

The logo for AeQui, featuring the letters 'AeQui' in a purple, sans-serif font. A light blue, hand-drawn style line loops around the letters, starting from the 'A', passing under the 'e', looping around the 'Q', and ending under the 'i'.

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**Master Interior Architecture: Research + Design**

**Piet Zwart Institute, Willem de Kooning Academy  
Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences**

***Report of the limited programme assessment  
9-10 June 2021***

Utrecht, The Netherlands  
September 2021  
[www.AeQui.nl](http://www.AeQui.nl)  
*Assessment Agency for Higher Education*

## Colophon

### Programme

Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences  
Master Interior Architecture  
Location: Rotterdam  
Mode of study: fulltime  
Croho: 44760  
Result of institutional assessment: positive

The assessment was conducted under responsibility of  
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*This document is best printed in duplex*

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## Summary

On 9 and 10 June 2021 an assessment committee of AeQui visited the Master programme Interior Architecture: Research + Design at the Piet Zwart Institute / Willem de Kooning Academy of the Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences. The international programme offers students a design-research education at master level with a critical and exploratory focus on the complex and developing field of interior architecture. For its assessment the committee has used the 2018 NVAO framework for limited programme assessment. It found the programme to meet all NVAO standards. Its overall judgement on the quality of the MIARD programme is therefore **positive**.

### Intended learning outcomes

The MIARD programme has a clear, relevant and outspoken profile, whose values and rationale are shared and promoted by all stakeholders. The expectations raised by this profile are met throughout the curriculum and in the programme learning outcomes. The seven ILOs are formulated precisely and reflect adequately the domain, level and orientation of the programme. Students benefit from MIARD's extensive (inter)national network and activities. The Advisory Board has a pertinent role as structural watchdog of programme standards, benchmarking and professional developments. The committee judges that the MIARD programme **meets** the standard.

### Teaching-learning environment

The MIARD programme features a strong teaching and learning environment, an appreciation that concerns not only the curriculum, but also the staff and the facilities. The synergy between management, tutors and students impacts positively on the learning environment. The curriculum is well structured; research forms an intrinsic part of the programme; the intimate scale, dynamic learning environment and open approach to pedagogy form a fertile basis for dialogue-based learning; the admissions process is meticulous and leads to high quality cohorts of students with diverse backgrounds and levels of experience. The number of staff is adequate and their expertise, commitment and student-centredness is exemplary. The MIARD archive constitutes an important asset as database and public hub for both internal and external stakeholders. The committee judges that the MIARD programme **meets** the standard.

### Student assessment

The MIARD programme features a strong assessment system that is tailored to the specific needs of the programme. The assessment provisions are effectively implemented and play an important role in the learning process of the MIARD student. Feedback is a key feature of student assessment. The role of the external expert in the assessment of graduation projects has been strengthened. The sample of graduation projects reviewed show that the final assessment is thorough and that feedback to students is extensive and relevant. The Examination Board assures the quality of assessment in an exemplary way. The committee judges that the MIARD programme **meets** the standard.

### Achieved learning outcomes

MIARD graduates definitely achieve the learning outcomes of the programme: the quality of the final projects is invariably strong and students consistently demonstrate a high standard in both making and writing. Graduates embody a broad definition of practice, are employed in different settings and in a variety of positions, and seem to provide added value to the field. The committee judges that the MIARD programme **meets** the standard.

### Recommendations

The assessment committee has issued a positive judgement on each standard and on the quality of the MIARD programme as a whole. Nonetheless the committee sees room for improvement in a number of areas. It therefore advises the institution and the programme:

- to enhance the impact of the Advisory Board by also involving experts who question the MIARD approach or represent a diverse range of fields, including more traditional practices in interior design;
- to engage in more internal and external collaborations that go beyond mere collegial exchange and relate to the field of actual design practice;
- to consider a more systematic use of reflective (self-)assessment in the curriculum;
- to train students on 'making public' their work to a non-expert audience;
- to strengthen the cooperation with alumni and keep track of their professional activities, possibly through a more data-driven approach.

All standards of the NVAO assessment framework (2018) are assessed positively; the assessment committee therefore issues a **positive** recommendation for the accreditation of the MIARD programme.

On behalf of the entire assessment committee,  
Utrecht, September 2021

Raoul van Aalst  
Chair

Mark Delmartino  
Secretary

## Introduction

The Master Interior Architecture: Research + Design presents itself under the name MIARD, and is one of six master programmes offered by the Piet Zwart Institute at the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam. MIARD is a small-scale full-time English-language programme of 120 ECTS featuring an international team of tutors and a selective and diverse group of about twelve students per year. It views interiors as an expanding field and emphasises in its education the role of practice-based research that is self-directed and multidisciplinary. In line with the Institute's notion of making public, the programme launched the MIARD Archive: an online database of student projects, programme publications and exhibitions as a source of inspiration for (future) students, tutors and the wider public.

### The institute

The Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences (RUAS) was established in 1988 as *Hogeschool Rotterdam & Omstreken* following a merger of nineteen higher education institutions in Rotterdam, Delft and Dordrecht. RUAS stands for high quality and inclusive education that prepares students for a changing job market and society. Education at RUAS is organised in 13 institutes, including the Willem de Kooning Academy (WdKA), one of the bigger arts academies in the Netherlands with more than 2000 students. The practice-based research master programme under consideration is hosted by the Piet Zwart Institute (PZI), the post-graduate institute for study and research in art, media and design within WdKA.

All PZI master programmes aim to educate professionals who have a critically reflective, innovative, questioning and imaginative approach to their work. They do so through curricula that combine collective learning, individual tutorials, practice-based research and theoretical inquiry. As an educational institute, the notion of making public is core to the activities of PZI and allows the institute to share and expand its research beyond academia. The academic framework of PZI and WdKA provide the programmes with the necessary space for reflection and knowledge-building.

