

ONDERZOEKERIJ

Research Master

Social Psychology:

Regulation of Social Behaviour

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Report of the limited programme assessment

De Onderzoekerij  
Vondellaan 58  
2332 AH Leiden

Email: [info@onderzoekerij.nl](mailto:info@onderzoekerij.nl)  
Internet: [www.onderzoekerij.nl](http://www.onderzoekerij.nl)



# Contents

Contents.....	3
Executive summary .....	4
1. Introduction.....	6
1.1 Administrative data.....	6
1.2 Introduction.....	6
1.3 Panel composition.....	6
1.4 Working method .....	7
2. Review.....	9
2.1 Intended learning outcomes .....	9
2.2 Teaching learning environment .....	10
2.3 Student assessment.....	14
2.4 Achieved learning outcomes.....	16
3. Strengths and recommendations.....	18
3.1 Strengths of the programme.....	18
3.2 Recommendations.....	18
4. Conclusion .....	19
Appendix A – Panel composition and programmes of the cluster .....	20
Appendix B – Schedule of the visit .....	22
Appendix C – Documents studied .....	23
Appendix D – Abbreviations .....	24



## Executive summary

The outcome of the external assessment of the research master's programme in Social Psychology: Regulation of Social Behaviour of the Vrije Universiteit (VU) by an NVAO approved panel is positive.

The two-year full-time programme aims to provide high-level training in social psychology, such that graduates are capable of working independently as a researcher, either inside or outside of academia. The programme has a specific focus on evolution, morality, and cooperation, which are the three thematic research pillars of the VU's Social Psychology Section. The panel is positive about the programme's aim to foster bridges between social psychology and adjacent disciplines.

The programme's formulated intended learning outcomes demonstrate the level that may be expected of graduates of a research master's programme, and clearly reflect the three main topics of the programme. The panel suggests evaluating and eventually rephrasing its learning outcomes to better reflect the orientation on research outside academia. In addition, the panel encourages the faculty-wide plans to make the integration of soft skills more explicit in the learning outcomes.

The curriculum is organised coherently and provides students with a solid basis of theoretical knowledge, academic skills, and research experience. The panel values the highly interactive learning environment with a great deal of attention for the students' individual needs, performances, and development. The panel was impressed by the state-of-the-art knowledge, skills, enthusiasm, and dedication of the staff. It is convinced that students are able to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

The panel is of the opinion that attracting more students is desired to ensure the viability of the programme. The programme should communicate more explicitly that its aim is not only to prepare graduates for a PhD position, but also for research positions outside academia.

The focus of the programme is very much aligned with the expertise of the teaching staff. The panel thinks highly of the staff members. They have a prominent position in the field of social psychology and take supervision and tutoring very seriously. It is clear to the panel that students are part of a high-quality and committed research environment.

The programme has installed adequate measures to monitor assessment quality. The Examinations Board plays an active role in ensuring the quality of assessments. The programme makes use of a variety of assessments, which are mostly assignments, for example presentations, research papers and proposals, home exams, data analysis assignments and literature review papers. Although there is an alignment between the courses and assessment methods, the panel encourages the programme to check the alignment of learning objectives with assessments on the programme level.

Following up on the recommendations of the previous accreditation panel, the programme improved the process for assessing the thesis. The panel is positive about the measures to better safeguard the independency of the second assessor. However, the panel noted that due to the small size of the programme and the close connections within the institute, it is challenging to truly guarantee the independence of the two examiners. The panel suggests involving an independent second grader whose research group is not involved in the research master's programme.

The panel is pleased with the quality and academic level of the fifteen theses it examined. According to the panel, the students reach a high level of achievement and are very well prepared for a career in social psychology research.



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

Date: 17 May 2021

Rob Ruiter  
(chair)

Esther Poort  
(secretary)



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Administrative data

Name of the programme:	Social Psychology: Regulation of Social Behaviour (research)
CROHO number:	60053
Level of the programme:	Master of science
Orientation of the programme:	Academic
Study load:	120 EC
Location:	Amsterdam
Variant:	Full-time
Expiration of accreditation:	1 November 2021

## 1.2 Introduction

This report focuses on the assessment of the research master's programme in Social Psychology: Regulation of Social Behaviour (hereafter referred to as Social Psychology). This assessment forms part of a cluster assessment of thirteen research master's programmes at seven universities. In total, fifteen panel members participated in this cluster assessment. Appendix A provides an overview of the thirteen participating research masters and the composition of the total panel.

