

MASTER'S PROGRAMME

MEDIA STUDIES

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY

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Project number: Q0717

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This report was finalised on 27 May 2019.



REPORT ON THE MASTER'S PROGRAMME MEDIA STUDIES OF MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY

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

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE PROGRAMME

Master's programme Media Studies

Name of the programme:	Media Studies
CROHO number:	60830
Level of the programme:	master's
Orientation of the programme:	academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Specializations or tracks:	Digital Cultures
Location(s):	Maastricht
Mode(s) of study:	full time
Language of instruction:	English
Expiration of accreditation:	29/06/2020

The visit of the assessment panel Communication and Information Sciences & Media Studies to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of Maastricht University took place on 24 and 25 January 2019.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE INSTITUTION

Name of the institution:	Maastricht University
Status of the institution:	publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	positive

COMPOSITION OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The NVAO has approved the composition of the panel on 5 November 2018. The panel that assessed the master's programme Media Studies consisted of:

- Prof. dr. D. (Daniël) Biltreyst, professor of Film and Media Studies at Ghent University and director of the Center for Cinema and Media Studies [chair];
- Em. Prof. dr. P.C. (Peter) Neijens, Honorary Fellow of the Amsterdam School of Communication Research and emeritus professor Media and Persuasion at the University of Amsterdam;
- Prof. dr. G. (Geert) Jacobs, professor of Language for Specific Purposes and head of the Linguistics Department of Ghent University;
- Drs. G. (Gaby) Wijers, founder and director at LIMA, an international platform for sustainable access to media art;
- Ms. A. (Aimée) Overhof, BA, recently graduated with a bachelor's degree in Online Culture at Tilburg University [student member].

The panel was supported by drs. R.L. (Renate) Prenen, who acted as secretary.

WORKING METHOD OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The site visit to the master's programme Media Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of Maastricht University was part of the cluster assessment Communication and Information Sciences & Media Studies. Between October 2018 and May 2019 the panel assessed 23 programmes at 9 universities. The following universities participated in this cluster assessment: Erasmus University Rotterdam, Maastricht University, Radboud University Nijmegen, University of Groningen, Tilburg University, University of Amsterdam, Leiden University, Utrecht University, and VU Amsterdam.

On behalf of the participating universities, quality assurance agency QANU was responsible for logistical support, panel guidance and the production of this report. Dr. Irene Conradie was project coordinator for QANU. She also acted as secretary in the cluster assessment at Leiden University and University of Amsterdam. The remaining assessments of the cluster were guided by independent NVAO-certified secretaries. Drs. Renate Prenen acted as secretary in the cluster assessment at Maastricht University, Radboud University Nijmegen, University of Groningen, and VU Amsterdam. Drs. Linda te Marvelde acted as secretary in the cluster assessment at Erasmus University Rotterdam, Tilburg University, and Utrecht University.

During the site visit at Maastricht University, the panel was supported by drs. Renate Prenen, a certified NVAO secretary.

Panel members

The members of the assessment panel were selected based on their expertise, availability and independence. The panel consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. D. (Daniël) Biltereyst, professor of Film and Media Studies at Ghent University and director of the Center for Cinema and Media Studies [chair];
- Em. Prof. dr. C.J.M. (Carel) Jansen, emeritus professor of Communication and Information Sciences at University of Groningen [chair];
- Em. Prof. dr. P.C. (Peter) Neijens, Honorary Fellow of the Amsterdam School of Communication Research and emeritus professor of Media and Persuasion at the University of Amsterdam;
- Em. Prof. dr. J.L.H. (Jo) Bardoel, emeritus professor of Communication Science at Radboud University Nijmegen;
- Prof. dr. W. (Wilco) Hazeleger, director/CEO of the Netherlands eScience Center (NLeSC);
- Prof. dr. O.M. (Odile) Heynders, professor of Comparative Literature at Tilburg University;
- Prof. dr. J.C. (Jaap) de Jong, professor of Journalism and New Media and chairman of the Media Studies programme at Leiden University;
- Prof. dr. G. (Geert) Jacobs, professor of Language for Specific Purposes and head of the Linguistics Department of Ghent University;
- Dr. J. (Joyce) Karreman, assistant professor at the Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social sciences (BMS) at University of Twente;
- Drs. J. (Judith) Mulder, co-founder and director of FirMM Information + Service Design;
- Drs. M. (Maike) Olij, freelance media consultant and concept developer;
- Prof. dr. S. (Steve) Paulussen, professor of Media and Journalism at University of Antwerp;
- Prof. dr. P.P.R.W. (Patricia) Pisters, professor of Film Studies and Media Studies at University of Amsterdam;
- Dr. B. (Bert) Pol, founder and managing partner at Tabula Rasa, an organization specialized in behaviour change and communication;
- Dr. E.M.C. (Els) van der Pool, assistant professor of Human Communication Development at the HAN University of Applied Sciences;
- Dr. M. (Mir) Wermuth, founder and owner of Blinkering, an organization for programme management in the creative industry;
- Drs. G. (Gaby) Wijers, founder and director at LIMA, an international platform for sustainable access to media art;
- Ms. M. (Monique) Kloosterman, BA, master's student Communication Science at University of Groningen [student member];

- Ms. A. (Aimée) Overhof, BA, recently graduated with a bachelor's degree in Online Culture at Tilburg University [student member];
- Ms. B.D.H. (Biba) Becker, bachelor's student Online Culture at Tilburg University [student member].