### The programme

MIARD is a two-year, full-time programme of 120 ECTS, leading to a Master of Interior Architecture. It started in 2000 as a master course in Retail and

Interior Design. Reflecting developments in the field, the programme has over time moved away from that niche towards a wider scope and orientation: the research and multidisciplinary dimensions of the field of interior architecture. Consequently, in 2017 the programme was renamed Master Interior Architecture: Research and Design. At the time of this assessment visit, towards the end of the academic year 2020-2021, MIARD is a small-scale English-language programme featuring a highly international team of core tutors and a selective and diverse group of twenty-five students.

The evolution of the programme over the past two decades reflects the changes in the cultural and professional sector, the rapid advances in technology and media, and the shift in higher education and professional practice towards a more prominent role for research as a means to explore processes of innovation and production. MIARD views interiors as an expanding field and operates from the perspective that education today must be adaptable to a variety of external forces. It emphasises the role of practice-based research that is self-directed and multidisciplinary. These developments have always been in sync with the broader educational and research interests across PZI and WdKA; also in the future, the programme is likely to play an important role in the ambitions of both Academy and Institute, notably with regard to third-cycle doctoral education.

The MIARD programme takes the notion of making public at heart: in 2018, it launched the MIARD

Archive: an online database storing and sharing a growing collection of student projects and presenting the programme's publications, exhibitions and key announcements. Staff and students use the archive as a source to study previous work, themes and methods, while it also serves as a public hub presenting student projects to diverse audiences beyond the institute.

Alumni of the programme, who have also finished both a bachelor's programme in interior architecture and a professional experience period, can register with the BNI as interior architect. The committee has noted that the programme conforms to the requirements. Relatively few alumni do register.

### **The assessment**

The Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences assigned AeQui VBI to perform a quality assessment of its master programme Interior Architecture: Research + Design. In close co-operation with the programme management, AeQui convened an independent and competent assessment committee. A preparatory meeting with representatives of the programme was held to exchange information and plan the date and programme of the site-visit.

In the run-up to the site visit, the assessment committee studied the self-evaluation report on the programme and reviewed a sample of graduation products that had been accepted during the last two years. The findings of the report and the results of the review were input for the discussions during the visit.

The site visit was carried out on 9 and 10 June 2021 according to the programme presented in attachment 2. The visit was held online.

The committee has assessed the programme in an independent manner; at the end of the visit, the chair of the assessment committee presented the initial findings of the committee to representatives of the programme and the institution.

The panel has carried out its assessment in relation to, and in consideration of, the cluster of programmes in which this programme is placed. The contextualisation of the programme within its cluster was conducted by the complete panel during the preliminary meeting and the final deliberations. The knowledge required for this was present in (part of) the panel.

In this document, the committee is reporting on its findings, considerations and conclusions according to the 2018 NVAO framework for limited programme assessment. A draft version of the report was sent to the programme management; its reactions have led to this final version of the report.

Initiated by the programme, a development dialogue will be planned in the latter half of 2021. The results of this development dialogue have no influence on the assessment presented in this report.

# 1. Intended learning outcomes

The MIARD programme has a clear, relevant and outspoken profile, whose values and rationale are shared and promoted by all stakeholders. The expectations raised by this profile are met throughout the curriculum and in the programme learning outcomes. The seven ILOs are formulated precisely and reflect adequately the domain, level and orientation of the programme. Students benefit from MIARD's extensive (inter)national network and activities. The Advisory Board has a pertinent role as structural watchdog of programme standards, benchmarking and professional developments. The potential impact of the Advisory Board can be enhanced by also involving experts who question the MIARD approach and/or represent more traditional practices in interior architecture. According to the assessment committee, the MIARD programme **meets this standard**.

## Findings

### *Profile*

The assessment committee gathered from the very informative Self-Evaluation that the MIARD programme started in 2000 as one of the first master programmes at the Piet Zwart Institute (PZI). Over time, the programme has constantly evolved, thereby reflecting the changes in the cultural and professional sector, in technology and in higher education. These developments have always been aligned with the broader educational and research interests across PZI and the Willem de Kooning Academy (WdKA).

The committee noticed that the developments over the past two decades have led MIARD to assume a clear position on interior architecture and its education: according to MIARD, interior architecture is a rapidly maturing and expanding field of practice. Practitioners are faced with a changing world of new realities, technologies, and socio-political, environmental and economic challenges. Consequently, the practice of the designer needs to expand, react and shape future roles. Today the interior is multivalent, as the practice and education of interiors encompass a broad spectrum within a diverse labour and cultural market. These considerations have led MIARD to emphasise in its education the role of practice-based research that is self-directed and multidisciplinary, and to embrace a dynamic learning environment with an open approach to pedagogy.

In the Student Perspective section of the Self-Evaluation, students earmark practice-based research, the multidisciplinary approach, and the attention to openness and growth through different perspectives on methodology and practice as the strongest aspects of the programme. The critical and multidisciplinary approach of MIARD allows them to see beyond the traditional professional paths and develop skills that support their critical research-driven practice. Representatives of the professional field indicated during the discussions that MIARD stands out in the field because it goes beyond interior architecture: it transcends all scales, does not stick to the discipline, works across disciplines and incorporates all fields of knowledge. It hints at what the future of the profession can be and the students who graduate MIARD have a critical relational practice that is research informed, not vocational.

The committee appreciates this outspokenness in the profile, as well as the fact that all interlocutors – students, alumni, tutors, professional field representatives and institutional management – share the underlying values and rationale of the programme. Throughout the discussions, the committee not only heard but also observed that the programme is strongly connected to its study body and offers students a transformative experience. Overall, the committee found that the impressions it gathered from the different sessions confirm the description and analysis in the programme's Self-Evaluation. It has met a very confident programme where every participant was



confident in both the quality and the trajectory. This confidence also comes through in the vision of the programme. According to the committee, MIARD values intellectual risk taking and encourages questioning the field of interior architecture; in that respect, the programme is both helpful to the profession and will challenge it.