The assessment is based on the standards and criteria described in the NVAO Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands 2018 (limited framework). Research master's programmes must meet a number of additional criteria as described by the NVAO (specification of additional criteria for research master's programmes, 2016).

## 1.3 Panel composition

For every online visit, a (sub)panel was composed, based on the expertise and availability of panel members. Each (sub)panel consisted of five members, including the chair and the student member. The panel that assessed the research master's programme Social Psychology consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. Rob Ruiters (chair), Professor of Health and Social Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience at Maastricht University;
- Prof. dr. Arne Roets, Professor of Social Psychology, Faculty of psychology and educational sciences, Department of Developmental, Personality, and Social Psychology, Ghent University;
- Prof. dr. Guus Smeets, Professor of Education in Psychology, Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences at Erasmus University Rotterdam;
- Marie Stadel MSc (student member), Behavioural and Social Sciences Research Master, University of Groningen (graduated in 2020);



- Prof. dr. Karine Verschueren, Professor of School and Developmental Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, KU Leuven.

The panel was supported by drs. Esther Poort, who acted as secretary.

All panel members and the secretary have signed a declaration of independence and confidentiality. In this declaration they affirm not to have had any business or personal ties with the programme in question, for at least five years prior to the review.

The NVAO approved the composition of the panel on 26 November 2020.

## 1.4 Working method

### *Preparation*

On 14 January 2021, the panel of the entire cluster held a general online kick off meeting. In this meeting, the panel received an introduction to the assessment framework and discussed the working methods in preparation to and during the online visits.

The programme drew up a self-evaluation describing the programme's strengths and weaknesses. This self-evaluation included a chapter in which the students reflected on the programme. The panel members prepared the assessment by analysing the self-evaluation report and the appendices provided by the institution. The panel also evaluated a selection of fifteen master theses and the accompanying assessment forms from the programme. The theses selection was made by the panel's secretary based on a provided list of at least fifty theses from the most recent years. In the selection, consideration was given to a variation in assessments (grades), and topics.

The panel members individually formulated their preliminary findings and a number of questions they wanted to raise during the online visit. The secretary made an overview of these preliminary findings and questions and sent it to the panel members as a starting point for the preparation of the panel during the online visit.

To further ensure that the different panels used the same working method and approach for all thirteen programmes in the cluster, the two chairs and the two secretaries had two additional meetings: one prior to the first visit and one halfway through all the visits.

### *Online visit*

The online visit took place on 3 March 2021 (see Appendix B for the schedule). During the preparatory meeting, the panel discussed the preliminary findings and decided which questions to raise in their meetings with the programme representatives. During the visit, the panel spoke with representatives of the management, students, lecturers, alumni and the Examination Board. Everyone involved in the programme had the opportunity to inform the panel in confidence about matters they consider important to the assessment. No one made use of this opportunity. The panel used the last part of the online visit to evaluate the interviews and have a second meeting with the programme's management to receive answers to any remaining questions. At the end of the visit, the chair presented the panel's preliminary findings and their first impressions of the programme.



### *Report*

The secretary drew up a draft report based on the panel's findings. This draft report was submitted to the members of the panel and adjusted on the basis of their review and feedback. After adoption, the draft report was sent to the institution for verification of factual inaccuracies. The secretary discussed the programme's comments with the chair, after which the secretary drew up the final report and circulated it to the panel for a final round of comments.

The report follows the four standards such as set of in the NVAO's Assessment Framework 2018 (limited framework): 1) the intended learning outcomes, 2) the teaching-learning environment, 3) assessment, and 4) achieved learning outcomes. Regarding each of the standards, the assessment panel gave a substantiated judgement on a three-point scale: meets, does not meet, or partially meets the standard. The panel subsequently gave a substantiated final conclusion regarding the quality of the programme, also on a three-point scale: positive, conditionally positive, or negative.

### *Development dialogue*

Although clearly separated from the process of the programme assessment, assessment panel members and programme representatives met to conduct the development dialogue, with the objective to discuss future developments of the programme in light of the outcomes of the assessment report.





## 2. Review

### 2.1 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, analysis, and considerations*

The research master's programme Social Psychology is embedded within VU Amsterdam's Faculty of Behavioural and Movement Sciences (*Faculteit der Gedrags- en Bewegingswetenschappen*; FGB). Teachers of the research master's programme are appointed to the Department of Experimental and Applied Psychology which consists of three subsections: Social Psychology, Cognitive Psychology, and Organizational Psychology. Under guidance from the programme director and within the rules and guidelines of the faculty, teachers can coordinate their teaching relatively autonomously.