Preparation

On 20 August 2018, the panel chairs and vice chair (Prof. dr. Daniël Biltereyst, em. Prof. dr. Carel Jansen, Prof. dr. Peter Neijens) were briefed by QANU on their role, the assessment framework, the working method, and the planning of site visits and reports. A preparatory panel meeting was organised on the same day. During this meeting, the panel members were instructed in the use of the assessment framework. The panel also discussed their working method and the planning of the site visits and reports.

The project coordinator composed a schedule for the site visit to Maastricht University in consultation with the Faculty. Prior to the site visit, the Faculty selected representative partners for the various interviews. See Appendix 3 for the final schedule.

Before the site visit to Maastricht University, QANU received the self-evaluation report of the programme and sent it to the panel. A thesis selection was made by the panel's chair and the project coordinator. The selection consisted of fifteen theses - seven 12 EC internship theses and eight 24 EC master's theses - and their assessment forms for the programme, based on a provided list of graduates between 2016-2018. A variety of topics and a diversity of examiners were included in the selection. The project coordinator and panel chair ensured that the distribution of grades in the selection matched the distribution of grades of all available theses.

After studying the self-evaluation report, theses and assessment forms, the panel members formulated their preliminary findings. The secretary collected all of the initial questions and remarks and distributed them among the panel members.

At the start of the site visit, the panel discussed its initial findings on the self-evaluation report and the theses, as well as the division of tasks during the site visit.

Site visit

The site visit to Maastricht University took place on 24 and 25 January 2019. Before and during the site visit, the panel studied the additional documents provided by the programme. An overview of these materials can be found in Appendix 4. The panel conducted interviews with representatives of the programme: students and staff members, the programme's management, alumni, representatives of the Board of Examiners, and student advisor.

The panel used the final part of the site visit to discuss its findings in an internal meeting. Afterwards, the chair publicly presented the panel's preliminary findings and general observations.

Report

After the site visit, the secretary prepared a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to the project coordinator for peer assessment. Subsequently, she sent the report to the panel. After processing the panel members' feedback, the project coordinator forwarded the draft report(s) to the Faculty for checking for factual irregularities. The project coordinator discussed the ensuing comments with the panel's chair, and changes were implemented accordingly. The report was then finalised and sent to the Faculty and Executive Board.

Consistency and calibration

In order to assure the consistency of assessment within the cluster, various measures were taken:

1. The panel composition ensured regular attendance of key panel members, including the chair;
2. The coordinator was present at the panel discussion leading to the preliminary findings at all site visits;



3. Calibration meetings took place on 13 February 2019 and 28 May 2019. During these meetings, the panel chairs (with the exception of em. Prof. dr. Carel Jansen on 13 February 2019 due to unforeseen family circumstances), vice chair, and QANU coordinator discussed the working method and the assessments.

Definition of judgements standards

In accordance with the NVAO's Assessment framework for limited programme assessments 2016, 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

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

The panel is positive about the programme's profile. It approves of the focus on the socio-cultural implications of digitalisation from a user perspective and the embedding of digital humanities. This profiling is distinctive and in line with (inter)national developments in the field. The panel also appreciates the programme's strong academic orientation with its emphasis on research, academic and reflective skills. It noted the links with the professional field, but they could be strengthened. The programme faces major challenges, and a strong network will be indispensable. The intended learning outcomes are of a high academic master's level and in line with (inter)national requirements, but also quite generic and wide-ranging. The panel advises adjusting the learning outcomes to better align them with the programme's profiling, content and one-year duration.

Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment

The panel established that the master's programme Media Studies is adequately designed and enables the students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The content suits a master's level and is well aligned with the intended learning outcomes. However, according to the panel, the programme's coherence and connection to the learning outcomes could be emphasised further by explicating the various teaching-learning trajectories that are implicitly embedded in the programme.

The panel is positive about the academic as well as the professional orientation of the programme. It appreciates the strong emphasis on research and the attention paid to the development of academic and professional skills like research skills, academic writing skills and communication skills. It approves the attention paid to digital skills and agrees with the chosen academic approach. However, it advises making a greater effort to create a better and more intensified environment where students can become acquainted with recent developments in the field in terms of different types of skills. It also advises clear communication to current and prospective students about the balance between theory, methodology and skills.

The link to the professional field is established through the use of real-life contemporary issues in the field of digital technologies and the involvement of professionals and field experts as guest lecturers. It is also enhanced by the non-compulsory internship that students can do as part of their thesis trajectory. The panel noticed that few students choose an internship thesis. In its opinion, this is partly due to the non-committal nature of the internship and the fear of study delay. It advises working on an explicit vision, developing a better planned internship policy, as well as making fundamental choices and developing a clear communication towards students and field representatives. It also advises investigating how to guarantee that the internship can be completed on time.

The panel is enthusiastic about the problem-based learning approach. It identified some very positive elements of this approach, such as the close involvement of students and staff and the stimulation of active and collaborative learning and the development of soft skills. Students also benefit from the international classroom in which the students' and staff's varied cultural and educational backgrounds provide diverse, valuable input. Although the panel found the first semester to be demanding, it still considered the programme to be feasible within the nominal study time. Various factors contribute positively to the feasibility, like clear admission procedures and criteria, and an adequate student support system.

