

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', and ending under the 'i'.

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**Master of Science
Marketing full-time
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam**

***Report of the limited programme assessment
16 - 18 November 2022***

Utrecht, The Netherlands

March 2023

www.AeQui.nl

Assessment Agency for Higher Education

Colophon

MSc Marketing full-time

VU Amsterdam

Academic master (wo-ma)

Location: Amsterdam

Mode of study: full-time

CROHO: 60048

Result of institutional assessment: positive (June 2020)

Panel

Hans van Ees, chair

Niels Hermes, domain expert

Eelke de Jong, domain expert

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The panel was presented to the NVAO for approval.

The assessment was conducted under responsibility of

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This document is best printed in duplex

Table of contents

Colophon.....	2
Table of contents	3
Summary	4
Introduction	7
1. Intended learning outcomes.....	9
2. Teaching-learning environment	12
3. Assessment.....	17
4. Achieved learning outcomes.....	21
Attachments.....	23
Attachment 1 Assessment committee.....	24
Attachment 2 Site visit programme.....	25
Attachment 3 Overview of materials.....	27

Summary

From 16 to 18 November 2022 an assessment committee of AeQui visited the School of Business and Economics (SBE) at VU Amsterdam to perform a quality assessment of 11 degree programmes in Economics. This document reports on the committee's assessment of the Master of Science in Marketing according to the 2018 NVAO framework for limited programme assessment. The MSc Marketing is a one-year full-time 60 ECTS programme offered in English. The assessment committee has established that the Marketing 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 MSc Marketing programme is **positive**.

Intended learning outcomes

The programme has a strong vision on the academically trained marketing professional, which is rooted in the vision on education of both VU and SBE and is operationalised in the programme through the "every course a case" approach. Both vision and approach are communicated clearly to (potential) students and make the Marketing programme stand out among master programmes in the Netherlands that address similar contents and topics. Since the previous accreditation, the intended learning outcomes have been restructured and reformulated; the current set reflects the domain, level and orientation of the programme. Although formulated in a quite general way, the learning outcomes do reflect the ambitions of the university, the school and the programme. The programme pays extensive attention to the professional component in the curriculum. Because Marketing students are trained to bridge theory and practice, the programme seeks input from external stakeholders to keep its curriculum up-to-date. The advisory board, as well as recurring contributions of alumni, constitute important and useful instruments in this respect. The assessment committee judges that the MSc Marketing **meets this standard**.

Teaching-learning environment

The teaching-learning environment of the MSc Marketing is strongly developed. The curriculum build-up is straightforward and reflects the aim and profile of the programme. The courses offer a good balance between contents and methods, while the cases connect theory and practice. The Marketing Mind course exemplifies how a programme can prepare its master students for a career as academic professional. The course learning goals and the programme learning outcomes are well attuned, thus

ensuring that Marketing students can achieve all intended learning outcomes. Acknowledging the efforts of the programme team in addressing the recommendations of the previous panel, the committee established that the Marketing programme now relies on a strong and feasible thesis process where students address relevant research topics. The committee endorses the choice of the school and the programme to offer the MSc Marketing programme in English. The programme's educational approach, Every Course a Case, combines theory and application in an attractive way and is fully aligned with the vision of the university and the faculty, and with the profile of the Marketing programme. There is a clear move towards more activating forms of learning: qualified and motivated educational innovators are taking the lead in introducing active blended learning in courses. Their work now needs to be picked up and streamlined across programmes. The programme attracts a growing number of students which are diverse in nationality and educational background. The admission process is not only extensive and meticulous, but also proves to be highly effective: only few students drop-out and the success rate is high. The extensive pre-master programme, moreover, ensures that students who are not automatically accepted will have reached an adequate level to enrol on the programme. The number and quality of staff involved in the Marketing programme is good: recent hirings have ensured that students can be taught and tutored in adequate conditions and by a sufficient number of highly qualified staff. The committee also thinks highly of the professional development opportunities for staff, and in particular of the fact that they also make use of these opportunities. In addition to all these positive considerations, there is one specific point that requires attention in the future: while the

growth in student numbers has not affected the quality of education until now, there is some concern regarding the staff-student interaction, the size of the facilities and the assessment workload of staff in case the student intake would increase further. The assessment committee judges that the MSc Marketing **meets this standard**.

Assessment

Assessment in the Marketing programme is robust. This appreciation is based on the fact that both course and thesis assessment are embedded in well-established policies and frameworks at the level of the university and the school. The sample of assessment formats the committee has reviewed shows that the assessment principles and policies are properly implemented in the course assessments. The Marketing assessment plan demonstrates that course learning goals are assessed adequately, which in turn ensures that the learning outcomes at programme level are covered. Since the previous accreditation visit, both school and programme have made considerable efforts to bring assessment quality up to par. The Examination Board has grown in capacity and competency, as is demonstrated by the variety of assessment tasks it has been assuming, and is capable to assure the assessment quality of the Marketing programme. Thesis assessment is organised very well. The programme can rely on a solid and transparently communicated thesis procedure and policy. It is using a relevant thesis evaluation form with adequate criteria, an extensive assessment matrix, and space for individual appreciations and feedback of the supervisor and the second reader. Moreover, the sample of thesis assessments reviewed by the committee showed that in almost all cases, the final grade was in line with the committee's appreciation and that almost all assessors had provided clear, insightful and constructively critical feedback. The assessment committee judges that the MSc Marketing **meets this standard**.

In sum, the assessment committee is impressed by the way in which the vision on education of both VU and SBE is translated into the specific profile of the MSc Marketing programme, which in turn is adequately and transparently operationalised in the courses and didactical approach of the curriculum. This results in a balanced programme that is geared towards the expectations of both the discipline and the professional field. Following the discussions with all relevant stakeholders on-site, the committee fully understands why the MSc Marketing programme is much appreciated by the students, receives consistently high scores in the National Student Surveys

Achieved learning outcomes

In order to establish whether the programme learning outcomes have been achieved, the committee reviewed a sample of master theses and checked what graduates were doing professionally after they finished the programme. The thesis sample and the discussions on-site revealed that upon graduation, MSc Marketing students have definitely achieved all programme learning outcomes. The thesis review has shown that students are capable of writing high quality final products. The discussion with alumni confirmed that the MSc Marketing programme prepares students for a relevant professional career. The specific profile, the educational approach and the structural involvement of alumni in the programme give Marketing graduates from VU a head-start on the labour market. The assessment committee judges that the MSc Marketing **meets this standard**.

