

Assessment report  
Limited Framework Programme Assessment

**Master International Development Studies**

Wageningen University

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## 1. Executive summary

In this executive summary, the panel presents the main considerations which led to the assessment of the quality of the Master International Development Studies programme of Wageningen University. The programme was 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 (Staatscourant nr. 69458).

The objectives of the programme are regarded by the panel to be very sound and relevant. The focus of the programme is clear in the panel's view, being intended to study livelihoods, agro-food networks and environment-human interactions from the disciplinary-based perspectives sociology, economics, innovation and communication or politics and governance. The panel welcomes students being introduced to inclusion and exclusion processes, equity and unequal access to resources.

The programme objectives are well-positioned within the domain-specific framework of reference, drafted by the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes, and therefore match the international requirements for the development studies domain. The panel appreciates the programme objectives to prepare students for positions on the labour market in this field. Judging by the objectives as formulated, the programme trains students very well for this goal.

The programme intended learning outcomes correspond to the programme objectives, are well-structured and comprehensive, addressing disciplinary and multidisciplinary knowledge and understanding, research knowledge and skills and general academic skills. The intended learning outcomes conform to the master level, as exemplified by the Dublin descriptors.

The panel is positive about the involvement of the representatives of the development studies professional field in the programme.

The panel considers the programme to be managed conscientiously.

The curriculum of the programme complies with the intended learning outcomes and is regarded by the panel to be well-structured and coherent. The panel is positive about the common part as well as about the specialisations. The panel especially appreciates the Academic Consultancy Training and the Internship, allowing students to gain relevant academic and professional skills. The panel proposes to strengthen the social critical and regional diversity perspectives in the curriculum.

The lecturers are regarded by the panel to be engaged in the programme. The expertise, research track records and educational skills of the lecturers are up to standard. The proportions of UTQ-certified lecturers and lectures being trained for the certificate are satisfactory. The lecturers are much appreciated by the students, which is regarded by the panel as very positive. The panel welcomed the discussions among lecturers on diversity issues, but advises to strengthen the diversity and internationalisation of the staff and to promote the opportunities for foreign staff to enter into tenured tracks.

The admission requirements and procedures of the programme are adequate. Students coming from other universities are well-accommodated. The panel recommends to challenge students coming from its own Wageningen Bachelor programme more in the first part of the curriculum. The panel noted the student population not being very diversified in regional terms.

The programme exemptions policy and regulations are adequate.

The educational concept and study methods meet the contents of the programme and promote students participating actively in class. The panel regards the number of hours of face-to-face education and the students-to-staff ratio to be adequate. The programme is demanding, but feasible. Students are generally guided appropriately, but the thesis supervision, especially in the data collection phase is somewhat lacking. The panel advises to intensify the thesis supervision. The student success rates after two years could be better.

The examination and assessment policies for the programme are adequate. The position and authority of the Examining Board for this programme are appropriate as well, the Board being in control of the examination and assessment processes in the programme.

The panel approves of the examination methods adopted in the programme, as these are suited to test the goals and the contents of the courses. The measures taken to ensure the validity and transparency of examinations and reliability of assessments are adequate. The panel appreciates the Examining Board inspecting the quality of the examinations and assessments of the chair groups and thereby monitoring the examination and assessment processes quite scrupulously. The fraud and plagiarism formalities are up to standard.

The assessment procedures of the Master Thesis are adequate, involving two examiners, who use elaborate scoring forms. The panel advises to add more extensive written comments, in addition to the oral feedback students are given.

The panel assesses the course examinations to be up to standard and some to be challenging. None of the Master Theses reviewed were assessed by the panel to be unsatisfactory. The grades of the theses were generally found to be consistent with the grades the panel would have given. The theses were satisfactory to good on research questions, data collection and linking data analyses to the conceptual framework. The panel suggests to emphasise the discussion of methodological limitations and research ethics in the theses.

In the panel's opinion, the programme succeeds in preparing the programme's graduates appropriately for positions on the labour market and in enabling them to find suitable positions. The panel appreciates the programme results in this respect.

