

ONDERZOEKERIJ

Research Master in Communication
Science

University of Amsterdam

Report of the limited programme assessment

De Onderzoekerij
Vondellaan 58
2332 AH Leiden

Email: info@onderzoekerij.nl
Internet: www.onderzoekerij.nl



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Executive summary

The outcome of the external assessment of the research master in Communication Science is conditionally positive. The programme complies with standard 1, 3 and 4 of the limited NVAO framework and partially complies with standard 2.

The two-year programme in Communication Science aims to give students a broad overview of the state-of-the-art of substantive fields in Communication Science and to train them in advanced research methods to be able to conduct high-quality academic research in these fields. The programme consists of two tracks: 1) an academic track, tailored to students who are more interested to pursue a career within academia and 2) a professional track, tailored to students who wish to ultimately understand and resolve communication challenges in the professional field.

The panel appreciates the broad profile of the programme and the extra attention that is paid to a research career outside academia. The formulated intended learning outcomes have been adequately concretised with regard to academic master's level and research orientation. For further improvement, the panel suggests evaluating and eventually rephrasing its intended learning outcomes to better reflect the shared objectives and differences between the academic and professional track.

The programme focuses on substantive theory in communication science, methodological skills, research participation and writing a master thesis. The panel appreciates the programme's focus on research in the methodological coursework, the research internship and master thesis. According to the panel, teachers are active academic researchers, didactically qualified and accessible to the students. The panel is positive about the feasibility of the programme. The study guidance appears to be sufficiently well organised.

However, the panel considers that there is room for improvement for the teaching-learning environment. First, the panel is not convinced that all courses contribute to the intended learning outcomes. Students have up to 30 EC electives of substantive coursework with one-year master's students. The panel recommends a structured system with a combination of courses that build upon and enrich the disciplinary background of the students. Second, the panel wishes more assurances that the electives are at the level of a research master.

The panel is of the opinion that the programme has an effective assessment system in place. It appreciates the variety in assessment methods used. The examinations board and its sub-committees are effectively organised and safeguard the quality of the assessments. The panel is in general positive about the thesis assessment procedure, but recommends the programme to further improve the thesis assessment form.

The panel concludes that students of the programme achieve an adequate final level and the intended learning outcomes. The theses show sufficient quality and the required academic level. The available information on the subsequent careers of the graduates indicates that the students find suitable jobs, both in the professional field and in academia.

The panel is convinced that the programme can improve its teaching learning environment within a reasonable period of time. All in all, the panel assesses the quality of the programme as conditionally positive.

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



Date: 25 May 2021

Janke Cohen-Schotanus
(chair)

Annemarie Venemans
(Secretary)



1. Introduction

1.1 Administrative data

Name of the programme:	Communication Science (research)
CROHO number:	60163
Level of the programme:	Master of Science
Orientation of the programme:	Academic
Study load:	120 EC
Location:	Amsterdam
Variant:	Full-time
Expiration of accreditation:	1 November 2021

1.2 Introduction

This report focuses on the assessment of the research master's programme Communication Science. This assessment forms part of a cluster assessment of thirteen research master's programmes at seven universities. In total, fifteen panel members participated in this cluster assessment. Appendix A provides an overview of the thirteen participating research masters and the composition of the total panel.

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

1.3 Panel composition

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

- Prof. dr. Janke Cohen-Schotanus (chair), Professor emeritus of research of education in the medical sciences;
- Prof. dr. Rachel Gibson, Professor of Politics, Department of Politics, University of Manchester;
- Prof. dr. Harm Hospers, Professor emeritus of Applied Health Psychology;
- Prof. dr. Maike Luhmann, Professor of Psychological Methods, Department of psychology, Ruhr University Bochum;
- MSc Hanne Oberman (student member). Methodology and Statistics for the Behavioural, Biomedical, and Social Sciences, Utrecht University (graduated in 2020).



The panel was supported by dr. Annemarie Venemans-Jellema, who acted as secretary.

