

MILITARY STRATEGIC STUDIES

FACULTY OF MILITARY SCIENCES

NETHERLANDS DEFENCE ACADEMY

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This report was finalized on 19/04/2018.

REPORT ON THE MASTER'S PROGRAMME MILITARY STRATEGIC STUDIES OF THE NETHERLANDS DEFENCE ACADEMY

This report takes the NVAO's Assessment Framework for Extensive Programme Assessments as a starting point (September 2016).

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE PROGRAMME

Master's programme Military Strategic Studies

Name of the programme:	Military Strategic Studies
CROHO number:	60469
Level of the programme:	master's
Orientation of the programme:	academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Specializations or tracks:	War Studies Intelligence and Security Military Management and Organising
Location(s):	Breda
Mode(s) of study:	part time
Language of instruction:	English
Expiration of accreditation:	16/01/2019

The visit of the assessment panel to the Faculty of Military Sciences of Netherlands Defence Academy took place on 16 and 17 January 2018.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE INSTITUTION

Name of the institution:	Netherlands Defence Academy (NLDA)
Status of the institution:	legal body providing higher education
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	not applied

COMPOSITION OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The NVAO approved the composition of the panel on 18 September 2017. The panel that assessed the master's programme Military Strategic Studies consisted of:

- Prof. T. (Terry) Terriff (chair), Professor and Arthur J. Child Chair of American Security, University of Calgary (Canada);
- Prof. P.A.G. (Philip) Sabin, Professor of Strategic Studies, King's College London (UK);
- Dr. M. (Max) Visser, Associate Professor in Economics, Radboud University, Nijmegen;
- Lieutenant General (retired) R.G. (Richard) Tieskens, Director Real Estate, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations;
- K. (Kees) Frijters, BSc (student member), master's student International relations, Leiden University.

The panel was supported by Dr. F. (Fiona) Schouten, who acted as secretary.

Appendix 1 contains the curricula vitae of the panel members.

WORKING METHOD OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

Preparation

In preparation for the assessment of the master's programme in Military Strategic Studies of the Faculty of Military Sciences at the Netherlands Defence Academy, the panel chair was briefed by QANU on the working method, assessment frameworks and planning of the assessment procedure. The secretary and the panel chair made a selection of theses of the programme under assessment. They were chosen from a list of students who graduated between 01/09/2015 and 31/08/2017. The selection followed the NVAO guideline for the assessment of theses and took the range of thesis subjects, tracks, supervisors and grades into account. The panel studied the selected theses and the assessment forms.

In consultation with the contact persons from programme, the secretary drafted a programme for the site visit (cf. appendix 4). The Faculty of Military Sciences selected representative discussion partners for the interviews. The panel and secretary agreed with this selection.

Upon receiving the self-evaluation report, the secretary checked its content before sending it on to the panel. The panel members studied the documents and formulated questions and preliminary findings. These were collected by the secretary, who arranged them according to subject matter.

Site visit

At the start of the site visit, which took place on 16-17 January 2018, the panel was informed in a preparatory meeting about the assessment frameworks and the planning of the site visit. During the visit, the panel studied documents provided by the programme (cf. appendix 5). It interviewed the programme management, students, staff members, alumni, employers and representatives of the Programme Committee and the Board of Examiners. It also offered staff members and students the opportunity for a confidential discussion. No requests were received for this consultation hour. At the end of the site visit, the panel held an internal meeting to formulate its preliminary findings. The panel chair concluded the site visit with a public presentation of the panel's findings.

Report

After the site visit, the secretary produced a draft version of the report based on the panel's findings and sent this to the panel members. After their comments were processed, the secretary sent the report to the Faculty of Military Sciences to check for factual errors. The Faculty's reply was discussed with the panel chair, and changes to the report were made with his approval. The report was then finalised and sent to the Netherlands Defence Academy.

Definition of judgements standards

In accordance with the NVAO's Assessment framework for limited programme assessments, the panel used the following definitions for the assessment of both the standards and the programme as a whole.

Generic quality

The quality that, in an international perspective, may reasonably be expected from a higher education Associate Degree, Bachelor's or Master's programme.

Unsatisfactory

The programme does not meet the generic quality standard and shows shortcomings with respect to multiple aspects of the standard.

Satisfactory

The programme meets the generic quality standard across its entire spectrum.

Good

The programme systematically surpasses the generic quality standard.

Excellent

The programme systematically well surpasses the generic quality standard and is regarded as an international example.

SUMMARY JUDGEMENT

Master's programme Military Strategic Studies

Intended learning outcomes

The master's degree programme Military Strategic Studies aims to study the military dimension of international security and focuses on strategic challenges and controversies concerning contemporary security and conflicts from the military perspective, spanning the post-Cold War era and adopting a European viewpoint. The panel considers the programme's focus and niche to be well-chosen, but advises the programme to consider expanding its European perspective to include non-Western viewpoints. The panel finds that the programme can be considered distinctive within the Dutch academic landscape due to its focus and specific military nature. It recommends closely monitoring policy developments and actively stimulating support for MSS within the Defence organisation in order to strengthen the programme's position, for instance by mobilising graduates or collaborating with the general staff course management to clearly formulate the added value of MSS.

The intended learning outcomes clearly reflect the focus and level of the programme. They are in line with the Dublin descriptors for academic master's degree programmes and match national and international requirements of a programme in the field of military strategic studies. The panel recommends naming the disciplines combined in the programme in the intended learning outcomes. It also advises MSS to revise the intended learning outcomes in such a way that they reflect the programme objectives listed in the study guide (including the differences between the programme's three tracks) in order to gain specificity.

Curriculum

The MSS curriculum balances a clear and strong professional (military) orientation with an academic focus. According to the panel, both the academic and the professional orientation are sufficiently visible in the course contents. Professional and academic skills are incorporated into the programme. The academic skills trajectory has been strengthened and now includes the Research Methods course, which the panel considers a valuable addition to the curriculum. The panel recommends strengthening English language skills in at least a part of the curriculum in order to prepare students better for a military professional field, in which international cooperation is expected.

The MSS curriculum has been revised since the previous assessment: the common core was expanded, the Research Methods course placed within this core at the start of the programme, and the Managing and Organising in the Military track refocused to increase coherence. The panel is pleased with these adaptations and commends the programme for moving Research Methods to the start of the programme. It concludes that the setup of MSS is highly coherent and well designed. The course objectives are formulated in detail and correspond with the intended learning outcomes and the track goals. As a consequence, the programme design clearly and demonstrably enables students in all tracks to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

The panel is pleased to see that MSS is designed to accommodate the flexibility necessary for officers in training. Nevertheless, the completion rates of the programme indicate that its feasibility could be improved. The panel recommends restructuring the curriculum in such a way that students begin working on their thesis much earlier on, writing their research proposal in the Research Methods course and writing their thesis while following courses. It also advises abolishing the system which allows grades to remain valid for as long as six years, which could have the effect that students put off finishing the programme. Instead, the programme could 'stop the clock' when students interrupt their studies due to military deployments. The panel commends the programme for stimulating in-class participation and concludes that the variety of working methods contributes to the activation of students. It recommends allowing students more flexibility in composing their own curriculum. In order to make this possible, the panel advises the programme to consider offering less popular courses and tracks biannually, so that staff and resources are liberated and the number of electives

can be expanded, and revising the academic schedule so that option courses can be taken by the students at various times during their enrolment in the MSS programme instead of only at the end of their main course work.