The panel that conducted the assessment of the Master International Development Studies programme of Wageningen 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, 16 April 2018

Prof. dr. D.A.N.M. Kruijt  
(panel chair)

drs. W. Vercouteren  
(panel secretary)

## 2. Assessment process

The evaluation agency Certiked VBI received the request by Wageningen University to support the limited framework programme assessment process for the Master International Development Studies programme of this University. The 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 Development Studies convened to discuss the composition of the assessment panel and to draft the list of candidates.

The panel composition was as follows:

- Prof. dr. D.A.N.M. Kruijt, emeritus professor Development Studies, Utrecht University, Netherlands (panel chair);
- Prof. dr. M.J. Spierenburg, professor Development Studies, Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands (panel member);
- Prof. dr. D.C. Mitlin, professor Global Urbanism, Manchester University, United Kingdom (panel member);
- Prof. dr. B. Kebede, professor Behavioural Development Economics, University of East Anglia, United Kingdom (panel member);
- M. Speelberg BA, student Master International Development Studies, Utrecht University, Netherlands (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.

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 15 final projects. The grade distribution in the selection was ensured to conform to the grade distribution in the list, sent by programme management. The specialisations students graduated in have been taken into account.

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. 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 panel met to speak about the preliminary findings on the quality of the programme. During this meeting, the preliminary findings of 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 17 and 18 January 2018, the panel conducted the site visit on the Wageningen 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 the Programme Board representatives, programme management, Examining Board representatives and study advisors, lecturers and final projects examiners, and students and alumni.

In a closed session at the end of the site visit, the panel considered in detail 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 International Development Studies  
Orientation, level programme: Academic Master  
Grade: MSc  
Number of credits: 120 EC  
Specialisations: Sociology of Development  
Economics of Development  
Inclusive Innovation, Communication and Development  
Politics and Governance of Development  
Location: Wageningen  
Mode of study: Full-time (language of instruction: English)  
Registration in CROHO: 66837  
Name of institution: Wageningen 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 objectives of the Master International Development Studies programme are to educate students to study and analyse social transformation processes with respect to livelihoods, agro-food networks and the environment independently, in an integrated manner, in comparative perspective and at local, regional, national and international levels. More specifically, students are educated to study individuals and groups shaping their livelihoods, as affected by contexts they live in, changing interdependencies and interactions within agro-food networks, and interactions of human actions and the environment. Students are trained to critically understand these processes, include stakeholders' perspectives and work in multidisciplinary teams in this field. In the programme, inclusion and exclusion processes, equity and unequal access to resources are highlighted.

Programme management showed the programme objectives to meet the domain-specific framework of reference, being the international Revised Definition of the field of Development Studies of October 2015 of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI). The framework defines development studies as the multi- or interdisciplinary field of study, seeking to understand social, economic, political, technological, ecological, gender and cultural aspects of societal change at local, national, regional and global levels and their interplay, the field being context-sensitive and being characterised by normative and policy concerns. The programme is a social sciences-based multidisciplinary programme. The programme is meant to offer disciplinary and multidisciplinary knowledge and skills. The specialisations give students the opportunity to specialise in either *Sociology of Development*, *Economics of Development*, *Inclusive Innovation*, *Communication and Development* or *Politics and Governance of Development*.

Programme management translated the programme objectives into a series of intended learning outcomes. These specify, among others, knowledge and understanding of disciplines within the development studies field, knowledge and understanding to study social transformation processes in livelihoods, agro-food networks and human-environment interactions and applying theoretical and methodological perspectives of one of the programme specialisations to these processes. In addition, students are meant to acquire research skills, critical thinking abilities, research ethics awareness, communication skills and learning skills.

Programme management presented a table to show the intended learning outcomes to correspond to the Dublin descriptors for master level programmes.

The programme is meant to train students to prepare students for positions on the labour market.

For the programme, an External Advisory Committee has been installed. This Committee, on which representatives from the development studies field from universities, government, NGOs and private companies sit, discusses regularly the dimensions of the programme with programme management. In general, the Committee members are in agreement with programme management on the objectives of the programme.