Recommendations

The assessment committee has issued a positive judgement on the Marketing 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 points for attention the committee picked up during the visit and reported in the respective assessment standards. The committee advises the MSc Marketing to:

- streamline the (results of the) work on educational innovation / active blended learning across programmes;
- prepare for a scenario of further student growth, and thus develop measures to either adopt a strict admission policy or maintain the same level of education quality for more students.

and has an excellent reputation in the labour market. 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 MSc Marketing at the School of Business and Economics of VU Amsterdam.

On behalf of the entire assessment committee, Utrecht, March 2023

Hans van Ees
Chair

Mark Delmartino
Secretary

Introduction

The School of Business and Economics at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam offers a one-year full-time MSc programme in Marketing, which is taught in English. It aims to educate marketing professionals with a critical understanding of and insight in the marketing discipline who apply theoretical insights to practical marketing problems and in this way make a genuine difference in the field of marketing. Over the years, the student intake has grown 190 students, 40-50% of whom are international. The external assessment of the MSc Marketing 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

Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam is a university with nine faculties in Humanities, STEM, Social and Medical Sciences. Since its foundation in 1880, VU Amsterdam has stood for scientific and value-driven education, research and knowledge transfer. Its education and research are closely linked and have a strong social orientation. All education is provided on one campus in the heart of the Zuidas Knowledge District.

The School of Business and Economics (SBE) is one of VU's faculties and offers four BSc, ten MSc and 15 postgraduate programmes in economics and business administration. Since its establishment in 1948, SBE has evolved into a school with more than 8,000 students and over 500 academic and non-academic staff members.

The school is governed by the SBE faculty board under the leadership of the dean. The academic staff is divided in departments; each head of department assigns the teaching, research and administrative tasks. SBE has a well-established system of quality assurance of teaching and assessment, which is based on the VU Manual for quality assurance of teaching and learning and to which all programmes adhere. SBE has two examination boards in the economics cluster: one governing all government-funded programmes and one for accredited postgraduate programmes.

Programme

Each degree programme has a dedicated programme director who is responsible for content, organisation and quality assurance. The director

ensures that the curriculum is adjusted to the intended learning outcomes and that the learning environment meets the quality requirements of SBE. In the bachelor and larger master programmes, one or more programme coordinators assist the director. Each degree programme has a programme committee comprising of an equal number of students and lecturers, appointed by the SBE faculty board.

The MSc Marketing is a one-year full-time 60 ECTS programme, which is taught in English. Over the years, the student intake has grown from 130 to 190 students, 40-50% of whom are international. In addition to this publicly funded initial master, SBE also offers a part-time post-experience MSc Marketing programme as part of its Executive Education. Both programmes share the same learning outcomes, but have a different educational approach, target group and CROHO registration. This report covers the external assessment of the fulltime MSc Marketing programme; the assessment of the part-time programme is addressed in a separate report.

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/facul-

ties, AeQui convened an independent and competent assessment committee. The committee members are shortly presented in attachment 1.

At VU Amsterdam, the cluster assessment features 11 bachelor, master and post-experience (executive) master programmes. In the run-up to the visit, a preparatory meeting was held with representatives of SBE to exchange information and plan the dates and programme of the site visit. The visit was carried out from 16 until 18 November 2022 according to the programme presented in attachment 2.

In so far as the Master of Science (MSc) Marketing is concerned, the assessment committee members studied the programme's self-evaluation report and reviewed a sample of 15 MSc Marketing theses. Their first impressions on the report and the thesis (evaluations) formed the basis for discussion during an online preparatory meeting on 8 November 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. Initiated by the programmes, the visit also featured a Development Dialogue.

The results of this dialogue have no influence on the assessment in this report.

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.

The committee has assessed the programme in an independent manner; 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 committee during the preliminary meeting and the final deliberations. At the end of the visit, the chair of the assessment committee presented the initial findings of the committee to representatives of the programmes and the school.

In the underlying document, the committee is reporting on its findings, considerations and conclusions according to the NVAO framework 2018 for limited programme assessment. A draft version of the report was sent to the programme management in February 2023; its reactions have led to this final version of the report.

1. Intended learning outcomes

The MSc Marketing programme has a strong vision on the academically trained marketing professional, which is rooted in the vision on education of both VU and SBE and is operationalised in the curriculum through the “Every Course a Case” approach. Both vision and approach are communicated clearly to (potential) students and make the MSc Marketing at VU stand out among comparable programmes. The intended learning outcomes reflect the domain, level and orientation of the programme. The MSc Marketing pays extensive attention to the professional component in the curriculum. Because students are trained to bridge theory and practice, the programme seeks input from external stakeholders – including an advisory board and alumni - to keep its curriculum up-to-date. According to the assessment committee, the MSc Marketing programme **meets this standard**.

Findings

Purpose

The Master of Science (MSc) in Marketing aims to educate marketing professionals with a highly developed critical and analytical intellect and profound understanding of and insight in the marketing discipline. To achieve this goal, the programme offers an integrated, consistent and structured approach to discussing the latest theory, which involves immersion in actual and current business cases. Moreover, the trend towards value co-creation within networks, combined with the increasing inter and intra-organizational dispersion of marketing capabilities, requires that marketeers can work in multidisciplinary teams and communicate their solutions well. Hence, students receive feedback on team role performance and on pitching ideas and solutions in the business cases. Implementing the programme’s aim through this curriculum set-up, the Marketing graduates should be able to apply theoretical insights to practical marketing problems and thus make a genuine difference in the field of marketing.

