

Assessment report
Limited Framework Programme Assessment

Master Sociology

Tilburg University

Contents of the report

1. Executive summary	2
2. Assessment process	4
3. Programme administrative information.....	7
4. Findings, considerations and assessments per standard	8
4.1 Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	8
4.2 Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	10
4.3 Standard 3: Student assessment.....	12
4.4 Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	14
5. Overview of assessments.....	15
6. Recommendations	16

1. Executive summary

In this executive summary, the panel presents the main considerations which led to the assessment of the quality of the Master Sociology programme of Tilburg University, which has been assessed according to the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, as published on 20 December 2016.

The panel regards the programme objectives to be sound and relevant. The objectives are to educate students thoroughly in sociological theory and methods and techniques of sociological research. The panel appreciates the strong research focus of the programme. Students are trained in doing research, especially in the programme focus of the relations between society, (social) policy and politics in comparative perspective. Predominantly, quantitative research methods and techniques are taught. In addition, students are trained in academic skills, and critical and independent thinking.

The panel appreciates the Domain-specific Framework for Sociology, which has been drafted by the joint programmes in the Netherlands in this field of study. The panel considers this framework to be a sound and up-to-date description of the Sociology domain and of the attainment levels of Bachelor and Master Sociology programmes. The programme objectives are clearly aligned to the reference framework.

The panel welcomes the students being offered the opportunities to take the Extended Master programme or complete one of the Double Degree programmes, organised in collaboration with foreign universities.

The panel considers the intended learning outcomes to be comprehensive and well-articulated, and to correspond to the master level.

The panel considers the admission requirements and procedures of the programme to be appropriate. As the pre-master programme is only 30 EC, the panel advises to monitor the effectiveness of the programme and to screen the contents of the programme in terms of sociological theory and methodology.

The curriculum meets the intended learning outcomes. The panel regards the quality and the level of the courses to be up to standard. Sociological theory and methodology are strongly represented in the curriculum. The coherence of the curriculum is adequate. The panel proposes to intensify labour market preparation in the curriculum.

The panel regards the lecturers to be both good researchers and to be skilled and very motivated teachers. The panel is positive about lecturers meeting regularly to discuss the programme. As lecturers' workload is quite high, the panel suggests to monitor this workload and to take action, if this is too demanding.

The educational concept and study methods of the programme meet the programme characteristics. The number of hours of face-to-face education and the students-to-staff ratio are satisfactory, allowing for intensive and small-scale education. The panel feels integration of international and Dutch students to have been accomplished in the programme. The student success rates of the programme are up to standard.

The panel approves of the programme examination and assessment rules and regulations. The position and the responsibilities of the Examination Board are up to standard.

The examination methods adopted for the courses are adequate, as these meet the course goals and course contents. The panel welcomes the diversity of examination methods in the courses.

The panel considers the supervision and assessment processes of the Master Thesis projects to be adequate. Students are well-guided in this process. Although the assessment procedures are appropriate, the panel suggests to clarify on the assessment forms both examiners arriving independently at their assessments. The thesis assessment scoring forms are comprehensive and include relevant criteria. The panel advises, however, to add more elaborate written comments to substantiate the assessments. In addition, the panel suggests to adopt procedures in case students collect data or present text in Master theses in languages other than examiners know.

The measures taken to assure the validity, reliability and transparency of examinations and assessments are appropriate. The panel regards the initiative by the Examination Board to review examinations and Master theses to be very important to pursue.

The Master theses the panel studied, match the intended learning outcomes. The theses' grades given by the programme examiners are generally supported by the panel, but some theses may have been graded somewhat lower by the panel. Some theses may have been strengthened in terms of sociological contents. The panel finds it important Master Thesis projects to be presented to the Ethical Review Committee.

As the proportion of students graduating *cum laude* is quite substantial, the panel recommends to monitor the grades given in the programme.

The panel considers students completing the programme to have reached the intended learning outcomes and regards the programme to offer suitable preparation for positions on the labour market in the programme domain. The panel suggests to involve alumni more intensively in the programme.