The general aim of the programme is to provide high-level training in social psychology; that is, to equip the student with a comprehensive knowledge of, and excellent skills in, the research field of social psychology. To achieve this general aim, the programme seeks to combine (1) a thorough study of state-of-the-art social psychological theories and research, with (2) a strong emphasis on research skills (e.g., writing, presenting, research methods and statistics), and (3) the ability to connect to societal issues and/or other disciplines.

The programme has compared itself to other research master's programmes in the field of psychology in the Netherlands and abroad. First, the programme distinguishes itself by focussing on social psychology from the onset. The panel appreciates this unique opportunity for gaining in-depth insight into the state-of-the-art theory and research in social psychology.

Second, the programme takes a multi-disciplinary, integrative approach to the field, and has a specific focus on Evolution, Morality, and Cooperation, which are the three thematic research pillars of the VU's Social Psychology research programme. The panel acknowledges that the programme clearly benefits from the strong links with the research focus of the department. Most researchers in the department have the highest international standing in their respective areas of expertise. This expertise is distinctive within the Netherlands, and gives the department a unique profile. The panel observed that at the time of the previous accreditation, the programme had a broader focus, being 'social interaction'. The panel learned from the interviews that this broader focus had to do with the fact that at that time 'Work and Organisational Psychology' was still involved in the programme. Although the panel understands the choice of the programme focussing on the specific research themes of the department, it also sees the risk of becoming too specialised and therefore being less attractive for a broader range of students interested in social psychology.

The third distinctive feature is the programme's aim to foster 'creative bridging'. While social psychology is the main focus, the programme actively bridges this field with knowledge and insight of adjacent disciplines. It aims to generate new insights within the study of social psychological phenomena such as communication, cooperative behaviour, interpersonal relations, the self, and emotions. The panel welcomes this laudable approach of connecting social psychology to other disciplines and to apply this to key societal issues.



The programme translated its aims into a set of sixteen intended learning outcomes which are linked to the Dublin descriptors for the master's level. In the eyes of the panel, these intended learning outcomes clearly and unambiguously reflect the level that may be expected of graduates of a research master's programme. They are in line with the goal of preparing students for conducting research in the field of social psychology and demonstrate a good balance between theoretical knowledge and research skills. The three main topics of the research (i.e., Evolution, Morality, Cooperation) are clearly reflected in the learning outcomes. The creative bridging with societal issues and/or other disciplines seems somewhat less prominent. The panel is of the opinion that this could be strengthened by addressing more explicitly soft skills like critical thinking, self-regulation, problem solving, reflection, interpersonal skills, and dealing with cultural differences in a globalising world. This would also be in line with the educational vision and the VU core values 'responsibility' and 'openness'. The panel was pleased to learn that this was fully acknowledged by both the programme management and the faculty management. It encourages the faculty-wide plans to make the integration of soft skills more explicit in the learning outcomes of all educational programmes.

According to the self-evaluation report, the main goal of the programme is to train students in the field of social psychology such that they are capable of working independently as a researcher, either inside or outside of academia. In the student's chapter, students indicate that the programme focusses too much on preparing for a PhD position and they express a desire for more presence of the outside world in the programme. In the self-evaluation report, the programme management responded to this by stating that the strong research focus of the programme is one of its signature features and that this should be maintained. The panel fully agrees that the programme must preserve its research focus, but it also noted that the programme could strengthen the orientation on applied research outside academia. It suggests evaluating and eventually rephrasing its intended learning outcomes to better reflect the orientation on research outside academia. To ensure that the needs of the applied fields are better reflected in the aims of the programme, it encourages to strengthen the ties to stakeholders in applied research.

### *Conclusion*

The intended learning outcomes are in line with the goal of preparing students for conducting research in the field of social psychology, and demonstrate a good balance between theoretical knowledge and research skills. The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 1.

## **2.2 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, analysis, and considerations*

#### *Curriculum*

Social Psychology is a full-time programme of 120 EC. The curriculum consists of content courses, academic skills courses, expert workshops, electives, research projects, and a master thesis.

