the programme profile and the student target group. Its didactic concept features several hallmarks:

- All courses provide a clear link between research and practice through various means. Some courses start at a company and integrate their main assignment with that company, whereas other courses have guest lecturers, use real-life practical cases, or apply a project-based programme that contributes to solving a business dilemma.
- A portfolio serves to bind all learning activities and experiences together in a document that enhances self-reflection and broadens the student horizons.
- Students are provided with a core structure of the programme, yet have control in crafting their own pathway, thereby directing their own learning process.

- There is a variety of assessment methods across courses to ensure that overall the programme caters to different learning styles.
- The MSc BA programme is attracting a diverse student population and therefore fosters a sense of community in which international students feel at home. The VU concept 'Mixed Classroom' stimulates a diverse atmosphere in class and provides an inclusive learning environment for all students.
- Active blended learning reflects the vision of the university to develop online teaching tools with the ambition to combine on-campus teaching with technological opportunities that enhance teaching effectiveness. The Centre for Teaching and Learning has supported several MSc BA course coordinators in implementing teaching tools. In the Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility course for instance, knowledge clips are combined with podcasts and in-class lectures and discussions to create a good blend of offline and online learning activities. The Contemporary Careers and Organisations course includes a "quest blog" component where students write an evidence-based answer to a question that is central to the learning activities, while other student teams reply to the initial post, thereby creating a lively online discussion.

The panel gathered from the discussions on site that the didactic concept is far more than a theoretical construct: in fact, each of its features stands for several concrete initiatives and (good) practices that are implemented in the day-to-day delivery of the MSc BA programme.

#### **Student admission, intake and success rate**

The panel read in the self-evaluation report and the detailed appendix on student data that since the previous accreditation, the yearly intake has

fluctuated between 429 (in 2022-2023) and 715 students (in 2019-2020). The drop in student numbers was largely caused by the separation of three specialisations. In the last two years, the intake seems rather stable at just over 500 students.

The student population of the MSc BA is quite diverse in terms of educational and geographical background. The programme explicitly considers applications from students with a different educational background than Business Administration. In order to avoid too much differentiation in prior knowledge and skills levels, students with an academic bachelor degree may be required to follow an online course on methods and statistics, a content-relevant discipline for which they need to provide a certificate, or a premaster if the gap is too large. Each applicant is appraised on their own merits and independently from other candidates, while all potential students need to go through the exact same selection procedure, including those students who obtained their bachelor degree at SBE. Every year between 5%-10% of the applicants are students with a hbo-bachelor degree. These applicants are selected before they start a half-year pre-master programme and are automatically allowed if they pass the pre-master. During the programme, the Research in Business Administration course offers various videos and reading materials to update and upgrade student knowledge and skills prior to starting the course.

According to the student data, the share of students dropping out has been fluctuating between 8% (in 2022) and 16% (in 2019). The lower share is certainly acceptable, according to the panel, and some of the higher rates are likely influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, if similarly high drop-out rates would occur in the future, then the programme may want to

investigate this, and take appropriate prevention measures accordingly.

In terms of success rate, the average study duration is 14 months: students complete their one-year study with an average delay of 2 months. About two thirds of the MSc BA students finish within the nominal duration of one year, while more than 80% do so in two years. According to the panel, these are very positive results, which confirm the student indications during the visit that the courses are feasible and the study load is well divided across the entire year and monitored at the level of the specialisations.

The panel gathered from the written materials that some students did not feel very connected with VU or SBE, for instance because of their international background or because they do not live in Amsterdam and only travel to the university for educational activities. The MSc BA programme is trying to optimise the learning effects of diversity, and organises/supports several initiatives to enhance community building throughout the study. During the site visit, the panel learned that most students feel fine within the programme and are mostly committed to their specialisation. While the size of these specialisations differs, and also their numbers/shares of international students, the MSc BA seems to consist of five genuine communities.

