

Assessment report
Limited Framework Programme Assessment

Bachelor Applied Earth Sciences

Delft University of Technology

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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 Bachelor Applied Earth Sciences programme of Delft University of Technology, which has been assessed according to the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, as published on 20 December 2016 (Staatscourant nr. 69458).

The programme objectives are relevant and sound. The panel welcomes the focus of the programme on the integration of engineering and geology, making this a unique programme in the Netherlands. The programme is clearly directed towards the study of applied geology and engineering. The panel encourages the programme to maintain this profile and this unique position. The programme objectives meet the domain-specific reference framework for the Earth Sciences programmes. The panel appreciates the efforts by the joint programmes in the Earth Sciences in the Netherlands to draft this framework and regards this to be the sound and up-to-date description of this domain. The panel welcomes the programme having been benchmarked against programmes in other countries, demonstrating the profile and the specific features of the programme.

The panel is positive about students being educated to enrol in master programmes of Delft University of Technology or other universities in this domain. The panel appreciates that the programme prepares students to enter the labour market as well.

The programme intended learning outcomes correspond to the programme objectives, are comprehensive and conform to the bachelor level.

The panel regards the entry requirements to be clear and relevant. The panel proposes to have applicants make mathematics and physics tests as examples of what can be expected in the programme itself.

The curriculum meets the intended learning outcomes of the programme. The courses in the curriculum are up to standard. The concepts and theories of geology, mathematics, physics are strongly represented. The panel advises, however, to diversify the methods and required level of mathematics and physics courses to better take into account the diversity of students and the required level of the different subsequent master programmes. Appropriate integration of these disciplines is offered in the Applied Earth Sciences courses. The panel welcomes the practical and fieldwork components in the curriculum. In addition, the panel is positive about the academic skills taught in the programme. The panel recommends to monitor the alignment of the curriculum with new, sometimes rapidly evolving societal trends in the programme domain.

The panel regards the lecturers in the programme to be capable researchers and skilled lecturers. Their educational capabilities are up to standard, as may be deduced from the proportion of UTQ-certified lecturers. The panel feels the lecturers' workload to be challenging, but manageable.

Although the programme has an educational concept, the panel recommends to formalise this concept and tailor it to the challenging nature of the programme. The panel proposes to consider new study methods to allow students to proceed through the programme more easily. The panel also suggests to monitor the study load of courses and the scheduling of resits. The number of hours of face-to-face education and the students-to-staff ratio are satisfactory. The programme has taken steps to assure adequate study guidance. The panel proposes, however, to raise the number of academic counsellors for the programme to allow more individual guidance of students. The panel suggests to organise the formal communication between the programme and the students in a way, which ensures the representation of the student population in all its diversity. The panel perceives the number of drop-outs as well as the student success rates to be rather disappointing.

The examinations and assessment rules of the programme are appropriate, being in line with the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Geosciences Assessment Policy. Although the position and activities of the Board of Examiners are satisfactory, the panel advises the Board to be more pro-active in monitoring examinations and assessments. The panel approves of the examination methods adopted by the programme. The methods are consistent with the goals and contents of the courses. The panel considers the measures ensuring the quality of examinations and assessments to be satisfactory.

The supervision and assessment processes for the Bachelor thesis projects have been organised adequately. Students are offered appropriate supervision. The assessment procedures are up to standard, involving two examiners assessing the work on the basis of assessment scoring forms. The programme management is planning on making a switch to one single assessment scoring form. The panel considers this to be an improvement.

The Bachelor theses the panel studied, match the intended learning outcomes and are adequate research projects. No theses were found by the panel to be unsatisfactory. The level and quality of the theses differ, which is reflected in the grades. The panel supports the grades given by the programme examiners.

The panel regards the programme graduates to have reached the intended learning outcomes and to be qualified to enrol in master programmes in this domain. The panel proposes to monitor current trends in the professional practice and to organise feedback from the professional field on a structural basis.

The panel that conducted the assessment of the Bachelor Applied Earth Sciences programme of Delft University of Technology 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 advises NVAO to accredit the programme.