Intake

The panel considers the admission criteria for MSS to be well thought out. It received no indication that the students selected are insufficiently prepared for the master's degree programme, and it is pleased with the existence of a deficiency programme. In order to enhance the programme's viability, the panel recommends improving intake numbers by abandoning predetermined quotas in the number of students per track and by allowing a 50-50 balance between civilian and military students. It also advises the programme to enhance the clarity and formality of the intake procedure. It could consider setting up an Admissions Board to avoid burdening the Board of Examiners with the task of dealing with admissions.

Staff

According to the panel, the quantity of MSS staff clearly suffices to organise the programme. The panel did notice, however, that a large proportion of staff members have a management background and relatively few have a background in intelligence, which does not match the demand there is for either track. It recommends the programme to adapt levels of staff expertise to such trends in demand. The panel considers MSS teaching staff as balancing the academic and practical expertise required to successfully run the programme. It encourages the programme to increase the number of staff members holding a BKO and to stimulate their English proficiency.

Facilities

According to the panel, the setting of the Royal Military Academy is of clear added value to the programme. Both civilian and military students are surrounded by military history as well as contemporary military facilities. The panel is impressed with the NLDA library, which is of national relevance in the domain of war studies and provides staff and students with access to a very wide range of publications.

Tutoring

The panel praises the programme for the way tutoring and thesis supervision are organised, with a central role for the programme coordinator. Students can also turn to the teaching staff or their thesis supervisor for assistance. According to the panel, information provision to students is satisfactory, but there is room for improvement. It advises the programme to look into ways to reduce the variety of information channels. It also recommends explicitly informing students of the nature and consequences of cheating and plagiarism, as well as about the system of grading used in every course.

Quality assurance

The panel finds FMS quality assurance to be well organised. It is impressed with the way the faculty's policy is translated into a system of quality control and quality improvement within MSS. The panel appreciates the organisation of MSS evaluations and especially with the fact that they take the tracks and the programme as a whole into account. It noted to its satisfaction that the programme is in the process of making evaluation results accessible to all those involved. The programme works hard to include all internal stakeholders in the evaluation and improvement process and is aided by a proactive Programme Board and Board of Examiners. External stakeholders are also involved in quality assurance. The panel is pleased with the increased involvement of the NLDA's Education Section. The influence of the professional field on the development and improvement of the programme is evident, but the panel recommends formalising it, for instance by creating an advisory body.

Student assessment

The panel gained the impression that the assessment in MSS is done in good faith and according to professional standards. Assessment in the programme is well designed and varied. The panel is



pleased with the proactive approach of the Board of Examiners and praises the programme for continually working on the improvement of the assessment procedures. It recommends formalising and harmonising certain aspects of assessment in order to diminish apparent subjectivity, improve transparency and better manage students' expectations. These aspects include the alignment of grading and weight of all written assignments, which show a large amount of variation throughout the programme. They also include plagiarism and appeals procedures.

Achieved learning outcomes

The panel found that the programme's theses showed the level and depth that may be expected of a master's thesis in Military Strategic Studies. The research methods were appropriate and matched the research question. In one case, the panel found that a master's thesis showed clear shortcomings, but it became convinced that this was an exception which will not be repeated. Military alumni and their employers consider the capacity for critical thinking they developed in the programme to be of significant added value in the professional field. The panel agrees and considers it unfortunate that this value is not recognised in the field through promotion or distinction of MSS graduates. Civilian alumni have gained knowledge of the Defence organisation and frequently end up working for the Ministry of Defence.

The panel assesses the standards from the *Assessment framework for extensive programme assessments* in the following way:

Master's programme Military Strategic Studies

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	satisfactory
Standard 2: Curriculum, orientation	satisfactory
Standard 3: Curriculum, content	good
Standard 4: Curriculum, learning environment	satisfactory
Standard 5: Intake	satisfactory
Standard 6: Staff	satisfactory
Standard 7: Facilities	good
Standard 8: Tutoring	satisfactory
Standard 9: Quality assurance	good
Standard 10: Student assessment	satisfactory
Standard 11: Achieved learning outcomes	satisfactory
 General conclusion	 satisfactory

The chair and the secretary of the panel hereby declare that all panel members have studied this report and that they agree with the judgements laid down in the report. They confirm that the assessment has been conducted in accordance with the demands relating to independence.

Date: 19/04/2018



Prof. T. (Terry) Terriff (chair)



Dr. F. (Fiona) Schouten (secretary)

DESCRIPTION OF THE STANDARDS FROM THE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK FOR EXTENSIVE FRAMEWORK ASSESSMENTS

The academic master's degree programme Military Strategic Studies (MSS) is organised by the Faculty of Military Studies (FMS) of the Netherlands Defence Academy (NLDA). It was developed at the request of the Ministry of Defence as well as the Defence Intelligence and Security Service, and started in 2012. MSS was developed as a follow-up to two bachelor's degree programmes offered by the Faculty of Military Studies: War Studies and Military Management Studies.

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.

Explanation:

The intended learning outcomes demonstrably describe the level of the programme (Associate Degree, Bachelor's, or Master's) as defined in the Dutch qualifications framework, as well as its orientation (professional or academic). In addition, they tie in with the regional, national or international perspective of the requirements currently set by the professional field and the discipline with regard to the contents of the programme. Insofar as is applicable, the intended learning outcomes are in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations. The points of departure for the set-up of the programme chime with the educational philosophy and the profile of the institution. The intended learning outcomes are periodically evaluated.

Findings

The master's degree programme Military Strategic Studies (MSS) aims to study the military dimension of international security. MSS positions itself as a multidisciplinary academic programme which resides within the area of security studies and incorporates defence studies. In order to limit the scope of the programme and provide focus as well as depth, MSS concentrates on the study of strategic challenges and controversies concerning contemporary security and conflicts from a military perspective, spanning the post-Cold War era and adopting a European viewpoint. This focus was chosen as a result of a benchmark analysis conducted in 2012, which included international programmes taught at Johns Hopkins University, King's College London, the University of Aberdeen and other institutions. It also aims to educate those who are currently engaged or seeking a career in the field of defence and security, and is open to officers in training as well as to civilian students.

The panel considers the programme's focus and niche to be well-chosen and agrees with the need to specialise in order to achieve sufficient depth. The field of strategic studies is so wide that a less specialised programme runs the risk of dealing with many subjects in a superficial manner. At the same time, it wonders whether the European viewpoint adopted by the programme could be enhanced by adding non-Western perspectives in order to deepen comprehension of current world events. It recommends the programme to consider including such perspectives. According to the panel, both the programme's focus and its specific military nature distinguish the programme within the Dutch academic landscape.

During the site visit, the panel discussed the purpose and background of MSS with the programme management. From these conversations, it gathered that the development of an academic master's programme within the larger defence organisation was and is backed by the Ministry of Defence (MoD): the programme springs from a clear MoD policy to stimulate the academic education of its officers. The programme forms an optional addition to the programmes already offered, including the General Staff course, which is a traditional and well-established part of officer training. This optional nature makes the position of MSS vulnerable: a policy change might weaken the programme's position within the organisation. The panel advises the programme and Faculty management to monitor policy developments closely and look for ways to actively stimulate support



for MSS in the Defence organisation, for instance by collaborating with the General Staff course management to clearly formulate the added value of each programme.