### **Staff**

The panel gathered from the self-evaluation report that almost all teaching is performed by academic staff belonging to one of the SBE departments. According to the staff overview, the MSc BA programme features 59 teaching staff, ranging from 11 full over 15 associate and 21 assistant professors to 7 lecturers. Around 40% of the staff is female, and 42% has an interna-

tional background. The faculty members are active in research, hence they can guide students to the current academic research frontiers, help shape their conceptual skills, and prepare them to engage in research. In addition, there are several lecturers who hold positions at SBE and in industry, and are thus well placed to support students in building bridges between science and practice. During the visit the panel established that staff dedicated to the MSc BA programme has good research credentials.

Furthermore, the panel noticed that staff development is well organised at the MSc BA as it is embedded in policies and documents including 'SBE HRM educational policy', 'SBE BKO policy', and 'SBE Tenure Track procedure'. All academic staff are expected to have English language proficiency at level C1. Permanent staff members can pursue continuing education in specific fields such as active blended learning, mixed classrooms, activating work formats, examinations and assessments. Currently, 83% of the academic staff involved in the MSc BA holds a university teaching qualification (BKO) and 19% obtained also the senior qualification (SKO/LOL). The latter group is particularly active in course innovation, such as the above-mentioned portfolio. During the visit, MSc BA staff gave some very concrete examples of how they are adjusting their teaching practice to serve both large and small groups of students. Students from their side emphasised the expertise, didactic skills and commitment of the staff. Taking all these elements together, the panel is convinced that the MSc BA staff is properly qualified to teach a diverse student audience.

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel established that the programme is well managed and coordinated. The discussions on site have shown that both the academic director and the specialisation coordi-

nators are experienced and co-operate as a very effective team. The MSc BA staff indicated to the panel that their management is very supportive and of crucial importance to help teaching staff to navigate across the different educational approaches when designing, preparing and delivering the respective courses. Moreover, programme management goes at lengths to create a team spirit among staff who belong to different departments through meetings, regular programme updates, and by improving the onboarding process of new staff. According to the panel, the MSc BA programme is doing well because the management is good at facilitating the teaching staff to operate as a team. This team approach, at the level of the specialisations, is also mentioned as a strength by some of the students.

### Considerations

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

The panel moreover endorses the decision of the school to offer the programme in English, and approves of its English-language title. According to the panel, the geographical and disciplinary diversity of the student cohorts constitutes a distinctive feature of the programme, as well as a value added for both students and staff.

The panel thinks highly of the organisational structure of the programme with its underlying common business administration core, five disciplinary specialisations and opportunities for students to carve their own pathway. To successfully deliver such programme for 500+ students is quite an achievement, according to the panel, which commends the programme team

for its management and coordination skills. Furthermore, the panel considers that the MSc BA course objectives in the curriculum are clearly aligned with the learning outcomes at the level of both programme and specialisations.

The panel is impressed by the didactic concept that underlies the programme. Together the different components reflect the educational vision of both VU and SBE and benefit the specific profile and objectives of the MSc BA programme. In addition, the teaching staff is well qualified to apply these educational principles to the substance of their courses, the different teaching formats and the diverse group of students.

Furthermore, the panel is positive about the specific admission policy that invites candidates with different backgrounds and appraises each applicant on their own merits. This approach seems to work as students welcome the diverse intake and do well in terms of success rate and time to completion.

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

In addition to these positive considerations, the panel welcomes the efforts of the programme team to implement the portfolio as a relevant curriculum component across all specialisations. The panel encourages the MSc BA programme to invest more in this portfolio, embed it stronger in the curriculum, and turn it into a credit-bearing activity. In view of future audits, the panel also advises the programme to describe explicitly the respective deliverables and

their assessment formats for both the Research in Business Administration course and the Thesis. Finally, the panel invites the MSc BA programme to tighten the cooperation with the study association.

