

BSc Economie en Beleid Wageningen University

*Report of the limited programme assessment
16 December 2022*

Colophon

BSc Economie en Beleid (Economics and Governance)

Wageningen University (WU)

Academic bachelor (wo-ba)

Location: Wageningen

Mode of study: fulltime

CROHO: 50101

Result of institutional assessment: positive (May 2018)

Panel

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The panel was presented to the NVAO for approval.

The assessment was conducted under responsibility of

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Summary

On 16 December 2022 an assessment committee of AeQui visited Wageningen University to perform a quality assessment of the Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Economics and Governance (in Dutch: Economie en Beleid, BEB) according to the 2018 NVAO framework for limited programme assessment. The BSc Economics and Governance is a three-year full-time 180 ECTS programme offered in Dutch. It is an economics programme with explicit attention to governance: BEB educates students in the principles of economics and their application to situations where intervention by national or international governing bodies is usually observed or asked for. The assessment committee has established that the BEB programme meets all four NVAO standards under consideration: intended learning outcomes, teaching-learning environment, assessment and achieved learning outcomes. As a result, the committee's overall assessment of the quality of the BSc Economics and Governance is **positive**.

Intended learning outcomes

The BEB programme has an attractive multidisciplinary profile combining economics with governance, integrating life sciences and addressing a range of application domains. This entanglement of different domains bears a clear WU-stamp and makes the programme stand out among other bachelor degrees in economics. There is, however, room for profiling the programme components more sharply. The set of learning outcomes does justice to the content of the programme, the profile of the university, and is sufficiently concrete to properly reflect the domain, level and orientation of the programme. The professional field is structurally involved in advising on the relevance and actuality of the programme contents, but its composition can be extended to cover all application domains of the BEB programme. The assessment committee judges that the BSc Economics and Governance **meets this standard**.

Teaching-learning environment

The teaching-learning environment of the BEB programme is well developed, an appreciation that covers not only the curriculum, but also the didactical principles, the student guidance, and the number and quality of the academic teaching staff. The curriculum structure combines core compulsory courses with a range of profiles, restricted and free electives that allow students to tailor the second half of their study programme

to their own individual interest. The recent adjustments to the curriculum have been implemented after extensive consultation and are clearly for the better. Nonetheless, the two programme profiles can be developed further and some learning lines could be more visible. While the overall curriculum and its individual courses appear to be feasible, the data on drop-out and above all success rate require the attention of the programme team. The limited size of the student cohorts allows for small-scale teaching with plenty of interaction between students and staff. The number as well as the disciplinary and didactic quality of the academic teaching staff is good, and their enthusiasm and availability constitute a key asset of the programme. Similarly, the study advisor plays a key role in the academic and personal development of BEB students and is credited for this by students and alumni alike. The assessment committee judges that the BSc Economics and Governance **meets this standard**.

Assessment

In terms of assessment, the BEB programme can rely on well-established university-wide rules and regulations, which are adequately translated in assessment provisions in the BEB courses. The Examining Board Social Sciences is competent for the tasks it fulfils and capable to assure the quality of assessment of the BEB programme. Thesis assessment is organised adequately and in full transparency to students. The thesis assessment

form is a relevant template, which some assessors are using very well while others could provide more insightful feedback. The assessment committee judges that the BSc Economics and Governance **meets this standard**.

Achieved learning outcomes

Students who graduate the BEB programme have achieved all learning outcomes. The extended thesis review showed that BEB bachelor theses are up to standard and (recent) graduates confirmed that the programme prepares students adequately for a variety of follow-up master programmes or for a relevant position on the labour market. The assessment committee judges that the BSc Economics and Governance **meets this standard**.

However, the thesis (assessment) review has also shown that at this moment, there is no full alignment between programme learning outcomes, bachelor thesis learning goals, and thesis evaluation criteria. Hence, the committee urges the programme team to make its ambitions for the bachelor thesis explicit and align outcome, goals and evaluation form accordingly. Any ambition that would not be part of the bachelor thesis, should

be accounted for equally explicitly in other courses and their respective assessment formats.

Recommendations

The assessment committee has issued a positive judgement on the BEB programme and on the quality of each individual accreditation standard. Nonetheless, the committee also sees room for improvement in a number of areas. The following suggestions constitute no formal recommendations, but should be seen as points for attention the committee picked up during the visit and reported in the respective assessment standards. The committee advises the BSc Economics and Governance to:

- sharpen the programme's economics and governance profiles and be more explicit to (potential) students on what they can (and cannot) expect;
- extend the composition of the external advisory committee;
- monitor the student drop-out and the average study length of the programme;
- urge all assessors to make optimal use of the thesis evaluation form;
- reflect on the purpose of the bachelor thesis, make the ambitions explicit, and take alignment action accordingly.

In view of its positive assessment of the programme quality as a whole and its judgement on each of the four accreditation standards, the committee issues a **positive advice** to NVAO regarding the accreditation of the BSc Economics and Governance at Wageningen University.

On behalf of the entire assessment committee,

Utrecht, April 2023

Hans van Ees
Chair

Mark Delmartino
Secretary

Introduction

Wageningen University offers a three-year full-time BSc programme in Economics and Governance. Every year, around 40 to 50 students start the BEB programme, which is offered in Dutch. The external assessment of this bachelor programme is part of a wider cluster assessment covering degree programmes at Erasmus University Rotterdam, VU Amsterdam, the University of Utrecht and Wageningen University.

Institution

Wageningen University (WU) consists of one Faculty of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences offering 18 bachelor and 30 master degree programmes. The Rector Magnificus is also the Dean of the Faculty. Academic teaching staff are hosted by one of the university's ninety Chair Groups, which in turn belong to one of five Science Groups at WU: Agrotechnology & Food, Animal Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Plant Sciences, and Social Sciences.