The committee gathered from the discussions on site that this specific approach – “Every Course a Case” – is indeed implemented consistently throughout the programme. Students indicated that the vision of the programme is clear right from the start and delivered effectively in practice. The ‘mind of a marketeer’ is a recurring theme in

the programme and refers to the bigger picture of being in the marketing field. It puts students in the shoes of a marketeer via numerous discussions and assignments. The practical cases proved interesting and helpful to make the programme content engaging and applicable in the real world.

Moreover, the written materials and the discussions on-site showed that the objective of this master programme aligns with the vision of both VU and SBE, which is formulated along two axes: (1) the behavioural component is firmly embedded in the core values responsible, personal and open of the VU; and (2) the content component consists of the roles academic, professional and citizen. These elements have guided the elaboration of education in the MSc Marketing and are reflected in the learning outcomes of the programme and the course learning goals. The committee endorses that integrating the academic, professional and citizen roles with the behavioural components responsible, personal and open creates a unique profile for both SBE and for the master students that graduate from the Marketing programme.

According to the benchmark section of the self-evaluation report, the contents and topics of MSc Marketing (Management) programmes in Dutch universities are quite similar. However, it is the specific “every course a case” didactic approach that makes the Marketing programme at VU

stand out. Moreover, VU is known among students for its strong teaching climate and its open and personal approach. Students and alumni from this and other economics programmes under review confirmed that the personal dimension is indeed strong. Moreover, Marketing students and alumni indicated that the case-based approach integrating theory and practice was an important factor for them to choose for Marketing at VU.

Intended Learning Outcomes

The programme's intended learning outcomes consist of learning goals and learning objectives: the goals refer to what graduates are or have and are set SBE-wide; the objectives refer to what graduates can do or make and are specific to the Marketing programme. The committee observed that there is a direct link between the respective goals and objectives, and that both goals and objectives are clustered around five dimensions: academic and research skills, bridging theory and practice, social skills, broadening horizons, and self-awareness.

The MSc Marketing programme features six learning goals and seven learning objectives. Compared to the previous accreditation visit, the intended learning outcomes have been reformulated to reflect the AACSB format: the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business is a highly reputed accreditation body whose international quality standard SBE managed to obtain since the previous accreditation visit. The current assessment committee has studied the intended learning outcomes and noticed that they are formulated at the appropriate master level and reflect the academic orientation of the programme.

The committee understands that it is a conscious choice of SBE and the programme to keep the formulation of the programme learning outcomes at a fairly abstract level. Nonetheless, the learning outcomes do indicate what the programme stands for. The committee appreciates in this respect the way in which the learning goals have been concretised in learning objectives that

reflect the programme profile. In terms of "bridging theory and practice", for instance, Marketing students should by the end of the programme be able to "develop solutions from different theoretical perspectives for complex real-life business problems by applying relevant marketing theories and methodologies."

Professional Field

In line with the vision of both VU and SBE, the Marketing programme aims to educate its students to become responsible professional practitioners. The committee noticed that there is ample attention for the professional component in both learning outcomes and curriculum. In order to keep the curriculum up-to-date, the programme obtains useful input from internship supervisors, from staff members who are also active in the professional field and from organisations which eventually employ Marketing graduates. In the yearly Students Meet Alumni event, alumni discuss their professional experiences after graduation and indicate to both students and programme management what is important to include/acquire in the study programme.

Moreover, the committee was informed that the MSc Marketing programme has had a long-standing advisory board to ensure a close connection between the academic and the professional world. The board, consisting of six members, advised both the fulltime and part-time programme, and met at least twice a year to discuss programme updates and specific themes. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the board did not convene. The programme team, however, continued to get an external perspective on the MSc Marketing by interviewing alumni. The committee welcomes the plans to revitalise the advisory board as such structural meetings allow to monitor and evaluate the professional dimension and relevance of the programme.

Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the assessment committee considers that the MSc Marketing has a specific profile, which is rooted in the vision on education of both VU and SBE and is adequately reflected in the learning outcomes and curriculum of the programme.

The committee thinks highly of the programme's vision on the academically trained marketing professional and the way this vision is operationalised in the programme through the "every course a case" approach. Both vision and approach are communicated clearly to (potential) students and make the Marketing programme stand out among master programmes in the Netherlands who address similar contents and topics.

The committee endorses the way the intended learning outcomes have been restructured and reformulated since the previous visit; the current set of learning goals and learning objectives reflects the domain (marketing), level (master) and orientation (academic) of the programme. Although formulated in a quite general way, the

learning outcomes do reflect the ambitions of the university, the school and the programme.

The committee appreciates the extensive attention of the programme to the professional component in the curriculum. As MSc Marketing students are trained to bridge theory and practice, the programme seeks input from external stakeholders to keep its curriculum up-to-date. The advisory board, as well as recurring contributions of alumni, constitute important and useful instruments in this respect.

In sum, the committee is impressed by the way in which the vision on education of both VU and SBE is translated into the specific profile of the MSc Marketing programme, which in turn is adequately and transparently operationalised in the courses and didactical approach of the curriculum. This results in a balanced programme that is geared towards the expectations of both the discipline and the professional field.

In view of the above findings and considerations, the assessment committee judges that **the MSc Marketing programme meets standard 1, intended learning outcomes.**

2. Teaching-learning environment

The programme's teaching-learning environment is strongly developed. The curriculum build-up is straightforward. The courses offer a good balance between academic content and method while the cases connect theory and practice. The course learning goals and the programme learning outcomes are well attuned. The committee endorses the decision to offer the MSc Marketing programme in English. The programme's educational approach, "Every Course a Case", combines theory and application in an attractive way and reflects the vision of VU and SBE, as well as the profile of the Marketing programme. Both the School and the programme are developing activating forms of learning and educational innovators are introducing blended learning in courses. Their work now needs to be picked up and streamlined across programmes. The high share of international students in the programme allows staff to use the mixed composition of the class for didactic purposes. The admission process is not only extensive and meticulous, but also proves effective as only few students drop-out and the success rate is high. The number and quality of staff involved in the Marketing programme is adequate to ensure good quality education. However, the committee is concerned that a further growth in student numbers will affect the staff-student interaction, the assessment workload of staff, and the available facilities. According to the committee, the MSc Marketing **meets this standard**.