#### *Considerations*

The objectives of the programme are regarded by the panel to be very sound and relevant. The focus of the programme is clear in the panel's view, being intended to study livelihoods, agro-food networks and environment-human interactions from the disciplinary-based perspectives sociology, economics, innovation and communication or politics and governance. The panel notes these subjects meeting Wageningen University profile. The panel welcomes students being introduced to inclusion and exclusion processes, equity and unequal access to resources.

The programme objectives are well-positioned within the domain-specific framework of reference, drafted by the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes, and therefore match the international requirements for the development studies domain.

The intended learning outcomes of the programme correspond to the programme objectives and are well-structured, addressing both disciplinary and multidisciplinary knowledge and understanding, research knowledge and skills and general academic skills. The intended learning outcomes are comprehensive, covering the relevant knowledge, understanding and skills.

The intended learning outcomes conform to the master level, as exemplified by the Dublin descriptors.

The panel appreciates the programme objectives to prepare students for positions on the labour market. Judging by the objectives as formulated, the programme trains students very well for this goal.

The panel is positive about the involvement of the representatives of the development studies professional field in the programme.

#### *Assessment of this standard*

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

## 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*

Wageningen University is a one-faculty University. The Rector is assisted by the Dean of Research and the Dean of Education. The Dean of Education is the chair of the Programme Board. This Board, being composed of four professors and four students, is legally responsible for all programmes of the Faculty. The Dean of Education is also the head of the Department of Education and Student Affairs, being in this capacity responsible for facilitating education within the University. For this programme as for all other programmes of the Faculty, the Programme Committee is responsible for the contents and the quality of the programme. The Programme Committee is composed of an equal number of staff members and students. This responsibility is subject to the approval of the Programme Board. For each of the programmes, the Programme Director is responsible for the day-to-day management and support activities of the programme. Courses within the programme are part of the programme curriculum, but all of the courses are taught by chair groups within the University. Chair groups are part of one of the five Science Groups of the University. In chair groups, expertise on specific subjects is clustered. The Programme Director maintains contacts with chair groups regarding design, contents and quality of the courses they deliver. The learning goals, contents, teaching methods and assessment methods are subject to the approval of the Programme Committee and the Programme Board. Each year, in the Education Modification Cycle, these are discussed. For all of the programmes of the University, four Examining Boards are in place. For the Bachelor International Development Studies and the Master International Development Studies, the Examining Board of the Social Sciences Group has the authority to ensure the quality of examinations and examination procedures.

Programme management presented a detailed schedule to demonstrate the curriculum meeting the intended learning outcomes of the programme. The curriculum has a total study load of 120 EC and takes two years to complete. The curriculum has been divided in the common part (51 EC), the specialisation part (51 EC) and the optional part for supporting and/or profiling courses. The common part is meant for all students and consists of two multi- or interdisciplinary courses, introducing students to perspectives and themes of international development studies and the critical reflection on research in this field (12 EC), the *Academic Consultancy Training* (9 EC) with a number of specific skills training modules (3 EC), training students to work in a multidisciplinary team on a real-life project and to develop their professional skills, the *Internship* (24 EC), allowing students to work in organisations in or outside of the Netherlands, and the *Seminar Social Sciences* (3 EC), teaching students to discuss and write academic texts in preparation of their Master Thesis proposal and the report writing phase of the Master Thesis. In the specialisation part of the curriculum, students take three courses geared towards one of the four specialisations offered (18 EC) and complete the *Master Thesis* (33 EC). Research methods and techniques are part of the specialisation courses. In the Master Thesis, students are to demonstrate being able to conduct empirical research, completing the whole research cycle. Students prepare and complete the thesis under the supervision of staff members of one of the chair groups, specialised in the field of the specialisation. In addition, students may choose 18 EC of supporting or profiling courses, allowing them to deepen their knowledge in a specific field or to improve their research skills.