Programme

The Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Economie en Beleid (BEB; in English: Economics and Governance) is a three-year full-time 180 ECTS programme offered in Dutch. BEB is an economics programme with explicit attention to governance. According to the self-evaluation report, it educates students "in the principles of economics and their application to situations where intervention by national or international governing bodies is usually observed or asked for". Since the previous accreditation visit in 2016, the yearly intake of students has fluctuated between 33 and 66. In the current academic year 2022-2023, 42 students are enrolled.

A Programme Director and a Programme Committee (consisting of six staff members and six students) manage the BEB programme, as well as one other bachelor (Business and Consumer Studies) and one master programme (Management, Economics and Consumer Studies). The Examining Board Social Sciences safeguards the quality of student assessment of the programme.

Lecturers on the BEB programme belong to one of eight Chair Groups: Agricultural Economics and

Rural Policy, Environmental Economics and Natural Resources, Development Economics, Urban Economics, Rural and Environmental History, Public Administration and Policy, Environmental Policy, Mathematical and Statistical Methods, and Research Methodology. While there are no formal specialisations or tracks, students can tailor their study programme in such a way that it features an economics or a governance profile. Moreover, they focus on a particular topic of their choice in the bachelor thesis, which is supervised by a staff member from one of the Chair Groups.

Assessment

This assessment is part of a wider cluster assessment Economics group 1, which consists of the Erasmus University Rotterdam, VU Amsterdam, Utrecht University and Wageningen University. The group assigned AeQui to perform a quality assessment of its bachelor, master and research master programmes in Economics. Together with the cluster group and its individual schools/faculties, AeQui convened an independent and competent assessment committee. The committee members are shortly presented in attachment 1.

At Wageningen University, the cluster assessment features one bachelor programme, which is offered in Dutch. In line with existing practice at WU, the self-evaluation report was produced in English. It was agreed that this assessment report would also be in English. In the run-up to the visit, a preparatory meeting was held with programme representatives to exchange information and plan the date and programme of the site visit. The visit was carried out on 16 December 2022 according to the programme presented in attachment 2.

Furthermore, the programme put at disposition many relevant materials, which served as background information for the assessment committee before and during the visit. An overview of these materials is listed in attachment 3.

In so far as the BSc Economics and Governance (BEB) is concerned, the assessment committee members studied the programme's self-evaluation report and reviewed a sample of bachelor theses. Their first impressions on the report and the thesis (evaluations) formed the basis for discussion during an online preparatory meeting on 14 December 2022, and guided the committee's questions during the site visit.

Prior to the visit, the committee held an Open Consultation Hour for students, teaching and support staff; eventually, nobody used the opportunity to speak individually and confidentially with the committee.

The programme team at Wageningen decided to organise the Development Dialogue in Spring 2023, after the finalisation of the assessment report.

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. In the underlying document, the committee is reporting on its findings, considerations and conclusions according to the NVAO framework for limited programme assessment. A draft version of the report was sent to the programme management at the end of March 2023. Its reactions have led to this final version of the report.

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.

The BEB programme has an attractive multidisciplinary profile combining economics with governance, integrating life sciences and addressing a range of application domains. This entanglement of different domains bears a clear WU-stamp and makes the programme stand out among other bachelor degrees in economics. The programme components, however, deserve a sharper profile. The learning outcomes do justice to the content of the programme and the profile of the university, and properly reflect the domain, level and orientation of BEB. The professional field is structurally involved in advising on the relevance and actuality of the programme contents, but its composition can be extended to cover all application domains. According to the committee, the BSc programme Economics and Governance **meets this standard**.

Findings

Purpose

The Bachelor of Science in Economics and Governance (Economie en Beleid, BEB) is a three-year full-time programme offered in Dutch. It is essentially a social science programme embedded in a life science context. BEB is an economics programme, combined with governance subjects. It educates students in the principles of economics and their application to situations where intervention by governing bodies is observed or desired. This often occurs in fields of economic activity that show a high degree of policy intensity, such as agriculture, natural resources, environment, and development. In order to prepare for these professional challenges, BEB students acquire a thorough understanding of both economics and (public) governance theories.

While the purpose of the programme was clearly described in the self-evaluation report, the committee wondered to what extent the objective of BEB was also properly reflected in the title of the programme and in the operationalisation of the curriculum. Offering a programme whereby two disciplines – economics and governance – are presented on equal footing in its title may raise false expectations in terms of programme content and follow-up study perspectives. Similarly, the fact that students can choose for an economics or a governance profile in the second year seems to confirm equal attention to both domains.

Both programme management and staff emphasised that BEB is first and foremost an economics programme. This is also communicated to (potential) students: BEB is not a public administration programme but an economics programme with attention to policy and governance. One participant compared BEB to a bachelor programme in economics and business economics with governance taking the position of business economics. Moreover, the participants pointed to the multidisciplinary character of the programme: throughout the curriculum – in both foundational and dedicated courses – there is particular attention to life sciences and to domains in which economic policy interventions are applied, such as agriculture, the environment, and international development.

The discussions on-site were very informative, according to the committee. It welcomes the specific purpose of the BEB programme and appreciates the multidisciplinary component of the programme and its attention to life sciences. In this way the programme stands out among other bachelor programmes in the economics cluster, aligns with the profile of WU and capitalises on the research strengths and reputation of the university. The committee furthermore acknowledged that students highly appreciate the orientation of the programme as a combination of economics and governance disciplines with a focus on sustainability as an area of application. Moreover, students see a lot of potential for their

own careers in the future, given the current societal interest in environmental sustainability and the need for bridge builders who are educated to understand and communicate with economists, public administrators and natural science experts. According to the students, BEB could attract even more high school students by focusing on the environmental sustainability component in the programme and communicate this more explicitly.