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

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

1.4 Working method

Preparation

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

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

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

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

Online visit

The online visit took place on 17 March, 2021 (see Appendix B for the schedule). During the preparatory meeting, the panel discussed the preliminary findings and decided which questions to raise in their meetings with the programme representatives. During the visit, the panel spoke with representatives of the management, students, lecturers, alumni, and the Examinations Board. Everybody involved in the programme had the opportunity to inform the panel in confidence about matters they consider important to the assessment. No one made use of this opportunity. The panel used the last part of the online visit to evaluate the interviews and had a second meeting with the programme's management to receive answers to any remaining questions. At the end of the visit, the chair presented the panel's preliminary findings and their first impressions of the programme.

Report

The secretary drew up a draft report based on the panel's findings. This draft report was submitted to the members of the panel and adjusted based on their review and feedback. After adoption, the draft



report was sent to the institution for verification of factual inaccuracies. The secretary discussed the programme's comments with the chair, after which the secretary drew up the final report and circulated it to the panel for a final round of comments.

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

Development dialogue

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



2. Review

2.1 Intended learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

Findings, analysis and considerations

The research master's programme in Communication Science at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) is embedded in the Graduate School of Communication (GSC). The GSC is part of the department of Communication Science. Most of the lecturers and thesis supervisors in the GSC are members of the Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR), which is one of the largest research institutes for Communication Science worldwide.

The research master's programme in Communication Science aims to give students a broad overview of the state-of-the-art of substantive fields in Communication Science and to train them in advanced research methods to be able to conduct high-quality academic research in these fields. Instead of being directed towards only one or a few specific areas in Communication Science, the programme covers the full range of (research) activities of the department of Communication Science. The panel agrees with the choice for a broad profile, which allows the programme to make use of all available expertise at the department.

Recently, the programme introduced two tracks for this research master: the academic track and the professional track. Based on the self-assessment report, the academic track is tailored to students who are more interested to pursue doctoral level study upon completion of the programme or otherwise wish to pursue a career within academia. The professional track is tailored to students who wish to ultimately understand and resolve communication challenges in the professional field. During the interviews the management explained to the panel that both the academic and professional track are research-oriented. The panel appreciates the extra attention that is paid to a research career outside academia. It is of the opinion that there is an increasing need for science practitioners.

The programme formulated four types of exit qualifications: a) Expertise in a specific field of Communication Science, b) Expertise in empirical research, c) Academic attitudes and abilities, and d) Professional skills and abilities. For each of these qualifications several intended learning outcomes have been formulated. The programme is in the process of updating these intended learning outcomes. It explained that the main change between the current and proposed intended learning outcomes is the addition of intended learning outcomes that better fit with the professional track, such as 'knowledge valorisation'.

The panel studied the final qualifications and concluded that they are suitable for a research master's programme in the field of Communication Science. They well-reflect the unique characteristics and the research orientation of the programme. After reading the proposed exit qualifications it was not completely clear if all intended learning outcomes apply for both the academic and professional track. For example, the outcome: 'Obtain hands-on experience in an academic or professional environment by working with an experienced researcher to support ongoing or planned research', might be better separated for the two tracks.



The panel therefore suggests evaluating and eventually rephrasing its intended learning outcomes to better reflect the shared objectives and differences between both tracks.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme has a clear profile with intended learning outcomes on research master's level. The programme therefore meets standard 1.

2.2 Teaching-learning environment

The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Findings, analysis and considerations

Admission and intake

The programme aims at enrolling fifty new students per academic year. The inflow increased in the past years from 15 in 2015/2016 to 43 in 2019/2020. Of all incoming students, 72% are international. Students can start in September or February.

Candidates possessing a bachelor's degree from either a Dutch or foreign institution of higher education, with an average grade of 7.5 (or the international equivalent) or higher, who can demonstrate that they have knowledge, understanding and skills at the level of the UvA's bachelor's programme Communication Science, including the necessary language skills, may be admitted to the programme. In addition, candidates must have demonstrated an active interest in research as well as an adequate analytical level. If an admission request does not satisfy all admission requirements, but these requirements can be expected to be met within a reasonable time period, applicants can be given the opportunity to satisfy the requirements by means of completing a series of preparatory seminars.