As has been indicated, courses are offered by chair groups. Lecturers in the programme are researchers doing research within their chair group. In addition, most of the lectures are fellows of the Wageningen School of Social Sciences, this School promoting research in his field. About 39 lecturers are involved in the programme. They are experts in the disciplines they teach. All but one have a doctorate or PhD. The proportion of lecturers being UTQ-certified is 33 % (UTQ is Dutch University Teaching Qualification). About 28 % are in the process of obtaining their UTQ, whereas 39 % are not UTQ-certified but have extensive teaching experience. From the results of surveys and from the opinions voiced in meetings with the assessment panel, it may be derived that students are generally very appreciative of the lecturers and their teaching qualities.

The number of incoming students in the programme fluctuated to some extent over the past years, going from 65 students in 2011 to 104 students in 2014 and to 72 students in 2016. On average, 70 % of the students are Dutch, 20 % come from other European countries and 10 % come from African, Asian or Latin American countries. The entry requirements are Bachelor diploma in relevant social sciences fields, such as sociology, economics, anthropology or international relations. All applications are screened by the Committee of Admission, being advised by the study advisor. Students may apply for exemptions. Requests for exemptions are handled by the Examining Board.

The programme educational concept is to promote active learning on the part of the students. The study methods adopted in the programme are selected in line with this concept and include lectures, small group tutorials and practical training sessions, group work and excursions. The average number of hours of face-to-face education per week is 13.4 hours in the first year. In the second year, there is individual guidance during the internship and in the thesis process. The students-to-staff ratio is 23 : 1. Students regard the programme to be demanding but feasible. The study advisor counsels students on the choices to be made in the programme. The Examining Board approves the individual study programmes of students, being advised by the study advisor. The student success rates are about 26 % for students completing the programme after two years and 73 % for students completing the programme in three years (average figures for last three to four cohorts). The student success rates after two years are relatively low and programme management recognises this and is in the process of identifying the causes.

### *Considerations*

The panel considers the programme to be managed conscientiously.

The curriculum of the programme complies with the intended learning outcomes and is regarded by the panel to be well-structured and coherent. The panel is positive about the common part as well as about the specialisations. The panel especially welcomes the Academic Consultancy Training and the Internship, allowing students to gain relevant academic and professional skills. The panel proposes to strengthen the social critical and regional diversity perspectives in the curriculum.

The lecturers are regarded by the panel to be engaged in the programme. The expertise, research track records and educational skills of the lecturers to be up to standard. The proportions of UTQ-certified lecturers and lectures being trained for the certificate are satisfactory. The lecturers are much appreciated by the students, which is regarded by the panel as very positive. The panel greets the discussions among lecturers on diversity issues, but advises to strengthen the diversity and internationalisation of the staff and to promote the opportunities for foreign staff to enter into tenured tracks.

The admission requirements and procedures of the programme are regarded by the panel to be adequate. Students coming from other universities are well-accommodated. The panel recommends to challenge students coming from the own Wageningen Bachelor programme more in the first part of the curriculum. The panel noted the student population not being very diversified in regional terms.

The programme exemptions policy and regulations are adequate.

The educational concept and study methods meet the contents of the programme and promote students participating actively in class. The panel regards the number of hours of face-to-face education and the students-to-staff ratio to be adequate. The programme is demanding, but feasible. Students are generally guided appropriately, but the thesis supervision, especially in the data collection phase is somewhat lacking. The panel advises to intensify the thesis supervision. The student success rates after two years could be better.

*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 examinations and assessments in the programme are governed by the Education and Examination Regulations of Wageningen University and the Rules and Regulations of the Examining Boards of the University. As has been indicated, the Social Sciences Group Examining Board has the authority to ensure the quality of examinations and assessments and to monitor the corresponding procedures. One of the members of the Examining Board is an external member.

Examination methods in the programme include written examinations, individual and group assignments, papers and essays, presentations and participation in course work. In all of the courses, multiple examinations are scheduled, assessing students in various ways. Examination methods are selected to conform to the course goals. For the Internship, students are required to submit an academic internship report on their results as well as a self-reflection report on their experiences.

