

MASTER'S PROGRAMME
MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES
FACULTY OF ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN

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This report was finalised on 8 July 2020



REPORT ON THE MASTER'S PROGRAMME MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN

This report takes the NVAO's Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands for limited programme assessments as a starting point (September 2018).

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE PROGRAMME

Master's programme Middle Eastern Studies

Name of the programme:	Midden-Oosten Studies
International name:	Middle Eastern Studies
CROHO number:	60842
Level of the programme:	master's
Orientation of the programme:	academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Specialisations or tracks:	-
Location:	Groningen
Mode of study:	full time
Language of instruction:	English
Submission deadline NVAO:	01/05/2020

The visit of the assessment panel Region Studies to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen took place on 30 and 31 October and 1 November 2019.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA REGARDING THE INSTITUTION

Name of the institution:	University of Groningen
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 4 March 2019. The panel that assessed the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies consisted of:

- Prof. dr. P. (Peter) Van Nuffelen, research professor in Cultural History of the Ancient World at Ghent University (Belgium) [chair];
- Prof. dr. D.M. (Diederik) Oostdijk, professor in English Literature at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam;
- Prof. dr. E.J.C. (Eibert) Tigchelaar, research professor in Biblical Studies at KU Leuven (Belgium);
- Dr. N.A. (Nicolet) Boekhoff-van der Voort, lecturer Islam and Arabic at the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies of the Radboud University;
- Prof. dr. G. (Gert) Buelens, professor in English and American Literature at Ghent University (Belgium);
- E.L. (Emma) Mendez Correa, bachelor's student in Greek and Latin Language and Culture at Leiden University [student member].

The panel was supported by E.G.M. (Mariette) Huisjes MA, who acted as secretary.



WORKING METHOD OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The master's programme Middle Eastern Studies at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen was part of the cluster assessment Region Studies. Between March 2019 and November 2019 the panel assessed 38 programmes at 5 universities: Radboud University, Leiden University, University of Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the University of Groningen.

Panel members

The panel consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. P. (Peter) Van Nuffelen, research professor Cultural History of the Ancient World at Ghent University (Belgium) [chair];
- Prof. dr. D.M. (Diederik) Oostdijk, professor in English Literature at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam;
- Prof. dr. A. (Umar) Ryad, professor in Arabic and Islamic Studies at KU Leuven (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. E.J.C. (Eibert) Tigchelaar, research professor of the research unit Biblical Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at KU Leuven (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. G. (Gunnar) De Boel, professor in (Greek) Linguistics and Modern Greek and Byzantine Literature (Department of Literary Studies) at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. I. (Inge) Brinkman, professor in African Studies at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. G. (Gert) Buelens, professor in English and American Literature at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Dr. D. (Diana Bullen) Presciutti, senior lecturer in Art History, director of Global Studies and director of the Interdisciplinary Studies Centre at the University of Essex (United Kingdom);
- R.A. (Rianne) Clerc-de Groot MA, teacher in Classics at the Cygnus Gymnasium in Amsterdam;
- Dr. D. (Dario) Fazzi, lecturer in North American Studies and International Studies at Leiden University;
- Prof. dr. A.F.R. (Ann) Heirman, professor in Chinese Language and Culture at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. A. (Axel) Holvoet, professor at the Institute of the Languages and Cultures of the Baltic of Vilnius University (Lithuania);
- Prof. dr. V. (Vincent) Houben, professor Geschichte und Gesellschaft Südostasiens at Humboldt Universität Berlin (Germany);
- Prof. dr. E.M.H. (Helena) Houvenaghel, professor in Spanish Language and Culture at Utrecht University;
- Prof. dr. D. (Daeyeol) Kim, professor at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INaLCO) of the Université Sorbonne Paris Cité (France);
- L. (Lotte) Metz MA, teacher in Greek and Latin at the Stedelijk Gymnasium Nijmegen;
- Prof. dr. J. (John) Nawas, professor in Arabic and Islamic Studies at KU Leuven (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. A. (Andreas) Niehaus, professor in Japanese Language and Culture at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. J.L.M. (Jan) Papy, professor in Latin Literature at KU Leuven (Belgium);
- Dr. N.A. (Nicolet) Boekhoff-van der Voort, teacher Islam studies and coordinator Graduate School for Humanities at Radboud University;
- C. (Charlotte) van der Voort, bachelor's student in Greek and Latin Language and Culture, and pre-master's student Dutch Language and Culture at Leiden University [student member];
- L. (Lara) van Lookeren Campagne, bachelor's student in Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Amsterdam [student member];
- G.M. (Gerieke) Prins, bachelor's student in Social and Migration History with a minor in Latin American Studies at Leiden University [student member];
- E.L. (Emma) Mendez Correa, bachelor's student in Greek and Latin Language and Culture at Leiden University [student member];
- Prof. dr. L.P. (Lars) Rensmann, professor in European Politics and Society at University of Groningen [referee International Studies at Leiden University];
- Em. prof. dr. C.H.M. (Kees) Versteegh, emeritus professor in Arabic and Islam at Radboud University [referee Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies at University of Amsterdam];

- Prof. dr. H. (Harco) Willems, professor in Egyptology at KU Leuven (Belgium) and director of the excavation in Dayr al-Barshā (Egypt) [referee Ancient Near East Studies at Leiden University];
- Prof. dr. J. (Jaap) Wisse, professor in Latin Language & Literature at Newcastle University (United Kingdom) [referee Greek, Latin and Classics at the University of Amsterdam and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam].