The purpose of BEB having become clear after extensive dialogue, the committee does advise the programme team to check, and possibly reconsider, its external communication, in particular to potential students. While the committee agrees to the purpose and set-up of this economics programme with particular attention to governance, this “hierarchy” of disciplines was not clear from the written materials. Similarly, the programme team may want to communicate upfront what the opportunities – and requirements – are for BEB students who want to pursue in their follow-up study a more monodisciplinary economics or a more explicit governance master programme.

Intended Learning Outcomes

The objective of the BEB programme has been translated in eleven intended learning outcomes, which are clustered around domain-specific knowledge, conducting research, and general academic abilities. In formulating the eleven learning outcomes, the programme has taken into account the five Dublin descriptors at bachelor level, as well as the subject-specific reference framework of the economics discipline. The committee noticed that both frameworks are incorporated properly in the set of BEB learning outcomes.

The committee moreover welcomes the detailed and specific way in which the respective learning outcomes are formulated. These are not vague statements, but nicely formulated and focused learning outcomes, which indicate precisely what this BEB programme at WU is about. The committee noticed that, in addition to explicit reference

to both economics and governance - and a dedicated learning outcome to making judgements on social and ethical issues in studying or working in the field of economics and governance - there is also ample attention to sustainability, life and natural sciences. The aim of the BEB programme is translated effectively in the first three learning outcomes. The written materials and the discussions on-site, moreover, have reinforced the understanding of the committee how these learning outcomes are covered throughout the curriculum and how every course contributes to BEB students achieving the learning outcomes at the end of their three-year study.

Anticipating on what will be covered in the next sections, however, the committee did notice that the – important and relevant – learning outcome 7 on applying statistical, econometric, modelling and data management methods to economic and governance problems was not very visible in the bachelor thesis contents, nor in the thesis evaluation criteria.

Professional Field

The BEB programme can rely on the input of an External Advisory Committee to strengthen the congruity between the programme and the labour market. The committee meets regularly to discuss labour market developments and their possible consequences for the curriculum. At its most recent meeting in June 2022, the External Advisory Committee confirmed the relevance of the application-oriented character of the BEB programme, which creates great benefits for employers, in particular when bachelor graduates combine BEB with a strongly related master programme. The committee gathered from the written materials and the discussions on-site that BEB graduates tend to be well-prepared for handling real-life challenges, and are therefore “in demand” on the labour market.

Appreciating that advisory committee members represent different public and private profit and non-profit employers, the assessment committee

did notice though that the composition of the External Advisory Committee is quite narrow, with a particular focus on the agricultural sector. Further to its findings on the programme profile, the assessment committee thinks that the advisory board could be extended with representatives who altogether cover the four themes the programme is developing around: agribusiness, natural resources, environment, and sustainability.

Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on-site, the committee considers that the BEB has an attractive multidisciplinary profile combining economics with governance, integrating life sciences and addressing a range of application domains. As a bachelor degree that first and foremost addresses economics, the BEB programme has a clear WU-profile. The committee, moreover, appreciates that the entanglement of the different domains is visible in the student audience, and is explicitly referred to as a unique selling proposition and value added of the BEB programme by the students.

While the committee eventually fully understood – and appreciated – the specific objective of the BEB programme, it advises the programme team to be more precise in profiling the respective components. It should be crystal clear to (potential) students what they can expect – and which

expectations are not realistic – when they enrol for the programme and when they choose for an economics or a governance profile. According to the committee, both profiles need sharpening and require precise indications of the implications a particular choice has for follow-up master studies.

The committee considers that the set of eleven learning outcomes does justice to the content of the programme and the profile of the university. They are sufficiently concrete and properly reflect the domain (economics and governance), level (bachelor) and orientation (academic) of the programme.

The committee welcomes the structural involvement of the professional field in advising on the relevance and actuality of the programme (contents) and the variety of organizations the individual members represent. In terms of fields of work, the committee advises the programme team to extend external advisory committee to cover all relevant (application) domains of the BEB programme.

In view of the above findings and considerations, the assessment committee judges that the BSc Economics and Governance **meets standard 1**, intended learning outcomes.

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.

The teaching-learning environment of the BEB programme is well developed, an appreciation that covers not only the curriculum, but also the didactical principles, the student guidance, and the number and quality of the academic teaching staff. The recent adjustments to the curriculum have been implemented after extensive consultation and are clearly for the better. Nonetheless, the two programme profiles – Economics and Governance - can be developed further. While the curriculum and individual courses are feasible, the data on drop-out and above all success rate require attention. The limited size of the student cohorts allows for small-scale teaching with plenty of interaction between students and staff. The disciplinary and didactic quality of the academic teaching staff is good, and their enthusiasm and availability constitute a key asset of the programme. Similarly, the study advisor plays a key role in the academic and personal development of BEB students and is credited for this by students and alumni alike. According to the committee, the BSc programme Economics and Governance **meets this standard**.

Findings

Programme

The three-year full-time 180 ECTS programme consists of five components: (i) a common compulsory part of 114 ECTS, (ii) an economics or a governance profile (12 ECTS), (iii) two life science courses (12 ECTS), (iv) a bachelor thesis (12 ECTS) in one of six Chair Group domains, and (v) an elective part of 30 ECTS. The common part is mostly concentrated in the first two years, while the profile and life science courses are taken in years 2 and 3. The elective part and the thesis are scheduled in year three. The electives can be clustered as a bachelor minor or a study period abroad. The choice for an economics or a governance profile impacts on the – economics or governance related – domain in which students prepare their bachelor thesis. At the start of year two, students complete a Bachelor Self-Assessment, which is guided by the study advisor and aims at exploring the personal motivation and skills of students for a particular profile and its ensuing courses and bachelor thesis. Students also have restricted options to choose two natural or life sciences courses, which are usually offered outside the Social Science Group and equip BEB students for future collaboration with disciplinary experts or in multi/interdisciplinary teams.