The panel which conducted the assessment of the Master Sociology programme of Tilburg University assesses this programme to meet the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, judging the programme to be satisfactory. Therefore, the panel recommends NVAO to accredit this programme.

Rotterdam, 20 March 2019

Prof. dr. A. Need
(panel chair)

drs. W. Vercouteren
(panel secretary)

2. Assessment process

The evaluation agency Certiked VBI received the request by Tilburg University to coordinate the limited framework programme assessment process for the Master Sociology programme of this University. This objective of the programme assessment process was to assess whether the programme would conform to the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, published on 20 December 2016 (Staatscourant nr. 69458).

Management of the programmes in the assessment cluster Sociology convened to discuss the composition of the assessment panel and to draft the list of candidates.

Having conferred with management of the Tilburg University programme, Certiked invited candidate panel members to sit on the assessment panel. The panel members agreed to do so. The panel composition was as follows:

- Prof. dr. A. Need, professor Sociology and Public Policy, Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences, University of Twente (panel chair);
- Prof. dr. I. Glorieux, professor, Department Sociology, Research Group TOR, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (panel member);
- Prof. dr. J. de Haan, senior researcher Culture, Media and Technology, Netherlands Institute for Social Research, SCP (panel member);
- A.G. Duursma, student Bachelor Sociology, VU Amsterdam (student member).

On behalf of Certiked, drs. W. Vercouteren served as the process coordinator and secretary in the assessment process.

All panel members and the secretary confirmed in writing being impartial with regard to the programme to be assessed and observing the rules of confidentiality. Having obtained the authorisation by the University, Certiked requested the approval of NVAO of the proposed panel to conduct the assessment. NVAO have given their approval.

To prepare the assessment process, the process coordinator convened with management of the programme to discuss the outline of the self-assessment report, the subjects to be addressed in this report and the site visit schedule. In addition, the planning of the activities in preparation of the site visit were discussed. In the course of the process preparing for the site visit, programme management and the process coordinator regularly had contact to fine-tune the process. The activities prior to the site visit have been performed as planned. Programme management approved of the site visit schedule.

Well in advance of the site visit date, programme management sent the list of final projects of graduates of the programme of the most recent years. Acting on behalf of the assessment panel, the process coordinator selected fifteen final projects. The grade distribution in the selection was ensured to conform to the grade distribution in the list, sent by programme management.

The panel chair and the panel members were sent the self-assessment report of the programme, including appendices. In the self-assessment report, the student chapter was included. In addition, the expert panel members were forwarded a number of final projects of the programme graduates, these final projects being part of the selection made by the process coordinator.

A number of weeks before the site visit date, the assessment panel chair and the process coordinator met to discuss the self-assessment report provided by programme management, the procedures regarding the assessment process and the site visit schedule. In this meeting, the profile of panel chairs of NVAO was discussed as well. The panel chair was informed about the competencies, listed in the profile. Documents pertaining to a number of these competencies were presented to the panel chair. The meeting between the panel chair and the process coordinator served as the briefing for panel chairs, as meant in the NVAO profile of panel chairs.

Prior to the date of the site visit, all panel members sent in their preliminary findings, based on the self-assessment report and the final projects studied, and a number of questions to be put to the programme representatives on the day of the site visit. The panel secretary summarised this information, compiling a list of questions, which served as a starting point for the discussions with the programme representatives during the site visit.

Shortly before the site visit date, the complete panel met to go over the preliminary findings concerning the quality of the programme. During this preliminary meeting, the preliminary findings of the panel members, including those about the final projects were discussed. The procedures to be adopted during the site visit, including the questions to be put to the programme representatives on the basis of the list compiled, were discussed as well.

On 28 January 2019, the panel conducted a site visit on the Tilburg University campus. The site visit schedule was in accordance with the schedule as planned. In a number of separate sessions, panel members were given the opportunity to meet with Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences representatives, programme management, Examination Board representatives, lecturers and final projects examiners, and students and alumni.