For each site visit, assessment panel members were selected based on their expertise, availability and independence.

The QANU project manager for the cluster assessment was dr. Els Schröder. She acted as secretary in the site visit to Radboud University and in the first site visit to Leiden University. In order to assure the consistency of assessment within the cluster, the project manager was present at the start of the site visits as well as the panel discussion leading to the preliminary findings at the other site visits and reviewed the draft reports. During her leave of absence, she was replaced by her colleagues at QANU. Dr. Irene Conradie acted as project manager in the combined site visit to the University of Amsterdam and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and in the second site visit to Leiden University. Dr. Anna Sparreboom acted as project manager in the site visit to the University of Groningen.

Several secretaries assisted in this cluster assessment: drs. Trees Graas, employee of QANU, also acted as secretary in the site visit to Radboud University; drs. Mariette Huisjes, freelance secretary for QANU, also acted as secretary in the first site visit to Leiden University and in the site visit to the University of Groningen; drs. Erik van der Spek, freelance secretary for QANU, acted as secretary in the second site visit to Leiden University; drs. Marielle Klerks, freelance secretary for QANU, acted as secretary in the combined site visit to the University of Amsterdam and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The QANU project managers and the secretaries regularly discussed the assessment process and outcomes.

Preparation

On 22 November 2018, the panel chair was briefed by the project manager on the tasks and working method of the assessment panel and more specifically his role, as well as use of the assessment framework. Prior to the site visit, the panel members received instruction by telephone and e-mail on the tasks and working method and the use of the assessment framework. A schedule for the site visit was composed. Prior to the site visit, representative partners for the various interviews were selected. See Appendix 3 for the final schedule.

Before the site visit, the programmes wrote self-evaluation reports of the programmes and sent these to the project manager. She checked these on quality and completeness, and sent them to the panel members. The panel members studied the self-evaluation reports and formulated initial questions and remarks, as well as positive aspects of the programmes.

The panel also studied a selection of 15 theses and their assessment forms, based on a provided list of graduates between 2016 and mid-2019. A variety of topics and a diversity of examiners were included in the selection (see Appendix 4).

Site visit

The site visit to the University of Groningen took place on 30 and 31 October and 1 November 2019. At the start of each site visit, the panel discussed its initial findings on the self-evaluation reports and the theses, as well as the division of tasks during the site visit. During the site visit, the panel studied additional materials about the programmes and exams, as well as minutes of the Programme Committee and the Board of Examiners. An overview of these materials can be found in Appendix 4. The panel conducted interviews with representatives of the programmes: students and staff members, the programme's management, alumni and representatives of the Board of Examiners. Members of the Programme Committee were included as part of the interviews with staff and students. It also offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour. No requests for private consultation were received.



The panel used the final part of the site visit to discuss its findings in an internal meeting. Afterwards, the panel chair publicly presented the panel's preliminary findings and general observations. The visit concluded with a development dialogue, held in parallel sessions, in which the panel members and the representatives of the programme discussed various development routes for the programmes. The results of this conversation are summarised in a separate report, which will be published through the programmes' communication channels.

Report

After the site visit, the secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to the project manager for peer assessment. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel. After processing the panel members' feedback, the project manager sent the draft reports to the faculty in order to have it/these checked for factual irregularities. The project manager discussed the ensuing comments with the panel's chair and changes were implemented accordingly. The report was then finalised and sent to the Faculty of Arts and University Board.

Definition of judgements standards

In accordance with the NVAO's Assessment framework for limited programme assessments, the panel used the following definitions for the assessment of the standards:

Generic quality

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

Meets the standard

The programme meets the generic quality standard.

Partially meets the standard

The programme meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard.

Does not meet the standard

The programme does not meet the generic quality standard.

The panel used the following definitions for the assessment of the programme as a whole:

Positive

The programme meets all the standards.

Conditionally positive

The programme meets Standard 1 and partially meets a maximum of two standards, with the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel.

Negative

In the following situations:

- The programme fails to meet one or more standards;
- The programme partially meets Standard 1;
- The programme partially meets one or two standards, without the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel;
- The programme partially meets three or more standards.

SUMMARY JUDGEMENT

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

The master's programme Middle Eastern Studies offers a multidisciplinary, research-driven approach to understanding contemporary developments in the Middle East, from both regional and international perspectives, with a focus on conflicts. It aims to train specialised experts in this clear and very relevant niche, bringing together conflict studies and Middle Eastern Studies. The panel considers this profile well-chosen since it is specific, distinguished and societally relevant. It finds the intended learning outcomes complete and clearly formulated. They are of the appropriate level and orientation, in its view, and in accordance with international requirements for master graduates. The panel recommends including the focus on conflicts explicitly in the intended learning outcomes. It encourages the programme in its plans to install an advisory board.

Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment

The panel found that the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies offers students a well-organised, stimulating learning environment, with captivating courses and excellent lecturers who are really involved in their students' work and career perspectives. It is happy to see that the suggestion of the previous accreditation panel was followed up, so that now the programme has its quality procedures in place, and the students' voice is properly listened to. It compliments the programme on its labour market orientation, which is a prominent feature of the programme. In this respect, the internships are culmination points; they could be a great asset to the programme. However, the internships pose a problem at this moment. Firstly, many students do not succeed in finding a placement. Secondly, if they do find an internship, it often takes up much more time than is officially allotted to it in the curriculum. They are forced to exceed their nominal study time, which could undermine the feasibility of the programme. The panel recommends fixing this situation.