Finally, the committee noticed with satisfaction that the developments regarding MIARD are linked to the interests and ambitions at institutional level, whereby developments and ambitions are mutually beneficial and strengthen each other. Similar developments have taken / are taking place in other master programmes at PZI. They strengthen not only the respective programmes but also the profile of the Piet Zwart Institute, as recommended in the previous accreditation report from 2013 that covered all PZI master programmes.

#### *Intended learning outcomes*

The committee understood from the Self-Evaluation, the MIARD Handbook and the discussions that the profile of the programme is reflected in the programme objectives, which in turn align with the profile for Arts and Design master programmes in the Netherlands. The Consultation Committee on Visual Arts (Overleg Beeldende Kunsten, OBK) has formulated a vision for master-level education in relation to the professional field, artistic practice and research emphasising context, disciplinarity, research, and self-direction.

MIARD's intended learning outcomes (ILOs) address seven areas: creative ability, self-directed research, critical reflection and awareness of context, communicative skills, capacity for media and technology, making and material ability, and organisational skills. The committee agrees with the statement in the Self-Evaluation that the ILOs reflect developments in the professional field that are relevant for MIARD. When developing these ILOs, the programme ensured that their formulation is in line with the five master level qualifications set by the Dublin Descriptors. The areas of

knowledge are not developed separately by students but overlap and intersect through an ongoing synthesis of activities across the curriculum. According to the committee, the relation between intended learning outcomes, Dublin Descriptors, OBK vision, curriculum components and assessment is convincingly described in the MIARD Handbook. The written materials and the discussions moreover indicated that students who successfully achieve the ILOs can pursue a career as interior architect in the Netherlands: MIARD graduates are qualified to enter a professional traineeship that complies with the Dutch WAT legislation for Interior Architects.

The committee thinks highly of the (intended) learning outcomes of the MIARD programme: they do not only align with the relevant sectoral, educational and professional requirements but also reflect the specific profile of MIARD and the professional developments it wants to promote. The formulation of the seven ILOs is clear and covers appropriately the domain (interior architecture), the level (master) and the orientation (professional) of the MIARD programme. The committee furthermore appreciates that these ILOs are no stand-alone statements but have been incorporated throughout the entire curriculum in the modules and their respective assessments.

#### *Professional field*

The committee learned that the MIARD programme is very well connected to the professional field. It maintains many institutional and working relationships with national and international experts, artists, studios and programmes across various contexts. Moreover, as part of the 'making public' agenda of PZI, the programme organises every year a range of activities to keep an active and meaningful dialogue with developments across cultural and professional sectors. These activities are essential to the development of the programme and the curriculum; the concrete actions and guests vary every year based on the programming activities, the external collaborations and the research interests of the students.

The committee appreciates the number and variety of these contacts as they invariably benefit the students and staff of the programme.

The MIARD programme can rely on an Advisory Board (AB), whose composition changes every few years. The committee spoke to all four members of the current AB, who are invited because of their distinct area of expertise, professional practice, international network and affiliations. The committee thinks highly of this AB in its function as structural reviewer and monitor of programme standards, benchmarking and professional developments. Moreover, it welcomes the inclusion of an alumnus on the AB, which is likely to further enhance the direct relevance of the AB contributions to the programme.

The committee did wonder though whether MIARD may want to expand the AB with experts who have a 'dissident' voice and/or represent a more 'traditional' professional background. While the committee recognises the expertise of the current AB members and their value added for the programme, their way of thinking did seem to align with each other and with the programme. If MIARD wants to expand its impact, it may do so according to the committee by involving also experts who work inside the boundaries of more traditional codified practice in interior architecture or represent a diverse range of fields such as interior design practice, industrial design, object design, (digital) interaction design.

### Considerations

The assessment committee considers that the MIARD programme has a clear, relevant and outspoken profile, whose values and rationale are shared and promoted by all programme stakeholders. Moreover, the programme manages to live up to the expectations raised by this profile through a similarly clear, relevant and tailored set of programme learning outcomes. The seven ILOs are formulated precisely and reflect the domain (interior architecture), the level (master) and the

orientation (professional) of the MIARD programme. According to the committee, the fact that these ILOs are no stand-alone statements but have been incorporated throughout the entire curriculum in the modules and their respective assessments strengthens the quality of the programme and facilitates its management.

The committee subscribes the opinion of students that MIARD is particularly strong in emphasising practice-based research, a multidisciplinary approach, and in offering a variety of perspectives on methodology and practice. As a result, the programme offers a transformative experience where students learn to see beyond the traditional professional paths and develop skills to support a critical research-driven practice. The committee also shares the opinion of the professional field representatives that MIARD stands out because it goes beyond interior architecture: the programme offers what the future of the profession can be and delivers graduates with a critical relational practice that is research informed.

The committee is impressed by the number and variety of connections and activities of the MIARD programme and considers that this extensive network and networking benefit both the students and staff of the programme. Furthermore, it welcomes the active and pertinent role of the Advisory Board and the complementary expertise of its members. If anything, the programme may want to expand the composition and potential impact of its Advisory Board by involving experts who question the MIARD approach and/or represent more traditional practices in interior architecture.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment committee concludes that the MIARD programme **meets standard 1, intended learning outcomes.**

## 2. Teaching-learning environment

The MIARD programme features a strong teaching and learning environment, an appreciation that concerns not only the curriculum, but also the staff and the facilities. The synergy between management, tutors and students impacts positively on the learning environment. The curriculum is well structured; research forms an intrinsic part of the programme; the intimate scale, dynamic learning environment and open approach to pedagogy form a fertile basis for dialogue-based learning; the admissions process is meticulous and leads to high quality cohorts of students with diverse backgrounds and levels of experience. The number of staff is fine and their expertise, commitment and student-centeredness is exemplary. The MIARD archive constitutes an important asset as database and public hub for both internal and external stakeholders. In addition to all positive considerations, the MIARD programme may promote more internal and external collaboration that goes beyond mere collegial exchange. According to the assessment committee, the MIARD programme **meets this standard**.