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 gathers from the extensive written materials and the discussions on site that the MSc BA programme operates an assessment system that complies with the assessment policy and procedures of SBE, which in turn are based on a university-wide policy on assessment quality. The programme has put at disposition both policy documents, the Manual for Quality Assurance of Teaching and Learning – VU Assessment Framework and the SBE Policy Plan – Assessment Policy. Moreover, every degree programme has a dedicated Assessment Plan, which is updated every year and describes the assessment vision, the programme and course objectives, the curriculum map and curriculum assessment, and the forms of testing. The programme director, specialisation coordinators and examination board use the assessment plan to control the relationship between the programme's intended learning outcomes, the course-level objectives and their assessment.

The panel has looked into the most recent Assessment Plan for the MSc BA and established that the elaborate document does justice to both central policies and the specificity of the degree programme, ensuring constructive alignment between goals, objectives and assessment. It is programme-wide policy that every course includes different forms of assessment and that a substantial part of the grade is based on an individual exam component. In this regard, the panel was informed that several course assessments feature a group component and that such assignments include safeguards against free-riding and/or individual reflections.

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 Examination Board included regulations on the use of (Generative) AI in its Rules and Regulations, which have been further specified by the respective programme directors. Across the school/programmes, these regulations follow the principle that they should instigate awareness and action rather than punishment, and that they should foster autonomous and critical thinking while recognising that AI can also be a support for learning. Hence, all course coordinators address AI in their manuals and choose from a menu of AI usage options for assignments. These options range from AI not being allowed at all to AI being mandatory. Students from their side must sign an Own Work Declaration affirming the authenticity of their deliverables. Both staff and students indicated to the panel that the rules are clear at the level of the individual assessment/course. In addition, programme and SBE management mentioned that the university and the school are working on comprehensive policies, which are likely to affect the contents of the courses, the delivery of education, the organisation of assessment, and eventually the intended learning outcomes of the respective programmes. Currently, there is a focus on the acquisition of AI skills, which differs at bachelor and master level. This specific area of attention is very new, and its implementation differs per programme. In sum, the panel found that the MSc BA 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.

### **Course assessment**

At the level of individual courses, course coordinators select the most appropriate assessment methods for testing the learning goals. They do so in close collaboration with the programme director/specialisation coordinator who ensure that across the programme/specialisation a variety of assessment methods is used. Each course has its assessment file. This file contains a test blueprint, the exam, resit exam and/or assignments, a model answer plus scoring guide, a test and item analysis, the results of the course evaluation, and a short reflection report by the examiner. Course coordinators are free to tailor the different exam components to the requirements of their course, provided they inform the management accordingly.

The teaching staff is encouraged to experiment with innovative forms of teaching and testing; in every course, however, the individual student performance should be the decisive factor in the assessment. The MSc BA programme specialisations ensure that there is a variety of assessment methods across courses, with courses typically either adhering to an assessment based on an individual exam and a group assignment, or an assessment based on an individual assignment and a group assignment. In all cases, the individual assessment weighs at least equally in the overall course grade to allow students to thrive based on their own qualities and motivation. Moreover, MSc BA exams are not allowed to be fully multiple-choice-based: at least 50% of the exam should be open-ended in order to ensure that different types of knowledge recollection and reproduction are achieved and tested. The panel agrees to the emphasis on individual

exam components and the promotion of diversity and innovation in assessment formats. It welcomes the elaboration of assessment files, which constitutes a good basis for the Examination Board to monitor the quality of assessment per course and disseminate the good practice examples they come across in their reviews.

Furthermore, the panel noticed both in the written materials and during the discussions on site that MSc BA students appreciate the programme's approach to assessment. In their dedicated section of the report, students mentioned that the variety of assessment types, including open-book exams and assignments, is valued because it caters to different learning styles. If anything, students would like to receive more individual feedback, also when they submit written assignments at mid-term stage, in order to prevent the final grade from being a black box. The panel discussed the feedback point with the programme management, who indicated that it is aware of the issue and is certainly willing to accommodate this request if resources allow.