The programme's staff is excellent, while student guidance and programme-specific services meet the standard.

Standard 3: Student assessment

The panel noted that the assessment system of the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies functions well, with a clear assessment plan and varied forms of assessment that emphasise critical thinking and communication skills. The quality of assessment is sufficiently monitored both before and after, and the students are happy with the extensive feedback they receive. The panel recommends that the programme continue on this path and possibly eliminate written exams as an assessment mode altogether in the future.

The assessment procedure for the master's theses is well organised, and the panel broadly agreed with the final marks given for the theses. However, it did not always find it possible to derive or reconstruct these final marks from the assessments on sub-categories. This can be remedied by designing the evaluation forms for the theses differently. The forms should also encourage the examiners to substantiate their assessments in writing. This often happens now, but not always.

The panel was informed during the site visit that the new central Board of Examiners for Arts was positively received. It endorses the benefits of harmonised procedures and efficiency gains. It congratulates the members of the new Board of Examiners on the energetic way in which they have shaped its duties and the associated procedures in a short period of time. It encourages the Board of Examiners to continue along the path it has chosen and is fully confident that the quality assurance of the assessment at the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies is in good hands.

Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

The panel is generally satisfied with the level of the master's theses written for the Middle Eastern Studies programme. The bar is clearly set high, and the theses effectively demonstrate that the graduates have achieved the appropriate level. Although there are no systematic data on the alumni's success on the job market, anecdotal evidence suggests that they do well. On the basis of the sample



of theses studied, information provided and conversations with alumni, the panel concludes that the graduates have realised the intended learning outcomes.

The panel recommends applying the programme's laudable focus on conflicts to the master's theses as well. This will give it more unity and strength. Since conflict is a very broad concept, it will not inflict too many limitations on students if they are asked to make conflict a theme in their theses.

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

Master's programme Middle Eastern Studies

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard
General conclusion	positive

The chair, prof. dr. Peter Van Nuffelen, and the secretary, Mariette Huisjes MA, of the panel hereby declare that all panel members have studied this report and that they agree with the judgements laid down in the report. They confirm that the assessment has been conducted in accordance with the demands relating to independence.

Date: 8 July 2020

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

Context

The master's programme Middle Eastern Studies is one of over 40 master's degree programmes offered by the Faculty of Arts at the University of Groningen. Since 2018, the faculty's programmes have been managed by 5 management clusters. The master's programme Middle Eastern Studies is part of the Classics, History, Archaeology, Middle Eastern Studies and American Studies (CHARMA) cluster. A programme coordinator acts as a link between the lecturers and the cluster board. The master's programme Middle Eastern Studies evolved in 2013 from a master's programme Semitic languages and cultures. The programme attracts 10 to 15 students each year.

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

Profile

The aim of the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies is to deliver specialised experts in the Middle East who are able to describe, analyse and interpret developments in the modern Middle East and to make constructive contributions to current academic research and social debates related to the region. The programme's profile is characterised by a research-driven and multidisciplinary approach to contemporary developments in the Middle East, with particular emphasis on conflicts, from both a regional and an international perspective. The programme focuses on Israel and the Arab world, on Judaism and Islam. It distinguishes itself on the one hand from other master's programmes in Middle Eastern Studies (e.g. in Leiden and Amsterdam) by its explicitly defined focus on conflicts, and on the other hand from master's programmes in the field of conflict studies (e.g. Religion, conflict and globalisation in Groningen and Global conflicts in the modern era in Leiden) by its focus on the Middle East.

The panel admires the carefully delineated profile that the Groningen master's programme has created for itself, since it falls into a clear and very relevant niche, bringing together conflict studies and Middle Eastern Studies. Given the geopolitical and economic importance of the Middle East and its status as the centre of both vibrant cultural diversity and entrenched sectarian conflict, there is an urgent need for graduates who know and understand this area. In particular, the panel finds the combination very attractive of religious, historical and cultural knowledge with an application of this knowledge to analyse conflicts. Furthermore, since conflict is rife, the focus on conflicts in this master's programme will prove to be key for graduates not only to understand the Middle East, but other domains as well. With this distinct and relevant profile – a regional focus on the Middle East combined with a thematic focus on conflicts – the programme should be able to attract students not only from the Netherlands, but from abroad as well.

Intended learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes for the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies are subdivided into five categories, aligned with the Dublin Descriptors for master's programmes. For a full overview of the intended learning outcomes, see appendix 1. They reflect the programme's profile, except that the focus on conflicts is not explicitly mentioned in them. In the 'knowledge and understanding' category, it is stated that the students should master specific knowledge in the field of political and religious developments in the contemporary Middle East. The 'applying knowledge and understanding' category is mainly concerned with academic skills, such as 'the ability to deal with complex issues' and 'the ability to investigate scientifically the relationship between characteristics of the western world and the Middle East'. The 'lifelong learning skills' category clearly outlines a few



skills for successful professional practice, such as 'showing initiative and personal responsibility' and 'being able to make decisions in complex and unpredictable situations'.

The panel finds the intended learning outcomes clearly formulated and of the appropriate level. It particularly appreciates that both academic and professional skills are very conscientiously outlined. It recommends including the focus on conflicts explicitly in the intended learning outcomes. In the future, the co-ordinator and staff aim to install an advisory board, in which alumni can offer recommendations on the profile, intended learning outcomes and modules of the programme. The panel applauds this initiative and encourages the programme to go through with it.