Findings

Programme

The MSc Marketing is a one-year full-time programme that amounts to 60 ECTS. It aims to educate students in the breadth of the profession with thorough theoretical knowledge and efficient practical skills. The curriculum consists of four compulsory courses (24 ECTS), three restricted electives (18 ECTS) and the master thesis (18 ECTS). In the first semester, students take the core courses Consumer Marketing, Customer & Marketing Analytics, Marketing Strategy, and the Marketing Mind. In period 2 and 4 students can choose among a limited number of electives. The method course chosen in period 4 depends on the type of thesis research students will do at the end of the programme. Students can undertake an internship, as a non-credited part of the programme, to signal their abilities to the job market.

According to the committee, the curriculum build-up is straightforward and reflects the aim and explicit profile of the Marketing programme at VU. Students indicated that the programme is a mixture of compulsory and elective courses, and balances well between content and methods courses. The connection between theory and practice is nicely incorporated in the cases and

further developed along the different courses in the programme. Students also emphasised the integration between courses: one course teaches the basics of a concept, while another course in the next period expands on what was learned before. In this way, the master programme constitutes an interesting and coherent journey.

Furthermore, the committee learned that there is a link between the course learning goals and the programme learning outcomes, which is not only visible on paper – the committee studied the curriculum map, the assessment plan and the study guide – but is also implemented in the day-to-day teaching and assessment practice of the courses. The committee gathered from the extensive description in the self-evaluation report that the respective programme learning objectives are addressed throughout the curriculum and that each course has formulated specific course objectives that contribute to an overall programme objective and are assessed explicitly.

The relationship between course-level objectives and programme-level intended learning outcomes is made clear to students in the course descriptions in the study guide. Moreover, the learning objectives and their related course objectives

are presented in the Assessment Plan, which also indicates the forms of assessment used in each course in relation to the course-level learning objectives. The committee observed in the assessment plan for the MSc Marketing that the courses and the thesis together ensure that all learning outcomes are covered in the curriculum.

The committee also discussed the Marketing Mind course, which is taught in period 3 and aims to prepare students for their life/career as an academic professional. It constitutes a kind of break in which students are invited to reflect to better understand themselves, their future and how they can contribute to society with their marketing focused capabilities and perspectives. In addition to assignments on self-awareness including anonymous peer assessment, students can choose one of ten skills they want to improve/discover. The committee gathered from the meetings with management, staff and students that the latter appreciated above all the opportunity to acquire a particular skill that will be relevant in their future career. The self-awareness component received mixed reactions: for some students it is a compulsory component of the programme, while others are interested – and even excited – to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, and get the opinion of peers on their self-assessment.

Further to the recommendations of the previous accreditation panel, the programme team has put in a lot of effort to enhance the master thesis process. In order to avoid that too many students (continue to) fail the master thesis, the team has rearranged the methods courses in period 4. Covering different research methods (such as experimental research, survey design, working with secondary data), students focus on the particular method they will use in the master thesis. Given the heterogeneous background of the MSc Marketing students, the core courses in periods 1 and 2 have also been adjusted to signal possible deficiencies in terms of theoretical models and statistics.

As a response to the previous panel's finding that the thesis topics were not always within the boundaries of the marketing domain, the programme team is now presenting students with a list of themes and a range of topics – and their accompanying research method – proposed by the thesis supervisors. While they can still propose a personal topic, students are encouraged to check how their own research idea fits the eligible themes and topics. According to the committee, these efforts are paying off. Anticipating on standard 4, the sample of theses reviewed by the committee indicates that the thesis quality in the academic year 2021-2022 is good.

Language of instruction

For a long time now, the language of instruction in the MSc Marketing has been English. The committee understood that it was a conscious choice of SBE to offer this master programme in English as it is the leading language in both academia and the business world. Although many graduates will join Dutch firms or international firms in the Netherlands, these organisations have an international workforce and also operate outside the Netherlands. The language of instruction therefore aligns with the international orientation of the programme and is consistent with comparable degree programmes in the Netherlands. An English-language programme offers students a better preparation for a professional or academic career, for example by offering them the opportunity to work with international teams already during their study. Based on the materials in the report and the discussions on-site, the assessment committee endorses the motivation of SBE and the programme team to offer the MSc Marketing in English.

Didactics

The MSc Marketing has its own specific educational approach, which is summarised in the baseline "Every Course a Case". In fact, six courses start at a company, where the marketing manager introduces the students to the company and their marketing issue. The cases are selected based on the theory that will be covered in the course. The

case is often used to exemplify theory, in addition to other examples, during the plenary lectures. In the tutorials, students discuss the case in relation to the theory presented that week. In small teams, they analyse step-by-step the actual problem, explain which theory is relevant for understanding the problem and what the implications are of applying that particular theory. Students then present and discuss their ideas, analyses and solutions to each other. Where possible, the diverse background of the students is leveraged to broaden the discussion. The staff eventually selects the best pitches for company presentation at the end of the course. The students indicated to the committee that they appreciate this educational approach as it combines theory and application in an attractive and insightful way. According to the committee, the didactic approach is not only interesting, but also fully concurrent with the vision and profile of the programme.

Furthermore, the didactical approach of the MSc Marketing is aligned with the educational vision of VU and the teaching methods at SBE: most courses and staff make intensive use of activating teaching formats and interactive tools to involve students as much as possible and to check whether they have understood the course materials. The committee was informed that such teaching formats are explicitly promoted by VU and SBE because it helps students to understand the materials in greater depth, it enhances their analytical and problem-solving skills, and it develops an attitude towards self-reflection.