### Findings

#### *Programme*

The master Interior Architecture Research + Design offers students who are interested in the expanding field of interior spatial practice a two-year fulltime programme. The curriculum is based on a multidisciplinary holistic model and features a range of topical themes, methods, tools and formats. The course modules provide students with bodies of knowledge and skillsets that overlap and interconnect across the programme. The written materials and the discussions have provided the assessment committee with good arguments to establish that the programme constitutes a clear and relevant operationalisation of the MIARD profile.

The programme curriculum consists of two years of 60 ECTS each. In the first year, students establish solid research skills that prepare them to work independently with supervisors on their graduation project in the second year. The first three terms of the programme are structured around thematic design projects (30 ECTS), multiple media modules (10 ECTS), critical strategy courses on theory, history and research methods (15 ECTS), and the graduation project preparation (5 ECTS). The final term is entirely dedicated to the graduation project thesis (15) and the design project

(25 ECTS). The committee has read with interest about the objectives and contents of each component, as well as their rationale within the overall MIARD programme in the Self-Evaluation. Moreover, the additional materials provided prior to the site visit and the discussions with staff and students have complemented and fine-tuned the committee's view on the curriculum. According to the committee, the curriculum is well structured: the individual components are relevant in their own right and at the same time form indispensable parts of the overall curriculum. There is a clear connection between the learning goals of the individual modules and the overall learning outcomes at programme level. Throughout the discussions with staff, students and alumni, the committee only heard positive elements on the curriculum and the way the overall structure of the programme and its constituent components allows individual students the flexibility to pursue their own path.

The committee understood from the materials and the discussions that the role of research (activities) has increased since the programme is offered as MIARD. Research is multifaceted and intrinsic to the curriculum: students follow three thematic design projects with topical research themes that are practice based. Moreover, the critical strategies modules play a significant role

in the development of a distinct body of research that impacts and serves as a critical backdrop to the design practice. All students go through a lot of material on research, learn about the research of their tutors, and discuss their own research development in class. The discussions have furthermore convinced the committee that - in comparison to the situation at the time of the previous accreditation visit - switching to the MIARD programme has brought increased attention to the research skills of students and a stronger connection between the written graduation project and the final design work.

Asked what this emphasis on research does to an average MIARD student, core tutors indicated that the programme profile mainly attracts students with some interest in and familiarity with artistic practice-based research. Students who show a particular curiosity and aptness for research are encouraged to continue pursuing research beyond graduation, possibly in the framework of a third-cycle doctoral programme. Other students are more attracted to the design part of the curriculum: this is equally fine according to the tutors because these students also undergo a transformative process and benefit to a similar extent from the curriculum.

The master courses at PZI are directed towards (further) developing the professional practice of students by means of research and education. The focus of MIARD on knowledge oriented, practice oriented and student-oriented education is supported by its intimate scale, dynamic learning environment and open approach to pedagogy. Although the visit took place online, the assessment committee noticed the intimate scale of the programme as well as the (sense of) community that is formed every year between staff and students who educate and learn from each other and develop professional relationships. The main pedagogical approach is dialogue-based learning. Teaching is multifaceted and involves individual tutorials, critiques and guidance, as well as collective learning in group reviews, seminars,

presentations, workshops and lectures. The process of self-direction is fundamental to the course. The discussions with students, alumni and staff confirmed according to the assessment committee that the didactic approach described in the Self-Evaluation is also effectively and successfully implemented in the day-to-day reality of the MIARD programme.

Compared to its forerunners, the MIARD programme attracts a wider variety of applicants whose backgrounds reflect a broad range of disciplines and experiences. Although it is offered only in a full-time variant, the programme attracts both recent bachelor graduates and individuals with established careers. Every year only a limited number of students – roughly a dozen – are accepted. Competition is high and the quality of applications has improved significantly; about 13% of the applicants eventually enrol. The MIARD admissions committee, which is composed of core tutors and programme director, reviews all applications. Potential candidates are interviewed and eventually selected on their qualifications, their professional ambitions and their expected fit within the cohort. According to the assessment committee, the outcome of the selection process fully aligns with the MIARD profile.

Students indicated that the admission process is extensive and tough, but that the procedure is feasible. Tutors indicated that the programme director is particularly good at assessing the different portfolios and selecting individually qualified students with various interests and backgrounds and the right (social) attitude to eventually create a cohort. Many students who pass the selection are non-Dutch and have different cultural and educational backgrounds. The graduation projects of former students and the discussions with current students have shown the committee that the quality of the selected students is very high and that their fit within the cohort is successful. Hence, the committee is convinced that the diversity of the incoming students in background and experience enriches the educational experience for both students and tutors.

The master programme has an English language title and is offered in English. According to both institutional and programme management, this is a conscious development and based on the decision to move away from a master programme that was geared towards the niche of retail design. The MIARD programme currently has a different profile and caters for students who are interested in the research and multidisciplinary dimensions of the field of interior architecture. The institutional ambitions with MIARD have led the programme director to recruit quality tutors with different backgrounds and complementary expertise. Several of these tutors are international. Given the considerable competition among applicants to get admitted to this small-scale programme, several of the successful applicants turn out to be more mature, have (some) work experience and/or obtained their bachelor degree abroad. The committee understands the viewpoint of WdKA, PZI and MIARD that internationally composed student and tutor groups are more likely to live up to the ambitions and envisaged profile of the MIARD programme. The discussions with students, alumni and tutors indicate according to the committee that the international dimension of the programme, including the use of English as language of instruction, has resulted in high quality students and tutors, who in turn are the best way for the programme to reach the ambitions.