Considerations

The master's programme Middle Eastern Studies offers a multidisciplinary, research-driven approach to understanding contemporary developments in the Middle East, from both regional and international perspectives, with a focus on conflicts. It aims to train specialised experts in this clear and very relevant niche, bringing together conflict studies and Middle Eastern Studies. The panel considers this profile well-chosen since it is specific, distinguished and societally relevant. It finds the intended learning outcomes complete and clearly formulated. They are of the appropriate level and orientation, in its view, and in accordance with international requirements for master graduates. The panel recommends including the focus on conflicts explicitly in the intended learning outcomes. It encourages the programme in its plans to install an advisory board.

Conclusion

Master's programme Middle Eastern Studies: the panel assesses Standard 1 as 'meets the standard'.

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 language and name

In line with the faculty's international ambitions, the programme is taught in English. This facilitates the participation of both international staff members and students. Also, the programme's subject matter is obviously international, and much of the relevant literature is in English. Being accustomed to English prepares students for the increasingly international job market. Since some students will obviously find employment in the Netherlands, they may choose to write their theses in either English or Dutch. The panel agrees with this policy.

Curriculum content and structure

The first semester of the master curriculum consists of four compulsory modules: 'Conflicts in the Middle East' (10 EC), 'International Organisations and the Middle East' (10 EC), 'Religion and politics in the Middle East' (5 EC), and 'Contemporary developments in the Middle East' (5 EC). In the second semester, the students do either an internship or a tutorial (10 EC) and write their master's thesis (20 EC).

The modules complement each other and combine three learning trajectories: thematic knowledge and insights, academic skills, and practical skills. The thematic focus on contemporary developments in the Middle East – conflicts in particular – is central to the four modules in the first semester. These modules also contribute to the programme's ambition to train students in several academic methods. For example, the 'Religion and politics' course focuses on historical approaches such as primary sources analysis, while social methods approaches, such as discourse analysis, are central to the 'Conflicts' module, and political science approaches are important to the 'International organisations' module. The modules also contribute to the development of practical skills and job market

orientation, by training students in communication skills as well as analytical and synthesising skills and by informing them about job market opportunities.

In contrast to the bachelor's programme Middle Eastern Studies, language skills in Arabic or Hebrew are not part of the master's programme. Students who have already mastered these languages can further develop them in individual assignments as well as in the tutorial and the thesis.

Over the last few years, approximately half of the students have been able to obtain a relevant internship during their studies. These were often conducted abroad, but also in the Netherlands. Students who do not find an internship – or who are more interested in doing academic research – may choose to do a tutorial instead. For this, they work on a project of their choice: for instance, writing a research or policy paper, or participating in a research project of one of the staff members. The panel studied the curriculum and a sample of the literature used in the courses; an overview of the documents it reviewed is presented in appendix 4. It concludes that the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies is captivating, well-constructed and of the appropriate level. The students confirmed to the panel that those who have not learned one of the Middle Eastern languages can still follow the master's programme without problems, whereas those who already know some Arabic or Hebrew get sufficient opportunities to bring their language skills to a higher level. This flexibility is laudable, the panel concluded.

Didactic methods

The programme aims to give students the maximum autonomy in finding their own learning curve. Small-scale seminars or a combination of lectures and seminars are the modes of instruction most often used in the modules. They typically include different kinds of assignments, presentations, and discussions about the literature studied. The students are encouraged to critically reflect on the literature and are involved in public debates and the work of fellow students. In addition to the seminars, the programme includes peer-review sessions and excursions. The students are also invited to organise a conference. They mentioned the challenging didactic methods as a strength of the programme. The panel is quite satisfied with the didactic methods, since they match the intended learning outcomes.

The master's programme is directly accessible for those who completed a bachelor's programme Middle Eastern studies or history, international relations or religious studies at a Dutch university. The students mentioned that the heterogeneity this creates produces some overlap for those who did a bachelor's programme Middle Eastern studies, particularly in the 'International organisations and the Middle East' course. This issue was also raised by the previous accreditation panel. The programme expects the differences in student backgrounds to become less prominent because of the introduction of a 30 EC faculty minor in Middle Eastern Studies in 2018. In the future, most students who did not do a full bachelor programme Middle Eastern Studies will have taken this minor prior to embarking on the master's programme. The content of the 'International relations' course can then be adapted – since students who did not do a bachelor in Middle Eastern Studies will have had sufficient introduction – so that it offers new material for all students. The panel suggests monitoring this process closely and possibly making the minor a necessary prerequisite for entering the master's programme.

Thesis trajectory, internship and feasibility

A thesis manual provides guidelines on the procedures and assessment criteria for the master's thesis. The students are advised to use the first semester for orientation on a master's thesis topic and find a supervisor who is most closely linked to their topic. A formal thesis proposal must be approved by the supervisor and signed by both the supervisor and the student. This signed proposal subsequently functions as a thesis contract. According to the formal step-by-step plan, the students decide on a thesis topic by February 1 and write their thesis in March, April and May. In June and the first half of July, the students may adapt their thesis according to feedback from both the first examiner/supervisor and the second examiner. They are happy with the supervision they receive during the thesis trajectory, they told the panel.