The panel values the professional, scientific and didactic qualities of the staff. The large variety of disciplinary backgrounds matches the programme's profiling and setup. The panel also concludes that the quantity of the staff is sufficient. It appreciates the expected expansion of the staff, including in the field of digital humanities.



Standard 3: Assessment

The panel concluded that the master's programme Media Studies has an adequate assessment system. The tests match the programme's level and content, and the forms of assessment suit the content and design of the programme. It appreciated the various measures taken by the staff to promote the reliability, validity and clarity of assessment, such as the education plan and the constructive alignment project. Moreover, it valued the clear assessment information and feedback towards students.

The assessment of the master's thesis takes place in an adequate manner. There are always two assessors involved, and completed assessment forms testify to a transparent and thorough evaluation procedure by these assessors. The panel also appreciated the staff's calibration sessions which contribute to the alignment of the process and criteria. A point of attention is the assessment of the internship thesis versus the regular thesis. The panel observed that the same criteria and procedure are used, while the two trajectories differ significantly in terms of size and shape. It advises elaborating more differentiation within the academic standards in order to do more justice to the specific characters of both thesis trajectories.

The quality control of the testing and examinations is adequate. The panel is positive about the functioning of the Board of Examiners: it clearly contributes to the quality assurance and control of the testing and evaluation within the programme.

Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

The panel studied a selection of theses and considered their overall quality as satisfactory. They sufficiently demonstrate academic attitude and understanding. They also testify to considerable skill in executing research and reporting on it. The interviewed alumni were positive about their programme, and the panel established that they are quite successful in their careers. Overall, it concluded that they achieved the programme's intended learning outcomes.

The panel assesses the standards from the *Assessment framework for limited programme assessments 2016* in the following way:

Master's programme Media Studies

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	satisfactory
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	satisfactory
Standard 3: Assessment	satisfactory
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	satisfactory
General conclusion	satisfactory

The chair, Prof. dr. Daniël Biltereyst, and the secretary, drs. Renate Prenen, of the panel hereby declare that all panel members have studied this report and that they agree with the judgements laid down in it. They confirm that the assessment has been conducted in accordance with the demands relating to independence.

Date: 27 May 2019

DESCRIPTION OF THE STANDARDS FROM THE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK FOR LIMITED PROGRAMME ASSESSMENTS

Introduction

The academic master's programme Media Studies of Maastricht University is a full-time, one-year programme (60 EC). It offers one specialisation: Digital Cultures (the programme's abbreviation is MSDC). The language of instruction is English. The programme is organised by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS) and uses the concept of Problem-Based Learning (PBL). The FASoS board consists of the dean and two associate deans (education and research). The managing director and a member of the FASoS student representative body are advisory members of the board. The two education management teams (bachelor and master) are chaired by the associate dean of education, and consist of the programme directors of the respective educational programmes, the head of the office of student affairs and a policy advisor.

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

As stated in the self-evaluation report, the programme focuses on the impact of digitalisation on cultural transformations and how they can be studied. During the programme, students gain advanced knowledge in the field of digital technology and related developments at an academic master's level through studying concrete examples of digital technologies and media, as well as focusing on user practices. They are trained to gain insight into a broad spectrum of issues concerning digitalisation, ranging from the use of digital media in creative production to the impact of digital media in political debates. The programme addresses digitalisation from an interdisciplinary perspective with a focus on research. The core disciplinary perspectives are media studies, philosophy, digital sociology, the history and sociology of technology, and arts and cultural studies. The emphasis on research means that students are systematically introduced to research methods, academic writing and research design. The methods are grounded in the humanities and qualitative social sciences; the phenomena focused on in the programme are strongly connected to the research of the MSDC staff. The programme has formulated a set of intended learning outcomes organised around the five Dublin Descriptors (cf. Appendix 1).

During the site visit, the panel considered the profile of the programme and discussed it with the programme management and teaching staff. It ascertained that the focus of the programme has shifted over the years from a broad spectrum of media devices and practices to digital media and digitalisation, particularly from a user perspective. Steps are being taken to give digital humanities a strong position within the programme; as of the academic year 2019/2020, it will be one of the core fields. The qualitative approach will remain dominant in the programme. Some quantitative methods might be included, but only to support qualitative research. The panel also learned from the interviews that the faculty will start a new bachelor's programme, Digital Society, in September 2019. This new bachelor's programme, as well as the incorporation of digital humanities within the programmes, will have an impact on the profiling, content and staffing of the programme Media Studies.

The panel is positive about the programme's profile. With the enhanced emphasis on the socio-cultural implications of digitalisation from a user perspective, the programme has become more specialised and distinctive in the context of Dutch academic higher education. The embedding of digital humanities is in line with (inter)national developments in the field. The panel appreciates the strong academic orientation of the programme, which is visible through an emphasis on scientific research, the development of academic skills, and the ability to critically reflect on and participate in debates on digitalisation. According to the panel, these academic competences are crucial in the fast



changing digital society. They also distinguish graduates from, for example, more practically oriented professionals in the field. The panel understands the programme's deliberate choice for qualitative methods, in which the expertise of the staff and the limited space in the programme have played a significant role, but also believes that more attention should be paid to quantitative approaches given the programme's focus on user perspectives and the intended emphasis on digital humanities as of the academic year 2019/2020.