The committee gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated the need for - and the possibilities of - new ways of teaching. SBE is using the lessons learned during the lockdown to develop its education vision on and implementation of promising online teaching tools and techniques that are relevant beyond a single course. In this regard, the committee noticed that the Faculty Board promotes blended learning as an important instrument for teaching innovation, yet leaves a lot of discretion

to the individual programmes for implementing such forms of educational innovation. The Marketing programme is discussed with the Task Force Active Blended Learning set up by the SBE. As a result a working group "active blended learning" was started and has in the meantime reached all staff involved in the programme. Currently, the courses Customer & Marketing Analytics and Marketing Strategy are used as pilot cases with high potential for active blended learning. The committee noticed during the visit that the individual lecturers and staff in the Task Force have not only adequate expertise but also a clear vision on active blended learning in the SBE programmes; the committee welcomes this expertise and vision, and encourages the innovators to continue disseminating the good practices to their colleagues. At some point, however, these good practices should also be shared across programmes at the level of the school, which according to the committee is not yet realised.

Students

The committee read in the self-evaluation report and the detailed appendix on student data that since the previous accreditation visit, the yearly intake has grown from 132 students in 2016 to 189 students in 2021. The committee was informed that the intake may further rise given the growing Marketing track in SBE's bachelor programme. According to the programme team, this growth is not an issue from an educational quality or staffing point of view. However, it does jeopardise the profile of the VU as an approachable and open institution. Moreover, the facilities for plenary sessions at VU and in the companies cater at most for 200 students.

In terms of cohort composition, the MSc Marketing programme attracts more female than male students, at an average ratio of 2:1. Around 40-50% of the students is international. The educational background of the Marketing students is quite diverse: students obtained their bachelor either at SBE, at other faculties of VU, at other Dutch universities, at higher education institutions abroad, or at universities of applied sciences. The

committee noticed that the programme has an extensive admission policy that takes into account the specific educational background of the individual applicant. The pre-master programme for students with a non-economic background or a professional bachelor degree consists of four courses on marketing, statistics and academic skills and an academic paper. Students who complete the pre-master tend to perform well in the master programme. The committee was informed that the GMAT requirement has been abolished at the VU as of the current academic year 2022-2023. This decision is likely to attract many more pre-master students. According to the programme team, this abolition should not necessarily impact on the quality of the students who complete the pre-master programme.

The committee noticed that the drop-out rate of the programme has been consistently low (around 6%) but increased somewhat during the pandemic. Those who graduate finish the programme on average in 13 months. Available data on the success rate of entire cohorts show that around two thirds of the MSc Marketing students finish within the nominal duration of one year, while more than 90% does so in two years. According to the committee, these figures are positive and demonstrate that the programme is feasible.

Staff

The committee gathered from the self-evaluation report that all the teaching and coordination is performed by staff belonging to the Marketing Department of SBE. All staff members are active in research and their research interests are very much in line with the topics they teach in this master programme. Hence, they are particularly suited to guide students to the current academic research frontiers and help them shape their conceptual skills and engage in research themselves.

According to the overview in the appendix to the report, the MSc Marketing programme consists of 26 academic staff who have an average 0.9 FTE appointment with SBE. About 38% of the staff is

international and 50% is female. The panel noticed from the list of staff members that the teaching staff is strong in research, well versed in the domain of marketing and quite diverse in background and seniority.

The steady growth in student numbers has led to additional staff recruitment. The discussions on-site have convinced the committee that the current number of staff is sufficient to deliver the Marketing programme in good quality. Student numbers have grown but are not exploding. Nonetheless, the current intake obliges course coordinators to organise several tutorials, sometimes up to five or six groups. In addition to the aforementioned facilities for plenary sessions, the main issue with the current student number is the growing assessment workload for staff in terms of revising assignments, grading exams and meeting deadlines for providing insightful feedback.

Furthermore, the committee noticed that staff development is well organised at the MSc Marketing as it is embedded in policies and documents including 'SBE HRM educational policy', 'SBE BKO policy', and 'SBE Tenure Track procedure'. All staff members are expected to have English language proficiency at level C1. Permanent staff members can pursue continuing education in specific fields such as active blended learning, mixed classroom, activating work formats, examinations and assessments. Currently, 14 academic staff involved in the MSc Marketing hold a university teaching qualification (BKO) and five staff also obtained the senior qualification (SKO). Some staff members are particularly active in course innovation, notably with regard to active blended learning in both teaching and assessment. Several lecturers also joined KnowVU, the knowledge network on teaching operated by the university and dedicated to educational innovation and improvement. Asking about career opportunities, the committee was informed that tenure track staff who engage in programme/course design and innovation can make promotion based on their educational performance and track record.

Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on-site, the assessment committee considers that the teaching-learning environment of the MSc Marketing is strong. The curriculum build-up is straightforward and reflects the aim and profile of the programme. The courses offer a good balance between contents and methods, while the cases connect theory and practice. The Marketing Mind course exemplifies how a programme can prepare its master students for a career as an academic professional. The committee noticed, moreover, that there is a clear link between the course learning goals and the programme learning outcomes. This, in turn, ensures that Marketing students will be in a position to achieve all intended learning outcomes by the time of their graduation. Furthermore, the committee endorses the choice of the school and the programme to offer the MSc Marketing programme in English.

The committee thinks highly of the programme's educational approach, "Every Course a Case", which combines theory and application in an attractive way and is fully aligned with the vision of the university and the faculty, and with the profile of the Marketing programme. Instigated by VU and SBE, there is a move towards more activating forms of learning, which the committee appreciates. In terms of blended learning, a lot is going on at individual course level. While there are qualified and motivated educational innovators among the programme staff, their work needs to be picked up and streamlined at programme (and school) level.

The programme attracts a growing number of students who are diverse in nationality and educational background. The admission process is not only extensive and meticulous, but also proves to be highly effective: only few students drop-out and the success rate is high. The extensive pre-master programme, moreover, ensures

that students who are not automatically accepted will have reached an adequate level to enrol on the programme.

The number and quality of staff involved in the Marketing programme is good: recent hirings have ensured that students can be taught and tutored in adequate conditions and by a sufficient number of highly qualified staff. The committee also appreciates the professional development opportunities for staff, and in particular the fact that staff also uses these opportunities.