Although it took quite some time to fully grasp the intricacies of the programme set-up in all its five components, the discussions and clarifications on-site have convinced the committee that the curriculum is coherent. This appreciation concerns the three-year curriculum as a whole, its five components, and the choice/freedom students have to pursue their specific interests as of year two. Moreover, the BEB programme provides a feasible and credible mixture of theoretical and applied courses, which in turn align with the background, objective, and ambitions of the programme. The committee also established that the content of the curriculum - and the learning goals of the respective courses - is connected to the learning outcomes at the programme level. This finding is backed up by a comprehensive table annexed to the self-evaluation report on the contribution of BEB courses to the programme learning outcomes.

The committee was informed that since the previous accreditation, the curriculum has been adjusted in several ways. These changes have been set in motion following recommendations of the previous accreditation panel, the advice from the External Advisory Committee and suggestions from the Programme Committee. In addition to rescheduling and replacing certain courses, an important adjustment concerned a strengthening

of the quantitative methods and skills (mathematics, statistics and econometrics) component in the curriculum. By offering empirical methods courses earlier in the programme, other courses would benefit from the skills students had already learned. According to the committee, these changes have increased the coherence of the curriculum.

Students indicated in their written contribution to the report that they value in particular the choice options in the second half of the curriculum. They can opt for advanced economics or governance courses, choose among a wide range of natural science / life science courses, and propose their own bachelor thesis topic. This freedom of choice contributes to their academic development and to a broad and multidisciplinary perspective on economics and governance. However, students found several courses to be rather abstract and theoretical, without a direct link to practical applications. The committee considers this as a point for attention. Moreover, there is some overlap in course content, which may be due in part to the participation of students from other programmes who may not have the necessary background knowledge for certain courses.

Notwithstanding its overall appreciation of the current (adjusted) curriculum, the committee noticed two flaws, which came to the fore during its review of a sample of bachelor theses. First, the governance profile does not seem to be extensively developed, notably in so far as methods and approaches are concerned. In their bachelor thesis, students often limited themselves to quoting and summarising instead of analysing policy documents. Hence, the reflection of the panel that a programme with a dedicated governance profile could do more to prepare students for a bachelor thesis in the domains of public administration and policy or environmental policy. Secondly, several students seemed to avoid quantitative methods in their bachelor thesis. They sometimes addressed a research question applying qualitative methods that did not seem partic-

ularly suited for the topic. According to the committee, there is room for more explicit – in the sense of outspoken and visible – attention to research methods in the respective courses and for better embedding the bachelor thesis as an element of individual research in the learning line research methods.

Finally, the committee noticed that the bachelor thesis is scheduled in the first half of the third year, which in turn allows students to finish the programme with a study period abroad and/or a package of electives. The discussions on-site confirmed that this is a conscious decision of the programme team, because it allows students to make optimum use of the electives and tailor the programme to their own individual interests or needs. While it endorses this approach, the committee advises the programme team to indicate more clearly the position and function of the bachelor thesis in the overall curriculum. In particular, the programme team is advised to rethink the position of the bachelor thesis as representing the capstone element, reflecting all the elements of the programme, including rigorous methods and theory development. The committee questions to what extent this ambition is feasible after only two years of bachelor education and invites the programme team to address this question with more precision and subsequently to carefully (re)position the bachelor thesis in the bachelor programme.

Language of instruction

The BEB programme is offered in Dutch. Notwithstanding the suggestion of the previous accreditation panel to consider changing to a fully English-taught programme, the programme team has decided not to follow-up on this advice. The current assessment panel was informed that the recommendation has been taken into consideration, that there has been a pilot at WU-level to offer bachelor programmes in English and that course-related materials are often in English anyway. However, it was a conscious choice of the programme team to stick to Dutch as language of instruction. Several course contents prepare for a

Dutch context, there was limited enthusiasm among staff to switch completely to English, and no need was felt to cater for a much bigger international student audience that might even outnumber the Dutch intake. The committee endorses the rationale of the programme team to continue offering the BEB programme in Dutch.

Didactics

The committee gathered from the materials and discussions that the educational approach to the BEB programme is in line with the overall WU-policy on education to provide both plenary lectures and intensive small-scale teaching. Courses use a variety of teaching methods, which are chosen based on the learning goals of the course and the size of the audience in class. In addition to dedicated courses for BEB cohorts, several courses are open to students from other programmes in the Social Sciences domain and beyond. The committee was informed that by opening up (restricted) elective courses, BEB students have a much broader choice of electives than what their cohort size would allow for. This in turn enhances the longer-term viability of the programme, even in times of lower student intake.

BEB students and staff indicated furthermore that there is a lot of variation in the educational set-up of courses, that very often classes are taught according to the principles of small-scale and intensive education, and that the diversity of the student audiences – which tends to differ per course - is both positive (contacts across disciplines) and challenging (different background levels). Moreover, students confirmed that the organisation of the academic year in relatively short periods allows for an evenly spread study load across the year. While acknowledging the didactical underpinning of the curriculum in general and its individual courses in particular, the committee was somewhat surprised that many courses still seem to focus on one-way knowledge transfer. The relatively small scale of the BEB cohorts and the profile of the programme might allow for a more problem-based or case-based form of education.

Students

Since the previous accreditation visit, the yearly intake of BEB students has fluctuated between 33 (in 2021-2022) and 65 (in 2017-2018). The committee was informed that it is WU-policy to set a minimum intake threshold of 20 students per year, that the current 2022-2023 cohort consists of 42 students and that the programme team considers an intake of 50 students as ideal. As the committee wondered why the specific profile of BEB did not attract more students, the programme team indicated that the Social Sciences group at WU is not very well known. Hence, potential students often do not know they can study economics at Wageningen, let alone a programme as specific as BEB. As the programme caters for a Dutch audience, the Open Days at WU are very important to inform, attract and convince students to consider studying in Wageningen. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the online information days did not have the same impact, which in turn led to smaller student cohorts. However, the programme team is confident that recent adjustments in the master programme will impact positively on the number of bachelor students, who will more easily than before find a relevant follow-up programme in-house.