The panel notes the links with the professional field. An External Advisory Board, in which alumni and experts from the field participate, is consulted once every two years about the development of the programme and its intended learning outcomes. There are also informal contacts through internships and professional guest lecturers. The panel realises that, as digitalisation has entered all professional fields and society at large, it is hard to capture 'the' professional field. However, it feels that the programme should do more to strengthen these links. It stresses the importance of a strong network around the programme, particularly considering the fast developments in the professional field and the many changes at the programme and faculty level. Such a strong network will be very useful in the process of reflecting on all these challenges and making informed choices with regard to the programme's goals.

The panel studied the intended learning outcomes listed in Appendix 1 and believes they are in accordance with national as well as international standards for an academic master's programme. It appreciates that they are formulated on a high academic level. Yet, it also finds the learning outcomes to be wide-ranging and quite generic. They do not clearly reflect the programme's distinctive profile and choices. Moreover, they not only contain substantive and scientific objectives at a high intellectual level but also objectives with respect to interdisciplinary and intercultural skills and practical tools and methods. In view of the one-year duration of the programme, the panel wonders whether the outcomes are not too ambitious. In its opinion, clear and realistic learning outcomes are crucial, for the further development of the programme as well as the communication with current and potential students. It recommends reformulating the learning outcomes in such a way that they clearly express the programme's profile and content and can be achieved within a year.

Considerations

The panel is positive about the programme's profile. It approves of the focus on the socio-cultural implications of digitalisation from a user perspective and the embedding of digital humanities. This profiling is distinctive and in line with (inter)national developments in the field. The panel also appreciates the programme's strong academic orientation with its emphasis on research, academic and reflective skills. It noted the links with the professional field, but they could be strengthened. The programme faces major challenges, and a strong network will be indispensable. The intended learning outcomes are of a high academic master's level and in line with (inter)national requirements. However, the panel established they are also quite generic and wide-ranging. It advises adjusting the learning outcomes to align them better with the programme's profiling, content and one-year duration.

Conclusion

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

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

Programme

The panel studied the curriculum described in the self-evaluation. It looked at the online study guide and course materials of several courses (cf. Appendix 4). It also discussed the programme with the



programme management, teaching staff, students and alumni. The one-year curriculum comprises two semesters. The first semester consists of five courses and offers topics and methods related to the reflection on digitalisation and user practices. Each course focuses on specific user practices and/or specific aspects of user practices, and presents a methodology most suited for this investigation. Students all follow the same courses. The second semester gives students the choice either to (1) write a full thesis or (2) do an internship and write an internship thesis. Appendix 2 shows an overview of the programme.

The panel is satisfied with the design of the programme. The fixed structure with obligatory courses helps place students on an equal footing and creates a shared knowledge base. Moreover, it enhances the coherence of the programme. According to the panel, the order of the courses is logical, and the courses are linked and build on each other. Despite the fact that the learning outcomes are formulated broadly (see Standard 1), the panel could establish that the programme is adequately aligned with the intended learning outcomes. An overview in the self-evaluation report adequately shows how the final objectives are linked to the different curriculum components. Yet, in order to create more insight into the programme's coherence, the panel advises making the teaching-learning trajectories more explicit, rather than their current implicit embedding in the programme. The relationship with the learning outcomes will become even clearer as a result.

The panel is positive about the programme's content. It observed that there is no systematic coverage of a fixed body of knowledge but rather the selection of topics occurs organically, based on the staff's expertise and developments in the field. Starting from a strong interdisciplinary focus and approach, which incorporates the integration of various disciplines and methods, students learn to critically investigate digital culture phenomena. They are not exposed to an exhaustive list of fixed subjects but are given a toolbox of relevant discussions, literature and methods. According to the panel, this setup is in line with the programme's interdisciplinary profile and suits the limited duration of one year. This approach also has the advantage of adapting to the rapid advances in the field. As highlighted by the interviews with students and alumni, the programme is very much up-to-date. However, this approach also comes at the risk of overlooking relevant topics. This risk must be mitigated by continually connecting to the overall learning outcomes.

The panel appreciates the strong scientific orientation of the programme. All staff members are active researchers and include the output of their current research in their teaching. In the various courses, students are informed of contemporary academic debates and are stimulated to reflect on them. They also become acquainted with qualitative research designs and are trained to evaluate the relevance of various methods. They learn to apply a limited number of qualitative methods in the assignments. During the thesis trajectory, they conduct independent academic research and get the opportunity to specialise in one or more qualitative methods. The panel is also positive about the professional orientation of the programme. Students are confronted with and work on real-life contemporary issues in the field of digital technologies. The academic staff is quite diverse and includes professionals such as journalists. In some courses, field experts are involved in lecturing and/or skills sessions.

Throughout the programme, particularly during the PBL tutor-sessions and assignments (see also *Teaching concept and methods*), students are given opportunities to develop their academic and professional skills further, including research skills, academic writing skills, communication skills, intercultural skills and collaboration skills. In various courses they have to write essays or papers and give presentations as part of the assessment.