### **Assessment of graduation works**

The master thesis is the culmination of the MSc BA programme. The thesis process is governed by clear rules and procedures, which are explained in an information session to students and in the thesis manual, and follow exactly the same provisions across the five specialisations. The master thesis is conceived as a course with learning goals and a detailed assessment grid. Every MSc BA specialisation has a dedicated thesis coordinator who oversees the entire process and is working closely together with the other thesis coordinators and the specialisation/programme management. Master theses at SBE are mostly supervised and assessed by academic staff members with a PhD. The thesis coordinators appoint both the supervisor and the second reader. The panel acknowledges that the

entire thesis process is well structured and includes a proper manual for students and an instruction for supervisors. MSc BA students from their side indicated that the thesis manual is comprehensive and the thesis process clear and well communicated.

The panel noticed that the programme team addressed the recommendations of the previous accreditation team regarding the thesis assessment process and thesis evaluation. In fact, two separate thesis reviews revealed that both the quality of assessment and the consistency in grading was good. Moreover, the thesis coordination team redesigned the thesis evaluation form in 2023-2024 improving the scale anchors and rubric contents, introducing a weighting of thesis elements and putting this in an Excel file that automatically calculates the final thesis grade. In addition, the thesis coordination team collectively monitors and improves the thesis policies and practices as part of its regular tasks, and organises calibration sessions for supervisors per specialisation at least once per year. The panel understands from the discussions that these sessions proved highly valuable.

The panel noticed on the basis of its own thesis review that the above-mentioned activities and interventions proved very effective. As part of its external assessment, the panel reviewed a representative sample of 15 MSc BA master theses, as well as the corresponding completed evaluation forms. The selected theses were submitted in the academic year 2023-2024. The quality of the MSc BA theses will be addressed under the next standard. In so far as thesis assessment is concerned, the panel noticed that the new thesis evaluation form is useful as a consolidated and detailed grading overview that allows for specific written feedback per criterion by the supervisor and the second reader. Moreover, the final grade was calculated on the basis of

weighted criteria. The thesis evaluation form was correctly used with both assessors providing relevant and sometimes extensive feedback on (almost) all criteria. The final scores, moreover, were very much in line with the respective appreciations of the panel members. As a point for attention, the panel wondered if it had received the entire evaluation form, as a more detailed breakdown and assessment per criterion was missing, and so was the independent judgement by the two assessors. Hence, the panel was not in a position to establish whether the assessment had been done independently by both assessors, and how the assessors had settled their possible differences in grading. The panel therefore recommends close monitoring by the thesis coordinator / Examination Board of the evaluation procedure to safeguard the independent assessment of theses by both assessors.

#### **Quality assurance**

The panel gathered from the written materials that different stakeholders are involved in assuring the quality of assessment: there is first and foremost the Examination Board, but also the programme director, the specialisations coordinators and the individual examiners play a role. The Examination Board supervises the examination process and carries final responsibility for safeguarding the quality control of assessment and examinations. It investigates systematically whether the process of assessment within SBE is carried out according to predefined criteria. These criteria are well established and include the reliability and validity of the tests. In the event that tests are not up to standard, the Examination Board reports to the programme director and the examiner and issues interventions for improvement.

During the site visit, the panel met with representatives of all three Examination Boards. It

gathered from the written materials and the discussion that these Boards – there is one for all publicly funded degrees, one for privately funded programmes, and one joint Board for the joint programme with the University of Amsterdam – fulfil their legal tasks adequately and have relevant expertise regarding assessment, fraud and legal issues. The external member has extensive assessment expertise. It is a conscious decision of SBE to have several programmes supervised by one Examination Board as this leads to greater uniformity, clarity and authority.

Because the entire assessment process is a complex chain of processes, products, procedures, and agreements, the Examination Boards at SBE not only guard the quality of assessment, but also look into assessment policy, assessment plans, assessment construction, and organisation. The panel was informed that in 2022-2023, the Examination Board paid extra attention to the reliability and consistency of the thesis assessments. The reason for this was the previously observed inconsistency between thesis forms and the increasing doubts around the authenticity of some theses through the use of outside assistance or AI tools in writing the thesis. This endeavour resulted in recommendations for adjustment of the thesis process and thesis manuals. The discussion with representatives from all three Examination Boards demonstrated according to the panel that the board members are knowledgeable about the different degree programmes they monitor and committed to their quality assurance tasks. Moreover, the panel noticed with satisfaction that the external members are highly valued members of the respective boards because of their assessment expertise.

