

Assessment report  
Limited Framework Programme Assessment

**MSc Business Administration (part-time)**

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

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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 part-time MSc Business Administration of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The programme was assessed according to the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, as published on 20 December 2016 (Staatscourant nr. 69458).

The part-time programme in Business Administration aims to provide students who have at least three years of work experience, with broader and deeper knowledge and insights in Business Administration. The programme is positioned as a theoretical programme for students who are involved in the professional practice. The programme qualifies itself as a theoretical focused MBA-programme. The programme's intended learning outcomes address three roles to be performed by the programme's graduates: the academic role, the professional role and the role of citizen. Graduates of the programme have developed an academic approach towards the professional practice. They analyse problems systematically, using theoretical knowledge and state-of-the art research skills. Graduates of the programme additionally reflect on ethical dilemmas. The programme offers the following specialisations: Management Studies, Financial Management and Digital Business and Innovation. The panel concludes that the programme's learning outcomes reflect an academic orientation at a master's level. It is positive about the specialisations on offer but recommends that a stronger rationale for these specialisations is provided in the programme, and tailor these to a greater extent to the needs of the professional field and the interest of potential students. The panel assesses standard 1, the intended learning outcomes, as satisfactory.

The programme offers students advanced knowledge in the Business Administration as a whole and more specifically, in the three areas of specialisation. The panel concludes that the courses allow students to obtain the intended learning outcomes. The structure and organisation of the programme is tailored towards the needs of the student population and as such appreciated by the students. The programme relates well to the intended learning outcomes. The panel is therefore positive about the coherence of the programme and the learning environment. The panel has noticed that the number of students the Financial Management specialisation is rather low, and recommends the programme to take this in consideration when reconsidering the specialisations on offer. In addition, the didactical approach of the programme could be further strengthened and more explicitly address academic adult learning and student's relation to practice. The panel observes that the programme sufficiently ensures that all staff members involved in the programme provide the quality which can be expected of academic teachers. The staff of the programme consists of experts in their fields and staff members are competent teachers. The panel assesses standard two, teaching and learning environment, as satisfactory.

The panel observes that the assessment methods used by the programme are varied. In addition, the programme's management and the Examination Board have measures in place to stimulate a reliable and valid assessment practice. The panel is positive about the programme's systematic approach in this regard. The panel recommends the Examination Board to start reviewing samples of theses in order to see to it that the process of assessment results in valid and reliable testing. The panel observes that students are informed on the assessment criteria. The panel assesses standard 3, assessment, as satisfactory.

The theses reviewed by the panel demonstrate mastery of the intended learning outcomes by the students. The subjects dealt with by students and the use of methodology demonstrate that students are able to

apply an academic approach towards practical problems in the professional practice. The programme held a survey among graduates, in which more than 80% of the graduates stated that the programme increased their chances for success on the job market. The panel assesses standard 4, achieved learning outcomes, as satisfactory.

The panel that conducted the assessment of the part-time Master programme in Business Administration of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam assesses this programme to meet the standards of the limited framework, as laid down in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, judging the programme to be satisfactory. Therefore, the panel recommends NVAO to accredit this programme.

Rotterdam, 11 April 2019

Dr. Cees Terlouw  
(panel chair)

Jetse Siebenga MSc.  
(panel secretary)

## 2. Assessment process

The evaluation agency Certiked VBI received the request by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam to support the limited framework programme assessment process for the part-time Master Business Administration. 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).

The management of the programmes in the assessment cluster Business Administration convened to discuss the composition of the assessment panel and to draft the list of candidates.

Having conferred with management of the 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:

- Dr. Cees Terlouw (chair), Emeritus lector Intake and Transition Management Higher Education Saxion University of Applied Sciences;
- Prof. dr. Marc De Ceuster, Full Professor in Finance, Antwerp University;
- Prof. dr. Peter van Baalen, Full Professor in Information Management and Digital Organisation, University of Amsterdam;
- Marijke Speelberg MSc, recently graduated student Master Global Business and Master Sustainability, Erasmus University Rotterdam (student member).

On behalf of Certiked, J.W. Siebenga MSc. served as the secretary in the assessment process. The overall coordination of the assessment cluster Business Management was executed by drs. W. Vercouteren.