The programme translated its profile into a set of seven intended learning outcomes (cf. Appendix 2). The panel studied them and concluded that they clearly reflect the focus and level of the programme. The outcomes are in line with the Dublin descriptors for academic master's degree programmes. They were reviewed after the programme's initial accreditation in 2012 and now refer more explicitly to the aim to teach students the ability to reflect on controversies and challenges. The panel feels this adaptation heightens the academic nature of the outcomes. According to the panel, the intended learning outcomes match the level, orientation and content of a master's degree programme in the domain of military strategic studies. It concludes that the intended learning outcomes match national and international requirements of a programme in military strategic studies.

The intended learning outcomes reflect the multidisciplinary nature of the programme, but do not name the various disciplines combined in the programme. Outcome 4 mentions 'a multidisciplinary body of knowledge'. The panel is aware of the fact that MSS touches on disciplines such as sociology, political science, history, international relations, strategy, management studies and economics. It recommends naming these disciplines in the intended learning outcomes in order to make them more concrete.

Finally, the panel noticed that the seven intended learning outcomes are reproduced in the study guide provided to students of the programme. In this document, they are followed by an extensive list of programme objectives. The latter are formulated in greater detail than the intended learning outcomes. This list also includes three subsets of objectives formulated for the three tracks within the programme: the War Studies track, the Intelligence and Security track, and the Managing and Organising in the Military track. According to the panel, the relationship between the intended learning outcomes and the programme objectives is not entirely clear. It recommends revising the intended learning outcomes in such a way that they reflect the programme objectives (including the differences between tracks) without going into such detail as might be expected of course objectives. This could add specificity to the programme's intended learning outcomes.

Considerations

The master's degree programme Military Strategic Studies aims to study the military dimension of international security and focuses on strategic challenges and controversies concerning contemporary security and conflicts from the military perspective, spanning the post-Cold War era and adopting a European viewpoint. The panel considers the programme's focus and niche to be well-chosen, but advises the programme to consider expanding its European perspective to include non-Western viewpoints. The panel finds that the programme can be considered distinctive within the Dutch academic landscape due to its focus and specific military nature. It recommends closely monitoring policy developments and actively stimulating support for MSS within the Defence organisation in order to strengthen the programme's position, for instance by mobilising graduates or collaborating with the general staff course management to clearly formulate the added value of MSS.

The intended learning outcomes clearly reflect the focus and level of the programme. They are in line with the Dublin descriptors for academic master's degree programmes and match national and international requirements of a programme in the field of military strategic studies. The panel recommends naming the disciplines combined in the programme in the intended learning outcomes. It also advises MSS to revise the intended learning outcomes in such a way that they reflect the programme objectives listed in the study guide (including the differences between the programme's three tracks) in order to gain specificity.

Conclusion

Master's programme Military Strategic Studies: the panel assesses Standard 1 as 'satisfactory'.

Standard 2: Curriculum, orientation

The curriculum enables the students to master appropriate (professional or academic) research and professional skills.

Explanation:

The curriculum ties in with current (international) developments, requirements and expectations in the professional field and the discipline. Academic skills and/or research skills and/or professional competencies are substantiated in a manner befitting the orientation and level of the programme.

Findings

The MSS curriculum starts with four core courses of 5 EC each. Students can choose one of three tracks: War Studies, Intelligence & Security Studies, or Managing & Organizing the Military (20 EC). Each track comprises four courses of 5 EC each. Finally, students choose an elective (5 EC) before embarking on their thesis (15 EC). See appendix 5 for an overview of the curriculum.

MSS is clearly oriented towards the (military) professional field. The courses deal with challenges and controversies encountered in the professional domain. The programme sets out to stimulate reflection among its students on strategic approaches, political and commanders' decisions, doctrines, policy developments and problem-solving strategies. Many of the students and staff members have a military background and bring practical questions and dilemmas into the classroom. Various courses deal with planning, scenario-building, presenting and debating, or training professional skills. According to the panel, the strong professional orientation of MSS is one of its most distinctive characteristics.

The programme also has a clear academic focus. This is clearly visible in the courses, which require students to read and discuss recent and topical international research. The panel studied the content of various courses (see appendix 6) and discussed them with students, alumni and teaching staff. It concludes that the courses achieve sufficient academic depth. Literature is not merely dealt with: it serves as a starting point for active debates and critical reflection among students. Students are encouraged to challenge each other's perspectives as well as their own. Staff members also refer to their own research in class. The panel is pleased with the critical and reflective way in which the course content is approached throughout the programme.

MSS has developed an academic skills trajectory to further strengthen its academic orientation. Following recommendations from the programme's initial accreditation in 2012, this trajectory has been changed and expanded. It now starts with a core course (5 EC) in research methods, whose aim is to familiarise students with a large, multidisciplinary variety of research traditions and methodologies that are common to the military domain. The course highlights those methods that are most relevant for strategic studies, such as data analysis and literature review. As a further part of the research skills trajectory, a structured series of meetings is organised during which students draft an individual research proposal in seven weekly meetings in groups of four or five, led by a lecturer. While writing their thesis, students share their progress in similarly structured thesis circles, led by the same staff member who chaired the proposal meetings. Research methods are also touched upon in the 'thesis market', where staff members 'pitch' research ideas to students looking for thesis topics and encourage them to take part in faculty research projects. Finally, academic skills are incorporated into the programme's courses, where students practise oral presentation and academic writing. The panel is satisfied with the increased attention paid to research methodology and academic skills in the MSS curriculum. In particular, it considers the Research Methods course to be a valuable addition to the programme. The panel is impressed with its content and setup. Students in the course are asked to write three papers, and in this way, train their research skills from the very start of the programme.



According to the students' contribution to the self-evaluation report, the programme could prepare them better for the professional field by paying more attention to English language skills. The programme and all its materials are in English, and so is the assessed course work, in particular essays, exams, and the final thesis. In practice, however, almost all courses are taught in Dutch, since all students are native Dutch speakers and there is no need for English-language instruction or discussion. Some of the students the panel met with during the site visit would have liked to have been taught in English for at least a part of the time. Others pointed out that speaking in English among Dutch-speakers could become uncomfortable, unnatural and might have a negative effect on the depth of in-class debates and discussions. Moreover, students and professors pointed out that students can choose to develop their English proficiency: they are free to present or write in English. The panel considers these arguments to be valid, but it finds a certain level of English proficiency to be essential in preparing MSS students for the military field, in which international cooperation is expected. Therefore, it recommends strengthening English language skills in at least a part of the curriculum.

Considerations

The MSS curriculum balances a clear and strong professional (military) orientation with an academic focus. According to the panel, both the academic and the professional orientation are sufficiently visible in the course contents. Professional and academic skills are incorporated into the programme. The academic skills trajectory has been strengthened and now includes the Research Methods course, which the panel considers a valuable addition to the curriculum. The panel recommends strengthening English language skills in at least a part of the curriculum in order to prepare students better for a military professional field, in which international cooperation is expected.

Conclusion

Master's programme Military Strategic Studies: the panel assesses Standard 2 as 'satisfactory'.