The fact that the programme leaves room for an internship is without doubt an asset, since it is known that doing an internship increases the students' chances on the labour market. However, the arrangements are currently suboptimal in the panel's view. Firstly, many students who wish to do an internship simply cannot find a placement, as can be read in the student chapter of the self-evaluation report and was confirmed in the dialogue the panel had with the students. This is the availability issue. The tutorial offers an alternative, but this does not have equal value as a preparation for the labour market. Secondly, the internship is worth 10 EC, which is equivalent to seven weeks' work and could well be combined with writing the 20 EC master's thesis in the second semester. However, the panel found that in practice, *if* students succeeded in finding a placement, the internship often lasted considerably longer. Since it is virtually impossible to combine a fulltime internship with the writing of a master's thesis, this inevitably brings study delay. This is the feasibility issue.

The panel finds it worrying that only a few students actually finish the one-year master's programme in one year (1 out of 14 in 2017, 4 out of 16 in 2016, none out of 19 in 2015). Most students take between one and two years, some even three years. Both the self-evaluation report and the programme staff in discussions with the panel presented two reasons for this slow progress, one being that some students take two master's degrees, the second being the feasibility issues associated with the thesis and internship mentioned above. The programme staff considers both of these valid reasons for prolonging the study, as the panel found out when discussing feasibility issues with them. As it is formulated in the self-evaluation report, 'Since both are valid reasons for prolonging the study, we do not consider these numbers to be problematic.' The panel disagrees with this conclusion. Part of a programme's feasibility is that the students are not only enabled but also feel encouraged to stay within the nominal time boundaries. Furthermore, it is important that all parts of the curriculum, including the internships, can be completed in the time allotted.

The panel discussed the limited number of available internships and their long duration with the faculty management, since these problems occur in several of the faculty's programmes. The faculty management pointed out that with the new minor arrangement, an internship coordinator will provide more support to students in finding an internship placement. This will help address the availability issue. The panel also discussed the feasibility issue with the programme staff. They were receptive to its recommendation that the programme itself should take more control in securing appropriate, 10 EC internship placements for its students. The alumni network that the programme aims to set up may help to realise these ambitions. Another option is to explore possibilities for linking the internship with the thesis. The panel stressed that it is paramount to resolve the problems surrounding internships, as they may well form one of the main causes for students graduating later than expected.

Student involvement

The previous accreditation panel suggested that the programme committee should contain a student member, and that it should be more proactive in evaluating courses and advising staff about improving the quality of the programme. These suggestions have been followed up. The programme committee now contains three staff members and three students. One of the students is in the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies. The programme committee meets at least four times a year. It monitors the quality of the programme more systematically than before, on the basis of course manuals and digital evaluations. It makes sure that the students' voice is heard. This has, for instance, led to the use of matrices to assess oral presentations. Besides this formal procedure, the lecturers and students also conduct an oral evaluation in class after each module. The panel is happy to see that the previous recommendation has been followed up well, and that the programme has its quality procedures in order.

Labour market orientation

The master's programme Middle Eastern Studies prepares its students for the labour market in several ways. Their job skills – such as peer reviewing and the writing of articles for a non-academic public – are trained in the courses. They go on an excursion to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and get the chance to organise a symposium. The 'International Organisations in the Middle East' module

is used to inform them about internship and career opportunities. Alumni regularly talk about internships and their careers. The icing on the cake is the opportunity to do an internship. The panel underscores that an internship is a great opportunity to get acquainted with the labour market and maybe find a job. Students in the past have had internships at the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, embassies, media companies, NGOs and refugee organisations. These internships took place in the Netherlands as well as in Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. Barring the complications with the internships, the panel finds the way the programme prepares its students for the labour market exemplary.

Student guidance

The students are informed about the programme through the digital learning environment and the course manuals, which offer information on the content, schedule, literature, assignments and assessment of individual courses. Information about internships, tutorials and the thesis trajectory is given in meetings during the first semester. Vacancies for internships are posted on the programme's Facebook page. The main mentors for master's students are the lecturers. The students told the panel that the lecturers not only show interest in their academic and future professional career, but also at a personal level, which they appreciated.

Staff

In the 2018-2019 academic year, one professor, three assistant professors, and one lecturer were involved in the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies. The student:staff ratio (calculated with FTEs reserved for both research and education) was 22:1. Four lecturers are in possession of a university teaching qualification, and one is in the process of obtaining one. The team of lecturers is varied in terms of expertise, cultural background, gender, and age. In addition to their academic work, they also shed light on current developments in the Middle East through public lectures, media appearances and as a guest speaker at various institutions. Both in the student chapter of the self-evaluation report and in conversations with the panel, the students stated that they were very satisfied with their lecturers. They felt they functioned excellently both academically and didactically. They also praised the involvement of their lecturers in their studies and career perspectives. During its visit, the panel found that the lecturers are indeed enthusiastic, hardworking and very involved and that the atmosphere in the programme is good. There are some concerns among the lecturers about their futures – as in many places in the academic world – because of the short-term contracts they receive. The panel recommends offering the lecturers as much job security as possible, in order to bring stability to the programme and maintain the excellent staff and atmosphere.

Programme-specific services

Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Groningen has an active study association: Siduri. It organises both substantive and social activities and is also involved in providing information to potential new students.

Considerations

The panel found that the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies offers students a well-organised, stimulating learning environment, with captivating courses and excellent lecturers who are really involved in their students' work and career perspectives. It is happy to see that the suggestion of the previous accreditation panel was followed up, so that now the programme has its quality procedures in place, and the students' voice is properly listened to. It compliments the programme on its labour market orientation, which is a prominent feature of the programme. In this respect, the internships are culmination points; they could be a great asset to the programme. However, the internships pose a problem at this moment. Firstly, many students do not succeed in finding a placement. Secondly, if they do find an internship, it often takes up much more time than is officially allotted to it in the curriculum. They are forced to exceed their nominal study time, which could undermine the feasibility of the programme. The panel recommends fixing this situation.