In a closed session at the end of the site visit, the panel considered every one of the findings, weighed the considerations and arrived at conclusions with regard to the quality of the programme. At the end of the site visit, the panel chair presented a broad outline of the considerations and conclusions to programme representatives.

Clearly separated from the process of the programme assessment, the assessment panel members and programme representatives met to conduct the development dialogue, with the objective to discuss future developments of the programme.

The assessment draft report was finalised by the secretary, having taken into account the findings and considerations of the panel. The draft report was sent to the panel members, who studied it and made a number of changes. Thereupon, the secretary edited the final report. This report was presented to programme management to be corrected for factual inaccuracies. Programme management were given two weeks to respond. Having been corrected for these factual inaccuracies, the Certiked bureau sent the report to the University Board to accompany their request for re-accreditation of this programme.

3. Programme administrative information

Name programme in CROHO: M Sociology
Orientation, level programme: Academic Master
Grade: MSc
Number of credits: 60 EC
Specialisations: None
Location: Tilburg
Mode of study: Full-time (instruction language is English)
Registration in CROHO: 66599

Name of institution: Tilburg University
Status of institution: Government-funded University
Institution's quality assurance: Approved

4. Findings, considerations and assessments per standard

4.1 Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

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

Findings

The Master Sociology programme is one of the programmes of Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences. The School offers bachelor, master and research master programmes in the social sciences and organises research programmes in the social sciences. The management team of the School, being chaired by the Dean, is responsible for the quality of all these programmes. The Department Sociology is responsible for both the research programmes in Sociology and the Bachelor and Master Sociology degree programmes. The programme director manages the Master Sociology programme on a day-to-day basis. Lecturers in the programme are recruited from the Department of Sociology. In addition, some lecturers from the Double Degree partners of the programme are involved. Support for the programme is provided by the School Education Support Team. The Programme Committee, being composed of equal numbers of lecturers and students, advises the programme director on the quality of the programme. The School Examination Board has the authority to ensure the quality of examinations and assessments of this and the other programmes of the School.

The objectives of the programme are to educate students thoroughly in the domain of sociology. The programme focus is theoretical-empirical. Students are educated to formulate sociological research questions and to answer these by testing hypotheses, derived from sociological theory. The programme is directed towards the study of the politics-policy-society nexus in comparative perspective. In the programme predominantly, quantitative research methods and techniques are taught. Students are also trained in academic skills, such as information processing skills, academic writing skills and presentation skills. The programme aims to teach students to become independent and critical thinkers.

The programme objectives correspond to the requirements of the Domain-specific Framework for Sociology which was completed in 2018. This domain-specific framework has been drafted by the joint Sociology programmes in the Netherlands. In this framework, the general objectives and final attainment levels for Bachelor and Master Sociology programmes have been outlined.

Students are prepared to enter the labour market. They are educated for positions in academia as PhD candidates or for positions in the professional field as policy advisors, consultants or researchers in public sector organisations, social institutions or private companies.

Students are given additional options in the programme. Students may select one of the Double Degree programmes, which have been organised by Tilburg University in cooperation with universities in Bamberg, Germany, Trento, Italy and Barcelona, Spain. These students study one year in Tilburg and one year at one of the other universities. Students may also take the Extended Master programme, entailing an additional, extra-curricular semester of study. This semester typically includes an internship.

The objectives of the programme have been translated into the programme intended learning outcomes. These intended learning outcomes specify, as the main points, knowledge and understanding of state-of-the-art sociological theory, knowledge and understanding of advanced research methods and techniques in this field, translate sociological analysis into intervention to address social issues, research skills in the programme domain, critical reflection upon sociological theory, methodology and policy analysis and intervention, ethical awareness, written and oral communication skills, and evaluation of trends in the professional field.

Programme management compared the intended learning outcomes to the Dublin descriptors for master programmes, to show these to meet master level requirements.