Standard 3: Curriculum, content

The contents of the curriculum enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Explanation:

The learning outcomes have been adequately translated into educational objectives of (components of) the curriculum.

Findings

The panel studied the setup and content of all courses within MSS. It concludes that the programme is very logical and coherent. The common core provides a solid foundation which gives students a common frame of reference for the multidisciplinary academic field of strategic studies. They also receive an introduction to the approach and research methods of the three tracks. Students then specialise further in one of three tracks, which offer a more in-depth approach to the military dimension of international security. The War Studies track focuses on the use of the military instrument; the Intelligence and Security track examines the general functioning of and main developments in intelligence organisations; and the Managing & Organizing the Military track focuses on the internal organisation and effectiveness of armed services. After completing the track phase, students follow an elective from a set list of options and begin writing their thesis.

The learning objectives per course have been formulated in detail and correspond to the intended learning outcomes. Each track has its own objectives, which are aligned with course goals as well as the intended learning outcomes. The academic skills trajectory, which consists of the Research Methods course, the proposal circles, and the thesis circles, enables students to gain the skills necessary to complete their master's thesis successfully. According to the panel, the curriculum is well designed. This impression was confirmed by students and alumni during the site visit.

Since the previous assessment, the MSS curriculum has been modified in order to enhance its coherence. By strengthening the common core with an additional course on War, Defence & Society, the programme responded to the previous committee's concern that students were separated too much into tracks and that they didn't share enough common grounds. The Research Methods course was developed more fully and transferred from the thesis phase to the common core, so that the research methods trajectory spans the entire programme. The Managing & Organising in the Military track is a more thematically coherent and focused version of the original track on Military Management & Logistics. The panel is pleased with these changes and commends the programme for changing the position of the Research Methods course.

Considerations

The MSS curriculum has been revised since the previous assessment: the common core was expanded, the Research Methods course placed within this core at the start of the programme, and the Managing and Organising in the Military track refocused to increase coherence. The panel is pleased with these adaptations and commends the programme for moving Research Methods to the start of the programme. It concludes that the setup of MSS is highly coherent and well designed. The course objectives are formulated in detail and correspond with the intended learning outcomes and the track goals. As a consequence, the programme design clearly and demonstrably enables students in all tracks to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Conclusion

Master's programme Military Strategic Studies: the panel assesses Standard 3 as 'good'.

Standard 4: Curriculum, learning environment

The structure of the curriculum encourages study and enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Explanation:

The curriculum is designed in a manner conducive to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The teaching-learning environment encourages students to play an active role in the design of their own learning process (student-centred approach). The design of the learning environment chimes with the educational philosophy of the institution.

Findings

In order to allow military students to combine MSS with their duties as officers, the programme is offered part-time and has a duration of 2 years. The courses are structured in 10 lecture sessions, which always take place on Fridays. Between courses, a two- to three-week period is scheduled during which guest lectures are organised for students to attend on a voluntary basis. The study load per week is 20 hours. The modular design of the curriculum allows students to enter who do not want to take the entire degree. Course grades remain valid for six years, allowing students to temporarily interrupt the programme, for instance in the case of military deployment.

The panel is pleased to see that the programme is designed to accommodate the flexibility necessary for officers in training. Nevertheless, it noticed that the completion rate of the programme could be improved. According to the critical reflection, only 44% of students graduate nominally (within two years). From additional information provided to the panel during the site visit, it concludes that of the classes of 2013 to 2015 (143 students), a relatively large number of students remains enrolled (44 students, 31%) or has left the programme (19, 13%). According to the panel, these numbers suggest that the feasibility of the programme could be improved.

The panel discussed this issue with programme management, alumni, students and teaching staff. From these conversations, it gathered that study delays rarely occur during the course modules, when students follow weekly classes. Instead, study success is usually compromised during the thesis phase. In this phase, students are no longer physically absent from their workplaces one day a week.



In the case of military students, this often means that their employers go back to demanding full-time commitment. Thesis writing is then necessarily done in the students' spare time. In addition, military students change posts once every three years, so often the thesis trajectory coincides with a new professional challenge, leading to extra delay. The programme has attempted to address delays in the thesis phase by introducing thesis circles, where students motivate one another in writing their thesis and discuss problems they encounter among themselves and with the lecturer. The panel concludes from the information it received and its discussions with students, alumni and staff members that structural improvement of the completion rates has not been achieved: students who graduate nominally benefit from the circles, but students who are delayed often stop attending them.

In order to improve the programme's feasibility and increase study success, the panel recommends taking a number of measures. It advises MSS to restructure the curriculum in such a way that students start working on their thesis much earlier on. In the current setup, students start writing their thesis proposal in the second half of their second year of studies. They begin writing the proposal at the end of December and present the finalised proposal in February. From March until August, they write their thesis, and the final version is due by August 31 in order for students to graduate nominally. In the opinion of the panel, extending the thesis writing period could greatly improve success rates, especially if the writing of the thesis is partly done while students are still following courses and employers are making allowances for time dedicated to their studies. The programme could consider having the proposal written during the Research Methods course, allowing students to change their thesis topic and proposal afterwards but forcing them to think about the thesis from the very start of the programme and teaching them how to write a proposal early on.

The panel also advises abolishing the system which allows grades to remain valid for as long as six years. Such leniency could have the effect that students put off finishing the programme. Instead, it recommends 'stopping the clock' when the programme is interrupted due to military deployments. After such a 'freeze' students go back to the regular rhythm. In this way, students don't lose touch with the programme and are quickly brought up to speed.

According to the self-evaluation report, the didactic concept of MSS follows a concentric model and focuses on activating learning methods. The teaching staff aims to apply the preparation-feedback model, which requires students to prepare for classes and take an active role in class. MSS working methods focus on stimulating active participation and include group debates and presentations. Some MSS courses have introduced a 'flipped classroom' by recording lectures for students to view before class. Students told the panel that this intended activation is achieved in practice. They considered the resulting exchange of ideas and the confrontation of civilian and military perspectives as contributing greatly to their individual academic development. The panel concludes to its satisfaction that the programme clearly succeeds in activating its students.

MSS students are further enabled to shape their own learning process through various choices presented by the programme. Students are free to choose a track, which makes up 20 EC of their programme; they can choose an elective of 5 EC from a set list; and they are free in the choice of their thesis subject, regardless of their track. During the site visit, the panel learned that not all students are allowed into the track of their choice. Each track accepts only 15 students. When students apply for the programme, they may be told that their preferred track is full and that they can enter the programme in a different track or start a year later in the track of their choice. Once inside the programme, students can only move to another track when a place opens up. Since this is communicated clearly at the start of the programme, students point out they do not mind this limitation to their freedom of choice. With the free thesis topic and the one elective, they have 20 EC to follow their own preferences.

The panel considers it a good thing that the programme communicates limitations to track choice clearly and early on to prospective students. It is also pleased with the addition of an elective course since the previous assessment. At the same time, it considers the programme rather rigid. It advises

the programme to allow students more freedom to decide on their own curriculum by revising the academic schedule so that option courses can be taken by the students at various times during their enrolment in the MSS programme instead of only at the end of their main course work. The programme could also decide to offer less popular courses biannually, so that staff and resources are liberated to make more flexibility possible. The panel advises the programme to consider offering a less popular track, such as Managing & Organising in the Military (see below, Standard 5), biannually. Instructors in this track could then be encouraged to offer optional courses in the off year, allowing for an expansion of the number of electives. In this way, the programme could create space for more flexibility.