Over the years, the share of students dropping out in year one has been relatively low, between 10% and 20%. While this share has increased to 35% in the academic year 2020-2021, it is not clear whether this is related only to the impact of the pandemic or whether the curriculum adjustments including the earlier introduction of the empirical methods courses play a role as well. In so far as the latter argument is concerned, the committee agrees to the approach of the programme team that it is important that students are exposed to empirical methods at the start of the curriculum, even if this makes the programme tougher. It also endorses the intention of the programme to inform (potential) students accordingly and to monitor carefully the drop-out rates of the next cohorts.

In terms of success rate, the committee noticed that the programme is not doing very well. Around 20% of the BEB students who entered year two, managed to finish the programme within the nominal duration of three years, while about two thirds do so in four years. Although student and staff perceive a longer than nominal duration of their bachelor programme as not problematic and sometimes even desirable, the committee found – also in comparison with other bachelor programmes in this cluster assessment – that the success rate after four years was relatively low and therefore encourages the programme team to monitor this carefully.

The committee gathered from the written materials and the discussions on-site that the BEB programme can rely on a strong student support system. The study advisor keeps close contact to individual students throughout their study period, helps them in making study choices and refers students to lecturers, the Examining Board, student counsellors, internship providers, alumni, etc. The study advisor also plays a key role in the so-called Bachelor Assessment in the second year and when students decide on their package of electives in year three. The committee obtained very positive feedback from both students and alumni on the role of the study advisor in general, and on the personal and professional student guidance and mentoring of the most recent study advisors in particular. The committee gathered from its meeting with these advisors that they indeed live up to their reputation in the self-evaluation report as the spiders in the programme web.

In sum, students and alumni indicated to the committee that they are/were very satisfied with the programme set-up, its small size, which allows for a personal touch, the proactive role of the study advisors towards individual students and throughout the study trajectory, the organisation of the teaching process, and the feasibility of the programme.

Staff

According to the information provided in the self-evaluation report, 43 staff members contribute to one or more BEB courses. Most staff members also teach in other programmes, hence their deployment is not limited to BEB. According to data provided by the programme team, the staff-student ratio was 1:14 for the academic year 2021-2022. According to the committee, the number of staff linked to the BEB programme is sufficient to organise and deliver good quality education.

Given the particular structure of WU with Science Groups and Chair Groups, the BEB core programme involves mainly staff from eight different Chair Groups, while electives and life sciences courses can also be delivered by academic teaching staff beyond the Social Sciences Group. According to the committee, the quality of the academic teaching staff is good, both from a content as well as from a didactic perspective. Moreover, these staff members are active researchers who deliver research-based education. Students and alumni were positive about the quality of the teaching staff. They mentioned in particular the availability of the staff, as well as their commitment and enthusiasm towards their courses, the BEB programme and the students.

Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on-site, the committee considers that the teaching-learning environment of the BEB programme is well developed. This positive appreciation covers not only the curriculum, but also the didactical principles, the student guidance, and the number and quality of the academic teaching staff.

The committee thinks highly of the curriculum structure, which combines core compulsory courses with a range of profiles, restricted electives and free electives that allow students to tailor the second half of their study programme to their own individual interest. The curriculum,

moreover, constitutes a clear and relevant translation of the programme objectives.

The recent adjustments to the curriculum have been implemented after extensive consultation and are clearly for the better. Nonetheless, the committee sees room for developing further the two programme profiles Economics and Governance, and for making some learning lines more explicit. Moreover, the position - and learning goals/expectations - of the bachelor thesis in the curriculum requires careful consideration and possibly adjustment. While the study programme as a whole and its individual courses seem feasible, more attention of the programme team is required for monitoring why more students than before have dropped out and why only two thirds of the students who enrol in year two finish the programme in four years.

The committee acknowledges with satisfaction that the limited size of the BEB student cohorts often allows for small-scale teaching with plenty

of interaction between students and staff. In this regard, the BEB programme is very much a small-scale community of learners. The committee considers that the number as well as the disciplinary and didactic quality of the academic teaching staff is good, while their enthusiasm and availability constitute a strength of the programme. Similarly, the study advisor plays a key role in the academic and personal development of BEB students and is credited for this by students and alumni alike.

In view of the above findings and considerations, the assessment committee judges that the BSc Economics and Governance **meets standard 2**, teaching-learning environment.

3. Assessment

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

The BEB programme relies on well-established university-wide assessment rules and regulations, which are adequately translated in assessment provisions in the respective BEB courses. The Examining Board Social Sciences is competent for the tasks it fulfils and capable to assure the quality of assessment of the BEB programme. Thesis assessment is organised adequately and in full transparency to students. The thesis assessment form is a relevant template, which some assessors are using very well while others could provide more insightful feedback. Offering room for individual feedback, the form does not allow to establish that assessors score the thesis independently. According to the committee, the BSc programme Economics and Governance **meets this standard**.

Findings

System of assessment

The committee gathered from the written materials that the system of assessment is described in the general Education and Examination Regulations at WU-level and the specific Study Handbook of the BEB programme. The latter describes the learning outcomes, the programme structure, the courses and their respective examinations. Moreover, each course comes with a course guide featuring information about the teaching material, education and exams.

At the level of the individual courses, student assessment is first and foremost a responsibility of the course examiners, which all have been appointed by the Examining Board Social Sciences (EBSS). All course assessments together aim to determine whether a student has achieved the intended learning outcomes of the programme. According to the committee, the WU-wide principles underlying course assessment at BEB are relevant and of good quality.