The panel observed that the admission criteria are formulated clearly and adequately reflect the research-oriented nature of the programme. The panel thinks highly about the selective yet effective pre-master seminars.

Curriculum

The research master's programme in Communication Science is a full-time programme of 120 EC, divided into four semesters, each consisting of three periods (8-8-4 weeks respectively). As mentioned in standard 1, the programme has two tracks: 1) an academic track, tailored to students who are more interested to pursue a career within academia and 2) a professional track, tailored to students who wish to ultimately understand and resolve communication challenges in the professional field.

Both tracks integrate seminars that focus on 1) substantive theory in communication science with 2) courses that enhance methodological skills. In addition, the curriculum consists of the element 3) 'research participation' and ends with 4) a master thesis. Curriculum details are given in appendix E.



The substantive coursework consists of a core seminar (6 EC) and 30 EC free choice. The panel noticed that this free choice mainly consists of one-year master courses without extra assignments for research master students. In the core seminar, *Advancing and Building Communication Science Theory* (ABC course), students are equipped to thoroughly reflect on the state of the art and the role of theory formation in the discipline of communication science. During the visit, the management mentioned that an additional aim of the ABC course is binding the students as a cohort. The panel is positive about the ABC course, because it gives a good theoretical foundation and set students on the same page at the start of the programme. However, the latter does not apply for students of the February intake who follow this course in their second semester. The panel suggests the programme to think about ways to promote group binding for this cohort at an earlier stage.

There are four mandatory seminars on methodology, namely 1) Content-analysis (6 EC), 2) Experimentation (6 EC), 3) Survey Design (6 EC), and 4) Research and Data Ethics (3 EC). In addition, students follow at least 12 EC of coursework from a group of seminars on data-skills, together with research master's students from the research master of Social Sciences, for example 'Advanced Network Analysis', or 'Dynamic Data-Analysis'. Besides this, students of the academic track have a free choice of another 18 EC elective methodological courses, out of which a maximum of 12 EC can be replaced with a research internship. The 18 EC elective courses can be chosen from research master's courses. This does not apply for students of the professional track, who fulfil the 18 EC with a professional internship (see below). In the student chapter of the self-evaluation report, students give a positive reflection on the range of research skills they obtained in the programme. The panel established that the abovementioned four core courses give students a strong foundation in research skills. Moreover, it appreciates the attention given to ethics in the core programme. However, it is of the opinion that some topics offered in the elective method seminars should be mandatory. This would include those providing training in the use of methods and software that can be used in the analysis of new forms of large-scale data, i.e. seminars that incorporate training in computational and programming languages such as 'R' and Python.

Hands-on experience in carrying out research is gained through the seminars: 1) Evaluating Academic Research (academic track) or 2) Evaluating Professional Research (professional track). These seminars ensure knowledge and awareness of the important aspects of conducting research in academic or professional practice. In addition, students of the academic track participate in an ongoing research project of the Amsterdam School of Communication Research ASCoR (6 EC) and can do a research internship of 12 EC (instead of extra methodological coursework). Students of the professional track participate in a compulsory professional internship (12 EC or 18 EC) to further develop research-related skills relevant to the discipline, and to gain experience functioning as a research professional in a professional organisation.

The programme ends with an 18 EC empirical research project, individually supervised by a senior ASCoR researcher, resulting in a master thesis. Next, there is a mandatory module 'Thesis communication: Item for lay or academic audience' (3 EC), where the thesis research findings are presented to academic or lay audiences.

The panel is of the opinion that the programme's focus on research is well reflected in the methodological coursework, the research internship and master thesis. The panel appreciates that the curriculum consists of a professional track and an academic track. Although the core curriculum of both tracks is mostly the same, the tracks give students the opportunity to explicitly focus on academic research or professional research. As stated in the self-evaluation report, a point of attention is the availability of professional research internships. The panel agrees with the programme that it is important to increase their network to ensure a stable pool of internships.