Considerations

The panel is pleased to see that MSS is designed to accommodate the flexibility necessary for officers in training. Nevertheless, the completion rates of the programme indicate that its feasibility could be improved. The panel recommends restructuring the curriculum in such a way that students begin working on their thesis much earlier on, writing their research proposal in the Research Methods course and writing their thesis while following courses. It also advises abolishing the system which allows grades to remain valid for as long as six years, which could have the effect that students put off finishing the programme. Instead, the programme could 'stop the clock' when students interrupt their studies due to military deployments. The panel commends the programme for stimulating in-class participation and concludes that the variety of working methods contributes to the activation of students. It recommends allowing students more flexibility in composing their own curriculum. In order to make this possible, the panel advises the programme to consider offering less popular courses and tracks biannually, so that staff and resources are liberated and the number of electives can be expanded, and revising the academic schedule so that option courses can be taken by the students at various times during their enrolment in the MSS programme instead of only at the end of their main course work.

Conclusion

Master's programme Military Strategic Studies: the panel assesses Standard 4 as 'satisfactory'.

Standard 5: Intake

The curriculum ties in with the qualifications of the incoming students.

Explanation:

The admission requirements in place are realistic with a view to the intended learning outcomes.

Findings

The programme is open to students with a military background as well as to civilian students. Military students are admissible when they are Defence employees with at least four years of experience and have successfully completed one of the FMS bachelor's programmes or their predecessors, or the advanced staff and command courses. Their commanding officer and HR division must approve their participation. International military students and civilian students are admissible when they hold a bachelor's or master's degree in a relevant academic field. Civilian students also have to send in their CV. All students are required to provide proof of English fluency, since reading materials are offered in English only. The Board of Examiners evaluates all applications and advises the Programme Board on admissions. It also decides which deficiencies it considers reparable by following courses of a maximum of 36 EC in one of the FMS bachelor's programmes. Students can enter MSS upon completing such a deficiency programme. The panel considers the admission criteria for the programme to be well thought out. It received no indication that the students selected are insufficiently prepared for the programme, and it is pleased with the existence of a deficiency programme.

The programme aims at a mix of military and civilian students with a ratio of 3 to 1. It also aims at admitting 15 students per track, although this has varied in the past. The panel studied admission



data on the programme and noticed that the Intelligence & Security track is clearly the most popular track, and that it usually reflects the 3 to 1 ratio. The War Studies track is slightly less popular and attracts a larger number of civilian students: in the class starting in 2015, War Studies was followed by 3 military and 14 civilian students. The Managing & Organising in the Military track often shows a 50-50 balance between military and civilian students; the class of 2017 was only made up of 6 students.

The panel discussed the admission policy with students, alumni, the Board of Examiners, and the programme management. It found that both civilian and military students feel that a majority of civilian students in class has a negative impact on the quality of the education. After experiencing this in 2015 in the War Studies track, the management came to the same conclusion. The distinctive military character of the programme is enhanced by the participation of students with experience in the military field. The panel agrees with the programme's decision to limit civilian intake. At the same time it noticed that the programme is currently under-recruiting: the class of September 2017 has 45 places and only 32 students. In order to enhance the programme's viability, the panel therefore recommends improving intake numbers by abandoning predetermined quotas which stop talented or qualified students from entering. The programme could consider opting for a 50-50 balance between military and civilian students. It could also create more fluidity within tracks by abandoning the strict boundaries between them (cf. Standard 4), so that students are not turned away because their preferred track is full.

The panel concludes from the data it studied that the intake policy has varied over the years. This seems to have been caused by the programme's attempts at finding the right mix between students from various backgrounds. The number of students admitted per track varies over time, and there is great variation in their background, even including students with a bachelor's degree in Biology or Communication Sciences. The panel advises the programme to enhance the clarity and formality of the intake procedure. The intake requirements should be made very clear. The programme could also consider setting up an Admissions Board to avoid burdening the Board of Examiners with the task of dealing with admissions.

Considerations

The panel considers the admission criteria for MSS to be well thought out. It received no indication that the students selected are insufficiently prepared for the master's degree programme, and it is pleased with the existence of a deficiency programme. In order to enhance the programme's viability, the panel recommends improving intake numbers by abandoning predetermined quotas in the number of students per track and by allowing a 50-50 balance between civilian and military students. It also advises the programme to enhance the clarity and formality of the intake procedure. It could consider setting up an Admissions Board to avoid burdening the Board of Examiners with the task of dealing with admissions.

Conclusion

Master's programme Military Strategic Studies: the panel assesses Standard 5 as 'satisfactory'.

Standard 6: Staff

The staff team is qualified for the realisation of the curriculum in terms of content and educational expertise. The team size is sufficient.

Explanation:

The teachers have sufficient expertise in terms of both subject matter and teaching methods to teach the programme. The staff policy is conducive in this respect. Sufficient staff is available to teach the programme and tutor the students.

Findings

According to the panel, the quantity of MSS staff clearly suffices to organise the programme. The self-evaluation report lists 26 staff members, who dedicate 60% of their time to teaching in MSS as well as in the Faculty's bachelor's degree programmes. There is sufficient teaching staff in the master's degree programme to ensure group sizes remain small. The panel notes that a large proportion of staff members have a management background and relatively few have a background in intelligence. This does not match the larger demand that exists for the Intelligence & Security track. The panel advises the programme to adapt levels of staff expertise to such trends in demand.

MSS staff members are required to be actively involved in research and must have a PhD degree. The panel is positive about this research-oriented profile. It noted that many staff members have links to civil universities. Staff members and guest lecturers also have practical experience in the military field. The panel considers MSS teaching staff as balancing the academic and practical expertise required to successfully run the programme.

The didactical training of the teaching staff is a focal point of the faculty, which aims to certify all lecturers at BKO (basic teaching qualification) level. At the moment of the site visit, only 7 staff members possessed a BKO, and one held an SKO (senior teaching qualification). Four more staff members were about to conclude their BKO training. The panel encourages the programme to increase the number of staff members holding a BKO and is pleased that this is being stimulated by faculty management. It learned from the self-evaluation report that not all staff members have proof of their fluency in English and recommends encouraging them to do so.

Considerations

According to the panel, the quantity of MSS staff clearly suffices to organise the programme. The panel did notice, however, that a large proportion of staff members have a management background and relatively few have a background in intelligence, which does not match the demand there is for either track. It recommends the programme to adapt levels of staff expertise to such trends in demand. The panel considers MSS teaching staff as balancing the academic and practical expertise required to successfully run the programme. It encourages the programme to increase the number of staff members holding a BKO and to stimulate their English proficiency.

Conclusion

Master's programme Military Strategic Studies: the panel assesses Standard 6 as 'satisfactory'.

Standard 7: Facilities

The accommodation and material facilities (infrastructure) are sufficient for the realisation of the curriculum.

Explanation:

The accommodation of the programme and the facilities are in keeping with the intended learning outcomes and the teaching-learning environment.