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 last two complete years. Acting on behalf of the assessment panel, the process coordinator selected 8 final projects from this list. The grade distribution in the selection was ensured to conform to the grade distribution in the list, sent by programme management.

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

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

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

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

On 8 January 2019, the panel conducted the site visit on the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The site visit schedule was in accordance with the schedule as planned. In a number of separate sessions, the panel was given the opportunity to meet with Faculty Board representatives, programme management, Examination Board representatives, lecturers and final projects examiners, and students and alumni.

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

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

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

### 3. Programme administrative information

Name programme in CROHO: M Business Administration  
Orientation, level programme: Academic Master (post-initial)  
Grade: MSc  
Number of credits: 60 EC  
Specialisations: Digital Business and Innovation  
Financial Management  
Management Studies  
Location: Amsterdam  
Mode of study: Part-time (language of instruction: Dutch)  
Registration in CROHO: 75017  
Name of institution: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam  
Status of institution: Government-funded University  
Institution's quality assurance: Approved

## 4. Findings, considerations and assessments per standard

### 4.1 Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

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

#### *Findings*

The programme aims to educate students who want to broaden and/or deepen their knowledge of Business Administration in order to enhance their career. Students choose among three areas of specialization which are Management Studies, Financial Management and Digital Business and Innovation. The programme made a comparison with other part-time programmes on offer in the field of Business Administration in the Netherlands. The programme qualifies itself as a theoretical focused Business Administration programme. Alumni appreciate this profile and highly value the academic component of the programme.

The programme has provided a domain-specific frame of reference which describe the disciplines students will encounter. The programme defines three pillars for today's professional practice, which are human, finance, and technology. The main disciplines on offer by the programme are therefore Human Resource Management, Financial Management and Digital (and) Organization. The panel discussed these pillars in relation to the demand of the professional field and the background and interests of potential students.

Students are taught how to analyse problems systematically, using theoretical knowledge and state-of-the-art research skills. The programme's intended learning outcomes are based on the university and faculty wide visions. The learning outcomes as such address attitudes, skills and knowledge. Three roles are distinguished: the academic role, the professional role and the citizen role. Regarding the academic role, the programme aims to teach students academic skills, theoretical knowledge and critical reasoning. Regarding the professional role, the programme aims to enhance students' career by working on students' skills, such as presentation skills and collaboration skills. Regarding the role of citizen, students are expected to reflect on ethical aspects. Graduates of the programme have developed an academic attitude.

The intended learning outcomes are related to the Dublin Descriptors. Students are expected to develop academic, research and communicative skills at an advanced level, and be able to apply these to the professional sphere.

The programme has renewed its relation to practice. Instead of discussing the programme with an advisory council with professional field representatives as members, the programme explores a more fluid structure for consulting the professional field about the learning outcomes and content of the programme. This structure involves bi-annual workshops with a thematic approach for which different sectors and types of representatives can be invited. The programme has ample connections to companies in different sectors and on different levels.

#### *Considerations*

The panel has established that the programme's intended learning outcomes reflect a master's level and an academic approach. In addition to this academic approach, the programme's learning outcomes address an attitude and skills that are relevant to the professional field. The programme is well aware of

its positioning in comparison to that of other programmes in terms of content and level. With regard to the content on offer in the programme, the programme did not articulate a clear and consistent rationale. This is visible in the specializations on offer which in the opinion of the panel could be based on a stronger rationale, and stronger related to the needs of the professional field. Improvement thereof might also help to increase student numbers in the programme. Also a stronger alumni policy could be helpful in this respect. The panel suggests the programme to consider offering a part-time programme in finance since there is a substantial interest in knowledge on finance by mid-careers. The new format of consultation of representatives from the professional field could offer a good platform to this end.

*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 programme resides in the School of Business and Economics which offers four bachelor programmes, eight master programme and seventeen post-graduate programmes. The part-time programme in Business Administration has a programme director, who is responsible for the (day-to-day) management of the programme. The Programme Committee, being composed of lecturers and students, monitors the quality of the programme and provides solicited and unsolicited advice to the programme director on the quality of the programme (course and examination design, content, schedules and changes in the programme). In addition, it advises on the Academic and Examination Regulations. The Examination Board is responsible for this programme and most other programmes of the School. It has the authority to ensure the quality of the examinations and assessments of this programme.