The committee gathered from the written materials and the discussions that the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the delivery of the MIARD programme. Following the lockdown in March 2020 the PZI rearranged its educational offering: first, it developed full online education in line with the national health policies that were in place at the time; later, it set up a blended pedagogical approach featuring elements of both physical and online education. Since September 2020, MIARD students are not hit as hard by the pandemic as many other students because arts education is exempted in part of the rulings of the government: students have access to their own

workspaces in the studio part of the building and – upon reservation - can use the stations at the academy. Tutors, from their side, were not allowed into the building and had to adjust their courses and their teaching methods to a format that is suitable for online delivery. Students indicated to the committee that they are satisfied with the way WdKA, PZI and MIARD have addressed the consequences of the pandemic. In addition to dealing adequately with the educational component, the staff team paid ample attention to the social and mental wellbeing of the students. Moreover, students who were about to finish the programme in spring 2020 managed to graduate in time.

#### *Staff*

A total of ten staff representing seven different nationalities is delivering the MIARD programme: the total involvement of one director, one coordinator and ten core tutors is set at 3.3 FTE. The committee noticed that - given the average number of MIARD students – both the number of staff and the student-staff ratio are fine.

The composition of the team is based on the needs and the orientation of the curriculum; each tutor brings in a particular area of expertise; collectively, the team forms a diverse group of highly talented professionals with distinct practices across various disciplines. The committee learned that the changes in programme name and curriculum have led new staff members to join the programme because their professional practices aligned well with the MIARD profile of practice-based research and interdisciplinary education. A few tutors who had been teaching in the programme for a number of years became permanent contract employees of the Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, which in turn helped solidify their commitment. The committee spoke to the majority of the MIARD team and found the tutors to be highly qualified and well-cast for the position they have in the programme.

The programme director, coordinator and tutors regularly meet to plan courses, share programme

and academy news, discuss student progress, and plan assessments and public activities. Tutors indicated that they often work together to deliver the programme; two staff who co-teach one module found that their cooperation is also an added value for their own development as professionals. Students indicated to the committee that they appreciate the quality of the individual tutors, as well as their availability for and genuine interest in the students.

In addition to the core team, the programme maintains an active roster of (inter)national external guests, critics and lecturers who visit MIARD annually and are essential to connect the programme, staff and students with the professional field. The committee noticed that these contacts are used in a very flexible way, contribute to the overall quality of the curriculum and often serve as additional inspiration (next to the supervisors and tutor team) for students who are in their graduation trajectory.

The committee noted that the command of English of the staff is very good. Some are native speakers, the others are proficient users of the language.

#### *Facilities*

The MIARD programme has its own room on the fourth floor of the Wijnhaven building where all PZI master programmes are located. Moreover, each student is provided with a studio space in the same building where they can work on projects throughout the academic year. The pandemic has led all students and staff at WDKA and PZI to use more consistently the online platform that was already available and is now the central space for information exchange and for uploading deliverables and assessments.

The curriculum emphasises both writing and making. The material and technical research is done at the ten stations in the adjacent building of the Academy, where students can experiment, explore new developments and innovations, and create prototypes. MIARD students appreciate

both the programme-specific facilities and the stations, and were positive about the expertise and didactic quality of the station coordinators. However, the pandemic seems to have increased rather than reduced the (perceived) separation between PZI studios and WdKA stations. As one student put it: "using the stations felt difficult to organise, even if the department did its very best; although the experience was positive overall, I regret that my connection to stations took so long." The committee noticed that both programme and institutional management are aware that there is room for improvement in this area.

Finally, the committee noticed that the programme is very strong at communication and at making things public. There are plenty of opportunities for dialogue between and among students and staff - both as structural parts of the curriculum and on an informal basis. The committee thought the Self-Evaluation report was of high quality both in providing the necessary background information on the programme and as a critical analysis of the past achievements and the future ambitions. The MIARD archive constitutes an important asset for the programme: as an online database and a public hub, it stores and shares the growing collection of student projects and serves as a reference for staff and students to study previous work, themes and methods. Several students indicated to the committee that the archive played an important role in their application process, either as a resource for inspiration or as a convincing argument that MIARD was the right programme to apply for.

#### **Considerations**

The assessment committee considers that the MIARD programme features a strong teaching and learning environment, an appreciation that is valid for programme, staff and facilities. According to the committee, there is a good synergy between the management, the tutors and the students, which in turn affects positively the entire learning environment.

The curriculum is well structured; there is a clear connection between the learning goals of the individual modules and the overall learning outcomes at programme level. The role of research (activities) has increased since the programme has changed name and profile and is now a multifaceted and intrinsic part of the curriculum. The didactic approach lives up to the ambitions of the MIARD programme: the intimate scale, dynamic learning environment and open approach to pedagogy form a fertile basis for dialogue-based learning.

The admissions process is both extensive and meticulous. The outcome of the competitive selection process leads to cohorts who are diverse in background and experience, which in turn enriches the educational experience for the small-scale community of students and staff. If anything, the committee found that admitting candidates that best fit the programme in the long term bears the risk that the selection becomes self-centred and self-referential. Hence, MIARD may want to consider to periodically change for example criteria or process for selection.

The committee agrees to the argumentation of the management to offer the programme in English: the profile, ambitions and size of the MIARD programme are served best in an international and diverse environment where competent staff tutor high quality students.

The number of staff and the staff-student ratio are fine. The committee was struck by the enthusiasm and commitment of the MIARD team. The

individual members are well cast for the position they have in the programme, and are much appreciated by the students for their availability and genuine interest in their development.