Students indicated during the online visit that they are content with the 'freedom of choice' of the curriculum. They appreciate to study a wide range of subjects and perspectives and to develop their competencies in various directions. As written above, students do 30 EC electives of substantive coursework together with one-year master's students.

Although the panel appreciates the free space students have to design their own learning path, it is not convinced that all courses contribute to the intended learning outcomes. According to the panel, there is no clear evidence of alignment between the intended learning outcomes and the substantive coursework. During the online visit, the management explained that the programme recently developed suggestions of possible study paths to help students with their choice of electives. The panel encourages this development, but wishes a more structured system with a combination of courses that build upon and enrich the disciplinary background of the students to ensure that the 30 EC substantive electives contribute to the programme's intended learning outcomes. It advises the programme to reconsider the aim of the electives and to be more restrictive and critical on what students can choose.

The panel also wishes more assurances that the electives are at the level of a research master. The panel learned that there are no extra assignments for research master students in elective courses with one-year master's students. The lecturers told the panel that there is a possibility to do some extra work, but this is on the students' initiative and not explicitly for research master's students. The panel strongly recommends the programme management to require additional assignments for research master's students in courses shared with one-year master's students.

The panel noticed that this recommendation is in line with the recommendations of the previous panel. The previous panel was of the opinion that the large component of undifferentiated training is undesirable and advised the programme to strongly focus on this by tailoring the assignments and assessment of research master's students to these joint courses. In addition, the previous panel suggested to consider developing separate communication science courses for the research master's students.

The programme has responded by these recommendations by adding the 6 EC ABC course as well as the courses 'Evaluating Academic/Professional Research', 'Research and Data Ethics' and 'Thesis Communication'. The panel appreciates the introduction of these courses, because these courses contribute to the development towards an independent research master's programme. However, it is of the opinion that the programme should take further actions to differentiate their research master's programme from one-year master's programme(s).

The panel is positive about the didactical approach based on the principles: commitment, critical mindset and autonomy. It acknowledges that this is indeed a relevant approach for this programme. Teaching methods used include mostly tutorials with active discussions. The online visit showed that students and lecturers value the small scale of the programme and the interactive teaching methods. It allows for in-depth discussions with students. Students however also noted that they did not appreciate the group work with one-year master's students, because of a difference in work ethics. This confirms the need to further differentiate the one-year master's programme and research master's programme.

The language of instruction is English. The programme management substantiates its choice by arguing that they place a high value on an international approach to the study of communication and the media. In addition, the international background of the academic staff and the internationally diverse influx of students, and international research and literature necessitate an English-taught programme. The panel supports this choice.



Staff

Many staff members of the Department of Communication Science are involved in the programme. The teaching staff consists of senior staff with a PhD degree of whom the majority participates in the research institute ASCoR. The panel noticed that all staff is properly qualified in terms of contents and academic skills. Moreover, it mentioned that teaching staff had a good scholarly reputation both in the Netherlands and abroad.

The students who spoke with the panel were very satisfied with the quality of the staff members. The students appreciate the lack of hierarchy between students and professors and stated that all staff members are easy to approach. Lecturers stated that it was a pleasure to teach the research master's students, who are part of their research community.

Study load and student guidance

Students are expected to work full-time. Most of these hours concern self-study, complemented by on average 8 hours per week of class meetings. Students indicated that the programme is challenging, but feasible.

The GSC has several services that offer students support and advice, both on a proactive basis and upon a student's request. These include an admissions office, a student desk, a team of study advisors, and a communication science methods desk. The students the panel spoke with, were satisfied with the services in place.

Study guidance is an important feature of the programme. Some students know exactly what they want to do from the very beginning and are very focused, others are not yet quite sure about their individualised programme. The programme has several study advisors that provide guidance on the individual study plan of the students. The panel values the guidance that is offered by the study advisors but suggests to make the meetings with the study advisor mandatory.