Findings

MSS students follow classes on the premises of the Royal Military Academy in Breda. The panel visited these premises and found that sufficient classrooms are available, including rooms where students can work on projects in smaller groups. It is very positive about the fact that MSS students are taught at the Royal Military Academy. This military setting is of clear added value to the programme. Both civilian and military students are surrounded by military history as well as contemporary military facilities.

The panel is impressed with the NLDA library, which specialises in military scientific literature. Apart from a physical collection of approximately 190,000 titles, it offers FMS staff and students access to over 25,000 e-journals in databases such as ProQuest Central, ScienceDirect, Wiley, Sage, T&F,



Psycharticles, and IEEE. Additionally, over 225,000 books are available through Ebrary and Springerlink. The complete collection can be searched through a discovery meta-search and accessed via the internet. The library serves as a place of study, and the library staff assists students in searching for information. The library is visited often by external students and researchers, proving its national relevance in the domain of war studies.

Considerations

According to the panel, the setting of the Royal Military Academy is of clear added value to the programme. Both civilian and military students are surrounded by military history as well as contemporary military facilities. The panel is impressed with the NLDA library, which is of national relevance in the domain of war studies and provides staff and students with access to a very wide range of publications.

Conclusion

Master's programme Military Strategic Studies: the panel assesses Standard 7 as 'good'.

Standard 8: Tutoring

The tutoring of and provision of information to students are conducive to study progress and tie in with the needs of students.

Explanation:

Students receive appropriate tutoring (including students with a functional impairment). The information provision of the programme is adequate.

Findings

Study guidance for MSS students does not take the shape of an official tutoring system. The MSS programme coordinator keeps track of students' progress and contacts them regularly when they temporarily leave the programme on military deployments or internships. The programme coordinator has also held exit interviews with students who left the programme prematurely. The central role of the programme coordinator in study guidance is made possible by the programme's small scale. Students can also approach other members of the teaching staff with questions or doubts. In the case of a functional impairment, the programme takes measures on an individual basis, for instance by adapting the form or duration of examinations. During the thesis trajectory, students receive additional tutoring from their thesis supervisor. Students and alumni told the panel that they considered MSS staff to be very accessible. They feel noticed, supported and appreciated by the programme. The panel praises the programme for the way tutoring and thesis supervision are organised.

Students consult course-related information through the electronic learning environment Moodle, where they can have online discussions and upload assignments. Students consult their schedules through the Parallax programme and have insight into their grades and progress through Osiris. According to the students, the online educational facilities are user-friendly and work well. The panel concludes that the various systems used by students are complementary and cause no confusion, but it advises the programme to consider whether reducing the number of information sources is an option to facilitate students' search for information.

The panel looked at the information given to students, both online and in the study guide, and discussed the provision of information with students and alumni. It concluded that there is some room for improvement here. For instance, it noted that study materials are not always included in the course descriptions it found in the study guide. It also found that students are not informed very clearly about the nature and consequences of cheating or plagiarism. Finally, it found that students are not explicitly informed about the grading system, so they don't always have a clear idea of what is expected of them to obtain a particular grade for a paper or presentation. It recommends informing students clearly about these issues.

Considerations

The panel praises the programme for the way tutoring and thesis supervision are organised, with a central role for the programme coordinator. Students can also turn to the teaching staff or their thesis supervisor for assistance. According to the panel, information provision to students is satisfactory, but there is room for improvement. It advises the programme to look into ways to reduce the variety of information channels. It also recommends explicitly informing students of the nature and consequences of cheating and plagiarism, as well as about the system of grading used in every course.

Conclusion

Master's programme Military Strategic Studies: the panel assesses Standard 8 as 'satisfactory'.

Standard 9: Quality assurance

The programme has an explicit and widely supported quality assurance system in place. It promotes the quality culture and has a focus on development.

Explanation:

The programme organises effective periodic feedback that supports the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Existing programmes implement appropriate improvements based on the results of the previous assessment. They initiate appropriate evaluation and measurement activities to that end. The outcomes of this evaluation demonstrably constitute the basis for development and improvement. Within the institution, those responsible are held to account regarding the extent to which the programme contributes to the attainment of the institution's strategic goals. Quality assurance ensures the achievement of the intended learning results. The Programme Committee, examination board, staff, students, alumni and the relevant professional field are actively involved in the programme's internal quality assurance. The programme's design processes, its recognition, and its quality assurance are in keeping with the European Standards and Guidelines. The programme publishes accurate, reliable information regarding its quality, which is easily accessible to the target groups.

Findings

The quality assurance of all FMS degree programmes, including MSS, is described in the Education Quality Manual. This document focuses on both quality control and quality improvement, and addresses the tasks and responsibilities of all involved in the quality cycle. The responsibility for quality assurance within the Faculty of Military Science lies with the Executive Board of SWOON (Stichting Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs en Onderzoek NLDA). The Programme Boards are in charge of programme evaluation. Each degree programme has a Programme Committee which assesses all evaluations. The Programme Committee reports to the Faculty Board regularly. The panel considers FMS quality assurance to be well organised.

Quality assurance within MSS takes course evaluations as its starting point. After the completion of a course, students are asked to evaluate it. At the course level, evaluations focus on teaching methods, didactic skills, teaching materials, assessments, learning effects and course results. Every course has a course dossier containing all information on the course as well as evaluation results. The dossier is created and managed by the course coordinator and published on a Sharepoint page, where it is available to colleagues as well as the Programme Board. Evaluations also take place on a supra-course level. As a result of a midterm review, a policy report on MSS quality management was produced with a special focus on such supra-course evaluations, including track evaluations as well as evaluation of the programme as a whole. The supra-course evaluation is initiated by the Programme Board, and an annual meeting with the Faculty Board is used to discuss measures taken in the previous year. In addition, student satisfaction surveys and alumni surveys have been introduced. Each course is screened once every three years by the NLDA Education Section based on an evaluation scheme provided by the Programme Board. Courses are also screened when they are



new, when they have a different coordinator or when a previous evaluation gives cause for concern. The panel is pleased with the organisation of MSS evaluations and especially with the fact that they take the tracks and the programme as a whole into account. It noted to its satisfaction that the programme is in the process of making evaluation results accessible to all those involved.

During the site visit, the panel discussed quality assurance with staff, students, and alumni, including members of the Programme Committee and the Board of Examiners. From these discussions, it learnt that the programme works hard to include all stakeholders in the process of evaluation and improvement, and that recommendations from the Programme Committee and the Board of Examiners are usually taken up and implemented when possible. Recommendations often deal with scheduling issues, but matters such as plagiarism have recently been discussed. The Programme Committee and the Board of Examiners play a proactive role in quality assurance. Programme committee members visit classes to introduce themselves to students and lecturers. They encourage their peers to fill out course evaluations by pointing out their importance in the PDCA cycle. The Board of Examiners produced a document to help teaching staff construct test matrices. The panel is impressed with the central place of quality control and improvement within MSS.

External stakeholders are also involved in the master programme's system of quality assurance. First of all, involvement of the Education Section of the NLDA has recently been increased. This section is external to the MSS programme and handles evaluations. Members of the Education Section are now also present at the meetings of the Programme Board and the Programme Committee. The Education Section is therefore well-informed about the issues these bodies deal with and can easily advise them. The panel praises the programme for including educational experts in such a structural manner.