The combination of high-quality students, competent tutors and a well-structured curriculum explains according to the committee why there is no dropout and only limited study delay in the MIARD programme. Furthermore, the committee found that the programme creates a safe and caring environment, a feature that students particularly appreciated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The MIARD programme has its own room in the Academy, students have dedicated studio spaces to work on their design projects and experiment with materials in the stations. The quality of the facilities on offer to students is beyond doubt. Nonetheless, there is room for more internal collaboration between MIARD and other PZI and WdKA programmes, as well as with the institute and the academy. Moreover, the committee appreciates the many forms of networking with external experts and organisations, but sees opportunities for more external collaboration that goes beyond collegial exchange and relate more to the field of actual design practice.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment committee concludes that the MIARD programme **meets standard 2, teaching-learning environment.**

### 3. Student assessment

The MIARD programme features a strong assessment system that is tailored to the specific needs of the programme. There is a clear link between the assessment formats, the assessment criteria, the learning goals of the curriculum components and the overall learning outcomes at programme level. The assessment provisions are effectively implemented and play an important role in the learning process of the MIARD student. Feedback is a key feature of student assessment. The role of the external expert in the assessment of graduation projects has been strengthened. The sample of graduation projects reviewed show that the final assessment is thorough and that feedback to students is extensive and relevant. The Examination Board assures the quality of assessment in an exemplary way. In sum, the MIARD programme has been handling assessment very well under both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances. If the programme would envisage more forms of reflective (self) assessment, then this component should be enhanced, possibly by having students systematically reflect in writing on the feedback they receive in the integrated assessments. According to the assessment committee, the MIARD programme **meets this standard**.

#### Findings

##### *Assessment system*

The principles underlying student assessment at MIARD reflect the overall assessment policy at WdKA and are formally laid down in the Exam Regulations (Onderwijs- en Examenregeling, OER). The committee noticed in the written materials and through the discussions that at the level of PZI, the assessment procedures have been regulated and formalised in recent years. These changes have positively affected the different PZI programmes, notably with regard to their alignment both internally and with national and international standards. By enhancing their assessment system, the institute and its master programmes address one of the recommendations of the previous accreditation visit.

The transition from the previous master programme Interior Architecture and Retail Design to MIARD has also affected the way in which student assessment is shaped and operationalised. The committee noticed that assessment plays an important role in the learning process of the MIARD student. It is designed to support the student's professional development and students are expected to effectively integrate advanced skills and knowledge in their practice. The assessment provisions that specifically concern MIARD are described in the Handbook.

In order to ensure the reliability, fairness and value of assessment, MIARD does not only assess separate modules but also works with integrated assessments to evaluate how students integrate knowledge and skills into self-directed, practice-based research. Each term tutors provide personalised written feedback to every student based on the assessment criteria of the modules. Written feedback is an important component of the assessment policy as it helps students build upon their strengths and provides constructive advice in their development. Next to formal assessments students continually assess and reflect upon their work with peers and tutors. Informal peer reviews along with more formal tutorial feedback are essential learning tools in the programme trajectory. The committee found that the assessment system at MIARD was well described in the Self-Evaluation section "Our Perspective on Assessing". Moreover, additional assessment materials and the discussions with management, tutors and students have provided numerous examples of how these assessment provisions are implemented in the day-to-day operations of the programme.

The committee was satisfied to hear that the COVID-19 pandemic did not require the MIARD



programme to change its perspective on assessment, apart from taking into consideration the additional challenges that students face.

#### *Course assessment*

Across its curriculum components, MIARD works with two modes of assessment: modular and integrated assessments. The Handbook contains an overview of the curriculum components and their respective assessment types. Modular assessments are held halfway and at the end of the first three terms and consist of both formative and summative evaluations of individual modules. These assessments constitute indicators of progress and development within the learning trajectory. Students are evaluated according to the specific assessment criteria listed in the course description. The assessment consists of collective verbal feedback by tutors and guest critics during design reviews and of formal assessment in writing by the learning module tutor. Integrated assessments also consist of formative and summative evaluations: the former occurs during the design project modules, while the latter is central to the graduation project. Integrated assessments are attended by a panel comprised of supervisors, the chair and the external expert who each give their individual evaluation and then agree on a joint assessment. Each integrated assessment contains assessment criteria that focus on the ability of students.

Students indicated to the committee that they are informed both orally and in writing about the assessment in each component. They appreciate this approach to assessment as it aligns with the objectives and profile of the programme. Tutors emphasised that they are assessing not only the product, but also the process and the intellectual development of students. Both students and tutors emphasised the important role of feedback, which is provided orally and in writing. Furthermore, students are increasingly expected to provide peer feedback to each other and encouraged by tutors to self-assess their own work. The committee gathered from the discussions that assessment is not only well-organised but also gets

proper attention from all relevant stakeholders. In case the programme really wants its students to self-assess their work, then MIARD still has some work to do in terms of student self-reflection. The committee suggests that this self-reflection can be incorporated in the feedback (forms) students obtain during the integrated assessments right from the first term until the end of the programme.

During the pandemic, the programme maintained both modular and integrated assessment, but adjusted the assessment templates to fit the online setting of the exam. Regular intervision among the tutor team continued in an online format during the pandemic: in addition to discussing the quality and progress of each individual student, the team also looked into their wellbeing.

The committee noticed that there is a clear link between the assessment criteria, the learning goals of the curriculum components and the overall learning outcomes at programme level. It gathered from the discussions with tutors that this is a relatively recent development, whereby all assessment forms were redesigned and adjusted to reflect the specific criteria of each module. The committee very much welcomes this improvement, which demonstrates that assessment is in line with the profile and the constructive approach of the programme.