The committee acknowledges the efforts of the programme team in addressing the recommendations of the previous panel. The Marketing programme can now rely on a strong and feasible thesis process where students address relevant research topics.

While the growth in student numbers has not affected the quality of education until now, according to the committee, there is room for concern regarding the staff-student interaction, the size of the facilities and the assessment workload of staff in case the intake would increase further.

In sum, the committee fully understands why this programme is highly appreciated by the students and receives consistently high scores in the National Student Surveys.

In view of the above findings and considerations, the assessment committee judges that **the MSc Marketing programme meets standard 2, teaching-learning environment.**

3. Assessment

The MSc Marketing features a robust system of assessment, which is embedded in the central policies and procedures of the VU and SBE. The assessment principles are properly implemented in the course assessments. The programme's assessment plan demonstrates that course learning goals are assessed adequately, which in turn ensures that all learning outcomes at programme level are covered. The current assessment committee recognises that since the previous accreditation visit, both School and programme have made considerable efforts to bring assessment quality up to par. The Examination Board has grown in capacity and competency, and monitors and assures the assessment quality of the MSc Marketing. Assessors are making good use of the thesis evaluation form and its extensive assessment matrix to grade the master theses and provide insightful feedback. According to the committee, the MSc Marketing programme **meets this standard**.

Findings

System of assessment

The committee gathers from the written materials and the discussions on site that the Marketing programme operates an assessment system that complies with the assessment policy and procedures of SBE, which in turn are based on a university-wide policy on assessment quality. The programme has put at disposition both policy documents, the *Handboek Onderwijskwaliteit - VU Toetskader* and the *SBE Beleidsplan – Toetsbeleid*.

Moreover, the committee noticed that the MSc Marketing has its own programme-specific Assessment Plan with a vision on education and on assessment, a curriculum map, and an overview of course learning objectives and assessment types. The assessment plan describes the forms of testing; in this way both programme director and examination board have an instrument to control the relationship between the programme's intended learning outcomes and course-level objectives and assessment.

Furthermore, each course coordinator creates an assessment file. This file contains, among other things, a test blueprint, the exam, resit exam and/or assignments, a model answer plus scoring guide, a test and item analysis, the results of the course evaluation, and a short reflection report by the examiner. According to the committee, next to good quality policy documents, the Marketing

programme also developed a relevant assessment plan that does justice to both central policies and the specificity of the Marketing degree programme.

Courses

At the level of individual courses, coordinators select the most appropriate assessment methods for testing the learning goals. They do so in close collaboration with the programme director who ensures that across the programme a variety of assessment methods is used. The committee noticed that SBE and the Marketing programme uphold the four eyes principle: when constructing the exam, the examiner – who very often is also the course coordinator – takes the course objectives into account and the extent to which these are assessed by the exam. Every course coordinator appoints a co-reader with content knowledge to check the contents of the exam, thus ensuring that all draft exams are reviewed by at least one other member of staff. The committee welcomes this approach.

Course coordinators are free to tailor the different exam components to the requirements of their course, provided they inform the programme management accordingly. Teaching staff is encouraged to experiment with innovative forms of teaching and testing; in every course, however, the individual student performance should be the decisive factor in the assessment. In fact, almost

every course in the MSc Marketing has an individual written exam that accounts for 70% of the grade; the remaining 30% is dedicated to the case, a team assignment with individual grading per student. The committee agrees to the emphasis on individual exam components and to the promotion of diversity and innovation in assessment formats.

Students mentioned in their written contribution and during the discussion on-site that they very much liked the practical cases, which befitted the substance of the course and could be linked to the theory and methods taught. The courses / cases they liked most were those where they received frequent and clear feedback on both contents and skills. This, however, did not always happen and in these cases students did not learn that much from their performance. Students also pointed to two practices on which they had mixed experiences. It seems that at least some students could not inspect the exams for which they got a passing grade. The committee understood that this was a temporary measure during COVID to ensure social distancing and which was abolished later. Moreover, several students mentioned they did not like the Comprehensive Assessment of Team Member Effectiveness (CATME) test to evaluate their team members anonymously, and would prefer to give this feedback orally and directly.

In the run-up to the site visit, the Marketing programme put at disposition a few individual courses and their 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 master programme of academic orientation.

Thesis evaluation

The master thesis is the culmination of the Marketing programme. The thesis process is governed by clear rules and procedures, which are explained in an information session to students and in the thesis manual. The master thesis is conceived as a course with a thesis coordinator,

course learning goals and a detailed assessment grid with nine individually weighted criteria. In terms of assessment, the evaluation form is completed by the supervisor and the second assessor separately before they reach a final assessment on each criterion. In addition to scoring grids, the evaluation form also features a dedicated space for motivating the grade and the scores per criterion. The extensive and informative manual on the master thesis contains an assessment matrix: each evaluation criterion has rubrics per score (below 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 or 10). According to the committee, the Marketing programme has a solid master thesis policy and procedure.

As part of its external assessment, the committee reviewed a sample of 15 master theses and their evaluation forms. Reporting on their review, committee members appreciated that the evaluation form addressed all relevant criteria and allowed for (extensive) feedback. This results in a very transparent evaluation process, which is centred around a detailed rubric yet leaves room for additional comments. Overall, the committee had a very positive impression on the way the theses were evaluated: in fourteen cases, the final grade was in line with their own appreciation and almost all assessors had provided clear, insightful and constructively-critical feedback to motivate their grade.

Asked about the weighting of the evaluation criteria, the programme team indicated that this weighting is a good basis, but does not constitute a strict mechanical process. Supervisors have the freedom in individual cases to weigh certain criteria differently. The committee also learned during the discussions that it is the task of second readers to take a fresh look at the thesis and report on their findings in a separate worksheet. While students expect feedback from the supervisor on the entire thesis trajectory, the second reader assumes the position of the critical reviewer offering comments solely on the substance of the thesis product.