The programme's staff is excellent, while student guidance and programme-specific services meet the standard.



Conclusion

Master's programme Middle Eastern Studies: the panel assesses Standard 2 as 'meets the standard'.

Standard 3: Student assessment

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

Findings

Assessment system

Through assessment, the programme wants to stimulate an active, critical and independent attitude among the students, and to steer their learning behaviour in such a way that they achieve the intended learning outcomes. To this end, an assessment plan was drawn up that specifies for each module when and how assessment will take place. The modes of assessment are further elaborated in the course manuals and linked to the intended learning outcomes. The assessment modes used in the master's programme are: written exams with essay questions, oral presentations, weekly assignments, critical reflections, research papers and popular articles. The internship is assessed on the basis of an internship report. These assessment modes reflect the strong emphasis on critical thinking and communication that characterises the programme. Compared to the bachelor's level, the master's programme puts more emphasis on applying knowledge and understanding, so there are fewer exams and more presentations, critical reflections on the literature and research papers.

The four-eye principle applies when designing assessment modes: a proposal for exam questions or assignments is always submitted to a colleague for feedback. Assessment of exams with open questions is based on an answer model. The lecturers use a matrix for the assessment of presentations and papers. They compile an assessment portfolio for each module, so that the Board of Examiners can monitor the quality of assessment.

The panel noted that the assessment system of the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies functions well. The students are particularly happy with the many presentations and papers they do, and the ample intermediate feedback they receive. They experience that they learn to communicate on an academic level. They are also enthusiastic about learning to write for a broader audience. The panel encourages the programme to continue on this path and possibly replace exams altogether.

Thesis assessment

The programme has developed its own assessment form for assessing the master's theses. The form must be completed independently by the supervisor and the second examiner. If their opinions diverge, they will involve the Board of Examiners in the final grade. The form deals with the content and form of the thesis according to a number of sub-criteria, and assesses them on a scale of five, ranging from 'inadequate' to 'excellent'. The supervisor also assesses the thesis-writing process.

The panel studied a sample of the theses and the corresponding assessment forms. It generally agreed with the examiners: good points are noted, and weak points are recognised. However, it did not always find the final marks sufficiently comprehensible because the judgments on sub-criteria are given on a different scale (in five qualitative categories) from the final assessment (expressed in a mark on a ten-point scale). The panel recommends that the programme redesign the forms in such a way that the final assessment can be traced back to the assessments of sub-areas by both assessors, so that the final grades can also be compared with each other, and any appearance of arbitrariness is excluded. The updated assessment forms for the master's programme Classics and Ancient Civilisations can be a good source of inspiration in this respect.

The panel noticed that the quality of the feedback on the forms varies. Some examiners argued their judgments clearly and comprehensively, others were extremely brief. The panel asks the programme to ensure that the examiners substantiate their assessment in writing, and redesigning the

assessment forms could be a good starting point to improve the quality and address the heterogeneity of the current practice.

Board of examiners

The assurance of assessment quality within the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies rests with the Board of Examiners. Until January 1, 2019, this was the Board of Examiners History, Media Studies and Greek and Latin Language and Culture. From that date, this group continued as an expertise team within a new central Board of Examiners for the Faculty of Arts. The chairs of the constituent expertise teams sit on this new Board of Examiners, along with a professional assessment expert. The Board evaluates the assessment of individual courses and the theses on a random basis, trying to give as many courses as possible an evaluation once every three years. It has drawn up a protocol for these evaluations: ensuring that the assessment proceeds in accordance with its own rules and guidelines, that the learning objectives stated in the assessment plan are assessed for each course and that the assessment is valid, reliable and transparent. The evaluations by the Board of Examiners take place on the basis of the assessment portfolios supplied by the course co-ordinators and lecturers. These contain study instructions, papers/exams and assessment forms, possible resits, answer models, and result lists with partial and final grades. In addition to evaluating assessment quality, the Board of Examiners also has an advisory function with regard to regulations, assessment forms, etc.

The panel was informed during the site visit that the recent transition to one central board of examiners has been received very positively all around. An important advantage is that procedures throughout the entire Faculty of Arts can be made comparable; also, one central board of examiners can work more efficiently than several decentralised ones. Expertise teams are available within the Board of Examiners for programme-specific matters. The panel endorses the benefits of the new central Board of Examiners and compliments its members on the energetic way in which they have expeditiously put the new working method on track. They did this, for example, by facilitating the assurance process, and drawing up rules and guidelines and an evaluation protocol. Providing a single 'counter' for the faculty where everyone can go with questions or complaints about assessment is another goal. The panel encourages the Board of Examiners to keep up the good work and is confident that the assessment quality of the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies can be safely entrusted to it for the future.

Considerations

The panel noted that the assessment system of the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies functions well, with a clear assessment plan and varied forms of assessment that emphasise critical thinking and communication skills. The quality of assessment is sufficiently monitored both before and after, and the students are happy with the extensive feedback they receive. The panel recommends that the programme continue on this path and possibly eliminate written exams as an assessment mode altogether in the future.