Rotterdam, 28 March 2019

Prof. dr. ir. A. Veldkamp
(panel chair)

drs. W. Vercouteren
(panel secretary)

2. Assessment process

The evaluation agency Certiked VBI received the request by Delft University of Technology to organise the limited framework programme assessment process for the Bachelor Applied Earth Sciences 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).

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

- Prof. dr. ir. A. Veldkamp, dean ITC Faculty of Geo-Information and Earth Observation, University of Twente, the Netherlands (panel chair);
- Drs. T.M. van Daalen, director Geological Survey of the Netherlands, Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research, the Netherlands (panel member);
- Prof. dr. P.A. van der Beek, full professor, Institut des Sciences de la Terre, Université Grenoble Alpes, France (panel member);
- Prof. dr. M. Landrø, full professor, Department of Petroleum Technology and Applied Geophysics, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway (panel member);
- I.S. van Essen, student Bachelor Earth Sciences, Minor Solid Earth, VU Amsterdam, the 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. Having obtained the authorisation by the University, Certiked requested the approval of NVAO of the proposed panel to conduct the assessment. NVAO have given their approval.

To prepare the assessment process, the process coordinator convened with management of the programme to discuss the outline of the self-assessment report, the subjects to be addressed in this report and the site visit schedule. In addition, the planning of the activities in preparation of the site visit were discussed. In the course of the process preparing for the site visit, programme management and the Certiked 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 the theses of 15 graduates from the last few years. The grade distribution in the selection was ensured to conform to the grade distribution in the list, sent by programme management.

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

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

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

Shortly before the site visit date, the complete panel met to go over the preliminary findings concerning the quality of the programme. During this meeting, the preliminary findings of the panel members, including those about the theses 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 21 January 2019, the panel conducted the site visit on the Delft University of Technology campus. The site visit schedule was as planned. In a number of separate sessions, the panel was given the opportunity to meet with Faculty Board representatives, programme management, Board of Examiners members, lecturers and final projects examiners, and students and alumni.

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

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 three weeks to respond. Having been corrected for these factual inaccuracies, the Certiked bureau sent the report to the Board of Delft University of Technology, to accompany their request for re-accreditation of this programme.

3. Programme administrative information

Name programme in CROHO: B Technische Aardwetenschappen (B Applied Earth Sciences)
Orientation, level programme: Academic Bachelor
Grade: BSc
Number of credits: 180 EC
Specialisations: None
Location: Delft
Mode of study: Full-time (language of instruction English)
Registration in CROHO: 56959

Name of institution: Delft University of Technology
Status of institution: Government-funded University
Institution's quality assurance: Approved and valid until 20 November 2023

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 Bachelor Applied Earth Sciences programme is one of the two bachelor programmes of the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Geosciences of Delft University of Technology. The Dean of the Faculty has the responsibility for research, education, operations and finance of the Faculty. The responsibility for the quality of the educational programmes has been delegated to the Director of Education of the Faculty. The Director of Studies of the Bachelor and Master Applied Earth Sciences programmes is responsible for the contents, quality and implementation of these programmes. The Director of Studies is assisted by two Bachelor coordinators and coordinators for each of the Master tracks. The Board of Studies, being composed of equal numbers of lecturers and students, advises programme management on quality issues. The Faculty Board of Examiners supervises the quality of examinations and assessments of this and the other programmes of the Faculty.

The Bachelor Applied Earth Sciences programme of Delft University of Technology is a three-year, research-based, multi-disciplinary, academic bachelor programme in the Earth Sciences domain. Within the Earth Sciences domain, the programme is directed towards geology. The programme is quite unique in the Netherlands, as it integrates engineering and applied geology. The objectives of the programme are to educate students in both applied geology and in engineering and technology. To introduce them to the knowledge and skills in the latter two domains, students are taught mathematics, physics and chemistry. Students are educated to apply their knowledge and skills to manage and utilise subsurface opportunities and solve problems in this field. Students are taught to relate these opportunities and problems to current societal issues, such as energy transition, resource security, environmentally responsible use of underground space or climate change.

The programme has been benchmarked against the domain-specific reference framework for the Earth Sciences in the Netherlands, which has been drafted by the joint programmes in the Netherlands. The objectives of the programme conform to this framework.