During the discussion on-site, the programme team indicated – and alumni confirmed – that students do get extensive and constructive feedback orally or by e-mail during the thesis trajectory and again after the final presentation. The committee was also informed that SBE and the Marketing programme are awaiting the introduction of a VU-wide online thesis trajectory platform. This initiative was put temporarily on hold during the COVID-19 pandemic and should facilitate consistent qualitative feedback by the assessors.

The committee's distinctly positive impression on thesis evaluation in the MSc Marketing seems to confirm that the efforts of the programme and the Examination Board since the previous accreditation visit are paying off. The Examination Board investigated a sample of completed thesis forms in the year 2019-2020, while an external assessor reviewed some Marketing theses as part of the programme's mid-term review. Moreover, SBE and the Tilburg School of Economics and Management (TiSEM) have exchanged MSc Marketing theses to review both contents and evaluations. In all these cases the results were positive, i.e. in line with the original assessment.

Quality assurance

The committee gathered from the written materials that different stakeholders are involved in assuring the quality of assessment: there is first and foremost the Examination Board, but also the programme director and individual examiners play a role. The Examination Board supervises the examination process and carries final responsibility for safeguarding the quality control of assessment and examinations. It investigates systematically whether the process of assessment within SBE is carried out according to predefined criteria. These criteria are well established and include the reliability and validity of the tests. In the event that tests are not up to standard, the Examination Board reports to the programme director and the examiner and issues interventions for improvement.

During the site visit, the committee met with representatives of the Examination Boards. It gathered from the written materials and the discussion that these Boards – there is one for all publicly funded degrees and another one for privately funded programmes – fulfil their legal tasks adequately and have relevant expertise regarding assessment, fraud and legal issues. The external member has extensive assessment expertise. It is a conscious decision of SBE to have several programmes supervised by one Examination Board as this leads to greater uniformity, clarity and authority.

The committee noticed, moreover, that since the previous accreditation visit, the Examination Boards have grown in capacity and competence, taking on board the recommendations of the previous NVAO report. In terms of assessment quality assurance, the examination board currently does not only guard the quality of assessment, but also looks into assessment policy, assessment plans, assessment construction, and organization. The committee also established with satisfaction that over the past few years the Examination Boards have stepped up the inspections of course examinations and theses.

The Examination Board for publicly funded degree programmes is in charge of assuring the assessment in the full-time Marketing programme. The committee noticed from the materials and discussions that the Examination Board follows-up attentively any issue that may pop up in the programme and that the Marketing programme has been served with similar intensity as all other publicly funded degree programmes. Just as for other programmes, the Examination Board has paid considerable attention to online assessment recently and informed students and staff about plagiarism. According to the committee the quality assurance of the assessment in the MSc Marketing is in competent hands with the Examination Board.

Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on-site, the assessment committee considers that assessment in the MSc Marketing is robust. This appreciation is based first and foremost on the fact that both course and thesis assessment are embedded in well-established policies and frameworks at the level of the university and the school. The sample of assessment formats the committee has reviewed shows that the assessment principles and policies are properly implemented in the course assessments. The Marketing assessment plan, moreover, demonstrates that course learning goals are assessed adequately. This, in turn, ensures that the learning outcomes at programme level are covered.

Furthermore, the committee considers that both school and programme have made considerable efforts since the previous accreditation to bring assessment quality up to par. Similarly, the Examination Board has grown in capacity and competency, as demonstrated by the variety of assessment tasks it has been assuming over time. The committee welcomes these developments and is convinced that the Examination Board is very capable to assure the assessment quality of the MSc Marketing programme.

The committee considers that thesis assessment is organised very well. The programme can rely on a solid thesis procedure and policy, which are communicated effectively in person and on paper to the students. The Marketing programme is using a relevant thesis evaluation form with adequate criteria, an extensive assessment matrix, and space for individual appreciations and feedback of the supervisor and the second reader. Moreover, the sample of thesis assessments reviewed by the committee showed that in almost all cases, the final grade was in line with the committee's appreciation and that almost all assessors had provided clear, insightful and constructively critical feedback. Furthermore, the committee appreciates the initiative to exchange master theses and their evaluation forms for review with colleagues of Tilburg University.

In view of the above findings and considerations, the assessment committee judges that **the MSc Marketing programme meets standard 3, assessment.**

4. Achieved learning outcomes

The thesis sample and the discussions on-site revealed that upon graduation, MSc Marketing students have definitely achieved all programme learning outcomes. The thesis review has shown that students are capable of writing high quality academic outputs. The discussion with alumni confirmed that the MSc Marketing programme prepares students for a relevant professional career. The specific profile, the educational approach and the structural involvement of alumni in the programme give Marketing graduates from VU a head-start on the labour market. According to the committee, the MSc Marketing programme **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 MSc Marketing programme.

Thesis quality

The master thesis is seen as the final product of the educational programme and the ultimate test whether students have achieved all learning outcomes. It emphasises the creation of an original contribution that goes beyond what can be found elsewhere in the literature. While the final thesis product is scored, going through the process of writing a thesis constitutes an important learning moment for students.

As part of their external assessment, committee members reviewed a sample of 15 MSc Marketing theses. The sample selection was based on a list featuring 174 students who graduated in the academic year 2021-22. The selection was representative in terms of scoring and the theses had been assessed by a variety of supervisors and second readers.

According to the committee, all theses were clearly of sufficient quality to pass. Hence, none of the theses was reallocated internally for a second opinion. The committee found that across the sample and taking into account the distribution of scores, the thesis quality was good. The

programme benefits from a highly structured approach in the thesis process in terms of set-up and lay out. While there is a bit of diversity in outlook, the theses are generally aligned to one another. There are clusters of thesis topics (such as game industry, social media influencers, greed, etc.), which are centred around the specific expertise of staff members. This approach is positive, according to the committee, as it strengthens the research – education nexus for both staff and students. The committee noticed moreover that across theses there was quite some variation in the complexity of the study design and the data analysis. While it applauds such variety, it was not fully clear to the committee if and how such complexity is rewarded in the grading process.

In sum, the thesis review has demonstrated convincingly, according to the committee, that Marketing students have achieved the programme learning outcomes when they complete the master thesis.