The assessment procedure for the master's theses is well organised, and the panel broadly agreed with the final marks given for the theses. However, it did not always find it possible to derive or reconstruct these final marks from the assessments on sub-categories. This can be remedied by designing the evaluation forms for the theses differently. The forms should also encourage the examiners to substantiate their assessments in writing. This often happens now, but not always.

The panel was informed during the site visit that the new central Board of Examiners for the Faculty of Arts was positively received. It endorses the benefits of harmonised procedures and efficiency gains. It congratulates the members of the new Board of Examiners on the energetic way in which they have shaped its duties and the associated procedures in a short period of time. It encourages the Board of Examiners to continue along the path it has chosen and is fully confident that the quality assurance of the assessment at the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies is in good hands.



Conclusion

Master's programme Middle Eastern Studies: the panel assesses Standard 3 as 'meets the standard'.

Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

Theses

Successful completion of all the modules in the master's programme proves that the graduates achieve the intended learning outcomes. The master's theses are the ultimate proof that they can independently set up and conduct research of the appropriate academic level. The panel studied a sample of the master's theses and is generally satisfied with their content. In one instance the panel had doubts about the assessment of a thesis. This thesis and accompanying assessment forms have therefore been read separately by two panel members. The thesis in question was graded low (between 6.0 and 6.5) by the programme. The assessments by the panel and the assessors are in agreement that the thesis' methodology and manner of argumentation is not made explicit, which could have been supported by a better framed research question. Where the assessors eventually considered the thesis just sufficient, the panel applies a somewhat stricter cut-off point and it might result in a lower assessment. By contrast, some of the other theses are quite ambitious and seem to be the fruit of a longstanding fascination with a specific subject that started out during the bachelor's programme and deepened in the period a student studied in the Middle East. Although of course the level of the theses varies, it is clear to the panel that the bar for master's theses is set considerably higher than for bachelor's theses, as it should be. It found the topics covered in the theses to be varied and interesting. Despite one weaker thesis, the panel reached the conclusion that students from the master's programme achieve the intended learning outcomes.

The panel was disappointed, however, to find that the focus on 'conflicts' is not always reflected in the theses. The students are completely free to choose their thesis topic, and the programme staff cherishes this freedom, the panel discovered during its visit. It recommends that theses for a programme that focuses on conflict should in some way or other be linked to the conflict theme. Since the theme is very broad and omnipresent in the studied region (unfortunately), such an instruction should not restrict the students too much.

Alumni

Graduates are experts on the Middle East and on conflicts. In this capacity they answer a specific societal need. Although alumni careers are not yet monitored systematically – which the programme intends to start doing in the future – from informal contacts and the dedicated LinkedIn page, the impression gained is that most graduates find a job related to the Middle East within a reasonable time. They feed into a broad job market, but most have found a position related to Dutch foreign policy and diplomacy. The types of jobs in which they found employment include policy officer in the Crisis Management and Peacekeeping Operations Unit at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, lecturer in safety and security at a university of applied sciences, public relations officer at the embassy of Israel in the Netherlands, researcher at the Netherlands Institute in Turkey, junior officer at the Dutch Ministry of Defence and Security, brand manager for the Middle East and North Africa at a bioscience company, political assistant to a member of parliament, and human rights officer at the United Nations.

Considerations

The panel is generally satisfied with the level of the master's theses written for the Middle Eastern Studies programme. The bar is clearly set high, and the theses effectively demonstrate that the graduates have achieved the appropriate level. Although there are no systematic data on the alumni's success on the job market, anecdotal evidence suggests that they do well. On the basis of the sample

of theses studied, information provided and conversations with alumni, the panel concludes that the graduates have realised the intended learning outcomes.

The panel recommends applying the programme's laudable focus on conflicts to the master's theses as well. This will give it more unity and strength. Since conflict is a very broad concept, it will not inflict too many limitations on students if they are asked to make conflict a theme in their theses.

Conclusion

Master's programme Middle Eastern Studies: the panel assesses Standard 4 as 'meets the standard'.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The panel assessed standards 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies as 'meets the standard'. Based on the NVAO decision rules regarding limited programme assessments, the panel therefore assesses the programme as 'positive'.

Conclusion

The panel assesses the *master's programme Middle Eastern Studies* as 'meets the standard'.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Qualifications Master level (Dublin-descriptors)	Final qualifications and programme learning outcomes Master
<p>Knowledge and understanding</p> <p>Students have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context;</p>	<p>The graduate students in the Master programme MES demonstrate:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Specific knowledge in the field of political and religious developments in the contemporary Middle East. 2. Insight in order to study the field from a theoretical and methodological point of view. The student is aware of current approaches. 3. Knowledge of the scientific codes of conduct / ethics with regard to referring to and making use of the work and insights of others, and with regard to the collection and processing of empirical data (data). 4. In-depth knowledge and insight into current developments within the field.
<p>Applying knowledge and understanding</p> <p>Students can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study;</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. The ability to formulate independently a scientific problem and to choose and use an adequate theoretical framework and one or more relevant research methods. 6. The ability to deal with complex issues systematically and creatively, and to arrive at a well-founded opinion. 7. The ability to write independently and scientifically, and speak as a well-informed critic, or as an empirically oriented scientist, while making adequate use of relevant issues, debates and developments in media and culture. 8. The ability to investigate scientifically the relationship between characteristics of the western world and the Middle East. 9. The ability to investigate scientifically how concepts and activities contribute to the social functioning of utterances related to the Middle East. 10. The ability to provide a scientific analysis of a genre, a period, a movement or an oeuvre in relation to the Middle East. 11. The ability to carry out independently theoretical and empirical research within their own field. 12. The ability to use the acquired scientific knowledge, insights and skills in the performance of a social and / or academic function with due regard for ethical and societal issues.