As has been said, the programme is unique in the Netherlands. The programme has been benchmarked against bachelor programmes of reputed institutions abroad. Although being quite similar to these programmes in a number of ways, the Delft University of Technology programme distinguishes itself from the other programmes by being broad and by offering specialisations not in the Bachelor programme, but in the subsequent Master programme.

The main objective of the programme is to prepare students for master programmes in this field, both of Delft University of Technology and of other universities in the Netherlands and abroad. Although most students continue their studies at master level, some may enter the labour market. Components have been included in the programme to prepare students for this route.

The programme objectives have been translated into intended learning outcomes. These specify, as main points, understanding the field of Applied Earth Sciences and the processes within this field, formulating research questions and systematically finding answers to research questions, international communication skills, and preparedness to continue studies at master level in engineering and/or Earth Sciences. In line with Delft University of Technology guidelines, students are also taught academic skills, such as critical and analytical thinking competencies, knowledge of scientific foundations of engineering, analytical and modelling skills, problem-solving skills, design skills, and reflection upon socio-economic and ethical dimensions of technology.

Programme management presented the comparison of the intended learning outcomes to the general Dublin descriptors as well as the Dutch Universities of Technology Meijers' criteria for the bachelor level.

Considerations

The panel considers the programme objectives to be relevant and sound. The panel welcomes the focus of the programme on the integration of engineering and applied geology, making this a unique programme in the Netherlands. The programme is clearly directed towards the study of applied geology and engineering, the latter domain being exemplified by the study of mathematics, physics and chemistry. The panel encourages the programme to maintain this profile and this unique position.

The programme objectives meet the domain-specific reference framework for the Earth Sciences programmes. The panel appreciates the efforts by the joint programmes in the Earth Sciences in the Netherlands to draft this framework and regards this to be the sound and up-to-date description of this domain.

The panel welcomes the programme having been benchmarked against programmes in other countries, demonstrating the profile and the specific features of the programme.

The panel is positive about students being educated to enrol in master programmes of Delft University of Technology or other universities in this domain. The panel appreciates the programme prepares students to enter the labour market as well.

The programme intended learning outcomes correspond to the programme objectives, are comprehensive and conform to the bachelor level. The panel appreciates both the domain-specific knowledge and skills and the more general academic skills, articulated in the intended learning outcomes.

Assessment of this standard

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

4.2 Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment

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

Findings

The number of incoming students in the last five years was on average about 100 students, the inflow being quite stable across these years. The number of incoming students in these years doubled compared to the previous years. The entry requirements of the programme are the secondary education (vwo) diploma. Students are only admitted, if they have taken Chemistry, Physics and Mathematics B courses in their previous education. About 20 % to 30 % of the incoming students have degrees from institutes for higher vocational training or originate from abroad. Prospective students are informed about the programme. Students are offered a MOOC course on mathematics to prepare them for the programme.

The curriculum of the programme takes three years and carries 180 EC of study load. For the programme, a table was presented, showing the mapping of the intended learning outcomes and the courses. The curriculum has been organised in four distinct learning lines, being the Mathematics, Science, Geology and Applied Earth Sciences learning lines. Each of the courses in the curriculum is part of one of these learning lines. The *Grand Challenges and Applied Earth Sciences* course in the beginning of the curriculum presents students with an overview of subjects to be addressed in the other courses and informs students about the relevance of these subjects. The courses in the Mathematics learning line are scheduled in the first two years. These courses are provided by the Delft University of Technology Mathematics Department. The courses have recently been aligned more closely with the other curriculum components. This has resulted in better results. The Science learning line includes Physics and Chemistry courses, covering fundamental concepts and theories in these disciplines. The Geology learning line includes both theoretical and fieldwork courses in this discipline. Fieldwork courses are scheduled at the end of the second and third year. Safety regulations for fieldwork are in place. The Applied Earth Sciences learning line brings together the knowledge and skills acquired in the other three learning lines, and requires students to integrate this knowledge and these skills. Academic skills are woven into the learning lines and are part of the courses mentioned. Academic skills training includes critical and analytical thinking, study attitude and skills, oral presentation and academic writing skills, ethics, and health and safety issues. In the third year, students take a minor (30 EC) to deepen or broaden their knowledge. Some students take minors abroad. At the end of the curriculum, the *Field Exploration Project* requires students to design projects. These projects are group projects. After this project, students complete the Bachelor Thesis project, being an individual research project. Study association *De Mijnbouwkundige Vereeniging* regularly schedules extra-curricular events. The study association also collects oral feedback among students about programme quality, which is discussed in regular quality assurance meetings with programme management.