Courses

Every course contains an assessment of students' knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to the course learning goals, which in turn inform both the education activities and assessment methods. Across the BEB programme a variety of assessment methods is used such as written exams, individual or group assignments, papers/essays, presentations, and participation in course work. Each examiner decides – and describes in

the course assessment strategy – how many assessments and assessment methods are required to determine if a student demonstrates all learning goals of a particular course. The EBSS checks and approves this assessment strategy, which is described in the online Study Handbook, the course catalogue of the BEB programme. Students indicated during the site visit that they appreciate the mixture of assessment methods and that assessment is organised in a transparent way.

In the run-up to the site visit, the BEB programme put at disposition materials on three individual courses and their respective assessments. According to the committee, these materials reflected the overall provisions for assessment and were in line with what one can expect of exams in a bachelor programme of academic orientation. Overlooking the entire range of assessment methods across BEB, the committee noticed that the programme seems to rely mainly on traditional assessment formats such as written exams and papers.

Thesis evaluation

The bachelor thesis is scheduled in the fifth semester of the BEB programme and amounts to 12 ECTS. Students receive a Thesis Guide with information and guidelines on the thesis process and the assessment procedure. The assessment criteria are described on the thesis assessment form and shared with students in advance. Evaluation criteria concern various items related to research competence (30%), thesis report (60%), oral

presentation (5%) and final discussion (5%). An extensive rubric has been developed, describing per evaluation item the requirements for a certain grade. Both evaluation form and rubric apply across programmes of the Social Sciences domain. Every thesis is assessed by the supervisor and a second reader, who have plenty of room to provide written feedback in a dedicated box on the evaluation form.

As part of its external assessment, the committee reviewed a sample of 21 bachelor theses and their evaluation forms. Reporting on their review, committee members appreciated that the assessment form addressed relevant criteria, that rubrics were very informative and that the combination of criteria and rubrics brought consistency in the thesis grading. Given that the form is used for several programmes, there is some margin to adjust the respective weighting of the core criteria per programme. Moreover, the evaluation form featured a dedicated section where assessors are explicitly invited to motivate their grades. Overall, the committee found the thesis evaluation form to be transparent, extensive and very supportive to provide both a balanced grading and an insightful motivation of this grading.

Reporting on their findings of the thesis assessment review, the committee noticed that the grades seem to have been given by the two assessors together, as there was no trace of individual scores per assessors. Moreover, a considerable part of the criteria and the grades addresses issues that are not related to the quality of the thesis report: between 40% and 50% of the final grade is determined by the criteria Colloquium (i.e. presentation), Final discussion (i.e. thesis defence) and Research competence (which includes sub-criteria such as time management or handling supervisor comments). According to the programme team, it is university-wide policy to consider the thesis as a learning process in which the research journey towards the product takes up a lot of time, which is also reflected in the assessment. Nonetheless, both process and product should be assessed as sufficient.

Although the sample itself may be too limited to draw overall conclusions, the committee did notice that students tended to receive lower grades for the criterion Thesis report than for the other criteria. As a result, the latter scores had an upward effect on the final grade.

Furthermore, the committee noticed that the feedback provided by the assessors was not always insightful. In addition to some careful and well-balanced comments, there were also several cases where the comments by the assessors could have been more explicitly related to the respective assessment criteria. While the assessment form explicitly invites "extensive comments by supervisor and second reviewer", the assessors do not always make use of this opportunity, possibly because this feedback is provided verbally. However, as this procedure is inherently informal, the committee advises to use the opportunity to provide feedback related to the assessment criteria in a more formal way.

Sharing its findings with the Examining Board, the committee also inquired whether the comments of the previous accreditation panel in 2016 had been taken on board. The Examining Board indicated that it was aware of the comments, among others on a more rigorous use of the rubrics scoring forms, and that it had addressed the issue in 2021 when it reviewed a sample of bachelor theses. The Examining Board also recognised the findings of the current assessment panel and indicated it had made some recommendations to the Programme Director on the weighting of the evaluation criteria and on more systematic feedback in the assessment forms. The Examining Board involved new/junior teaching staff in this review as part of their University Teaching Qualification trajectory.

Quality assurance

The Examining Board Social Studies is responsible for assuring the quality of assessment in the BEB programme and for awarding bachelor degrees upon demonstration that students have acquired all (intended) learning outcomes. It is one of four

Examining Boards at WU and looks after nine degree programmes in total. One of the EBSS members is involved in the BEB programme and ensures content-related background. Moreover, EBSS can rely on the educational and assessment expertise of the central Educational Training & Advice service.

Prior to the site visit, the committee studied the university-wide Rules and Regulations of the Examining Board, as well as the latest Annual Report of EBSS. The committee gathered from these materials and from the discussion with EBSS representatives on-site that there are different ways in which EBSS monitors and ensures the quality of assessment at BEB. An important instrument in this regard is the visit of the EBSS to the Chair Groups that contribute to the BEB programme. Other tools include the thesis review and the appointment of course examiners. To ensure that by the end the programme students are in a position to demonstrate all learning outcomes, their individual study programmes are submitted to EBSS for approval. The discussions on-site revealed that there are clear procedures in place and that EBSS handles its tasks in a meticulous way.

According to the committee, the provisions for assessment quality assurance seem to function well in case of the BEB programme. The visits to the Chair Groups, the appointment of external examiners, the approval of individual study programmes and the sample review of bachelor theses all contribute to a quality assurance system that instils confidence. The committee advises EBSS to proactively follow-up its recommendations to the Programme Director: if the Examining Board had come to similar findings on the thesis quality/evaluation as the assessment panel, then this flaw should have been picked up with priority attention by the programme team.

Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on-site, the committee considers that as-

essment is properly organised at BEB. The programme can rely on well-established university-wide rules and regulations. The sample of course materials and assessments which the committee reviewed has demonstrated that the programme is adequately implementing this assessment policy in the curriculum. The committee moreover appreciates that assessment methods pay proper attention to skills acquisition in courses. The Examining Board in general, and its members in particular, are competent for the tasks they fulfil and the instruments they have at disposition instil confidence that EBSS is capable to assure the quality of assessment of the BEB programme.