The first year provides three content courses that stress basic principles of social psychology (Moral and Political Psychology; Interpersonal Processes; Motivation and Emotion, each of 6 EC). These courses primarily aim to expand knowledge of contemporary social-psychological theories and



research with overarching conceptual frameworks and integrating various empirical literature. In the second year, students follow two content courses 'Evolutionary Principles' and 'Bridging Social Psychology'. The panel particularly appreciates the course 'Bridging Social Psychology', which focusses on the question of how social psychology can be connected to various other disciplines, such as behavioural economics, social neuroscience, and sociology.

The first year provides three academic skill courses (each of 6 EC). Two academic skill courses focus on quantitative research methodology and ethics. In addition, students can receive individual supervision and education about specific statistical analyses that they will use in their research projects for their master thesis. Students and alumni were very positive about both the quantitative research methodology courses and the individual supervision. The academic skills course 'Writing and Presenting' focusses on communication, particularly communicating scientific findings through written papers or oral (conference-style) presentations.

Throughout the programme there are four expert workshops, each of 3 EC. An expert workshop is a one-week, intensive course taught by a recognized international expert in the field. Through the expert workshop students acquire in-depth and up-to-date knowledge about a range of topics, provided directly by the leading researchers in that field. The panel appreciates these opportunities for students to be introduced into the larger international community of social psychology research. In the student's chapter, students also indicate their appreciation of the expert workshops.

Twice in the programme (once in the first year and once in the second year) students take an elective (each of 6 EC). Students can select a course from the electives pool offered by the research master's programmes at FGB. One of these electives concerns the 'Introduction to R for Behavioral Sciences', which is much appreciated by the students. In addition, students may take an external course from outside of the faculty as elective. This elective must be approved by the programme director. The panel is of the opinion that the electives allow students to adapt the programme to their personal interest or ambitions.

The panel appreciates the several research projects in the curriculum. This allows students to engage actively in different research activities, offering ample possibilities of learning to conduct research. In the first year, students are subdivided into groups of three, and put under the supervision of a staff member to conduct a group-based research project (Research Project I, 12 EC). Students write an individual research report that has the shape of an article to be submitted for publication. In the second year, students conduct two research projects (Research project II and III) and write their thesis (in total 36 EC). The thesis must be written in the format and style of an English-language scientific journal article, following APA standards. The thesis should constitute a solid basis for an article that might be submitted to an English-language, peer reviewed scientific journal.

The goal of the Research Projects II/III is to ensure that all students gain experience with the empirical cycle of conducting scientific research. As described in the self-evaluation, the programme recommends students to combine the two projects into a coherent study line of research. However, students may also conduct two truly separate studies and write two smaller theses, or they may conduct a single yet labour-extensive study to fulfil both projects (such as testing of extensive training programmes, extensive data collection, physiological measurements, longitudinal designs, and so on). The panel understands that the programme wants to give students some flexibility in how to design their research project(s), however it also noted that this can create some confusion. It advises the programme to communicate the several options more explicitly and avoid that students and staff by default see Research Projects II and III as one.

Overall, the panel is of the opinion that the curriculum is organised coherently and provides students with a solid basis of theoretical knowledge, academic skills and research experience. Based on the



self-evaluation and the document linking the intended learning outcomes to the courses, the panel gathered that the intended learning outcomes are clearly substantiated in the curriculum. However, the panel is of the opinion that the soft skills like critical thinking, self-regulation, problem solving, reflection, and interpersonal and intercultural skills, could be better integrated in curriculum (in line with standard 1). The panel learned that most lecturers already pay attention to these soft skills in their courses, but the panel also believes that the programme would benefit from a more explicit integration of soft skills within the curriculum.

Although the panel applauds the solid research basis provided by the programme, it is of the opinion that the research focus is mainly academic (also in line with standard 1). The panel learned from the materials and the discussions that the ties to organisations in applied research are less developed. It encourages the programme to strengthen these ties for example by stimulating research internships in organisations outside academia or by inviting more guest lecturers from the applied field, including alumni of the programme working outside of academia.

The didactic concept is characterised by teaching in small classes and individual mentoring by high-quality staff. In doing so, most courses encourage active learning through face-to-face interaction, and discussion about research and theory. All interviewees confirmed that these didactical principles not only exist on paper, but are a reality within the research master's programme. According to the students and alumni, all teachers are willing to invest time, are accessible and try to accommodate them as much as possible. Staff members, students, and alumni informed the panel that there is a real sense of community among students as well as very good contacts between teachers and students. Students feel respected and taken seriously by the teachers. The panel applauds this highly interactive learning and tutoring environment with a great deal of attention for the students' individual needs, performances, and development.