Besides these academic and general professional skills, attention is also paid to digital skills in support of the academic content, predominantly as a means to get students to experience the user-practice perspective. These skills are for example blogging, audio editing and video editing. Based on the various interviews and the information in the self-evaluation, the panel observed a mismatch between the expectations of students and the actual offer. Some students expressed their disappointment; they expected the digital skills training to be at a rather advanced level and more extensive. The



panel highly values this skills development which contributes positively to the employability of graduates. Although it agrees with the management that the programme involves first and foremost academic training and that within the limited space it is a challenge to teach more practically oriented skills, it recommends that the programme increase its efforts to facilitate a better and more intensified environment for students to get acquainted with the most recent developments in the field in terms of different types of skills, including digital skills. At the same time, it encourages the management to provide clear information for current and prospective students about what to expect in relation to the balance between theory, methodology and skills.

Students finish their studies with a thesis or an internship and thesis. The regular thesis comprises 24 EC. Students opting for an internship and thesis have to write a thesis (12 EC), do an internship (10 EC) and write an internship report (2 EC). The panel appreciates the internship as it gives students the opportunity to come into contact with the professional field, build a network fitting their academic and professional interests, and practise their practical and so-called soft skills, like time management, teamwork and communication skills. Unfortunately, it also found that few students actually choose the combined internship and thesis option. As the interviewed students and staff explained, this is caused by their personal choices. Many students come from abroad and are eager to finish their studies within the nominal study duration. The one-year programme is quite intensive with little room for an internship. When choosing an internship, students fear that they will incur a study delay. Moreover, it is difficult for foreign students to find an internship in the Maastricht area because they do not speak Dutch. The panel also related the low popularity of the internship to its rather non-committal character and lack of an explicit and unambiguous vision on its merits and goals. In its opinion, this is a missed opportunity. It urges the programme management to develop a more efficient internship policy, with the creation of a strong network of institutions (in the wider region around Maastricht and elsewhere in the Netherlands) in which all students opting for an internship could find a suitable internship position. It also advises investigating how to ensure that the internship can be completed within the nominal study time.

Teaching concept and methods

As described in the self-evaluation report, the didactic approach at Maastricht University, and MSDC as well, is Problem-Based Learning (PBL), a teaching method in which active learning is promoted and stimulated through its student-centred teaching approach. In MSDC, students work in small tutor groups (around 15 students) in which students perform different roles, such as chairperson and secretary. The tutor (a member of the teaching staff) facilitates and monitors the group discussions and intervenes when the group runs the risk of straying from the topic/issues at hand, or misunderstanding a point. In two PBL sessions a week, students work on concrete topics and problems.

During the site visit, the panel studied course materials and discussed the use of PBL with the management, staff, students and alumni. It identified some very positive elements of the problem-based approach, such as the close involvement of students and staff; the stimulation of constructive, collaborative, contextual and self-directed, active learning; and the development of soft skills like communication and cooperation skills. The interviewed students and alumni expressed their enthusiasm for PBL. Students feel very much involved and highly appreciate the group discussions and other collaborative learning activities. The staff is also positive about PBL. They emphasised that close monitoring of the students' learning processes is a major advantage of this system. PBL enhances the students' academic and personal development as well as the development of their general and professional skills. According to the panel, the problem-based approach fits very well with the content and design of the programme and is applied adequately. At this point, it would also like to compliment the programme on the quality of its course materials (printed and online). Overall they encompass clear student instructions, relevant literature and well-formulated assignments.

The panel also observed a positive effect of the programme's international environment, with many nationalities represented among both students and staff. This confronts students with a truly international classroom. The learning process clearly benefits from students working in small tutorial

groups with people from different cultural backgrounds: by approaching problems from a variety of perspectives, students are acquainted with different ways of seeing things that enhance the quality of the discussion. Students can also strengthen their English language skills as all teaching and learning activities are in English.

Feasibility

Based on the information in the self-evaluation and the interviews with students, alumni, teaching staff and students, the panel established that the programme is feasible within the nominal study duration. One point of concern is the above-mentioned risk that the internship cannot be completed within the nominal study time. The students and alumni considered the programme to be challenging but doable. They did not detect any stumbling blocks. The panel noticed that the programme has implemented parallel courses in the first semester, as advised by the previous re-accreditation panel (2 x 8 weeks in parallel instead of 4 x 4 weeks in sequence). The panel supports this measure because the parallel programming provides students with more time to 'digest' and reflect on the theory and methods taught. Although some students and alumni mentioned that this has led to an increase in study load, the overall impression is that the first semester is demanding but feasible. The panel appreciates that the programme management closely monitors the workload in the parallel courses, based on course evaluations, oral student evaluations and mentor meetings.

The panel saw various measures that contribute positively to the programme's feasibility. First of all, there are clear admission procedures and criteria. Besides a relevant bachelor's degree, students must demonstrate prior knowledge in the field of digitalisation as well as qualitative research methods, as attested through prior coursework or work experience. Fluency in English is also required. The panel appreciates that applicants are asked to submit a motivation letter, enabling specific attention to be paid to the expectations of incoming students in the admission procedure. As mentioned before, it is important that students are fully aware of the academic character of the programme. The influx of students is very heterogeneous, but as emphasized by the teaching staff, this has no negative consequences for the students' learning process. On the contrary, the staff believes that the different educational backgrounds and expertise of the students enrich the learning environment.

The panel also noted that the small-scale set-up of the programme and the good study guidance facilities have positive effects on the feasibility. With PBL group sessions twice a week, students have easy access to course coordinators and tutors, giving them the opportunity to ask questions or seek advice. This close collaboration between students and staff also strengthens the group cohesion and is very motivating. In the second semester, students are assigned an individual supervisor to guide them through their thesis process. Support in academic writing is offered by the faculty's academic writing advisor. Students can also turn to the study advisor for study-related and other concerns.

