

Recovery plan GIMA

From 18 to 20 June 2025, the re-accreditation panel visited the Geographical Information Management and Applications (GIMA) joint degree programme at Utrecht University. The panel concluded that the joint programme meets the NVAO standards 'intended learning outcomes', 'student assessment', and 'achieved learning outcomes', while it partly meets the NVAO standard 'teaching-learning environment'. Following the site visit, the panel drew up four conditions the programme must meet to ultimately receive a positive assessment. The programme received these conditions on 4 July 2025. Based on these conditions, this recovery plan was written. This plan was elaborated in close coordination with the GIMA Board and approved by the GIMA Programme Committee and the Executive Board of the four partner universities. All parties involved in the preparation of this recovery plan are confident that the planned actions will enable the programme to demonstrate that it meets all the NVAO standards.

Actions planned

Condition 1 - To produce a quality assurance plan that addresses the current flaws in course delivery (such as quality of the materials and teaching staff responsiveness). The plan should identify how these weaknesses will be addressed in the short run and structurally avoided in the long run.

We will address current flaws and improve the current GIMA quality assurance plan to arrive at a yearly structural evaluation of the quality of our programme.

We will achieve this through four actions:

- 1.1 A review at module¹ level (all GIMA courses) by the project team² to identify current flaws regarding the quality of teaching materials, evaluation, assessment, and responsiveness of teaching staff. The input for this review will be module guides, existing module evaluations over the past 2 years, reports from the Programme Committee, and the overview prepared by the 2024-2025 student cohort, complemented with an interview with each module coordinator.
- 1.2 The elaboration and implementation of a Module Improvement Plan for each module by the module coordinator to address the flaws; if necessary, educational experts of Educational Development & Training /Utrecht University will be consulted to support the adjustment of the modules.
- 1.3 The systematic and structural implementation of the yearly Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA)-cycle following the Utrecht University approach for quality assurance³. The PDCA includes a yearly review of all GIMA modules based on the input from the Programme Committee, students' evaluations, the module coordinators, the GIMA Board, the Labour Market Committee and the Examination Committee. We consider introducing a

¹ Please note that the GIMA programme refers to modules instead of courses.

² In order to implement and monitor the recovery plan, we will compose a project team. See p. 5 for more detailed information on this team.

³ <https://intranet.uu.nl/kwaliteitszorg-onderwijs/kwaliteitszorg-aan-de-uu/kwaliteitszorg-aan-de-uu>

peer review of modules by GIMA staff, once every 3 years, to strengthen the coherence of the programme. The Programme Director is in the lead, in close collaboration with the Director of Education of GEO/Utrecht University.

1.4 We will broaden channels for student input at the module level through the introduction of sounding board groups (composed of GIMA students currently taking the module) to obtain feedback during the module. The groups will be organized by module coordinators; they will indicate in the module reflection reports how the feedback was addressed.

Expected result

Adequate delivery of the modules, with a quality assurance plan in place that is aligned with the PDCA-cycle and Utrecht University policy and known to all relevant stakeholders. Staff and students understand their role in this process and act in accordance with the agreed arrangements, ensuring that follow-up on quality improvements is structurally secured.

Monitoring and evaluation

- The outcomes of module evaluations and the input of sounding board groups will be used to monitor the efficacy of the improvements at the module level;
- NSE results of 2026 and 2027 will be used to evaluate the efficacy of the improvements, comparing these with the NSE 2025 outcomes (variables: Content and Organisation, Teachers and General);
- Input from the Programme Committee who has the monitoring role regarding the quality of the programme.

Condition 2 - To produce a communication plan stipulating how the internal communication among the institutional partners, the programme board, the programme coordinator and the teaching staff will be designed in the future and be operationally effective. The plan should also elaborate how student input on individual courses and the programme as a whole will be treated swiftly and effectively.

We will evaluate and adjust our current communication approach to achieve a more transparent and effective internal and external communication and implementation. We will realize this goal through the following four actions:

- 2.1 Following the PDCA cycle (*see Condition 1*) and the cooperation agreement (*see Condition 4*), the project team will identify the format, content and frequency of communication between the Board members, the Programme Director, the Programme Committee, the module coordinators, the Examination Committee, the Director of Education of GEO/Utrecht University, and the (vice)-Deans/Directors of Education of the four partners.
- 2.2 Strengthening the communication with and among the teaching staff by systematic scheduling of module staff meetings by module coordinators, an additional Teachers Day/day away and the development of a *Teaching in GIMA* guide by the project team

that includes the expectations, rules, and procedures for teaching in our programme (*as an outcome of the Quality Assurance Plan under 1*).