The student composition is clearly international. By and large, around 70%-75% of the student cohorts tend to be international. The panel welcomes the international classroom setting and noted that the programme makes well use of this, for example by challenging students to reflect on cultural differences, emphasising again the need for a more explicit focus on professional skills in a globalising world.

The language of instruction of the programme is English. The programme management substantiates its choice by arguing that the field of Social Psychology is internationally orientated, the fact that the vast majority of students each year comes from outside the Netherlands, and the ambition to prepare students for a career in academia. The panel endorses this.

#### *Admission and student numbers*

Candidates are selected based on academic achievements (guideline is Grade Point Average of 7.5 or higher), requirements regarding methods and statistics, English language proficiency, and motivation. Applicants are asked to write a motivation letter and an academic assignment. In addition, the admission board considers letters of recommendation from applicants' previous university. The management indicated during the interview that approximately 25% of the applicants are not admitted.

The panel noticed during the interview with the students that they all made a well-informed and deliberate choice for this programme. Overall, the panel is of the opinion the admission criteria are formulated clearly and adequately reflect the research-oriented nature and high demands of the programme. It was pleased to learn that, in response to the previous accreditation, prior knowledge of statistics is now a formal requirement in the admission criteria.



The programme aims at enrolling in between twenty and twenty-five new students per academic year. The average number of students actually starting the programme is eighteen over the past six years. The panel noticed that the intake in the previous three years was rather low, with fifteen students in 2018 and 2019 and twelve students in 2020. Although the panel realises that this low intake in 2020 could be partly due to the COVID-19 situation, the panel is of the opinion that these small cohort sizes provide challenges for the viability of the programme. According to the panel, attracting more students is desired. The panel was pleased to learn that the programme already intensified the publicity campaigns in order to attract more national and international students. In order to attract a broader range of students, the programme should communicate more explicitly that its aim is not only to prepare graduates for a PhD position, but also for research positions outside academia. The alumni who are currently working outside academia, suggested in their meeting with the panel that they could be helpful in making the different options more tangible to current and future students. The panel encourages the programme to take up this suggestion.

The programme should communicate more explicitly that its aim is not only to prepare graduates for a PhD position, but also for research positions outside academia.

#### *Study load and study guidance*

Throughout the programme, students receive extensive supervision and tutoring. Besides supervision of research, students also get a tutor - a PhD student from the social psychology section - to guide them through the practicalities of academic life. Students meet up with their tutor at least twice in their first year, and are free to meet up more frequently if they wish.

The students and alumni the panel met, all agreed that the workload of the programme is high. However, all of them agreed that it is feasible, due to the intimate research community and the openness of all staff members. Students and alumni indicated they felt free to approach staff members when they encountered problems or needed advice. Students, alumni and staff members indicated that the programme director plays a pivotal role. The panel applauds the responsiveness of programme management to the students' questions, and highly values the intimate atmosphere. However, it also noticed that students are less aware of the possibility to receive formal guidance at the faculty level, in the form of academic advisors. The panel advises to communicate this more explicitly.

#### *Staff*

The panel was impressed by the state-of-the-art knowledge, skills, enthusiasm and dedication of the staff. Their track records testify to their prominent position in the field of social psychology and their ability to conduct innovative research in this field. It is clear to the panel that students are part of a high-quality and committed research environment.

The focus of the programme is very much aligned with the expertise of the teaching staff. The panel agrees that this is one of the strengths of the programme. However, it also believes that the fact that the programme is organised by a small single research group brings certain risks. The panel wonders what happens if one or two core staff members would leave and whether it is possible to accommodate these vacancies, without making a major switch in the focus of the programme.

The panel is not only impressed with the scientific quality of the teaching staff, but also with their involvement in the programme and with the students. As mentioned earlier, supervision and tutoring are taken very seriously by all staff members. The previous accreditation committee noted that a



relatively low number of teachers had a University Teaching Qualification (UTQ). The panel was pleased to learn the vast majority of staff members have received their UTQ.

#### *COVID-19*

Due to COVID-19 almost all education switched to online teaching and assessment in the past year. The panel asked students and teachers about their experience with online teaching. Whilst COVID-19 evidently had an impact on the interaction between student and teachers, both students and teachers were positive about the quick and efficient transition. Because of the relatively small group size, it was quite easy for teachers to interact with all students online. Prior to the crisis most assessments already had the form of assignments and papers that do not require physical proximity. Student presentations have switched to online since the beginning of the crisis, but are still part of the assessment.