Secondly, members of the working field are consulted frequently to ensure the programme's goals and intended learning outcomes match the requirements of the field. The panel spoke to representatives from the professional field who employ MSS students and alumni. It learned that they are usually consulted informally, through their personal contacts with staff members. It became evident to the panel that these contacts are very fruitful. MSS consulted the employers within the Ministry of Defence at the start of the programme and consulted them again during the midterm review it organised. As a result, MSS has adapted courses and tracks (such as the recently revised Managing and Organizing the Military track) to better fit the employers' needs. The panel also noticed that the MSS management has a clear view of developments in the field, and that this view corresponds with that of the employers. It is pleased with the successful involvement of the professional field in the development of the programme. However, according to the panel, the time has come to formalise these ties, for instance through the creation of an advisory body. The programme can then use the continuous input from the professional field to its advantage and monitor the extent to which its goals still match those of the Defence organisation.

Considerations

The panel finds FMS quality assurance to be well organised. It is impressed with the way the faculty's policy is translated into a system of quality control and quality improvement within MSS. The panel appreciates the organisation of MSS evaluations and especially with the fact that they take the tracks and the programme as a whole into account. It noted to its satisfaction that the programme is in the process of making evaluation results accessible to all those involved. The programme works hard to include all internal stakeholders in the evaluation and improvement process and is aided by a proactive Programme Board and Board of Examiners. External stakeholders are also involved in quality assurance. The panel is pleased with the increased involvement of the NLDA's Education Section. The influence of the professional field on the development and improvement of the programme is evident, but the panel recommends formalising it, for instance by creating an advisory body.

Conclusion

Master's programme Military Strategic Studies: the panel assesses Standard 9 as 'good'.

Standard 10: Student assessment

The programme has an adequate student assessment system in place.

Explanation:

The student assessments are valid, reliable and sufficiently independent. The quality of interim and final examinations is sufficiently safeguarded and meets the statutory quality standards. The tests support the students' own learning processes.

Findings

Assessment within MSS follows the FMS Education Quality Manual. Its regulations are incorporated in the Teaching and Examination Regulations of Military Strategic Studies. Student assessment quality is safeguarded by a Board of Examiners.

The panel studied the Education Quality Manual, the Teaching and Examination Regulations, and the study guide. From these documents, as well as from its conversations with students, alumni, teaching staff and the Board of Examiners, the panel gained the impression that assessment is done in good faith and according to professional standards. The types of assessment match the learning goals of the courses, and the Programme Board as well as the Board of Examiners monitor the alignment of assessments with the intended learning outcomes. Assessment is sufficiently varied: a course is usually assessed through various assignments, ranging from take-home exams to papers and presentations. The master's thesis has two assessors, who jointly fill out an assessment form, sometimes including separate comments and sometimes agreed joint comments, which the panel found sufficiently insightful. In order to safeguard thesis quality, the Board of Examiners studied a sample of four theses. Moreover, an extensive external validation of eleven theses was carried out in 2017.

In 2014, the Board of Examiners carried out a thorough investigation into the assessment procedures and criteria of all MSS courses. It found that in some courses, examiners did not make use of test matrices. It also discovered that they use different standards for the length of written assignments in relation to the credits assigned to them. Finally, it noted that grading formats were not always used, exams were sometimes created by a single examiner, and subsequent analysis of assessments was rare. Based on this investigation, measures were taken by the Programme Board to improve these aspects and bring assessment in line with the Faculty's assessment policy. Course coordinators were approached and requested to make the necessary changes. The panel is pleased with this proactive attitude of the Board of Examiners and praises the programme for working on the improvement of the assessment procedures.

Nevertheless, the panel found that the assessment of written assignments, which the Board of Examiners addressed in its investigation, still requires attention. From the study guide and the Teaching and Examination Regulations, it learned that the amount of work required to earn a certain amount of credits varies greatly throughout the courses. For instance, the Peacekeeping and Statebuilding (5 EC) course in the War Studies track includes a paper assessment of around 3500 words which makes up 60% of the final grade. In Coercive Diplomacy (5 EC, War Studies track), a paper of 3000-4000 words accounts for 80% of the final grade, while in Defence Economics & Performance Management (5 EC, Managing & Organising the Military track), a paper of 3500 words makes up only 40% of the grade. The panel recommends aligning the weight of written assignments throughout the programme in order to improve transparency and to manage students' expectations better. It also advises the programme to create a grading guideline for written assignments to diminish subjectivity in grading. The master's thesis grading form may serve as an example.

The panel noted that various other aspects of student assessment could benefit from harmonisation and formalisation. One of them is plagiarism. While papers are checked for plagiarism through built-in software in Moodle, the Teaching and Examination Regulations do not describe what exactly



constitutes plagiarism or how it is dealt with. The subject is not covered in class and only briefly mentioned in the study guide. The panel recommends clarifying the concepts of plagiarism and fraud, for instance in the Research Methods course, and making very clear to students what the consequences are. It also considers the appeals and complaints procedures to be overly informal. When students are unhappy with a particular grade, they can discuss it with the examiner in a formal discussion moment. Based on this discussion, the grade can be adapted. This discussion is not recorded or written down. According to the panel, this may allow students to 'talk up' a grade. The panel advises the programme to formalise such procedures and create a paper trail which makes them explicit and visible to external parties.

Considerations

The panel gained the impression that the assessment in MSS is done in good faith and according to professional standards. Assessment in the programme is well designed and varied. The panel is pleased with the proactive approach of the Board of Examiners and praises the programme for continually working on the improvement of the assessment procedures. It recommends formalising and harmonising certain aspects of assessment in order to diminish apparent subjectivity, improve transparency and better manage students' expectations. These aspects include the alignment of grading and weight of all written assignments, which show a large amount of variation throughout the programme. They also include plagiarism and appeals procedures.

Conclusion

Master's programme Military Strategic Studies: the panel assesses Standard 10 as 'satisfactory'.

Standard 11: Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Explanation:

The achievement of the intended learning outcomes is demonstrated by the results of tests, the final projects, and the performance of graduates in actual practice or in post-graduate programmes. The programme must describe how it tests the achievement of the exit level. Such tests may be based on various products or examinations that are summarised here in the concept of a "final project". A non-exhaustive account of final projects is: the final thesis, a portfolio, a professional product, an interim exam or series of interim exams, a paper, an artistic achievement, or a combination thereof.

Findings

The panel studied 15 recent master's theses. It found that they showed the level and depth that may be expected of a master's thesis in Military Strategic Studies. The research methods used were appropriate and matched the research question. In one case, the panel found that the master's thesis showed clear shortcomings. It discussed the thesis with the two assessors during the site visit and learned that the shortcomings were caused by the ambitious level of the research proposal, which did not yield the result hoped for based on the student's excellent earlier performance. The panel became convinced that this particular case was an exception which will not be repeated.

During the site visit, the panel interviewed MSS alumni and a selection of their (military) employers. Both the military alumni and the employers stressed that the added value of the programme lies in the graduates' capacity for critical thinking and analysis. MSS alumni are able to approach practical issues and problems concerning military strategy from an academic perspective. According to the panel, this critical perspective is of real value to the alumni as well as to the Defence organisation at large. Officers who complete the MSS degree are and will be prepared to respond appropriately to the challenges they meet in the field due to their having developed and deepened the strategic capability and adaptive mindset they need to reflect on the context and complexities in a rigorous manner. The completion of MSS, however, is not valued obviously within the Defence organisation. MSS graduates are not distinguished in any way, and their degree does not lead to a promotion.