Teaching staff

The panel studied the composition of the staff based on the information in the self-evaluation. It also discussed the quality and quantity of the staff during the visit with the management, staff, students and alumni. It concluded that the quality of the staff is good. All staff members coordinating and teaching the substantive courses and supervising the theses are tenured senior staff with a PhD and University Teaching Qualification (UTQ), and are active researchers. They come from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, including media studies, sociology, philosophy and aesthetics, science and technology studies, digital humanities and semiotics, as well as diverse national and cultural backgrounds. This well-trained and heterogeneous staff matches the interdisciplinary, research-based and practice-oriented teaching environment in an international setting. Course evaluations confirmed the panel's impression that the teaching staff is considered good by the students. The interviewed students and alumni also expressed their enthusiasm. They appreciate the staff's expertise as well as their accessibility and engagement.

The quantity of the staff is sufficient. The panel noted that the staff members are involved in the programme, although they come from different departments. It appreciates that the staff regularly



consults the programme management on the structure and quality of the programme. There are a few meetings a year, but much is discussed informally. There is a sense of quality, as evidenced by the critical self-evaluation report and the open conversations during the site visit. With the introduction of digital humanities and the new bachelor's programme Digital Society, new staff members will be recruited, including a professor in the field of digital humanities. This offers many opportunities for the programme.

Considerations

The panel established that the master's programme Media Studies is adequately designed and enables the students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The content suits a master's level and is well aligned with the intended learning outcomes. However, according to the panel, the programme's coherence and the connection to the learning outcomes could be further emphasised by explicating the various teaching-learning trajectories that are implicitly embedded in the programme.

The panel is positive about the academic as well as the professional orientation of the programme. It appreciates the strong emphasis on research and the attention paid to the development of academic and professional skills like research skills, academic writing skills and communication skills. It also supports the attention paid to digital skills and agrees with the chosen academic approach. However, it advises making a greater effort to create a better and more intensified environment where students can become acquainted with recent developments in the field in terms of different types of skills. It also advises clear communication to current and prospective students about the balance between theory, methodology and skills.

The link to the professional field is established through the use of real-life contemporary issues in the field of digital technologies and the involvement of professionals and field experts as guest lecturers. It is also enhanced by the non-compulsory internship that students can do as part of their thesis trajectory. The panel noticed that few students choose an internship thesis. In its opinion, this is partly due to the non-committal nature of the internship and the fear of study delay. It advises working on an explicit vision, developing a better planned internship policy, as well as on making fundamental choices and presenting a clear communication towards students and field representatives. It also advises investigating how to guarantee that the internship can be completed on time.

The panel is enthusiastic about the problem-based learning approach. It identified some very positive elements of this approach, such as the close involvement of students and staff and the stimulation of active and collaborative learning and the development of soft skills. Students also benefit from the international classroom in which the students' and staff's varied cultural and educational backgrounds provide diverse, valuable input. Although the panel found the first semester to be demanding, it still considered the programme to be feasible within the nominal study time. Various factors contribute positively to the feasibility, like clear admission procedures and criteria and an adequate student support system.

The panel values the professional, scientific and didactic qualities of the staff. The large variety of disciplinary backgrounds matches the programme's profiling and setup. The panel also concludes that the quantity of the staff is sufficient. It appreciates the expected expansion of the staff, including in the field of digital humanities.

Conclusion

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

Standard 3: Student assessment

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

Findings

Assessment system

The panel studied the information in the self-evaluation concerning the programme's assessment system. It also examined assessment documents of different courses and spoke with students, teachers and representatives of the Board of Examiners about the assessment system. Based on these interviews and the materials studied, it ascertained that the assessment methods used within the master's programme are in line with the learning outcomes, content and didactical design of the courses. It also established that the assessments match the programme's master's level and content. It appreciates that a variety of assessment methods are used throughout the programme. As it learned from the self-evaluation, most courses assess students' knowledge through individual written academic papers in combination with another type of assessment, such as producing a podcast, presentation, or video essay. Some practical assignments are undertaken in teams (e.g. video essay) to ensure students get acquainted with the opportunities and challenges of working in groups. Practical digital skills are assessed as well. Here, the emphasis is not on the technical quality of the end product, but more on the understanding of the academic theory and the capability of communicating this knowledge in different ways using different media. According to the panel, this focus on the academic is well-chosen and in line with the overall approach of the programme.

The panel appreciates the considerable amount of attention paid to the quality of assessment by the staff. A detailed educational plan is available which specifies the relationship between the learning outcomes, course objectives, the teaching and learning activities, and the chosen assessment method. In an annual cycle, the programme management reflects on the programme design, including assessment. In 2017, the programme organised a constructive alignment project in which the learning outcomes were updated, but also the different types of assessment were made explicit. The panel is pleased to observe that students are well informed about the grading criteria and the assessment forms used. Furthermore, it is positive about the amount and quality of the feedback students receive on their assessment. Depending on the character of the course, this may take different forms, including written or oral feedback. In most courses students also receive feedback from their fellow students.