The programme admits students with relevant knowledge in the field of Business Administration and at least three years working experience who are highly motivated. Most applicants are between 26 and 35 years old. Applicants who, based on their application file, are likely to be admitted and applicants for which some doubt exists, are interviewed to discuss their application. The interview is focused at establishing whether the candidate's knowledge, experience, interest and motivation matches with the level and aims of the programme. Students with deficiencies have to take a bridging programme. The number of students enrolled in the programme is about 20 per year. The specialisation in Financial Management is elected by less students than the other two specialisations.

The curriculum consists of a 60 EC, two-year programme. Classes are taught once a week during evening hours and are spread over six periods per year. Students take one course per period. The programme starts in the first year with two content-courses which focus on Strategy and Organization and Financial Management. The programme continues with a research seminar. The second half of the first year is focused on digital business and innovation and is finalised by a course on ethics. During the second year of the programme, students take two courses in their area of specialisation. Students with an interest in Marketing have the option to take courses on offer in the part-time programme in Marketing offered by the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The programme's final stage consists of a second research seminar and the writing of the thesis.

Classes are small and students are challenged to bring in their own experiences. The first courses of the programme allow students to increase their knowledge and establish a level playing field for all students. In addition, students get acquainted with each other's background. Students have to work on group assignments and give presentations. The group assignments help students to exchange insights from various professional fields, which they experience as very rewarding. The two research seminars allow students to show their understanding and insights in the use of various research methodologies and is for some students quite difficult. The programme offers a preparation programme for the research seminar in the bridging programme, so that students with less knowledge of research methodologies can prepare themselves. In the research seminars, students can work with their own data, provided by their company.

The organisation of the programme is tailored to the needs of the students. Students are positive about the effective communication and scheduling of the courses. The group assignments require some coordination of agenda's which can sometimes be difficult. Students prefer not to use the digital learning

environment of the programme but prefer working with digital instruments to which they are more familiar. The programme monitors the use of the (new) digital learning environment by students and staff members closely, in order to be able to implement effective solutions.

Students prepare their thesis in the first half of the second year. They describe their topic of interest, and based on this description, the programme coordinator matches the student with a supervisor. The students meet with their supervisor before the start of the second research seminar; this seminar is also used to develop the research question. Students have five to six meetings with their supervisor, and in order to stimulate progress all students gather twice to exchange their research topics, ideas and progress, under supervision of one of the staff members.

Staff members of the programme are liaised to both the full-time and the part-time programme. All of the 27 staff members in the programme have obtained their PhD or are working towards their PhD. In addition, the vast majority of the staff members has obtained their University Teaching Qualification (UTQ). Most of the 27 staff members are related to the professional practice by having part-time appointments, being part of advisory councils or conduct research of the professional practice, sometimes in collaboration with the professional practice. Staff members also teach in the full-time programme of Business Administration.

#### *Considerations*

The panel appreciates the intake procedure organized by the programme. Students and alumni are positive about the information provided to students and the advice given to students. Students who start the programme have sufficient prerequisite knowledge. The programme is coherent, the content of the courses gradually build towards the full mastery of the programme's intended learning outcomes. The panel is especially positive about the research seminars in the programme and the extent to which these allow students from various backgrounds to become competent researchers with an academic approach. With regard to the courses on digital developments, the panel recommends to retain a cutting-edge character of the programme.

The organization of the programme is tailored to part-time students. The panel concludes that the balance between group assignments and individual studying is justified, taking into account the appreciation of students for the exchange of insights from different professional fields. Also the teaching and learning methods of the programme are tailored to part-time students, and allow students to be fully engaged in the programme. The panel thus is positive about the teaching and learning environment but recommends the programme to develop its didactical concept by further specifying academic adult learning in relation to students' daily practice. In addition, the panel has some concerns regarding the number of students in the financial management specialization in relation to the applied teaching methods. The effectiveness of some teaching and learning methods may diminish when the number of students decreases under a certain threshold.