The panel finds this unfortunate. Civilian alumni encounter no such issues: they have gained knowledge of the Defence organisation and frequently end up working for the Ministry of Defence.

Considerations

The panel found that the programme's theses showed the level and depth that may be expected of a master's thesis in Military Strategic Studies. The research methods were appropriate and matched the research question. In one case, the panel found that a master's thesis showed clear shortcomings, but it became convinced that this was an exception which will not be repeated. Military alumni and their employers consider the capacity for critical thinking they developed in the programme to be of significant added value in the professional field. The panel agrees and considers it unfortunate that this value is not recognised in the field through promotion or distinction of MSS graduates. Civilian alumni have gained knowledge of the Defence organisation and frequently end up working for the Ministry of Defence.

Conclusion

Master's programme Military Strategic Studies: the panel assesses Standard 11 as 'satisfactory'.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The panel assesses Standards 3, 7, and 9 as 'good' and Standards 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10 and 11 as 'satisfactory'. According to the decision rules of NVAO's Framework for extended programme assessments the panel assesses the *master's programme Military Strategic Studies* as 'satisfactory'.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: CURRICULA VITAE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

Prof. T. (Terry) Terriff (chair) is Professor, and Arthur J. Child Chair of American Security Policy in the Department of Political Science, and a Senior Research Fellow of the Centre for Military, Security and Strategic Studies, at the University of Calgary. Dr. Terriff received his PhD from the Department of War Studies, King's College, London. His university service includes: Director of Graduate Studies at the Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham (1997-2000); Interim Head of the Department of Political Science, University of Calgary (2011-2012); and Associate Director of the Centre for Military, Security and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary (2014-2016).

K. (Kees) Frijters BSc (student member) is master's student of International relations at Leiden University. He is an active member of AIESEC, an international, non-profit student organization that facilitates exchanges and development of young people. For AIESEC he was Human Resource Manager of the Nour Project (2015-2016) and Vice-President Outgoing Global Talent (2016-2017).

Prof. P.A.G. (Philip) Sabin is Professor of Strategic Studies in the War Studies Department at King's College London, where he has taught since 1985. He has written or edited 15 books and monographs on topics ranging from ancient warfare to air power, and his recent books *Lost Battles* (2007) and *Simulating War* (2012) make major contributions to the scholarly application of conflict simulation techniques. Since 2013 he has taken part in several defence wargaming projects, and co-organised the annual Connections UK conference for wargames professionals. He has lectured in countries from Japan to Chile.

Lieutenant General R.G. (Richard) Tieskens currently holds a position as director at the NLD Government Real Estate Agency. He started at the Engineer Corps and later took a master degree in Electrical Engineering at Delft Technical University. During his military career (1976-2014) he served in a broad variety of functions. He was part of the NLD contingent in Bosnia (SFOR, 1998) and Afghanistan (ISAF, 2006). From 2010 till 2012 he served as the Commander of the Netherlands Defense Academy. He completed his military career as the Chief of Staff at NATO's Joint Force Command Headquarter in Brunssum.

Dr. M. (Max) Visser is an Associate Professor of Management, Accounting & Organization at Nijmegen School of Management, Radboud University, The Netherlands. He received his PhD from Twente University in 1998. His research interests include the relations between organizational learning, management control and performance, in particular in army and other governmental and non-profit organizations. Further, he is interested in the relations between governance, performance and behavior in organizations, increasingly from a Critical perspective. His publications have appeared in *Academy of Management Review*, *Management Learning*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *The Learning Organization*, among others.



APPENDIX 2: INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

MSS graduates are able to:

1. understand and explain the evolution of contemporary Western security policy and the perspectives of Western (European) societies concerning the use of force;
2. understand and explain dominant trends and characteristics of contemporary conflicts and modes of warfare;
3. understand and explain the role of strategy at the interface between political and military activity in general and in various types of conflict in particular;
4. understand, analyse and reflect on contemporary strategic challenges Western (European) states and military organizations are confronted with, using relevant insights derived from a multidisciplinary body of knowledge;
5. relate the outcomes of analysis and reflection (in)to problem solving strategies that are relevant to the military interventions and the management of defence organizations;
6. communicate ideas, perspectives and results in an international context in constructive dialogue, in oral presentation and in cooperative workgroups;
7. (independently) conduct research to develop the capacity to contribute to the body of knowledge in the MSS domain.

APPENDIX 3: OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

Thesis (15 EC)		
Elective (5 EC)		
<u>MANAGING & ORGANISING IN THE MILITARY</u> (20 EC)	<u>WAR STUDIES</u> (20 EC)	<u>INTELLIGENCE & SECURITY</u> (20 EC)
Technology Management and the Military	International Law of Military Operations	Methods & Analytical Concepts in Intelligence
Leadership and Ethics	Peace keeping & State building	International Intelligence Cooperation
Strategizing & Organizing	Insurgency & Counterinsurgency	Intelligence and its Environment
Defence Economics & Performance Management	Coercive Diplomacy	Intelligence Organizations and their Cultures
<u>Core Courses</u> (20 EC)		
War, Defence & Society		Research Methods
War & Warfare in the (post) Modern World		Contemporary Security and Strategy



APPENDIX 4: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

Tuesday 16 January 2018		
9.30	10.00	Arrival panel and welcome
10.00	12.30	Preparatory meeting
12.30	13.00	Lunch
13.00	14.00	Interview with programme management
14.00	14.45	Interview with students
14.45	15.15	Break
15.15	16.00	Interview with teaching staff
16.00	16.45	Interview with representatives of the professional field
16.45	17.00	Break
17.00	17.45	Interview with alumni
17.45	18.30	Tour of the facilities
Wednesday 17 January 2018		
9.00	9.30	Preparatory meeting and review of available documents
9.30	10.00	Interview with Programme Committee
10.00	10.45	Interview with Board of Examiners
10.45	11.30	Break
11.30	12.30	Interview with programme management
12.30	13.00	Lunch
13.00	15.30	Formulation preliminary findings
15.30	15.45	Presentation preliminary findings
15.45	16.15	Drinks
16.15	17.15	Development dialogue

APPENDIX 5: THESES AND DOCUMENTS STUDIED BY THE PANEL

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied a selection of 15 theses. Information concerning these theses is available from QANU upon request.

During the site visit, the panel studied, among other things, the following documents (partly as hard copies, partly via the institute's electronic learning environment):

- Course materials, sample exams, answer models and a representative selection of actual tests administered of the following courses:
 1. War and Warfare in the Modern World
 2. Contemporary Security and Strategy
 3. Strategizing and Organizing (track MOM)
 4. International Intelligence Cooperation (track I&S)
 5. Methods and Analytical Concepts in Intelligence (track I&S)
 6. Peacekeeping and Statebuilding (track WS)
 7. Coercive Diplomacy (track WS)
 8. Dynamics of Military Innovation (elective)
- Midterm Review MSS November 2016
- External Thesis Validation MSS, November 2017
- Bestuurs- en Beheersreglement Stichting Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs en Onderzoek NLDA (SWOON), incl. Faculteitsreglement en Mediarichtlijn NLDA, 16/07/2012
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