The Examination Board for publicly funded degree programmes is in charge of assuring the assessment in the MSc BA programme. The panel noticed from the materials and

discussions that the Examination Board follows-up attentively on any issue that may pop up in the programme. On average the board selects two MSc BA courses per year for further examination. Programme management is informed about this decision, supports course coordinators in submitting the dossier, and includes the received feedback in course coordinator conversations. According to the panel, the quality assurance of the MSc BA assessment is in competent hands with the Examination Board.

### Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on-site, the panel considers that the MSc BA 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 and the school. The MSc BA assessment plan, moreover, demonstrates that course learning goals are assessed adequately. This, in turn, ensures that the learning outcomes at programme level are covered.

Course and thesis assessments have undergone several changes since the previous accreditation round, and these adjustments are for the better, according to the panel. The panel is also positive about the capacity and competency of the Examination Boards, as is demonstrated by the variety of assessment tasks it is assuming. The panel is convinced that the Examination Board for publicly funded degree programmes is very capable of assuring the assessment quality of the MSc BA programme.

The panel's review of the MSc BA theses demonstrated that in terms of assessment, the evaluation form is relevant. Moreover, the panel agreed in all cases to the thesis scores and found that almost all thesis evaluation forms

were completed in a comprehensive and insightful way. The panel wants to commend the thesis coordination team for its efforts to set and maintain consistency across thesis assessment in five specialisations and for developing a new and relevant thesis evaluation form.

In so far as thesis assessment is concerned, the panel probably did not see the entire thesis evaluation form. It would have been more transparent if the independent assessments of both

assessors would have been provided, together with a separate note on the consolidation phase. Hence the panel recommends the programme to archive – for audit purposes – not only the consolidated thesis evaluation but also the grading sheets of the individual assessors.

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 achievement of the intended learning outcomes is assessed by the cumulative results of the exams and the thesis. The BA master thesis is the culmination of the programme and as such assesses most of the learning objectives. As part of its external review, the panel looked at a selection of 15 master theses, which were representative in terms of final scores and specialisations.

The panel found that the MSc BA theses were generally of a high standard. The research questions were actual and relevant. Across the sample the panel saw a variety of research designs, both qualitative and quantitative, which befitted the research question and were implemented correctly. It was clear from the sample that students 'knew their methods'. As a point for attention, the panel noticed that students who produce a qualitative study only need a limited number of interviews to pass the thesis.

In sum, the panel is positive on the overall level of the BA master theses as it reviewed several good research projects and only a few that were merely sufficient but still clearly beyond the pass/fail threshold. It is fair to conclude that through the master thesis, BA students across

all specialisations demonstrate that they have reached the (intended) learning goals and objectives.

#### Performance of graduates

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that MSc BA graduates are prepared for professional life after the master programme. As part of the student chapter, recent graduates indicated that they felt well prepared for their careers: first of all because of the balance between academic and practical elements in the curriculum, and secondly because of the comprehensive support provided by the Career Services, including mandatory workshops and numerous opportunities for proactive students. Moreover, graduates mentioned to the panel that they had appreciated the international focus of the programme, both in content and student population.

The panel welcomes the efforts of the MSc BA programme to keep track of its graduates, and fully supports the current initiatives to enhance community building in the programme specialisations by strengthening ties with alumni. According to several internal and external surveys, the recently graduated alumni find their way to a range of jobs in different sectors at the level of academic professionals, and they do so relatively quickly: different survey data reported that 54% of graduates find a job within two months after graduation, 66% after three months, and 86% within half a year.

#### Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that students who graduate the

master BA have effectively acquired all intended learning outcomes. According to the panel, the selected and reviewed MSc BA theses are of good quality and meet the expectations for a final project of academic orientation at master level.