<p>Making judgements Students have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements;</p>	<p>13. The ability to adopt a well-considered position in current developments within the discipline independently and to defend this in debate (oral and written). 14. The ability to provide an independent well-founded (comparative) analysis and interpretation of aspects of the Middle East. 15. The ability to assess critically theoretical and empirical research within their own field.</p>
<p>Communication Students can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously;</p>	<p>16. The ability to use scientific research and present the results of this research both in writing and orally to an audience of specialists and non-specialists.</p>
<p>Lifelong learning skills Students have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.</p>	<p>17. The ability to process large amounts of complex information efficiently and effectively. 18. To realise that the developments in the field and beyond require continuous training, as well as the necessary written and oral skills to be able to (continue to) follow the scientific literature and the debate in his / her field. 19. The ability to keep track of developments in the scientific field, to deepen and supplement their own knowledge and insights, and to apply these in a professional practice. 20. The skills required for successful professional practice. These include: o showing initiative and personal responsibility; o being able to make decisions in complex and unpredictable situations; o the ability to work independently; o the ability to function as a member of a team.</p>

APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

Semester 1	ECTS	Semester 2	ECTS
Conflicts in the Middle East	10	Internship / Tutorial	10
International Organisations and the Middle East	10	Master's thesis	20
Religion and Politics in the Middle East (bloc 1)	5		
Contemporary developments in the Middle East (bloc 2) ²	5		

2: As of 2019-2020, the modules Religion and Politics in the Middle East and Contemporary developments in the Middle East will be offered in reverse order.



APPENDIX 3: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

Day 1 (Wednesday 30 October)	
09.00 - 09.15	Arrival of the panel / Welcome from the Vice-Dean
09.15 - 12.30	Preparation, private panel meeting and documentation review
12.30 - 13.00	Lunch break
13.00 - 13.45	Meeting with faculty senior management
13.45 - 14.15	Private panel meeting
14.15 - 15.00	Meeting with programme management - BA en MA (North) American Studies
15.00 - 15.45	Meeting with students - BA en MA (North) American Studies
15.45 - 16.30	Meeting with staff - BA en MA (North) American Studies
16.30 - 17.30	Private panel meeting and documentation review
17.30 - 18.00	Open consultation hour

Day 2 (Thursday 31 October)	
09.00 - 10.00	Private panel meeting
10.00 - 10.45	Meeting with programme management - B Griekse en Latijnse Taal en Cultuur and M Classics
10.45 - 11.30	Meeting with students - B Griekse en Latijnse Taal en Cultuur en M Classics
11.30 - 12.15	Meeting with staff - B Griekse en Latijnse Taal en Cultuur en M Classics
12.15 - 12.45	Lunch break
12.45 - 13.15	Private panel meeting
13.15 - 14.00	Meeting with programme management - B Midden-Oosten Studies en M Middle Eastern Studies
14.00 - 14.45	Meeting with students - B Midden-Oosten Studies en M Middle Eastern Studies
14.45 - 15.30	Meeting with staff - B Midden-Oosten Studies en M Middle Eastern Studies
15.30 - 16.30	Private panel meeting
16.30 - 17.15	Meeting with Examination Board
17.15 - 17.45	Private panel meeting

Day 3 (Friday 1 November)	
09.00 - 10.00	Private panel meeting and documentation review
10.00 - 11.00	Final interview with management
11.00 - 11.30	Break
11.30 - 12.30	Private panel meeting to formulate conclusions of the visit
12.30 - 13.00	Lunch break
13.00 - 15.30	Private panel meeting to formulate conclusions of the visit
15.30 - 16.30	Development dialogue(s) in three parallel sessions: Middle Eastern; (North) American Studies; Classics
16.30 - 17.00	Informal feedback on the panel's findings and recommendations
17.00 - 18.00	End of the site visit / Drinks

APPENDIX 4: THESES AND DOCUMENTS STUDIED BY THE PANEL

Thesis selection

The panel studied 15 theses of the master's programme Middle Eastern Studies; 12 prior to the site visit and 3 afterwards. This was done to complete the panel's picture of the achieved learning outcomes. The selection was based on a provided list of 39 graduates between 2016 and mid-2019. There are no specialisations to take into account. A variety of topics and a diversity of examiners were included in the selection. The project manager and panel chair assured that the distribution of grades in the selection matched the distribution of grades of all available theses. Further information on the selected theses is available from QANU upon request.

Documents studied

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):

Faculty-wide documents:

- Arts Board of Examiners annual report 2017-2018;
- Arts Board of Examiners minutes 2018-2019;
- BoE Expert team History, Media Studies and Greek and Latin Language and Culture annual report 2017-2018;
- BoE Expert team History, Media Studies and Greek and Latin Language and Culture minutes 2018-2019;
- Big7 Arts Board of Examiners.

Specific reading material master's programme Middle Eastern Studies:

- Self-evaluation report including appendices;
- Programme Committee Middle Eastern Studies annual report 2017-2018;
- Programme Committee Middle Eastern Studies minutes 2018-2019.

Of the following courses, the panel studied complete portfolios (course guide and literature, relevant course documents, assignments, tests and answer keys, a selection of assessed student work and course evaluations):

- Contemporary Developments in the Middle East (LXX032M05);
- Conflicts in the Middle East (LXX029M10).