#### *Assessment of graduation works*

The graduation programme consists of a thesis and a design project. The assessment of both components happens during a formal presentation to the graduation project committee at the MIARD graduation exhibition. The committee is chaired by the programme director and features the external expert and the supervisor(s). The integrated assessment has both a formative and summative component: the assessment form contains numerical grades for each criterion as well as room for written feedback.

Prior to the site visit, the assessment committee reviewed a representative sample of graduation

projects and their assessment. Comparing their observations on the assessment of the graduation projects during the preparatory meeting, the committee members mentioned that they found the assessment process to be well described, solid and comprehensive; the exercise did not look like a box-ticking compulsory procedure but something the programme wants to have and takes seriously. Moreover, the assessment shows the quality of everyone involved, as constructive feedback is provided in line with the supportive and constructive environment of the programme; some comments reflected on the experience of students and staff during the entire programme trajectory. The quality of feedback and their level of detail was strong. While overall the grades tend to be rather on the high end, the overall quality of the graduation works is also relatively high. The committee did notice that grades are different and that students who received higher grades had indeed produced better quality products. In sum, the committee thought the assessment is thorough and the feedback provided to students is extensive and relevant. Furthermore, the committee found that the programme has handled assessment very well under both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances.

The external expert ensures that graduation assessment procedures are carried out in accordance with academic guidelines and offers feedback on whether graduation projects are of an appropriate professional standard that is comparable to other master programmes in the field. After the graduation process, the external expert writes a detailed report on the visitation and the final assessments. The committee has looked at the external expert reports on the 2019 and 2020 graduations and found that the information provided in the reports was pertinent and reflected the meticulous approach of the MIARD programme – and its external expert - to graduation. According to the committee, the description in the Self-Evaluation and the quality and comprehensiveness of the external expert report demonstrate that the MIARD programme has adequately

responded to the recommendation of the previous accreditation visit on the assessment criteria of the final graduation project and the involvement of the external expert.

#### *Assuring assessment quality*

The committee gathered from the written materials and the discussions that the level, clarity and fairness of assessments at MIARD are gauged through a matrix of checks and balances that occur on multiple levels from students to staff, the external expert and the Examination Board (EB).

The EB is set up at the level of the Academy and plays an active role in the quality assurance system of all programmes. It features a separate chamber covering the master programmes at the Piet Zwart Institute. In addition to annual meetings with the programme director, the EB appoints (internal and external) examiners, checks the quality of course assessments and responds to requests submitted by students.

Further to the question by the committee, the EB indicated that it has no additional task in checking whether graduating MIARD students are fit to pursue the regulated profession of Interior Architect. In fact, the learning outcomes of the programme are such that students who achieve these outcomes have the necessary qualifications to embark on the professional practice traineeship set by the Architects Registration Bureau.

Their annual reports and the discussion with the chair and master chamber member of the EB have provided ample proof to the committee that the EB members are up to standard and in control of their quality assurance tasks. The EB reported to the committee that there are hardly any 'issues' with the MIARD courses, students and tutors. Moreover, the EB could review a draft version of the MIARD Self-Evaluation and noticed that the final version reflected its comments and suggestions.

The committee welcomes the initiative of the EB to attend the graduation exhibitions and participate in as many graduation project presentations as possible to verify that students have indeed reached all programme learning outcomes and are fit for graduation. By being actively involved in the internal quality assurance system and by securing that graduates reach the exit qualifications, the EB lives up to the recommendation of the previous accreditation panel. According to the committee, the EB fulfils its quality assurance duties in an exemplary way.

### Considerations

The assessment committee considers that the MIARD programme features a strong assessment system. This system was built around the time MIARD assumed its new name, profile and curriculum and is tailored to the specific needs of the programme. The committee sees a clear link between the assessment formats, the assessment criteria, the learning goals of the curriculum components and the overall learning outcomes at programme level.

The committee welcomes the newly developed modular and integrated assessment forms that are specific to the MIARD curriculum components. It establishes that the assessment provisions are effectively implemented and play an important role in the learning process of the MIARD student. Feedback is a key feature of student assessment and is provided both orally and in writing by peers, tutors and graduation project committees. If the programme would strive towards more reflective assessment, then the committee

sees room for further enhancement of this component in the assessment system, e.g. by asking students to reflect systematically on the feedback they receive during the integrated assessments.

The sample of graduation projects which the committee reviewed show that the final graduation assessment is thorough and the feedback to students extensive and relevant. The committee appreciates that the external expert takes up a central position in the assessment of the graduation project and reports on both the quality of the work and the consistency of the assessment procedure.

The committee considers that the Examination Board assures the quality of assessment in an exemplary way. The competencies of the individual EB members are up to standard and as a team they are in control. The committee appreciates the efforts of the EB to support the assessment activities of the MIARD programme, to attend the graduation exhibitions and to secure that MIARD students who are about to graduate have indeed reached the programme learning outcomes.

In sum, the assessment committee establishes that the MIARD programme has been handling assessment very well under both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment committee concludes that the MIARD programme **meets standard 3, student assessment.**

## 4. Achieved learning outcomes

MIARD graduates definitely achieve the learning outcomes of the programme: the quality of the final projects is invariably strong and students consistently demonstrate a high standard in both making and writing. Graduates embody a broad definition of practice, are employed in different settings and in a variety of positions, and seem to provide added value to the field. If anything, the programme could train students on making public their work to a non-expert audience, and would benefit from a data-driven approach regarding alumni engagement. According to the assessment committee, the MIARD programme **meets this standard**.

### Findings

#### *Quality of graduation works*

In order to establish whether students achieve the intended learning outcomes, the committee has reviewed a sample of fifteen graduation projects from the academic years 2018-2019 and 2019-2020. The graduation project is a yearlong self-directed exploration composed of a design project and a thesis. By merging practice and theory in a multi-disciplinary process, students develop a self-directed critical viewpoint and construct a unique body of work that confronts existing spatial ideologies and expands notions of space. The graduation process starts with the preparation module during the first term. The thesis encompasses the theoretical framework of the design activity. The design project and thesis influence each other throughout the process, creating reciprocity between the two endeavours. Students meet bi-weekly with the supervisors and collective presentations are scheduled throughout the second term.