Considerations

The panel regards the programme objectives to be sound and relevant. The objectives are to educate students thoroughly in sociological theory and methods and techniques of sociological research. The panel appreciates the strong research focus of the programme. Students are trained in doing research, especially in the programme focus of the relations between society, (social) policy and politics in comparative perspective. Predominantly, quantitative research methods and techniques are taught. In addition, students are trained in academic skills, such as information processing skills, academic writing skills and presentation skills, and critical and independent thinking.

The panel appreciates the Domain-specific Framework for Sociology, which has been drafted by the joint programmes in the Netherlands in this field of study. The panel considers this framework to be a sound and up-to-date description of the Sociology domain and of the attainment levels of Bachelor and Master Sociology programmes. The panel regards programme objectives to be clearly aligned to the reference framework.

The panel welcomes the students being offered the opportunities to take the Extended Master programme or complete one of the Double Degree programmes, organised in collaboration with foreign universities.

The panel considers the intended learning outcomes to be comprehensive and well-articulated. In the intended learning outcomes, the objectives of the programme have been clearly operationalised. The panel considers the intended learning outcomes to correspond to the master level.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 1, Intended learning outcomes, to be satisfactory.

4.2 Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment

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

Findings

The student influx between 2011 and 2016 was about 20 to 27 incoming students per year, increasing to nearly 40 students in 2017. A number of the incoming students come from abroad. The programme expects the inflow of students to rise the coming years, on account of additional programmes and tracks in Sociology being offered within the School. About 30 % of the incoming students opt for the Extended Master programme. The proportion of students taking one of the Double Degree programmes is also about 30 %. Dutch students tend not to take the Double Degree programmes. Students may begin in the programme in either February or September, Prospective students are informed about the programme. The admission criteria for the programme are to have completed the bachelor programme in sociology, the bachelor in related disciplines with minors in sociology, the bachelor Liberal Arts and Sciences programme with major in social sciences or the bachelor Leisure Studies of NHTV Breda. Students having completed bachelor programmes in other disciplines or with bachelor degrees from higher vocational education institutes (hbo) are to complete the pre-master programme. From the year 2016/2017 onwards, the study load of the pre-master programme was reduced from 60 EC to 30 EC to accommodate these students.

The regular programme takes one year to complete and carries the study load of 60 EC. For the programme, the intended learning outcomes have been mapped to the curriculum components to show the curriculum meeting the programme intended learning outcomes. The curriculum is composed of four mandatory courses (6 EC each), introducing students to the relations between society, (social) policy and politics and allowing them to study the effects of societal changes on social risks, policies and politics in comparative perspective. In addition, students take the Master Seminar (12 EC) and complete the Master Thesis project. The objective of the Master Seminar is to prepare students for the Master Thesis project. Students are introduced to more advanced statistical techniques, are taught to draft hypotheses and to test these, using these techniques. In parallel, students draft the research proposal for the Thesis project. The proposal is to include the problem definition, research question, hypothesis, methodology, and theoretical concept for the Thesis project. The Master Thesis project itself is an individual research project at the end of the curriculum.

A total number of 14 permanent staff members are involved in the programme. They are recruited from the Department of Sociology. The lecturers are experts in the fields they lecture in, and are actively engaged in research in their fields. About 29 % of the lecturers are full professors. The proportion of staff members having PhD degrees is 100 %. About 79 % of the staff is BKO-certified, testifying to their educational qualities. In addition to these staff members, external lecturers are involved in the programme. Also, some lecturers from the Double Degree partners lecture in the programme. Staff meet regularly to discuss the programme. The lecturers' workload is quite demanding. School management supports the Departments in coping with the workload. Additional staff may be recruited. Students expressed being very positive about the lecturers.

The programme adheres to the principles of the Tilburg Educational Profile of Tilburg University, which imply small-scale, activating and interactive education, and foster academic, research and professional skills. On the basis of 40 weeks in the year, the number of hours of face-to-face education is about 6.5 hours per week over the curriculum as a whole. The study methods include lectures, tutorials and practical sessions. All courses include more than one of these study methods. Lectures are meant to transfer knowledge. Tutorials or practical sessions allow students to process and apply the knowledge acquired and to practice their skills. The programme is small-scale. The students-to-staff ratio for the programme is 23/1. Students with whom the panel met, indicated appreciating the small-scale education in the programme. The programme is experienced as being quite challenging, but interesting and doable. The student success rates of the programme are on average 47 % after one year and on average 87 % after two years. These figures include students taking the regular programme and the Extended Master programme. The proportion of students completing the programme in nominal time is on average about 77 %.