In order to maintain some form of contact between students and staff, and to increase students' feeling of being part of an academic community, the department has organised regular online 'Brown Bag Lunches', in which a staff member or external scholars holds a research presentation. Also, the programme has organised online social events for the students, enabling them to informally talk to some of the staff members. Students with whom the panel spoke, stated appreciating these social events.

The panel concluded that although the COVID-19 situation is not an optimal teaching and learning situation, the programme still allows students to achieve the academic objectives. In addition, the pandemic has offered a good opportunity to gain experience with blended learning. The panel was pleased to learn that the VU will investigate what measures might be kept after COVID-19. An example that was mentioned is the online debate with international experts that was organised in the course Bridging social psychology.

#### *Conclusion*

The panel is positive about the coherent programme, the interactive learning environment, and the dedicated staff who are experts in their domain. Students are able to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 2.

### **2.3 Student assessment**

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

#### *Findings, analysis, and considerations*

##### *Assessment policy and Examination Board*

As described in the self-evaluation report, the programme distinguishes three levels of responsibility for the execution and quality control of the assessments. The first level is the examiner, who is responsible for the quality of the assessment of a specific course. The second level is the programme director, who monitors the assessments throughout the programme, and takes appropriate action if an assessment fails to meet the standards. The third level is the Examination Board (EB), that monitors and ensures the quality of examinations, in various complementary ways. The faculty has one central EB and separate subcommittees for the clusters Psychology, Education & Family Studies,



and Human Movement Sciences. Every subcommittee consists of lecturers of the corresponding cluster, and every programme is represented by at least one lecturer. At least one of the members of the central EB is not directly affiliated with (employed at) FGB. From the discussion with representatives of the EB, the panel gathered that these members possess the proper capacity, expertise and attitude to perform all tasks in a proactive way.

One of the appendices to the self-evaluation report contains the assessment plan of the programme. The relation between the intended learning outcomes, the course objectives and the assessment is well thought-out. The programme uses a variety of assessment forms. This includes presentations, writing research papers and proposals, home exams, data analysis assignments, and writing literature review papers. The courses that are designed to teach students research methods or statistics, include an exam with open-ended questions to assess their knowledge, application, and judgment of these skills. Besides these two exams, the programme only uses assignments as an assessment form. The panel wonders if all learning outcomes, especially the learning outcomes regarding knowledge typically shared under Dublin descriptor 1, can be assessed with assignments. Although there is an alignment between the courses and assessment forms, the panel encourages the programme to check the alignment of learning objectives with assessments on programme level.

In the student chapter, students mention the widely shared concern that the requirements of courses should be clearer in the beginning. The panel was pleased to see that the programme manager recognises this is a point of improvement, and will address this immediately by making a clear and concrete “requirements” paragraph a standard part of any course syllabus. In addition, the programme coordinator will encourage teachers to also clearly present the requirements at the beginning of the first lecture.

### *Master thesis*

The panel studied thesis assessment forms and the thesis assessment procedure for grading the master theses. The master thesis is assessed by two examiners: the supervisor and the independent second reader. Following the suggestions made by the previous accreditation panel, the task of the second reader is to stay independent of the project for its entire duration, and objectively evaluate the thesis as second examiner at the end of the research process. The panel is positive about the improvement of the procedure and the explicit instruction that students are not allowed to ask the second assessor for feedback before handing in the final thesis. However, from the interview with the lecturers and the Examination Board the panel gathered that due to the small size of the programme and the close connections within the institute, it is challenging to guarantee the independence between the two examiners. The panel encourages the programme to better safeguard the independency, and to consider involving an independent second grader whose research group is not involved in the research master’s programme.

Another recommendation of the previous panel was to improve the quantity and quality of the feedback given on the master theses. Based on the completed assessment forms the panel studied, it established that the forms include sufficient written feedback. However, the panel has one point of attention. It noticed that the box regarding the plagiarism check was not always checked. The panel encourages the programme to make it obligatory to run such a check for each thesis and to complete this box.