The panel thinks highly of the employability of MSc BA graduates. The fact that they manage to find a position quickly and in a wide variety of relevant positions and sectors demonstrates that the programme delivers high-quality students.

Graduate success impacts positively on the programme. The panel therefore supports the initiative of the programme team to enhance community building across the programme and within the specialisations by strengthening the ties with its alumni network.

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

**dr. Johanna Vanderstraeten, expert**

Associate professor Entrepreneurship at University of Antwerp, Belgium

**em.prof.dr. Hans van Ees, expert**

Professor of Corporate governance and institutions, Faculty of Economics & Business, University of Groningen.

**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: NU Building, VU campus, De Boelelaan 1111, Amsterdam

### Tuesday 12 November 2024

- 09.00 Arrival panel and internal meeting
- 10.00 Faculty Board
- 10.45 Programme Management BSc Bedrijfskunde & BSc International Business Administration
- 11.45 Students/Alumni BSc Bedrijfskunde & BSc International Business Administration
- 12.45 Lunch and internal meeting
- 13.30 Lecturers BSc Bedrijfskunde & BSc International Business Administration
- 14.30 Break
- 15.00 Programme Management MSc Digital Business and Innovation
- 15.35 Students/Alumni MSc Digital Business and Innovation
- 16.10 Lecturers MSc Digital Business and Innovation
- 16.40 Internal deliberations
- 17.45 Preliminary feedback programmes day 1
- 18.15 End of day 1

### Wednesday 13 November 2024

- 09.00 Arrival panel and internal meeting
- 09.30 Programme Management MSc Verandermanagement
- 10.05 Students/Alumni MSc Verandermanagement
- 10.40 Lecturers MSc Verandermanagement
- 11.10 Break
- 11.30 Examination Boards all programmes
- 12.30 Lunch and internal meeting
- 13.15 Programme Management MSc Business Administration fulltime
- 13.50 Programme Management MSc Business Administration parttime
- 14.25 Students/Alumni MSc Business Administration parttime
- 15.00 Lecturers MSc Business Administration parttime
- 15.30 Break
- 15.40 Students/Alumni MSc Business Administration fulltime
- 16.15 Lecturers MSc Business Administration fulltime
- 16.45 Internal deliberations
- 17.45 Preliminary feedback programmes day 2
- 19.00 End of day 2

### Thursday 14 November 2024

- 09.00 Arrival panel and internal meeting
- 09.30 Programme Management MSc Transport Supply Chain Management & MSc Entrepreneurship
- 10.30 Students/Alumni MSc Entrepreneurship
- 11.05 Lecturers MSc Entrepreneurship

- 11.35 Break
- 11.55 Students/Alumni MSc Transport & Supply Chain Management
- 12.30 Lecturers MSc Transport & Supply Chain Management
- 13.00 Lunch and internal meeting
- 14.30 Preliminary feedback programmes day 3
- 15.00 Internal deliberations
- 16.30 Plenary feedback all programmes
- 16.30 End of site visit

The names of the participants are available with evaluation agency AeQui.

## Attachment 3: Recommendations from previous assessment

The MSc Business Administration programme was last assessed in 2018-2019. The overall assessment of this accreditation for the master programme was satisfactory. The feedback coming from the previous accreditation round was:

1. To improve the articulation of the justification of the programme. The societal orientation of the programme is useful in this regard but does not become clear from the presented general vision on the iii programme. Therefore the panel recommends to formulate the societal orientation of the programme more explicitly, and with that also to strengthen this societal orientation;
2. to clearly define its (international) target audience;
3. to establish the margins on the extent to which students have to get acquainted with several disciplines (multidisciplinarity) and are confronted with the professional practice (relation theory practice);
4. to define a coherent didactical approach especially taking into account the multidisciplinarity of the programme and the theory – practice relation;
5. to look for possibilities to strengthen the student community;
6. to start periodical reviews of samples of theses in order to evaluate if the process of assessing thesis results in a reliable and valid assessment;
7. to start calibration sessions with staff members involved in thesis grading;
8. the further development of the portfolio as a (self-) assessment instrument;
9. to improve the extent to which graduates apply research-based knowledge acquired in their research to the professional practice in their thesis.