Considerations

The panel considers the admission requirements and procedures of the programme to be appropriate. As the pre-master programme is only 30 EC, the panel advises to monitor the effectiveness of the programme and to screen the contents of the programme in terms of sociological theory and methodology.

The curriculum meets the intended learning outcomes. The panel regards the quality and the level of the courses to be up to standard. Sociological theory and methodology are strongly represented in the curriculum. The coherence of the curriculum is adequate. The panel proposes to intensify labour market preparation in the curriculum.

The panel considers the lecturers to be both good researchers in their fields and to be skilled and very motivated teachers. The generous proportion of lecturers being BKO-certified testify to their educational capabilities. The panel is positive about lecturers meeting regularly to discuss the programme. As the lecturers' workload is quite high, the panel suggests to monitor this workload and to take action, if this is too demanding.

The educational concept and study methods of the programme meet the programme characteristics. The number of hours of face-to-face education and the students-to-staff ratio are satisfactory, allowing for intensive and small-scale education. The panel feels integration of international and Dutch students to have been accomplished in the programme. The student success rates of the programme are up to standard.

Assessment of this standard

These considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 2, Teaching-learning environment, to be satisfactory.

4.3 Standard 3: Student assessment

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

The programme examination and assessment regulations are in line with the Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences assessment system and Tilburg University Rules and Guidelines. As has been indicated, the School-wide Examination Board has the authority to monitor the quality of examinations and assessments of all the School's programmes, including this programme. One of the members of the Board is an external member. Two legal experts serve as secretaries to the Board. The Board publishes the School's Handbook for Constructing and Grading Exams, serving as the guide for examiners.

In nearly all of the courses, multiple examination methods are adopted. Examination methods include written examinations, papers, practical and written assignments on practicing and applying methods, models or theoretical reasoning, class discussions and presentations on analysis and evaluation of literature. Peer reviewing is also used in several courses. Most of the examinations in the courses are individual.

For the Master Thesis projects, students may propose topics themselves, but they may also choose subjects, close to the research interests of staff members. Before being allowed to start, students are to present the research proposal for approval by the supervisor and second reader. Research proposals are graded with pass or fail. All students are entitled to supervision by their supervisor. Throughout the thesis drafting and writing process, students meet at least five times with their supervisor to discuss the Thesis project. In addition, they take part analysis seminars to discuss analysis problems. Students are to present their project at the Student Research Symposium. The supervisor and the second reader assess the Thesis project separately and together come to the final grade. They use the Master Thesis assessment scoring form, comprising as assessment criteria, among others, problem statement, research question, theory, research design, analysis, results, and independence. The oral defence by the student is part of the assessment. In case of discrepancies in grades between supervisor and second reader of more than 1.5 points or in case of unsatisfactory assessments, a third examiner is invited to study the thesis and to determine the grade. Students taking the Extended Master programme may combine the internship with the Master Thesis project, but this is not mandatory. In case of the combination, the internship supervisor is involved in supervision but not in the formal assessment of the Thesis project. Students taking one of the Double Degree programmes, are jointly supervised by supervisors of both universities. The examiners may also come from both universities.

Programme management and the Examination Board have taken measures to promote the validity, reliability and transparency of examinations and assessments. The programme assessment plan has been drafted for the programme as a whole, specifying the relations of the intended learning outcomes and the courses. Examiners are appointed by the Examination Board, these examiners being required to be BKO-certified. Test matrices have been introduced for the course examinations, specifying the relations between the course goals and the examinations. Each of the course examinations and the model answers are drafted by examiners and are peer-reviewed by fellow-examiners. On behalf of the Examination

Board, an ad-hoc committee inspects samples of examinations. The Examination Board intends to review examinations and Master theses. Students are informed about the requirements and assessment criteria and are provided with test examinations. These procedures are appreciated by students. Written assignments, papers, essays and theses are screened for fraud and plagiarism. The Examination Board handles cases. The number of cases is limited.