The panel is very positive about the quality and the enthusiasm of the teaching staff. The panel concludes that the programme sufficiently ensures that all staff members involved in the programme provide the quality which can be expected of academic teachers.

#### *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 assessment policies are described in the University's manual on quality assurance. The examination policies are drafted on the basis of this manual. The programme provided an assessment plan which indicate the connection between the intended learning outcomes and the assessment thereof in the various courses, specified for the core elements of each course. The assessment plan further provides an overview of the assessment methods used in each course. The programme uses a variety of assessment methods, such as open exams, multiple-choice exams, group assignments, individual assignments and presentations. In almost all courses, more than one assessment method is used. For all courses a test blueprint is available, as well as a model answer or assessment criteria. Per course, an assessment file is assembled, containing all relevant documents regarding the assessment of the course. Assessment criteria are provided to students in course manuals and students have the right to be able to practise their skills and knowledge in at least one representative mock exam.

In order to structure their courses and the development of the assessment of the courses, staff members are provided a digital tool, the 'Academic Course Support'. The quality assurance process involves an evaluation by the course instructor and by the students. Furthermore, the construction of exams is guided by the four-eye principle. With regard to the assessment of group work, the programme ensures that the individual addition of a student is valued, students are positive about how the programme assesses group assignments.

The thesis is assessed by the supervisor and a second assessor. The thesis assessment form contains a specification of five levels of competence, for each criteria that is assessed. The staff members independently fill out this form, and decide afterwards together on the grade for the thesis. In the case of strong disagreement, the thesis coordinator of the department is informed about both assessments. Next, the thesis coordinator decides on the final grade. The grade distribution of all thesis grades awarded in 2016, 2017 and 2018 demonstrates that theses have been awarded with an average of a 7.3. The panel agrees with the grades given to the theses it reviewed.

The Examination Board is responsible for the process of assessment. It performs audits on the quality of the process and the outcomes thereof. These audits take a thematic approach and concern for example the validity and reliability of the multiple-choice exams. The Examination Board has so far not reviewed samples of theses, but has the intention to start calibration sessions among staff members to maintain a similar standard among staff members within and from different research units. The Board intends to start this procedure next academic year.

#### *Considerations*

The panel has established that the assessment methods comply with the teaching and learning methods, and are fit to assess the course objectives and as such, the learning outcomes. The panel is positive about the quality assurance management regarding the assessment. The programme's management as well as the Board of Examiners have measures in place to ensure a reliable and valid assessment practice. The panel recommends that a regular thesis assessment review process of a sample of theses is started in order to evaluate whether the process of assessing theses result in a reliable and valid assessment of students. The approach on group work fits the programme's target audience and is appreciated by the panel.

*Assessment of this standard*

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

#### **4.4 Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes**

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

The panel has reviewed eight theses. The theses reviewed by the panel discuss topics related to the profile of the programme and discuss issues such as cloud computing, responsible investment, knowledge sharing and increasing success of start-ups. Students use different methodological approaches such as case and literature studies and quantitative analysis.

The programme recently performed a survey. Results of this survey show that graduates are positive about the extent to which the learning outcomes are realised. Over 80 percent of the students feel that taking part in the programme has increased their chance for success on the labour market.

*Considerations*

The panel is positive about the quality of the theses it reviewed in terms of content and depth. The theses reflect the academic master level requirements. Students demonstrate the capacity to apply theoretical insights to their own professional practice. The choice of subjects for the thesis connects well to the programme's intended learning outcomes. The panel concludes that the theses show that students have obtained the programme's learning outcomes. The panel is impressed by the extent to which some of the students master statistical research capacities.

*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, the panel listed a number of recommendations. For clarity, these have been brought together below:

- to reconsider the rationale and content of the specializations on offer within the programme taking into account the number of potential students, and also in relation to other programmes on offer by the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, such as the part-time programme 'Marketing' The new format for the consultation of the representatives of the professional fields and a stronger alumni policy could be helpful in this process;
- to retain a cutting-edge character of the programme concerning the courses on digital developments;
- to start a regular thesis assessment review process with a sample of theses in order to evaluate if the process of assessing theses results in a reliable and valid assessment.