During the site visit, the panel spoke with staff and the Board of Examiners about the assessment of the thesis. As described in Standard 2, the final work always entails a thesis, though students have the choice to combine this with an internship. The panel is satisfied with the thorough manner in which the thesis assessment takes place. There are always two assessors involved, and a designated thesis assessment form specifying the grading criteria is used in the grading process. The panel studied several completed assessment forms and was satisfied with the transparency of the assessments and the extensive feedback. Moreover, it appreciated that the programme annually organises calibration sessions which particularly focus on grading final work for all assessors. Yet, it also observed that the same format, grading process and criteria are being applied for both the regular and the internship thesis. It found this remarkable because students who write an internship thesis do this in a shorter period and receive fewer credit points. It agreed with the explanation of the staff and the Board of Examiners that, in view of the learning outcomes to be achieved, it is necessary to use the same academic standards. Nevertheless, it recommends making a clear distinction, without compromising these academic requirements, to do more justice to the differing character of the two thesis trajectories. It advises reconsidering the current assessment procedure, from a clear vision on the internship thesis versus the regular thesis, and investigating further differentiation options.

Board of Examiners

There is one Board of Examiners for all bachelor's and master's programmes of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. It has five members, including an assessment expert as an external member. It



is responsible for the quality control of testing and examinations. It also appoints examiners, handles individual cases of fraud and individual requests from students, issues certificates, grants exemptions, and takes care of the handling of appeals and/or complaints about exams.

During the site visit, the panel talked to members of the Board of Examiners. It ascertained from this interview that the formal tasks and responsibilities of the Board are carried out adequately and that there are clear agreements and procedures. It also confirmed that the Board has undertaken various initiatives to ensure the quality of tests and final projects. The Board screens the abovementioned educational plan every year as a quality assurance measure for the assessment of the programme as a whole. It also looks at the distribution of grades of all courses. If there are any deviations in the outcomes, a meeting is arranged with the responsible programme management. In the short term, the Board will start with the evaluation of the testing of individual courses.

Regarding the quality control of the final work, the Board has organised audit checks on the assessment of theses since 2014, including those of the master's programme MSDC. It appoints a number of audit-examiners from a pool of examiners. These audit-examiners are asked to accomplish a meta-assessment on a random selection of already graded theses. Each year a special focus is chosen, such as the Cum Laude theses, the verification of the achieved final qualifications, the spread of grades, or the quality of internship reports. In the case of divergence between the grade suggested by an examiner of the MSDC programme and the audit-examiner, the thesis or report is discussed in the next calibration session with the staff. The panel expressed its appreciation for all the initiatives and considers the Board of Examiners a hard-working and proactive board.

Considerations

The panel concluded that the master's programme Media Studies has an adequate assessment system. The tests match the programme's level and content, and the forms of assessment suit the content and design of the programme. It appreciated the various measures taken by the staff to promote the reliability, validity and clarity of assessment, such as the education plan and the constructive alignment project. Moreover, it valued the clear assessment information and feedback towards students.

The assessment of the master's thesis takes place in an adequate manner. There are always two assessors involved, and completed assessment forms testify to a transparent and thorough evaluation procedure by these assessors. The panel also appreciated the staff's calibration sessions which contribute to the alignment of the process and criteria. One point of attention is the assessment of the internship thesis versus the regular thesis. The panel observed that the same criteria and procedure are used, although the two trajectories differ significantly in terms of size and shape. It advises differentiating them more, within the academic standards, in order to do more justice to the specific characters of both thesis trajectories.

The quality control of the testing and examinations is adequate. The panel is positive about the functioning of the Board of Examiners: it clearly contributes to the quality assurance and control of the testing and evaluation within the programme.

Conclusion

Master's programme Media Studies: the panel assesses Standard 3 as 'satisfactory'.

Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

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

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied a selection of fifteen master's theses (both regular theses and internship theses) and the accompanying assessment forms completed by the examiners. This selection included a wide spread of the marks. The panel was generally satisfied with the quality of

the theses and ascertained that the students achieved the intended learning outcomes covered by the master's theses. It observed that most theses reflect the central focus of the programme, i.e. research on digital media from a critical and cultural studies perspective and with an emphasis on qualitative methods like participating observation and interviews. Overall, the theses were adequately executed and properly written. In general, they encompass sufficient attention for discussions and claims in the literature on the subject. The chosen qualitative research methods are usually substantiated and effectively applied. Furthermore, in most theses the research results are adequately reflected upon and linked to the literature.

During the site visit, the panel received additional information on the first and current positions of alumni and spoke with a few alumni. It ascertained that most graduates have relevant jobs on an academic level in the field of communication and media. The panel was enthusiastic about the interviewed alumni: they appeared to be doing well in the job market. These alumni were very satisfied with the education offered in their programme and felt it provided them with a solid basis. They explicitly mentioned that the debating and cooperation skills acquired through problem-based learning proved particularly useful in their current positions.

Considerations

The panel studied a selection of theses and found that their overall quality could be considered satisfactory. They sufficiently demonstrate an academic attitude and understanding. They also testify to considerable skill in executing research and reporting on it. The interviewed alumni were positive about their programme, and the panel established that alumni are quite successful in their careers. Overall, it concluded that they achieved the programme's intended learning outcomes.

Conclusion

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

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The panel assesses Standard 1, 2, 3 and 4 as 'satisfactory'.

According to the decision rules of NVAO's Framework for limited programme assessments 2016, the panel assesses the master's programme Media Studies as 'satisfactory'.