Graduate performance

The committee gathered from the written materials that the Marketing programme opens up various career opportunities. Marketing graduates are highly in demand and tend to find a relevant job quickly. Students and alumni indicated that the combination of theory and application, the focus on the “Mind of the Marketeer”, and the attention in cases to different aspects of one strategy, has prepared VU students very well for the life as academic professional after their studies. Moreover, once they found a job, graduates realised that they had been taught the right

things at VU and that their competencies were often more advanced than what companies in the business world would expect. In this regard, several stakeholders informed the committee that both the Marketing programme at VU and its graduates have an excellent reputation in the job market.

In addition to regular meetings with companies in the course cases, the interaction with the business community is organised through the SBE Career Services, which facilitates both contact between students and the business world and between faculty and alumni. Marketing alumni indicated to the committee that the substance of the programme prepared them adequately for the labour market. Both current and past students referred in positive terms to the role of individual lecturers, as well as to the SBE Career Services and the study association Aureus. They moreover appreciated the various skills workshops and networking events, and in particular the Students Meet Alumni event during the Marketing Mind course.

Considerations

Based on the written materials, the thesis sample and the discussions on site, the committee considers that upon graduation, MSc Marketing students have achieved all programme learning outcomes. The thesis review has shown that students are capable of writing high quality final products. The discussion with alumni confirmed the committee's finding that the MSc Marketing programme at VU prepares students for a relevant professional career.

Marketing students in general are high in demand on the labour market and easily find relevant jobs. In addition, the site visit has convinced the committee that the specific profile, the educational approach and the structural involvement of alumni in the Marketing programme at VU give graduates a head-start on the labour market. Hence, it comes as no surprise to the committee that the programme and its graduates enjoy an excellent reputation in the work field.

In view of the above findings and considerations, the assessment committee judges that the **MSc Marketing programme meets standard 4, achieved learning outcomes.**

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 corporate governance, board of directors and sustainable corporate performance. Hans has extensive accreditation experience.

Niels Hermes, member

Prof. dr. Hermes is professor 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.

Eelke de Jong, member

Prof. dr. de Jong is emeritus professor of International Economics at Radboud University in Nijmegen. His research focuses on the role of culture, in the sense of norms and values, in economic behaviour. Eelke has extensive accreditation experience.

Hans van Trijp, member

Prof. dr. ir. van Trijp is professor of Marketing and Consumer Behaviour at Wageningen University. His expertise lays in the domains of consumer studies, environmental marketing, cooperatives, and supply chain management. Hans has relevant accreditation experience.

Judith Kikkert, student-member

Ms Kikkert is a master student MSc Management, Economics and Consumer Studies at Wageningen University and student-member of the university-wide Board of Education. Judith holds a bachelor's degree *Economie en Beleid* from Wageningen.

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: VU Amsterdam, De Boelelaan, Amsterdam

Wednesday 16 November 2022

- 08.30 Arrival of the committee and set-up
- 09.00 Session with Faculty Board
- 10.00 Session with Management BSc EBE, BSc EOR & MSc EOR
- 11.00 Session with Students and Alumni BSc EBE, BSc EOR & MSc EOR
- 12.00 Session with Staff BSc EBE, BSc EOR & MSc EOR
- 13.00 Lunch and internal meeting
- 14.00 Session with Management MSc RMFI
- 14.40 Session with Students and Alumni MSc RMFI
- 15.20 Session with Staff MSc RMFI
- 16.00 Break and internal deliberation
- 16.30 Return meeting with Management MSc RMFI
- 17.00 Internal deliberation
- 17.30 End of day 1

Thursday 17 November 2022

- 08.30 Arrival of the committee and internal meeting
- 09.00 Session with Examination Board
- 10.00 Session with Management MSc ECO & MSc STEE
- 10.50 Session with Students and Alumni MSc ECO & MSc STEE
- 11.40 Session with Staff MSc ECO & MSc STEE
- 12.30 Lunch and internal meeting
- 13.30 Session with Management MSc Marketing FT + PT
- 14.20 Session with Students and Alumni MSc Marketing FT + PT
- 15.10 Session with Staff MSc Marketing FT + PT
- 16.00 Break and internal deliberation
- 16.30 Return meeting with Management MSc ECO & MSc STEE
- 17.00 Internal deliberation
- 17.30 End of day 2

Friday 18 November 2022

- 08.30 Arrival of the committee and internal meeting
- 09.00 Session with Management MSc FIN, MSc AC & MSc ITACA
- 10.15 Session with Students and Alumni MSc FIN, MSc AC & MSc ITACA
- 11.30 Session with Staff MSc FIN, MSc AC & MSc ITACA
- 12.45 Lunch and internal deliberation
- 14.00 Return meeting with Management MSc ITACA

- 14.30 Internal deliberation
- 15.30 Preliminary feedback
- 16.00 Development Dialogue Executive Programmes
- 17.00 Development Dialogue Funded Programmes
- 18.00 End of site visit

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

Attachment 3 Overview of materials

Information materials

Self-evaluation report MSc Marketing full-time, VU School of Business and Economics, 2022.

Appendices to the self-evaluation report

- Intended Learning Outcomes
- Programme 2021-2022
- Course descriptions 2021-2022
- Assessment plan 2021-2022
- Thesis Manual and thesis assessment form 2021-2022
- Teaching and Examination regulations 2021-2022
- Regulations and Guidelines regarding examinations SBE 2021-2022
- Overview of academic staff including quality
- List of all graduates in academic years 2020-2021 & 2021-2022
- Intake, drop out and success rates
- AACSB Memorandum

Additional materials

Following materials were made available online for the committee:

- VU Assessment Policy
- SBE Assessment Policy
- Annual Reports Examination Committees
- Annual Reports Programme Committees

Graduation products

For every programme under review, the assessment committee studied a sample of graduation projects. In case of the MSc Marketing programme, the committee reviewed 15 master theses which had been successfully submitted by students in the academic year 2021-2022. The selection was representative in terms of scoring and supervision by a variety of staff.

A list with student numbers is available at AeQui