- 2.3 Strengthening the role and visibility of the study advisor. We will also explore the option of appointing a dedicated GIMA study advisor. The vice-Dean of GEO/UU will be in the lead for this action.
- 2.4 Improving formal and informal communication between programme and students by systematizing the existing intake talks with students, and developing FAQs and a '*what to do if..*' flowchart for students and escalation paths. This action will be the responsibility of the project team, and implemented by the Programme Director.

Expected result

A communication plan that describes the communication strategy and resources in a structured manner according to the PDCA cycle is operational. All stakeholders receive in a timely, consistent, and uniform manner relevant information throughout the academic year. The plan also ensures that relevant information reaches the programme management and the Board and that all stakeholders know who and how to approach for what, and contributes to a stronger GIMA community.

Monitoring and evaluation

The following instruments will provide information for monitoring and evaluation:

- NSE results of 2026 and 2027 will be used to evaluate the efficacy of the improvements, comparing these with the NSE 2025 outcomes (variables: Teachers, Counseling, Engagement and Contact);
- The module evaluations, the input from the study advisor and the input of the sounding board groups will provide input on the communication between teachers and students and between teachers.

Condition 3 - To develop a shared vision on both current programme features and the integration in the curriculum of forthcoming disciplinary developments. The resulting vision document should advocate for the programme choices made until now (joint degree, two years duration, full-time/part-time variants, hybrid delivery, etc.) and stipulate how developments in the discipline are/will be addressed in the learning materials, the course learning objectives, and the programme learning outcomes.

We will enhance our shared vision of the current programme and formulate a future oriented vision on the development of the programme.

The following three actions are foreseen:

- 3.1 The project team will organize workshops with relevant stakeholders (e.g., teaching staff, GIMA Board, GIMA Programme Committee, Labour Market Committee, and alumni) to revisit the core elements of a joint shared vision of the GIMA programme.
- 3.2 The GIMA Board will draft a joint vision document based on the input from these workshops, and discuss this with the Programme Director, Programme Committee, teaching staff, Labour Market Committee, teaching staff, and the (vice)-Deans/Directors of Education of the four partners.

3.3 The GIMA Board and the Programme Director will check whether the new vision still aligns with the existing end qualifications of the programme; if not, adjustments will be planned and implemented.

Expected result

A vision document in which GIMA explicitly describes its core values, its long-term ambition for the period from 2026 to 2032, its unique positioning in relation to comparable programs, and its social added value. After approval by the Board, the (vice)-Deans/Directors of Education of the four partners, and the Programme Committee, the document will serve as a framework for curriculum development, collaborations, and communications from 2026–2027 onwards.

Monitoring and evaluation

The joint vision will be reviewed with the stakeholders (listed under 3.2) every 3 years so that developments and trends related to science and market can be monitored and incorporated (see 3.3).

Condition 4 - To produce a detailed cooperation agreement that contains clear and unambiguous provisions regarding the governance and coordination of the joint programme, as well as the ownership of, and the final responsibility for, the programme. These provisions should address the responsibility for programme execution, the final responsibility of the respective partner institutions, and the division of tasks and roles between the coordinating institution and the other institutions.

4.1 The existing cooperation agreement will be reviewed by the Board in close consultation with the (vice-)Deans/Directors of Education of all partners, and adjusted to clarify the roles, responsibilities, available time and resources and coordination mechanisms among partner institutions⁴. We will use ‘good practice’ examples from other joint degree programmes, and consider the use of a RACI-matrix to define responsibilities.

Expected result

The four universities have updated their cooperation agreement to safeguard their collaboration in legal, organizational, and substantive terms. This agreement establishes a clear and binding foundation, ensuring that all parties are aware of their responsibilities and enabling the program to be implemented sustainably and at a high standard. The result is a stronger governance among partner institutions and ownership of all partners.