In so far as thesis assessment is concerned, the committee considers that the assessment principles and criteria are clear and transparent for students and that the assessment form constitutes a relevant template for assessment. The committee welcomes the intention of the programme team to encourage assessors to provide more consistent feedback. It also advises the programme team to make it more visible in the assessment form that both assessors provide individual scores on the respective thesis criteria, independently from each other.

In the next section, the committee argues that the programme team should reflect on the scope and ambitions of the bachelor thesis. The results of this reflection are likely to impact on how thesis quality will be assessed and how this assessment is formalised in the thesis evaluation form. If it is for instance decided that the thesis process is very important, then this should be properly indicated on the evaluation form, while more research content-related elements should then be demonstrated elsewhere in the programme.

In view of the above findings and considerations, the assessment committee judges that the BSc Economics and Governance **meets standard 3**, assessment.

4. Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved. This is demonstrated by the results of tests, the final projects, and the performance of graduates.

The BEB programme is set up in such a way that students, irrespective of their individual study programme, achieve the intended learning outcomes. The committee motivates this conclusion by pointing to its extended thesis review, which featured nineteen theses that were up to standard and two weaker theses that proved to be exceptions to the rule. Moreover, the information on and testimonies of (recent) graduates confirmed that the BEB programme prepares students adequately for a variety of follow-up master programmes or for a relevant position on the labour market. Nonetheless, the committee also established that there is no full alignment between programme learning outcomes, bachelor thesis learning goals and thesis evaluation criteria. Hence, it invites the programme team to make its ambitions for the bachelor thesis explicit and align outcomes, goals and evaluation form accordingly. According to the committee, the BSc programme Economics and Governance **meets this standard**.

Findings

There are two ways to establish whether the programme learning outcomes have been achieved – through a quality review of the final products and through checking what graduates are doing after they finished the programme. The committee has looked at both elements when assessing the end level qualifications of the programme.

Thesis quality

The panel gathered from the self-evaluation report that each programme learning outcome is examined in one or more courses, which means that a student who has successfully completed all courses in the programme, including the thesis, has achieved all learning outcomes. In the bachelor thesis, students demonstrate their ability to study a subject in the field of economics and governance and prove to have sufficient knowledge to critically analyse and report on the given subject.

As part of their external assessment, committee members reviewed a sample of 15 bachelor theses. The sample selection was based on a list featuring 76 students who graduated in the academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. The selection was representative in terms of scoring, thesis track and Chair Group. According to the

committee, 13 out of 15 theses fulfilled the minimum requirements of what one can expect of a final academically oriented product at bachelor level. Hence, the committee decided to review another sample of six theses. All six theses were reviewed by two committee members each and proved to be of sufficient quality. Combining the results of the two review rounds, the committee established that the two weaker theses constituted the exception to the rule that overall, the quality of the bachelor thesis in the BEB programme is up to standard.

Overlooking the entire sample, the committee found that several theses were of good quality, addressed a variety of interesting topics and sought to integrate insights from economics and governance, in line with the ambitions of the BEB programme. Moreover, a number of theses covered empirically topical issues with high societal relevance.

Having established that the overall quality of the BEB theses is sufficient and in some cases quite good, the committee nonetheless identified two issues in the extended thesis sample it reviewed that require priority attention of the programme team. First, the use of theory in certain theses is rather limited as a number of students relied for their arguments mainly on policy documents and less on their own analysis of empirical data.

Hence, the statement in the self-evaluation report that the theses include empirical analysis could not be verified. Second, several students adopted qualitative methods (document analysis, interviews) in their thesis without demonstrating a solid theory-informed choice for such qualitative research. Despite their training in quantitative data analysis in the curriculum, only few students seem to have used quantitative methods to study their topic, even though in some of the theses a quantitative approach would have been appropriate and feasible. In line with the recommendation of the previous accreditation panel, also the current committee recommends to further elaborate the subjects and scope of the theses by promoting that students apply quantitative methods in their thesis.

Asked to comment on these findings, the programme team indicated that both WU and BEB find it very important that students come up with a thesis proposal of their own and perform their research independently. The bachelor thesis focuses very much on this learning experience and on the process of producing a research product. Hence, an important part of the supervision/guidance takes place in the start-up phase of the trajectory. Moreover, the number of study credits (12 ECTS) limits the ambitions of the students in terms of data collection and size of the research project. While quantitative elements are integrated in the curriculum and could have been displayed in the bachelor thesis, students are not necessarily encouraged to include these as it is the policy of the programme not to steer on the adopted methods in the thesis. In this regard, the committee was informed that BEB students often prefer to work on applied policy thesis topics, hence a lack of strong theoretical and quantitative analysis in the thesis. Acknowledging that not all students demonstrate quantitative skills in their bachelor thesis, the programme team indicated to the committee it would ask the Programme Committee to check where and how this learning outcome is demonstrably covered and assessed in other parts of the curriculum.

The thesis review has demonstrated that the programme team should reflect on its ambitions for this important component in the programme. According to the committee, the standards and ambitions for the bachelor thesis could be higher than they currently are, in terms of both theoretical frameworks and methodology.

Apart from reflection, the committee thinks there is also need for action on the side of the programme team, because at this moment, the learning goals of the bachelor thesis (as mentioned in the course guide BSc Thesis) and the criteria in the assessment form are formulated in such a way that students are not expected to demonstrably achieve all programme learning outcomes. However, the overview table in the annex to the self-evaluation report indicates that, apart from ILO 9 on multidisciplinary project team work, the bachelor thesis addresses all learning outcomes, including ILO 1 on the explanation of economic and governance concepts, and ILO 7 on applying quantitative methods. This means that if students are expected to demonstrate ten out of eleven learning outcomes, the course guide and the thesis evaluation form require adaptation. However, if it is not the ambition of the programme that students demonstrate ten out of eleven learning outcomes in the thesis, then this should be indicated clearly in the programme documents and should be reflected more explicitly in the thesis learning goals and the assessment form. In that case, moreover, the programme team should indicate explicitly where the missing learning outcomes (ILOs 1, 7 and 9) are taught, demonstrated, and tested at end-level.