Conclusion

The panel assesses the *master's programme Media Studies* as 'satisfactory'.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of the Master Media Studies graduates are able to:

Knowledge and understanding

1. demonstrate advanced knowledge (theories, concepts and methods) and understanding of user practices and trends in digital cultures and their social, cultural and political implications (as deriving from e.g. media studies, media philosophy and critical theory, history of media, and science and technology studies).
2. demonstrate advanced knowledge and understanding of the interrelations between user practices, technologies, and social dynamics in digital cultures.
3. demonstrate knowledge of contemporary events in digital cultures (e.g. protest movements, whistle blowing), developments (e.g. retro movements, digital public spheres) and debates (e.g. virtualisation, privacy/surveillance, ownership) and are able to put them into historical context.
4. analyse processes of (digital) media transformations with a focus on user practices both on an
 - 4.1.1 individual and
 - 4.1.2 societal level.
5. demonstrate knowledge of different qualitative research methods, and reflect on their (interdisciplinary) relevance for a research problem and their limitations.

Applying knowledge and understanding

1. analyse and discuss the debates around the introduction of new digital technologies and how users engage with them from an interdisciplinary perspective.
2. demonstrate the skills to cooperate constructively in international multidisciplinary and intercultural teams by applying relevant academic theories and research methods in:
 - 2.1.1 informed debates about new issues of digital cultures in academic interdisciplinary contexts;
 - 2.1.2 the field of digital media production and distribution.
3. identify and analyse the complex interplay of individual experiences, social, scientific and technological developments in the context of digital cultures.
4. select an appropriate research design and method(s) to address a specific research question; collect and analyse qualitative data relevant to answering the research question.

Making judgements

1. identify and analyse ethical and social consequences of developments in (digital) media cultures (e.g. privacy, copyright, surveillance).
2. evaluate the impact of digital media developments and related user practices.
3. evaluate the relevance of a chosen research method in relation to the problem to be investigated.

Communication

1. build a coherent argumentation and engage critically in debates.
2. attune their written and oral debates/presentations to diverse audiences.
3. use various formats for describing and presenting their (research) findings (e.g. academic papers, reports, weblogs, short audio documentaries and video essays).
4. communicate, learn and collaborate in intercultural teams.

Learning skills

1. transfer and apply their knowledge and understanding to address emerging issues, media practices and technologies.
2. act and engage in life-long learning independently by applying the acquired generic skills such as information retrieval, and critical, comparative analysis and reflection on academic literature.
3. reflect upon their own learning process and can utilize these reflections to further develop their (a) academic and (b) professional skills.
4. learn how to update their media skills (e.g. audio and video editing, podcasting) and to use new software products.



APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

Master's programme Media Studies

1 st semester			
Study period	Course	Course	Digital skills
Period 1 September-October 8 weeks	Transformations in Digital Cultures	Real Virtualities	Blogging Introduction to NodeXL
Period 2 November-December 8 weeks	Sound Technologies and Cultural Practices	New Public Spheres: Digital Platforms and Public Debate	Audio editing (making an audio documentary) Introduction to Voyant
Period 3 January 4 weeks	Sharing Practices and Online Communities		Video editing (focus on the use of scripts)

2 nd semester		
Study period	Course	Supervision
Period 4 (part 1) February 4 weeks	Research Design	Individual supervision throughout period 4-6
Period 4 (part 2) and Period 6 March and June 8 weeks ⁵	Workshops preparing for thesis writing	
Period 6	Presentation day (peer feedback and feedback by supervisors)	

4 The internship contract is available in the digital base room.

5 In period 5 (April and May) we do not offer any workshops as this is the time when students can do their internships. Individual supervision continues.

APPENDIX 3: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

Thursday – 24 January 2019

17:00	19:00	Arrival of panel, preparation, internal meeting and documentation review
19:30	21:30	Dinner (panel meeting)

Friday - 25 January 2019

08:30	09:00	Arrival of panel / Welcome with a short presentation
09:00	09:45	Meeting with management
09:45	10:30	Meeting with students and alumni (including PC student)
10:30	10:45	Break / internal meeting
10:45	11:30	Meeting with teaching staff (including PC staff member)
11:30	12:15	Meeting with Board of Examiners and student advisor
12:15	13:30	Internal meeting with lunch break
13:30	14:15	Final interview with management
14:15	15:30	Deliberations panel, formulating preliminary findings and conclusions
15:30	15:45	Feedback of preliminary findings and conclusions
15:45	16:00	Break
16:00	16:45	Development dialogue
16:45	17:00	Departure



APPENDIX 4: THESES AND DOCUMENTS STUDIED BY THE PANEL

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied fifteen theses of the master's programme Media Studies. Information on the selected 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):

General information:

- Master Education & Exam Regulations
- Rules & Regulations
- MA MSDC SER
- MA MSDC SER annexes
- PC annual reports
- Course evaluations

Course selection:

- Transformations in Digital Cultures (study period 1)
- Real Virtualities (study period 1)
- Sharing Practices and Online Communities (study period 3)

Assessment:

- Assessment Policy
- Thesis score form
- Internship thesis score form
- Assessment form internship report
- Assessment form internship work
- Annual Report Board of Examiners 2016-2017

Other documentation:

- Information about Pre-master
- Internship contract
- Overview first and later job positions of alumni