The programme recently implemented the new faculty’s formal evaluation form, which is a standardised Excel sheet that weighs a range of subgrades for various assessment criteria of the thesis. These evaluation forms require the examiner to grade various aspects of the thesis including



abstract, introduction, writing quality, and to provide feedback on these aspects. After the examiner has rated all the criteria, the form automatically provides a grade through weighing all the subgrades. The final grade for the thesis is jointly determined by both examiners after comparing their independent grades. In most cases, the two grades are simply averaged to determine a final grade, but the two examiners may also reach consensus based on discussion. Should it be impossible for the supervisor and second reader to reach agreement about the final grade, the programme director may assign a third reader to resolve the dispute. The panel learned that until now, this has never happened. In the eyes of the panel, this may also be a consequence of the earlier observation that it is difficult to guarantee true independency between two examiners within such a small research group. The panel suggests always involving a third assessor when the independent, provisional grades of the two assessors differ by more than 1 point.

#### *Conclusion*

The panel is convinced that the programme has installed adequate measures to monitor assessment quality. The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 3.

## **2.4 Achieved learning outcomes**

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

#### *Findings, analysis, and considerations*

As described before, students finish the programme with a master thesis, which is based on Research Project II and III.

In order to assess whether the intended learning outcomes are achieved, the panel has studied a sample of fifteen recent theses. The panel is impressed by the high quality and academic level of the fifteen theses it examined. In general, the reports and theses were well-constructed and demonstrated a high level of in-depth knowledge of the respective topics. The panel agrees with all grades and would have given the same marks, deviating maximally by 0.5 only, sometimes giving a slightly higher or slightly lower grade. The panel is convinced that graduates achieve the ambitious intended learning outcomes of the programme.

The quality of the programme is also expressed by the achievements of the students, who are doing well according to the self-evaluation report. The self-evaluation report doesn't provide exact figures about the current positions of alumni. However, it indicates that approximately half of the graduates continue with a PhD or other positions at universities or academic institutions in either the Netherlands or abroad. The alumni who do not pursue a career in science, usually end up being employed in high quality professional positions outside of academia, in national and international commercial, governmental, and non-profit organizations. The panel advises strengthening its network of alumni, because this may increase the opportunities to collaborate with organisations who conduct applied research in the field of social psychology.

During the online visit, the panel talked to five alumni. All of them are very enthusiastic about the programme and its practical use in their profession. They pointed out that they had benefited from the focus on research skills and academic skills.





*Conclusion standard 4*

The panel concludes that the master theses reflect the high scientific standards of the research master's programme, and graduates achieve the ambitious intended learning outcomes of the programme. The programme therefore meets standard 4.



## 3. Strengths and recommendations

### 3.1 Strengths of the programme

The panel is impressed by the following features:

- Fostering Bridging – The programme aims to foster bridging, not only within social psychology, but also across disciplines and with application to key societal issues;
- Expert workshops – The expert workshops introduce students into the larger international community of social psychology research, and provide students with in-depth and up-to-date knowledge about a range of topics;
- Research projects – The curriculum consists of three research projects, allowing students to engage actively in different research activities;
- Interactive learning environment – The didactic concept is characterised by teaching in small classes and individual guidance with a great deal of attention for the students' individual needs, performance and development;
- Teaching team – The teaching staff is dedicated and well-qualified. Staff members are experts in their respective areas, bringing in the latest developments in their field.

### 3.2 Recommendations

For further improvement of the programme, the panel makes the following recommendations:

- Applied research – Strengthen the orientation on applied research outside academia in the intended learning outcomes and curriculum. To this end, strengthen the ties to organisations in applied research, including the network of alumni;
- Soft skills – Integrate the soft skills more explicitly in the intended learning outcomes and the curriculum;
- Viability of the programme:
  - Ensure a sufficient inflow of students in the programme. In order to attract a broader range of students, make more explicit that the programme also aims to prepare for research jobs outside academia;
  - Reflect on the dependency of the programme on a single research group, and consider extending the core group of staff involved;
- Independency – Ensure the independency of the second assessor of the master thesis. Consider involving an independent second grader whose research group is not involved in the research master's programme.



## 4. Conclusion

The intended learning outcomes are in line with the goal of preparing students for conducting research in the field of social psychology. The panel is of the opinion that the content and structure of the curriculum and the available staff constitute an attractive teaching-learning environment for the students. The programme has an adequate assessment system. The final projects of the research master's programme are of a good quality, and convincingly show that students achieve the intended learning outcomes of the programme.