COVID-19

Due to COVID-19 almost all education of the programme switched to online teaching and assessment in the past year. The panel asked students and teachers about their experience with online teaching. Whilst COVID-19 evidently had an impact on the interaction between student and teachers, both are positively surprised about the online possibilities. Students mentioned that there was still a lot of social interaction and discussion possible. Teachers felt really supported by the programme management and the UvA Teaching and Learning Centre that provided tools and information. The management already formed a committee to inventory what measures might be kept after COVID-19, for example bringing the larger global space into the classroom in a financial managing way and quick one-to-one meetings. The panel concluded that although the COVID-19 situation is not an optimal teaching and learning situation, the programme still allows students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. In addition, the pandemic has also brought some positive developments.

Conclusion

Summing up, the panel recognises a number of strong points in the programme: the two tracks, the mandatory methodological coursework, the quality and dedication of the teaching staff and the



research context. However, in the panel opinion, the elective courses need to be more restrictive to ensure a better alignment with the intended learning outcomes. In addition, for courses together with one-year master's students, the panel wishes to see additional requirements for research master's students. The panel expects that with these additional requirements, the programme has a good teaching learning environment. The programme therefore partially meets standard 2.

2.3 Student assessment

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

Findings, analysis and considerations

Assessment policy and methods

The system of assessment of the research master is guided by the assessment policy of the GSC, which the panel found well-thought-out.

The panel established that the programme has the necessary tools to ensure the link between the overall learning outcomes, the learning goals of the core programme and the assessments that establish to what extent students have covered the learning goals and are achieving the intended learning outcomes. To measure the intended learning outcomes, the programme uses a variety of assessment methods ranging from oral presentations, research proposals, essays and research reports to take home exams. If group work is part of course examinations, at least 70% of the final grade for the course should be determined by traceable, individual contributions by students, in order to assure the reliability of the assessments. Every course in the curriculum has a course file which explains how the exit qualifications of the programme are expressed in verifiable goals and teaching and assessment activities. During annual assessment days, the programme focuses at the relation between intended learning outcomes, courses and assessments.

Students indicated during the visit that assessment is organised in a transparent way. They are informed about the type of assessment and provided with sufficient feedback on assignments. They always feel free to approach lecturers to ask for more feedback, if necessary.

Thesis assessment

The panel studied thesis assessment forms and the thesis assessment procedure for grading the master theses. Two staff members are involved in the assessment of the master theses, namely the individual supervisor and an additional examiner. The additional examiner functions as second examiner for a series of master theses assigned to him/her during the relevant semester. Both supervisor and additional examiner are authorised examiners, assigned by the Examinations Board. The panel applauds this assessment procedure with two independent assessors of which the second assessor comes from a limited pool of additional examiners. It agrees with the programme that this procedure ensures standardisation. However, the panel has also some points of attention with respect to the thesis procedure and thesis assessment forms.

First, the procedure contains guidelines for what would constitute a fail (< 5.5), a grade that is just about sufficient (6.0), and an excellent level grade (≥ 9) but there is no explanation for a 7 or an 8. The panel urges the programme to also describe what it means to achieve a 7 or an 8.



Second, the panel noted that the grades given to subcategories of the thesis (for example, the category ‘problem definition’ or ‘research design’) were in decimals. The panel wonders how it is possible to grade these subcategories at such a precise level. In addition, the set weighting structure for the subcategories is overly prescriptive in that it tells the students what to emphasise rather than having them decide this, and constrains the marker unnecessarily. Currently, a student that has done an exceptional analysis is not rewarded as well as the student who has presented a strong theoretical approach. Given the utility of analysis for the professional track the panel is of the opinion that this may be somewhat imbalanced weighting. It encourages the programme reconsidering this weighting structure.