Since the previous panel visit, a series of smaller and larger changes have been implemented to enhance the programme's quality. The most important changes are as follows:

1. We have made progress on clarifying and strengthening the **articulation of the justification of the programme** (point #1). Specifically, the emphasis on connecting business and science and preparing our students for their roles in society after graduation have all been articulated more clearly in the programme. For example, each specialisation features course activities that involve partners from businesses (and public organisations). Such activities include guest lectures, assignments, internships, company visits, and projects together with businesses. The information for current and prospective students has also been clarified, for example, through a careful rewriting of the website and programme flyers by professional communication experts. Finally, the programme has become more focused now that it consists of five specialisations, i.e., Strategic HRM, International Management, Leadership & Change Management, Management Consulting, and Strategy & Organisation. These tracks have a shared focus on bridging science and practice and preparing students to adopt an evidence-based approach to solving the big challenges that organisations face.

2. The **target audience** (point #2) for our Business Administration programme is broad. This broad focus is a deliberate choice as we want to be open to as many different perspectives and backgrounds as possible. The previous years have shown that students from a wide range of disciplinary and cultural backgrounds can thrive in our programme, which has reinforced our belief that – in line with the University's and School's focus on diversity and inclusion – we do not want to make the target group too

narrow. Concretely, this implies that we communicate to prospective students (e.g., through information sessions and flyers) that we encourage them to apply if they meet a certain set of standard criteria, which include having a predefined amount of EC in content-related matters and research methods and statistics. Overall, this means we did not make significant changes to the intended target groups of the programme but we did ensure more clear communication about our approach.

3. The **multidisciplinary nature** (point #3) of the programme offers students the opportunity to craft part of their learning pathway, which implies that students, to a certain extent, can decide for themselves to what extent they want to engage with multidisciplinary. To illustrate, students can do five dedicated courses in their core content domain (e.g., students of the Management Consulting specialisation can do five consulting courses across Periods 1, 2, and 3), but they can also exchange one of those courses with one from another specialisation (e.g., two consulting courses and one International Management course across Periods 2 and 3). Furthermore, students can choose a so-called “interdisciplinary elective” course in Period 5, which offers them potentially more insights from other disciplines (e.g., a Strategy & Organisation student can do a course on Diversity in Organisations). This freedom to craft their own programme has been greatly appreciated by students over the past years. The programme philosophy is that society needs a diverse array of students – those with a strong disciplinary foundation but also those with interdisciplinary skills and knowledge – and hence, we have clarified in our communication to students that they can influence their own paths in this regard. That said, all students will leave our programme with some multidisciplinary insights, as specialisations and courses also cover multidisciplinary perspectives. For example, the Performance Management course features insights from Management, Psychology, and Accounting. Similarly, we have just redesigned a course (which will start in the academic year 2024-2025) titled Global Innovation and Entrepreneurship, which bridges insights from International Business, Innovation Sciences, and Entrepreneurship.

4. Strengthening the **theory-practice relationship** (points #3-4) is a central aim of this programme. After the previous accreditation, we have continued to strengthen these connections further. For example, collaborations with organisations – e.g., through guest lectures, assignments, company visits, and joint projects – are even more frequent than they were before. One of the specialisation coordinators is doing her SKO (senior teaching qualification) project dedicated to redesigning the specialisation to further strengthen the theory-practice link with a specific focus on AI. In addition, we now organise, in collaboration with the faculty’s Career Services team, an alumni event for the MSc BA students each year, during which current students can connect with alumni to learn about their career paths and experiences in practice (which also helps **strengthen the student community**, point #5). One of the specialisations pilots an alumni mentoring programme students can join to receive professional guidance from alumni working in practice; the other specialisations plan to follow up on this initiative in the near future. Following the advice from the previous accreditation committee, we have also retained the **professional portfolio in the programme** (point #8). We are currently redesigning this aspect of the programme to integrate it even more strongly and make it more valuable to students. One of the specialisation coordinators is doing her SKO (senior teaching qualification) project dedicated to the portfolio redesign. The strong connections with practice are also shown in several concrete outcomes. For example, the NSE scores for preparing students for the labour market have gone up over the last few years and ranks among the highest of all Dutch universities. Moreover, the MSc BA programme scored well in a recent