Standard	Judgement
Standard 1	Meets the standard
Standard 2	Meets the standard
Standard 3	Meets the standard
Standard 4	Meets the standard
Final conclusion	<b>Positive</b>



## Appendix A – Panel composition and programmes of the cluster

Panel composition of the cluster:

- Prof. dr. Janke Cohen-Schotanus (chair) Professor emeritus of Research of Education in the Medical Sciences;
- Prof. dr. Rob Ruiter (chair), Professor of Health and Social Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience at Maastricht University;
- Prof. dr. Lidia Arends, Professor of Statistics and Research Methodology, Department of Psychology, Education & Child Studies at Erasmus University Rotterdam;
- Prof. dr. Caroline Braet, Professor of Developmental Psychopathology, Department of Developmental, Personality and Social Psychology at Ghent University;
- Prof. dr. Rachel Gibson, Professor of Politics, Department of Politics, University of Manchester;
- Prof. dr. Harm Hospers, Professor emeritus of Applied Health Psychology;
- Prof. dr. Detlev Leutner, Professor of Instructional Psychology, Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Duisburg-Essen;
- Prof. dr. Maike Luhmann, Professor of Psychological Methods, Department of psychology, Ruhr University Bochum;
- Hanne Oberman MSc (student member). Methodology and Statistics for the Behavioural, Biomedical, and Social Sciences, Utrecht University (graduated in 2020);
- Prof dr. Arne Roets, Professor of Social Psychology, Faculty of psychology and educational sciences, Department of Developmental, Personality, and Social Psychology, Ghent University;
- Prof. dr. Guus Smeets, Professor of Education in Psychology, Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences at Erasmus University Rotterdam;
- Yvonne Schittenhelm BSc, (student member), Master Individual Differences and Assessment, Tilburg University;
- Marie Stadel MSc (student member), Behavioural and Social Sciences Research Master, University of Groningen (graduated in 2020);
- Prof. dr. Lieven Verschaffel, Professor of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, KU Leuven;
- Prof. dr. Karine Verschueren, Professor of School and Developmental Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, KU Leuven.
- 

The cluster consist of thirteen programmes:

- M Individual Differences and Assessment (research), Tilburg University;
- M Behavioural Science (research), Radboud University;
- M Clinical and Developmental Psychopathology (research), Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam;
- M Social Psychology: Regulation of Social Behaviour (research), Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam;
- M Psychology (research), University of Amsterdam;
- M Communication Science (research), University of Amsterdam;
- M Educational Sciences: Learning in Interaction (research), Utrecht University;



- M Methodology and Statistics for the Behavioural, Biomedical and Social Sciences (research), Utrecht University;
- M Development and Socialisation in Childhood and Adolescence (research), Utrecht University;
- M Social & Health Psychology (research), Utrecht University;
- M Behavioural and Social Sciences (research), University of Groningen;
- M Psychology (research), Leiden University;
- M Developmental Psychopathology in Education and Child Studies (research), Leiden University.



## Appendix B – Schedule of the visit

3 March 2021

Time	Session
08.30 – 10.00	Preparation panel
10.00 – 10.45	Management
10.45 – 11.00	Evaluation
11.00 – 11.45	Students
11.00 – 12.00	Evaluation
12.45 – 13.30	Lecturers
13.30 – 13.45	Evaluation
13.45 – 14.15	Alumni
14.15 – 14.30	Evaluation
14.30 – 15.00	Examination board
15.00 – 15.30	Evaluation and preparing questions for management
15.30 -16.00	Second meeting management
16.00 – 17.30	Evaluation
17.30 – 17.45	Presentation of first findings



## Appendix C – Documents studied

- Self-evaluation report;
  - Appendix I – Assessment report previous accreditation, and actions taken;
  - Appendix II – SWOT analysis;
  - Appendix III – Influx of students (2015-2020);
  - Appendix IV – Schedule and curriculum overview;
  - Appendix V – Learning outcomes;
  - Appendix VI – Connection of courses to learning outcomes;
  - Appendix VII – Overview of teaching staff Research Master Social Psychology;
  - Appendix VIII – How the programme has coped with the corona crisis;
- Influx and NSE results Research master Social Psychology;
- Besluit NVAO Research Master Social Psychology;
- 20-21 Course and Examination Regulations RM programmes Psychology;
- Assessment plan RM SP;
- Assessment programme RM Social Psychology;
- Faculty Assessment Framework FBMS (FGB) - February 2019;
- Fifteen theses with assessment forms.



## Appendix D – Abbreviations

EB Examination Board

FBG *Faculteit der Gedrags- en Bewegingswetenschappen* (Faculty of Behavioural and Movement Sciences)

NVAO *Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie*

UTQ University Teaching Qualification (UTQ)

VU Vrije Universiteit