Third, the panel noted that assessors use the same thesis assessment form for both research master’s and one-year master’s students. During the online visit, the Examinations Board (EB) explained that supervisors have additional guidelines for the assessment of research master’s theses and that supervisors are well aware of the differences between one-year master’s and research master’s theses. The panel appreciates the additional guidelines, but it suggests to develop a separate assessment form for research master’s students to make more explicit that the research master is a different programme with different intended learning outcomes.

Examinations Board

The bachelor’s, one-year master’s and research master’s programme Communication Science are covered by one independent EB. The EB consists of five members and fulfils all tasks according to Dutch law. One of the members of the EB is also the assessment coordinator. This coordinator studies all evaluations of assessments and monitors the curriculum course files.

According to the panel, the position and responsibilities of the EB are up to standard. The panel is of the opinion that the EB performs thoroughly and pro-actively conducts its tasks to control the quality of the exams and the assessment procedures. The Board shows good knowledge of the programme and its assessment.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the assessments are valid, reliable and independent but the panel made some suggestions to further improve the assessment of the theses. The programme therefore meets standard 3.

2.4 Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings, analysis and considerations

The programme concludes with a master thesis, that must be based on an empirical research project in the domain of communication and media. The panel read and assessed a selection of fifteen theses. The documents it studied show that students have acquired knowledge and understanding at a level that suits a research master’s programme and that they are able to conduct research at that level as well. The panel considers none of the theses read unsatisfactory.



The panel considers the theses generally to be very good and to be in line with the grades actually given. A number of theses are in the opinion of the panel suitable for publication.

The quality of the programme is clearly expressed by the achievements of the students, who are doing well according to the self-assessment report. All, except one alumnus, currently are in paid jobs as a 'Research/Data analyst' (33%), PhD student (22%), a teaching or other academic position (11%) or a job outside academia or applied research (for example social media manager, project consultant, or self-employed personal trainer). The panel established that this programme prepares students for a variety of jobs. It is of the opinion that with the introduction of the professional track, there are even more possibilities.

During the online visit, the panel talked to alumni, who reported that they were very satisfied with their education, and felt well prepared for a job as a researcher. They pointed out that they had benefited from the large variety of courses and good practical skills.

Conclusion

Due to the satisfactory overall level of the theses and the fact that alumni continue on easily to a career in communication, the panel is convinced that the learning outcomes are achieved upon graduation. It therefore meets standard 4.



3. Strengths and recommendations

3.1 Strengths of the programme

The panel is impressed by the following features:

- Professional track – there is ample attention for a research career outside academia by introducing a professional track;
- Teaching staff – The teaching staff are enthusiastic, motivated and well known in the field. The staff members bring in a wide array of expertise from various disciplines;
- Assessment system – The programme has a sound and transparent system of assessment in place, characterised by an appropriate set of assessment methods and fit by the intended learning outcomes. The Examinations Board plays an important and proactive role in ensuring the quality of assessment.

3.2 Recommendations

For further improvement of the programme, the panel makes the following recommendations (next to the conditions that are described in chapter 4):

- Intended learning outcomes – Evaluate and eventually rephrase the intended learning outcomes in order to have a better alignment with both the professional and academic track;
- Thesis assessment form – Develop a thesis assessment form explicitly for the research master's programme and have a critical look at the current weighting structure of the subcategories.



4. Conclusion

The outcome of the external assessment of the research master in Communication Science is conditionally positive. The programme complies with standards 1,3 and 4 of the limited NVAO framework and partially complies with standard 2.

The panel concludes that the intended learning outcomes are a good indication of the research master's level. The programme has an adequate system of student assessment and sufficient mechanisms to safeguard its quality. The theses and careers of the graduates persuasively show that they have achieved the intended learning outcomes.

The panel recognises a number of strong points in the teaching learning environment of the programme: the two tracks, the mandatory methodological coursework, the quality and dedication of the teaching staff and the research context. However, in the panel's opinion, the elective courses need to be more restrictive and on research master's level. The panel expects that, if the aim and level of the electives is guaranteed, the programme is an attractive programme. All in all, the panel assesses the quality of the programme as conditionally positive.