In the programme, measures are taken to ensure the validity, reliability and transparency of examinations and assessments. The Examining Board appoints examiners, who have to be involved in the courses as lecturer or coordinator and who have to be UTQ-certified. Every four years, the Examining Board checks the examinations and assessments of each of the chair groups, which participate in the programme. The Board checks example examinations for the students being available and students being informed about the type of examination and about the specification of assignments. In addition, the Board inspects the alignment of course goals and examinations contents, specification tables for examinations, answer keys for correcting written examinations and methods and scoring models for the assessments of assignments. In these inspections, the results of peer reviews by colleagues of other universities are taken into account. The Examining Board noted the elements inspected to conform to the requirements.

The study load of the Master Thesis is 33 EC. As has been said, the thesis is an empirical study. Students are encouraged to find their own subject. In the thesis process, students are guided by their supervisor. The thesis is assessed by the supervisor and the second reader, using a scoring form (rubrics) and adding comments in writing. The assessment includes research competencies (30 %), the written report (60 %) colloquium to present the thesis results (5 %) and the oral defence (5 %). In 2017, the Examining Board invited external examiners to review theses. Only minor differences in grading surfaced. The Board intends to schedule these external assessments on a regular basis.

The Examining Board handles cases of fraud or plagiarism. These are very rare and mostly not intentional. The first time, students are warned. Thus far, there were no repeat cases.

#### *Considerations*

The panel considers the examination and assessment policies for the programme to be appropriate, these being in line with the Wageningen University rules and regulations. The position and authority of the Examining Board for this programme are appropriate, the Board being in control of the examination and assessment processes in the programme.

The panel approves of the examination methods adopted in the programme, as these are suited to test the goals and the contents of the courses.

The measures taken to ensure the validity and transparency of examinations and reliability of assessments are adequate. The panel especially appreciates the Examining Board inspecting the quality of the examinations and assessments of the chair groups and thereby monitoring the examination and assessment processes quite scrupulously. The fraud and plagiarism formalities are up to standard.

The assessment procedures of the Master Thesis are up to standard, involving two examiners and being conducted using elaborate scoring forms. The panel advises to add more extensive written comments, in addition to the oral feedback students are given.

*Assessment of this standard*

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

#### 4.4 Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

##### *Findings*

The panel studied the examinations of a number of courses of the programme.

The panel reviewed a total number of fifteen theses of graduates of the programme, the grades of which ranged from satisfactory to very good. The average grade of the Master Theses over the last two years was 7.8 (Dutch grading scale, going from 1.0 to 10.0). In the theses, students have to show being able to independently do research in social science, formulating a research question, conducting empirical research, analysing the results, drawing conclusions. In addition, students are to show being able to write academically and to orally defend the work.

About 85 % of the graduates of the programme find suitable positions within six months after graduation. Students obtain jobs as consultants, advisors or project coordinators in the not-for-profit sector (31 %), as consultants or managers in the profit sector (18 %), policy advisors in government positions (13 %) or researchers (11 %). About 12 % of the programme graduates succeed in obtaining PhD positions. Study advisors assist students in finding positions.

##### *Considerations*

Having studied the examinations of a number of courses of the programme, the panel assesses these examinations to be up to standard and some to be challenging.

None of the Master Theses reviewed were assessed by the panel to be unsatisfactory. The grades of the theses were generally found to be consistent with the grades the panel would have given. The theses were satisfactory to good on research questions, data collection and linking data analysis to conceptual framework. The panel suggests to emphasise the discussion of methodological limitations and research ethics in the theses.

In the panel's view, the programme succeeds in preparing the programme's graduates appropriately for positions on the labour market and in enabling them to find suitable jobs. The panel appreciates the programme results in this respect.

##### *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	Good
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	Satisfactory
Standard 3: Student assessment	Good
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 reinforce the social critical and regional diversity perspectives in the curriculum.
- To strengthen the diversity and internationalisation among the staff.
- To promote the opportunities for foreign staff to enter into tenured tracks.
- To challenge incoming students from it's own Wageningen Bachelor programme more in the first part of the curriculum.
- To intensify the thesis supervision.
- To add more extensive written comments on the Master Thesis scoring forms, despite the oral feedback students are given.
- To emphasise the discussion of the methodological limitations and the discussion of research ethics in the theses.