A total number of about 33 lecturers are involved in the programme. Most of the lecturers are employed at the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Geosciences. Some lecturers are from other Faculties within the University. The lecturers are active researchers in their fields. Nearly all staff members have PhD degrees. Of the total number of lecturers 70 % are UTQ-certified and 21 % are in the process of acquiring the UTQ-certificate. Lecturers experience the workload as demanding, but manageable. New staff has been recruited to replace older lecturers. Lecturers meet at the beginning and after completion of quarterly periods in the academic year to align courses. In addition, informal meetings among lecturers are scheduled.

The programme educational concept is meant to challenge students to apply and synthesise knowledge and skills acquired to address and solve problems in the programme domain and to promote students to engage actively in the learning processes. Study methods adopted in the programme are lectures, tutorials, practical classes, individual and group assignments, fieldwork, laboratory work, and tutor sessions. New study methods, such as MOOCs and interactive classes with cell phones are being introduced. Students are encouraged to prepare classes. Students are provided feedback on assignments by lecturers. The total number of hours of face-to-face is about 15 to 20 hours in the first year, about 10 to 12 hours in the second year and about 8 to 10 hours in the third year. The programme stimulates students to be self-directed in their studies. The students-to-staff ratio is 23/1. Students are guided by tutors, being staff members, to improve study attitudes. Mentors, being elder students, assist students in making the transition from secondary school to university. Academic counsellors may assist students and monitor study progress. The number of students per academic counsellor in the Faculty is, however, very large. In line with the Binding Study Advice, students must obtain at least 45 EC in the first year. The curriculum is very challenging. For some courses, the real study load may be more than the credits stated. In some cases, scheduling of resits hampers students' study pace. On average 35 % to 40 % of the students drop out of the programme, the vast majority of them in the first year. The average student success rates are about 20 % after three years and about 52 % after four years (proportions of students re-entering in second year, figures for last four cohorts).

Considerations

The panel regards the entry requirements to be clear and relevant. The panel proposes to have applicants make mathematics and physics tests as examples of what can be expected in the programme itself.

The curriculum meets the intended learning outcomes of the programme. The courses in the curriculum are up to standard. The concepts and theories of geology, mathematics, physics are strongly represented. The panel advises, however, to diversify the methods and required level of mathematics and physics courses to better take into account the diversity of students and the required level of the different subsequent master programmes. Appropriate integration of these disciplines is offered in the Applied Earth Sciences courses. The panel welcomes the practical and fieldwork components in the curriculum. In addition, the panel is positive about the academic skills taught in the programme. The panel recommends to monitor the alignment of the curriculum with new, sometimes rapidly evolving societal trends in the programme domain.

The panel regards the lecturers in the programme to be capable researchers and skilled lecturers. Their educational capabilities are up to standard, as may be deduced from the proportion of UTQ-certified lecturers. The panel feels the lecturers' workload to be challenging, but manageable.

Although the programme has an educational concept, the panel recommends to formalise this concept and tailor it to the challenging nature of the programme. The panel proposes to consider new study methods to allow students to proceed through the programme more easily. The panel also suggests to monitor the study load of courses and the scheduling of resits. The number of hours of face-to-face education and the students-to-staff ratio are satisfactory. The programme has taken steps to assure adequate study guidance. The panel proposes, however, to raise the number of academic counsellors for the programme to allow more individual guidance of students. The panel suggests to organise the formal communication between the programme and the students in a way, which ensures the representation of the student population in all its diversity. The panel perceives the number of drop-outs as well as the student success rates to be rather disappointing.

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.

Findings

The examination and assessment procedures of the programme are aligned with the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Geosciences Assessment Policy. As has been indicated, the Faculty Board of Examiners has the authority to monitor and ensure the quality of examinations and assessments of the programme.

The examination methods for the courses are selected in line with the course goals. In most courses, multiple examinations are scheduled. The examination methods in the programme are, among others, written examinations, practical assignments, projects, fieldwork assignments, reports and presentations. Projects and assignments may be individual work or group work. Written examinations are the dominant examination method. In some courses, intermediate summative tests are scheduled.