Magnet.me survey that lists the programmes that Dutch employers hire from often. In particular, the Strategy & Organisation specialisation was at number 3 in that ranking.

5. The **thesis assessment process and evaluation** (points #6-7) have continued to evolve since the previous accreditation. Although the programme did not have a formal mid-term evaluation due to the successful completion of the AACSB accreditation in early 2022, we did conduct a formal review of thesis samples with an external panel in 2023. The external panel did not mention any significant problems with the thesis sample. Furthermore, in 2023, a Full Professor from SBE conducted a detailed study on the thesis grading within the MSc BA as part of her senior qualification assessment (SKE). Her project confirmed that the thesis assessment is of good quality and shows consistency across the specialisations. The programme also has a dedicated thesis coordination team, which collectively monitors and improves the programme's thesis policies and practices. These coordinators organise thesis calibration sessions for supervisors in their respective specialisations at least once per year. These sessions have proved highly valuable in uncovering some differences in perspectives and reconciling such differences to create more consistency. Finally, we have redesigned the thesis grading form this year (2023-2024) to update and improve it further. Specifically, we have improved the scale anchors and rubric content to ensure an even more precise and clear explanation of the criteria. Moreover, we have introduced a weighting of thesis elements (e.g., introduction, theory, methods, etc.) and an Excel file that automatically calculates the final thesis grade. This approach is expected to further increase transparency and objectivity.

6. The programme values and emphasizes the connections between research and practice (see also the explanations under 1 and 4). This means that the **application of research-based knowledge** (point #9) happens throughout the programme and in virtually every course. These activities also include applying research insights to practical problems. For example, the Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility course includes several assignments in which students directly connect with practical problems around CSR, for instance, through making podcasts about these topics. Similarly, students in the Recruitment & Selection course use scientific insights to record knowledge clips for HR professionals about effective and inclusive hiring practices. Because of this increasingly strong emphasis on applying research insights to practice throughout the programme, we decided not to make any major changes to the thesis process in this regard. That said, all students write a section on practical implications, and some students choose to conduct a more problem-focused approach in their thesis (e.g., conducting their research at an organisation to help solve a current problem).

## Attachment 4: Reviewed documents

### Self-evaluation report

MSc Digital Business and Innovation, Self-evaluation report NVAO accreditation cluster Business Administration, VU Amsterdam 2024.

- General information
- Intended learning outcomes
- Teaching-learning environment
- Assessment
- Achieved learning outcomes
- Strengths and weaknesses analysis
- Student's paragraph

### Appendices

- Intended Learning Outcomes
- Programme 2023-2024
- Course descriptions 2023-2024
- Assessment plan 2023-2024
- Thesis Manual and thesis assessment form 2023-2024
- SBE Assessment policy
- VU Assessment policy
- Teaching and Examination regulations 2023-2024
- Regulations and Guidelines regarding examinations SBE 2023-2024
- Annual report Examination Board funded programmes SBE 2022-2023
- Overview of academic staff including quality
- List of all graduates in academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024
- Intake, drop out and success rates
- AACSB Memorandum

### Additional materials

- Cluster bedrijfskunde – curriculumwijzigingen 2024-2025
- Cluster bedrijfskunde – instroom 2024-2025
- Cluster bedrijfskunde – Raden van Advies

### Thesis review

A representative sample of 15 graduation works and their assessment forms, selected among students graduating the MSc Business Administration full-time in 2023-2024. Names and student numbers are available with evaluation agency Aequi.