The conditions to be met within a period of two years are the following:

- Improve the constructive alignment between the learning goals of the substantive coursework (30 EC) and the intended learning outcomes of the programme. To do so, be more critical and restrictive with elective courses;
- Take further actions to differentiate the one-year master's and research master's programme, and set additional requirements if students take a one-year master's course as an elective.

Standard	Judgement
Standard 1	Meets the standard
Standard 2	Partially meets the standard
Standard 3	Meets the standard
Standard 4	Meets the standard
Final conclusion	Conditionally positive



Appendix A – Panel composition and programmes of the cluster

Panel composition of the cluster:

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

The cluster is composed of thirteen programmes:

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



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



Appendix B – Schedule of the visit

17 March, 2021

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



Appendix C – Documents studied

- Self-evaluation report with appendices
 - Appendix 1, Accreditation report 2015
 - Appendix 2, Recommendations accreditation panel
 - Appendix 3, Key programme data
 - Appendix 4, Teaching and examination regulations 2019-2020
 - Appendix 5, New proposed exit qualifications
 - Appendix 6, research master's course catalogue
 - Appendix 7, Master's thesis guide and assessment procedure
 - Appendix 8, Overview final projects
 - Appendix 9, Adjustments education 2019-2020 due to Covid-19
 - Appendix 10, Staff members including positions
- Fifteen theses with assessment forms
- Alumni research report
- Alumni positions
- AScoR Self-assessment report 2016-2020
- *Toetsbeleid 2019-2020*
- Courses files of compulsory courses
- Early lessons learned, COVID-19
- Overview student well-being facilities COVID-19
- Research master padlet evaluation online-hybrid education
- Annual report PC 2019-2020
- Annual report Methods desk 2019-2020
- *Jaarverslag en -plan 2019-2020*
- *Jaarverslag EC 2019-2020*
- Plans GS 2021-2022



Appendix D – Abbreviations

ABC course	Advancing and Building Communication Science Theory course
ASCoR	Amsterdam School of Communication Research
EB	Examinations Board
EC	European Credit
GSC	Graduate School of Communication
NVAO	<i>Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie</i>
UvA	University of Amsterdam



Appendix E – Curriculum components

Academic Communication Research	without internship	with 12 EC internship	Professional Communication Research	with 18 EC internship
<i>Substantive coursework</i>			<i>Substantive coursework</i>	
ABC	6	6	ABC	6
Choice	30	30	Choice	30
<i>Methodological coursework</i>			<i>Methodological coursework</i>	
Survey Design	6	6	Survey Design	6
Experimentation in the Social Sciences	6	6	Experimentation in the Social Sciences	6
Content Analysis	6	6	Content Analysis	6
Research and Data Ethics	3	3	Research and Data Ethics	3
Choice ¹	30	18	Choice ¹	12
<i>Research participation</i>			<i>Research participation</i>	
Evaluating Academic Research	6	6	Evaluating Professional Research	6
ASCoR Research Participation	6	6	Professional Research Participation	6
Academic internship (or Methodological coursework)	0	12	Professional Research Internship	18
<i>Dissertation module</i>			<i>Dissertation module</i>	
Thesis	18	18	Thesis	18
Thesis Communication: Item for lay or academic audience	3	3	Thesis Communication: Item for lay or professional audience	3

¹ At least 12 EC from the following elective courses concerning the statistical analysis of empirical data needs to be completed:

*Advanced Multivariate Modelling, Structural Equation Modelling, *Interpreting Qualitative Data, Big Data & Automated Content Analysis, Big Data & Automated Content Analysis, Part I & II, *Advanced Network Analysis, Using R for data wrangling, analysis and visualization, Qualitative Analysis of Media Content, *Fixed and Random Effects, *Qualitative Research Design, *Replication and *Measurement Models and Data Theory.

Research Master's in Communication Science

*Research Master's in Social Sciences