Graduate performance

The committee gathered from the self-evaluation report that the large majority of BEB graduates continues with a master programme. Data on the most recent graduates belonging to cohort 2019 shows that about one third moved on to the MSc Management, Economics and Consumer studies at WU, to which BEB graduates are unconditionally admitted. Roughly a quarter of the graduates enrolled in other MSc degrees at WU: in these

cases, BEB students were either directly admitted (e.g. MSc Biobased Sciences) or could prepare for admission (e.g. MSc Climate Studies) by including relevant introductory courses in their set of electives. Another quarter of BEB graduates pursued a master degree at other Dutch universities, such as VU Amsterdam (e.g. MSc Econometrics), Utrecht University (MSc International Economics and Business - Banking and Finance) or Radboud University Nijmegen (MSc International Political Economy). In these cases, students usually tailored their package of elective courses to facilitate admission. One alumnus indicated during the discussion on-site that – prior to the most recent BEB curriculum adjustment – it was not possible to directly enter an MSc Econometrics without additional coursework. The remaining 15% either pursued a MSc study abroad or entered the labour market.

The committee was informed that there is little concern among students that they would not find a relevant job position, even if they enter the labour market directly after the bachelor degree. Alumni indicated during the discussion that they themselves and their fellow students at the time all found relevant positions that were in line with the domain and level of their studies.

Considerations

Based on the written materials, the extended thesis review and the discussions on-site, the committee considers that students who graduate the

BEB programme have achieved all learning outcomes. It motivates this consideration by pointing to its findings on the extended thesis review, which featured nineteen theses that were up to standard and two weaker theses that proved to be exceptions to the rule. Moreover, the information on and testimonies of (recent) graduates confirmed that the BEB programme prepares students adequately for a variety of follow-up master programmes or for a relevant position on the labour market.

In view of the above findings and considerations, the assessment committee judges that the BSc Economics and Governance **meets standard 4**, achieved learning outcomes.

The thesis review has also shown that the programme team should reflect on its ambitions regarding the bachelor thesis and take action accordingly. The committee established that at this moment, there is no full alignment between programme learning outcomes, bachelor thesis learning goals and thesis evaluation criteria. Hence, it urges the programme team to make its ambitions for the bachelor thesis explicit and align outcomes, goals and evaluation form. Moreover, any ambition that would not be part of the bachelor thesis, should be accounted for equally explicitly in other courses and their respective assessment formats.

Attachments

Attachment 1 Assessment committee

Hans van Ees, chair

Prof. dr. van Ees is emeritus professor Corporate Governance and Institutions at the University of Groningen and former Dean of the University College Groningen. His research deals with comparative corporate governance, board effectiveness and sustainable corporate performance. Hans has extensive accreditation experience.

Niels Hermes, member

Prof. dr. Hermes is professor in International Finance at the University of Groningen. His expertise lies in the fields of corporate governance, microfinance, international finance, financial systems and economic growth. Niels has extensive accreditation experience.

Andries de Grip, member

Prof. dr. de Grip is emeritus professor of Economics at the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA) of Maastricht University. His expertise is in the domain of labour economics, and includes skill mismatches, training and sustainable employability.

Sebastiaan Princen, member

Dr. Princen is associate professor in the field of Governance and Policy Making in the European Union at the School of Governance of Utrecht University. His research focuses on processes of agenda-setting and the role of policy paradigms in the EU.

Joris Hahn, student member

Mr. Hahn holds a bachelor in Economics and Business Economics from Groningen University and is now enrolled in the MSc Spatial, Transport and Environmental Economics at VU Amsterdam. He has extensive experience as student member in accreditation panels.

Mark Delmartino, external secretary

Mark Delmartino is owner of the Antwerp-based company MDM CONSULTANCY. As certified NVAO secretary he regularly supports assessment committees.

All committee members and the secretary have signed a declaration of independence. The assessment committee has been submitted to, and validated by, NVAO prior to the site visit.

Attachment 2 Site visit programme

Venue: Wageningen University, De Leeuwenborch, Hollandseweg 1, Wageningen

Friday 16 December 2022

- 09.00 Arrival of the committee and internal meeting
- 10.00 Session with Dean of Education and programme management
- 11.00 Session with students and alumni
- 12.00 Session with lecturers, thesis supervisors and examiners
- 13.00 Lunch and internal meeting
- 14.00 Session with examining board and study advisors
- 15.15 Session with programme management
- 15.45 Internal deliberations
- 16.45 Plenary feedback
- 17.00 End of site visit

Attachment 3 Overview of materials

Information materials

Critical Reflection 2022, Economics and Governance BSc, Wageningen University.

Appendices to the self-evaluation report

- Faculty structure and organisation
- Subject-specific reference framework
- External Advisory Committee
- BEB curriculum 2021-2022: courses and course descriptions
- Contribution of BEB courses to programme learning outcomes
- Teaching methods, credits, and contact hours
- Key staff, including qualifications
- Education and Examination Regulations
- WU Rules and Regulations of the Examining Boards
- BSc Thesis assessment form
- Social Sciences BSc Thesis Assessment Rubric

Additional materials

Following materials were made available online and/or on-site for the committee:

- Governance of WU degree programmes
- Course Guide BSc thesis
- Annual reports Programme Committee
- Annual reports Examining Board
- Materials on selected courses Econometrics, Environmental Economics and Environmental Policy, and Industrial Organisation

Graduation products

The assessment committee studied a sample of 21 bachelor theses and their assessment forms which had been successfully submitted by students in the academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. The selection was representative in terms of scoring and tracks, and was supervised by a variety of staff.

A list with student numbers is available at AeQui