Considerations

The panel approves of the programme examination and assessment rules and regulations, these being aligned with the School and University guidelines and policies. The position and the responsibilities of the Examination Board are up to standard.

The examination methods adopted for the courses are adequate, as these meet the course goals and course contents. The panel welcomes the diversity of examination methods in the courses.

The panel considers the supervision and assessment processes of the Master Thesis projects to be adequate. Students are well-guided in this process. Although the assessment procedures are appropriate, the panel suggests to clarify on the assessment forms both examiners arriving independently at their assessments. The thesis assessment scoring forms are comprehensive and include relevant criteria. The panel advises, however, to add more elaborate written comments to substantiate the numeric assessments. In addition, the panel suggests to adopt procedures in case students collect data or present text in Master theses in languages other than examiners know.

The measures taken to assure the validity, reliability and transparency of examinations and assessments are appropriate. The panel regards the initiative by the Examination Board to review examinations and Master theses to be very important to pursue.

Assessment of this standard

The considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 3, Student assessment, to be satisfactory.

4.4 Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.
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Findings

Master Thesis projects are individual research projects. Students have to demonstrate in these projects to have reached the programme intended learning outcomes. Research to be done in the context of these projects may have to be presented to the School Ethical Review Committee to be checked on ethical, data management and privacy dimensions.

The panel studied fifteen Master theses of programme graduates of the most recent years. The average grade for the Master Thesis projects fluctuated between 7.4 and 7.6 for graduates of the years 2012 to 2016. The panel notes the proportion of *cum laude* in the programme to be quite substantial.

Students are prepared to enter the labour market. On average, programme graduates take about two to three months after graduation to find positions in the programme domain. About 20 % of the programme graduates proceed to PhD trajectories. The proportion of PhD students among Double Degree graduates amounts to about 60 %. Other graduates of the programme find positions as policy advisors, managers, teachers or organisation/human resource advisors. Most graduates find jobs in academia or organisations in the welfare or health sector.

Considerations

The Master theses the panel studied, match the intended learning outcomes. The theses' grades given by the programme examiners are generally supported by the panel, but some theses may have been graded somewhat lower. Some theses may have been strengthened in terms of sociological contents. The panel finds it important Master Thesis projects to be presented to the Ethical Review Committee.

As the proportion of students graduating *cum laude* is quite substantial, the panel recommends to monitor the grades given in the programme.

The panel considers students completing the programme to have reached the intended learning outcomes and regards the programme to offer suitable preparation for positions on the labour market in the programme domain. The panel suggests to involve alumni more intensively in the programme.

Assessment of this standard

The considerations have led the assessment panel to assess standard 4, Achieved learning outcomes, to be satisfactory.

5. Overview of assessments

Standard	Assessment
Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes	Satisfactory
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	Satisfactory
Standard 3: Student assessment	Satisfactory
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	Satisfactory
Programme	Satisfactory

6. Recommendations

In this report, a number of recommendations by the panel have been listed. For the sake of clarity, these have been brought together below. These panel recommendations are the following.

- To monitor the effectiveness of the pre-master programme and to screen the contents of this programme in terms of sociological theory and methodology, as the programme carries only the study load of 30 EC.
- To intensify labour market preparation in the curriculum.
- To monitor the lecturers workload and to take action, if this is too demanding.
- To clarify on the assessment forms both examiners arriving to independent assessments of the Master Thesis projects.
- To add more elaborate written comments to substantiate the assessments of the Master Thesis projects.
- To adopt procedures in case of data collection or presentation of text in Master theses in languages other than examiners know.
- To monitor the grades given in the programme, as the proportion of students graduating *cum laude* is quite substantial.
- To involve alumni more intensively in the programme.