The Bachelor thesis projects are individual research projects. In the projects, students are to demonstrate having achieved the intended learning outcomes of the programme. Students are entitled to supervision by their individual supervisors. Supervisors and students meet regularly to discuss progress made. At regular intervals, progress made and draft theses submitted are evaluated by supervisors. Bachelor thesis projects are assessed by two examiners, coming from different research groups and using assessment scoring forms. Now, two forms are in use. One single assessment scoring form will be drafted. Theses are assessed on the basis of the written report and the oral defence by the student. All theses are checked for plagiarism.

Programme management and the Board of Examiners have taken a number of measures to promote the validity, reliability and transparency of examinations and assessments. The Board of Examiners appoints examiners, who are UTQ-certified. For the courses, assessment matrices have been drafted. These matrices indicate the relations between the course goals and the examinations. Examinations' drafts may be peer-reviewed by fellow-examiners. Students are informed about types of examinations and the grading schemes. They are also presented trial examinations. Sub-committees of the Board of Examiners inspect on a regular basis samples of examinations and samples of Bachelor theses. Plagiarism and fraud rules for the programme are in place. Both students and lecturers are informed about these rules. Cases of plagiarism or fraud are to be reported to the Board of Examiners, who will handle these cases.

Considerations

The panel considers the examinations and assessment rules and regulations of the programme to be appropriate, these being in line with the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Geosciences Assessment Policy. Although the position and activities of the Board of Examiners are satisfactory, the panel advises the Board to be more pro-active in monitoring examinations and assessments.

The panel approves of the examination methods adopted by the programme. The methods are consistent with the goals and contents of the courses.

The supervision and assessment processes for the Bachelor thesis projects have been organised adequately. Students are offered appropriate supervision. The assessment procedures are up to standard, involving two examiners assessing the work on the basis of assessment scoring forms. The programme management is planning on making a switch to one single assessment scoring form. The panel considers this to be an improvement.

The panel considers the measures ensuring the validity, reliability and transparency of examinations and assessments to be satisfactory.

Assessment of this standard

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

4.4 Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

As has been said, the Bachelor thesis projects are individual research projects. In these projects, students have to show having reached the programme intended learning outcomes. The Bachelor thesis projects are assessed on work attitude, initiative taken, level of self-reliance demonstrated, technical level reached, results achieved, written reporting and oral presentation. The panel reviewed fifteen Bachelor theses of programme graduates of the last two years. The average grade for the projects is little over 8.0.

As a rule, programme graduates do not enter the labour market. They proceed to master programmes in this domain, both of Delft University of Technology and of other universities in the Netherlands and abroad. As has been indicated, some graduates do enter the labour market.

Considerations

The Bachelor theses the panel studied, match the intended learning outcomes and are adequate research projects. No theses were found by the panel to be unsatisfactory. The level and quality of the theses differ, which is reflected in the grades. The panel supports the grades given by the programme examiners.

The panel regards the programme graduates to have reached the intended learning outcomes and to be qualified to enrol in master programmes in this domain.

The panel proposes to monitor current trends in the professional practice and, therefore, to organise feedback from the professional field on a structural basis.

Assessment of this standard

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

5. Overview of assessments

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

6. Recommendations

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

- To have applicants make mathematics and physics tests as examples of what can be expected in the programme itself.
- To diversify the methods and required level of mathematics and physics courses to better take into account the diversity of students and the required level of different subsequent master programmes.
- To monitor the alignment of the curriculum with new, sometimes rapidly evolving societal trends in the programme domain.
- To formalise the educational concept and to tailor it to the challenging nature of the programme.
- To consider new study methods to allow students to proceed through the programme more easily.
- To monitor the study load of courses and the scheduling of resits.
- To raise the number of academic counsellors for the programme to allow more individual guidance of students.
- To organise the formal communication between the programme and the students in a way, which ensures the representation of the student population in all its diversity.
- For the Board of Examiners to be more pro-active in monitoring the examination and assessment processes.
- To monitor current trends in the professional practice and, therefore, to organise feedback from the professional field on a structural basis.