⁴ The agreement will include the following items: a clear definition of the ownership; composition of the Board; roles, responsibilities, and tasks of Board, Programme Director, Programme Committee, Director of Education of GEO/Utrecht University, (vice)-Deans /Directors of Education from all partners, module coordinators & teaching staff; role/tasks of Utrecht University vs the other partners in the joint programme regarding administration and management; decision-making protocols and escalation paths; a complaints procedure for students; role/tasks of study advisor; composition/role/tasks of GIMA secretariat; financial agreements

Monitoring and evaluation

The functioning of the cooperation agreement will be reviewed every two years by the Board and the (vice)-Deans/Directors of Education of the partner universities.

Monitoring

Next to the monitoring of the trajectories for the four conditions we will monitor the implementation of the recovery plan. The following instruments will be used for this purpose:

- A logbook to keep track of the delivery of the recovery plan, indicating the activities, the substantiation of choices made, and the timeline. For transparency, the minutes of relevant meetings will be added to the appendix of the logbook;
- A survey among teaching staff to collect information on their experiences and needs regarding the implementation of the recovery plan and teaching in GIMA;
- Discussion with all teaching staff on the annual Teachers Days, in particular on quality assurance and communication.

The project team will draft a monitoring plan, collect the required input and report on this.

Apart from the regular PDCA-cycle at the programme level we foresee intensified 'control and guidance mechanisms' at all levels for at least the upcoming two years. This implies the following:

- The Board and the Project Team, including the Programme Director and the Director of Education GEO/UU, will meet once every month to discuss project progress and eventual bottlenecks. The conclusions of this meeting will be reported to the Programme Committee;
- The Programme Committee will discuss progress of the recovery plan in their regular meetings and bring recommendations to the GIMA Board (in alignment with the PDCA cycle);
- The Board and the (vice)-Deans/Directors of Education of all partners will meet twice a year to discuss project progress and eventual adjustments.

Timeline

Annex 1 provides an in-depth timeline. Most actions will start in Fall 2025, so that the programme can run at least once with all conditions addressed. Since the vision document is essential for the content and format of the programme, this should be finalized by March 2026, so changes in the curriculum can be introduced from 2026-2027 onwards. The same applies to the cooperation agreement.

Organization

The further elaboration of the four components of the recovery plan will be taken up by the project team consisting of the GIMA Board, a project leader and a student assistant, with an advisory role of the Programme Director and the Director of Education of GEO/UU. The project team will also implement and monitor the recovery plan, with substantial roles for the Programme Director and the Director of Education of GEO/UU.

Teaching staff will be updated about the progress and outcomes through the Teaching Days and GIMA Newsletters.

Resources & budget

The implementation and monitoring of the recovery plan requires additional investments, both temporary and structural. Incidental costs include the appointment of a project leader (0.3 fte for 18 months, more intensive in the first six months, less intensive in the second part), a student assistant and additional hours for the Board members and the teaching staff. Additionally, we foresee structural extra ftes for the study advisor, the GIMA Board members, the Programme Director and the GIMA secretariat. All four partners will contribute equally to the recovery plan budget and the structural costs.

Annex 1 – Timeline

The timeline provides an overview of the timing of the different actions.

	Oct - Dec 2025			Jan - March 2026			April - June 2026			July -Sept 2026			Oct - Dec 2026			Jan - March 2027			April - June 2027		
1. Quality assurance plan																					
1.1 Review all modules						X															
1.2 Module Improvement Plans							X														
1.3 Further systematization of PDCA cycle										X								X			
1.4 Broaden channels for student input										X											
2. Communication plan																					
2.1 Identify format, content and frequency of comm.				X						X								X			
2.2 Communication among teaching staff										X											
2.3 Strengthen role study advisor										X											
2.4 Improve formal and informal communication with/to students				X						X								X			
3. Vision document																					
3.1 Workshops with relevant stakeholders				X																	
3.2 Drafting joint vision document							X														
3.3. Alignment updated vision <-> end qualifications										X								X			
4. Cooperation agreement																					
4.1 Review and adjustment cooperation agreement						X			X									X			
Monitoring																					

Light coloured cells = preparing the action

Dark coloured cells = implementing the action

X = monitoring, if necessary followed by adjustment