The committee established that all final projects meet at least the minimum level of quality one could expect from a final product at master level, and very often go well beyond that level. The quality of the individual projects differed according to the committee yet followed the variety in scores provided by the graduation project team. The committee thought that none of the projects and theses was even near the minimum quality threshold, while it considered several works to be very good. Several projects could be published in

academic magazines. Comparing their observations on the quality of the final projects during the preparatory meeting, the committee members found the works to be provocative, engaged, well balanced, and personal without being self-centred or losing its relevance for the audience. Several projects featured active and critical engagement with technology. In so far as the theses are concerned, committee members found the quality of writing above average, the literature relevant and the research well contextualised.

Having reviewed the entire sample, the committee found the projects to be more cohesive than diverse, and reflective of the specific direction of the MIARD programme and its community of like-minded people. Further to its observations in previous standards, the committee thinks that the MIARD programme could benefit from some graduation projects that are completely different; it should be feasible to welcome students (and projects) that are critical of the principles underlying the MIARD programme, which in turn would bring a new and fresh approach. The programme may consider training its students in connecting / 'making public' their intriguing projects to a non-expert audience.

#### *Alumni*

In addition to verifying the quality of the graduation projects, the professional performance of graduates is another way to establish whether students achieve the intended learning outcomes upon completion of the programme. In 2019 MIARD graduated the first cohort of students with

the new programme title, profile and adjusted curriculum. MIARD graduates embody a broad definition of practice and identify professionally in multiple ways. The diversity of professional paths echoes the multidisciplinary and research-based profile of the programme. Graduates are employed in a variety of settings: some have started design studios, others work for interior architecture, design and architecture studios, some started media and branding companies, hold teaching positions or continue their professionalisation in doctoral studies. Apart from speaking to several MIARD graduates who are doing quite well professionally, the committee could establish in the Self-Evaluation that MIARD graduates indeed end up in a variety of positions, and seem to do so successfully.

The committee gathered from the discussions that the tutor team is very helpful in connecting students and graduates with their professional contacts. Nonetheless, the committee noticed that more could be done in sketching the professional trajectories that are open to students once they have graduated MIARD. This applies to all opportunities, both academically and professionally, both in interior architecture and beyond. Moreover, the programme could provide a structured and data-driven alumni network that monitors the whereabouts of the MIARD graduates at regular intervals; the data gathered could be used for different purposes, such as demonstrating the impact of the programme or establishing and maintaining an internship network. The commit-

tee understood from the discussions that the programme director is very much in favour of supporting alumni and in making better use of their potential input to the programme.

### Considerations

The assessment committee considers that graduates of the MIARD programme have definitely achieved the learning outcomes of the programme. The quality of the final projects - as shown not only in the sample but also throughout the archive - is good and students consistently demonstrate a high standard of both making and writing. It goes to the credit of the programme that at the start it selects high quality students who make good progress during the studies, produce relevant and high-quality projects and theses, and move on to a career where they can add value to the field.

If anything, the committee sees room for the programme in (training students on) making public the work of students / graduates to a non-expert audience. Moreover, a more data-driven approach in alumni engagement is likely to pay off in two ways: measuring programme impact and developing alumni support networks.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment committee concludes that the MIARD programme **meets standard 4, achieved learning outcomes.**



## Attachments

## **Attachment 1 Assessment committee**

**Drs. R.R. (Raoul) van Aalst**  
independent consultant

**Igor Siddiqui**  
Programme Director for Interior Design at the University of Texas

**Lilet Breddels**  
Programme director at Sandberg Institute Amsterdam

**Rianne Hagen**  
Student Industrial Design UTwente

The panel was supported by **Mark Delmartino**, external NVAO-certified secretary

A full CV of these panel-members and the secretary plus their signed declarations of independence and confidentiality, were submitted to NVAO.



## Attachment 2 Programme of the assessment

### Wednesday 9 June 2021

- 12.00 Welcome
- 12.30 Internal panel meeting
- 14.00 Workshop and Interactive Audio Tour
- 15.15 Internal panel meeting
- 15.45 Session with institution and programme management
- 16.30 Open consultations
- 17.00 Round-up of day one

### Thursday 10 June 2021

- 08.45 Introduction to the day's programme
- 09.00 Session with alumni and students
- 10.00 Internal panel meeting
- 10.15 Session with core tutors
- 11.15 Internal panel meeting
- 11.30 Session with examination board
- 12.00 Lunch break and internal panel meeting
- 13.00 Session with representatives of the professional field
- 14.00 Internal panel meeting
- 14.15 Round table discussion with panel and MIARD representatives
- 15.15 Internal panel meeting (findings, considerations, judgement)
- 16.30 Feedback on preliminary findings of the panel
- 17.00 End of online site visit

A list with the names of the participants is available at AeQui.

## Attachment 3 Documents

### Information materials

- Self-Evaluation. Master Interior Architecture: Research + Design (MIARD), Piet Zwart Institute 2021.
- MIARD website: <http://miard.pzwart.nl/>

### Additional information

- Previous exit qualifications (until 2020)
- MIARD Handbook 2020-2021
- MIARD Handbook appendix 2020-2021
- Course syllabi
- Staff overview
- List of external guests
- Assessment and Examination Regulation 2020-2021
- Assessment forms
- Examination Board WdKA - Annual reports 2018-2019 & 2019-2020
- Graduation project documents
- Reports external expert 2019 and 2020

### Graduation products

The assessment committee has studied the graduation products and their assessment of 15 students who graduated the programme in 2019 and 2020. A list with student numbers is available at AeQui.