



MSc Research in Public Administration and Organisational Science
Utrecht University
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Contents

- Summary 4
 - Score table 6
- Introduction..... 7
 - Procedure..... 7
 - Panel 8
 - Information on the programmes..... 10
- Description of the assessment..... 11
 - Organization 11
 - Previous accreditation..... 11
 - Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes 11
 - Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment..... 14
 - Standard 3. Student assessment 19
 - Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes 22
 - Standard 5. Diversity 24
 - General conclusion 25
 - Development points 25
- Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes 26
- Appendix 2. Programme curriculum..... 28
- Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit..... 29
- Appendix 4. Materials..... 30

Summary

This evaluation concerns the master programme Research in Public Administration and Organisational Science, a two-year full time programme of 120 EC that is offered jointly by Utrecht University and Erasmus University Rotterdam, with Tilburg University and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam as associate partners. On behalf of Utrecht University, the Utrecht University School of Governance (USG) bears full responsibility for the quality assurance of the programme, while accreditation is granted to the universities of Utrecht and Rotterdam. The long-standing cooperation between the four partner universities ensures that there is a common understanding on the programme ambitions, as well as a good level of trust between the central and local programme representatives.

The research master programme has a clear and attractive profile, which combines key features of the Utrecht/USG vision and mission on education with the depth of research methodological training and the breadth of topical expertise from four universities. This profile is adequately translated in three learning pathways and sixteen exit qualifications that align with the domain-specific reference framework and do justice to the content, level and orientation of the programme. The recently established Advisory Council advises the programme on the latest developments in, and expectations of, the professional field.

The teaching-learning environment is strong. The programme structure is coherent, the course contents reflect the objectives of a research master and align with the overall learning outcomes, and the small-scale, intensive and master-apprentice education approach is conducive to forming a safe learning environment and a community of staff and students. The students are well selected and resourceful, while each of the teaching staff brings a lot of complementary substantive, methodological and research expertise to the programme.

The research master programme has a robust assessment system, which is embedded in the provisions and policies of the school and the university. Since the previous accreditation visit, the programme's testing plan links course learning goals to relevant assessment formats. Course assignments and exams are transparent in terms of requirements, formats and evaluation criteria, and students receive proper and insightful feedback on their tests. The research master thesis is assessed in a similarly transparent and meticulous way: the sample review showed that assessors take thesis evaluation seriously and put in a lot of effort to ensure that the quality of the thesis is reflected properly in the scores, which in turn are motivated in the insightful written feedback. The programme can also rely on the expertise and operational capacity of the Board of Examiners and the Assessment Committee in assuring the quality of assessment.

Students who eventually graduate the research master programme have effectively achieved all learning outcomes. In the thesis trajectory they demonstrate their competencies as academic master level graduates with a specific focus on research. The sample review showed that the overall thesis quality is high and that each thesis clearly reflected the requirements of a final research master's product. Upon graduation students find a research-oriented job that is in line with the objective of the programme.

Diversity is on the radar of the research master programme, the school and the partner institutions. Since the previous accreditation visit, several initiatives have been taken to enhance diversity among students, among staff and in course contents.

The programme fulfils all specific requirements for a research master programme. Its research oriented nature is very much present in the learning outcomes and set-up of the programme. It brings student competencies up to an academic master level and uses the 120 EC in an effective way to add a distinctively

research orientation to the curriculum. The length of the curriculum allows students to connect education and research. During the programme they are trained as researchers, and treated in this way by the teaching staff. The thesis is the result of an extensive exercise that covers the entire research cycle and addresses a topic with clear societal relevance that is related to the research context of the programme.

In addition to these positive findings, considerations and conclusions, the panel also sees room for improvement in a number of areas. The following suggestions constitute no formal recommendations but points for attention the panel picked up during the visit and reported in the respective assessment standards. The panel advises the research master programme to:

- map the networks of individual staff and share it as a source of (extra-) curricular study, research, internship and conference opportunities with (international) students;
- enhance its outreach efforts to attract more yet equally qualified students in general, and among bachelor students at the four partner institutions in particular;
- emphasize in its communication to prospective students that the programme prepares for a wide range of research-informed positions in academia and with private and public bodies;
- dedicate specific attention in its (extra-) curricular activities to career pathways outside academia;
- extend the team spirit among programme representatives to the other staff members who teach on the programme;
- continue its efforts in recruiting a more diverse student and staff body, and in making course contents more inclusive with regard to non-European issues.

In sum, the panel issues a positive conclusion on the quality of the master programme Research in Public Administration and Organisational Science. The programme is up to standard on all accounts. Moreover, the panel considers that the programme fulfils the specific accreditation requirements set for research master programmes.

Score table

The panel assesses the programmes as follows:

M Research in Public Administration and Organisational Science (Utrecht University)

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 5: Diversity	meets the standard
General conclusion	positive

M Research in Public Administration and Organisational Science (Erasmus University Rotterdam)

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 5: Diversity	meets the standard
General conclusion	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.

Prof. Monique Kremer
Chair

Mark Delmartino
Secretary

Date: 25 January 2024

Introduction

Procedure

Assessment

From 25 to 27 September 2023, an independent peer review panel visited the Utrecht University School of Governance (USG, in Dutch: USBO) to assess the quality of four degree programmes. This visit is part of the cluster assessment Public Administration, involving 20 degree programmes at eight higher education institutions across the Netherlands. The assessment followed the procedure and standards described in the NVAO-EAPAA agreement signed on 18 May 2021. Programmes and institutions participating in this cluster assessment want to obtain accreditation by both the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Body (NVAO) and the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation (EAPAA).

On request of the cluster Public Administration, quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment of the different programmes. It composed the peer review panel in cooperation with the institutions taking into account the expertise and independence of the members and ensuring consistency within the cluster. The composition of the panel was approved by NVAO on 11 September 2023 and by EAPAA on 14 September 2023.

The coordinator at Academion, Peter Hilderling, instructed the panel chairs on their role in the site visit according to the Panel chair profile (NVAO 2016) in May, and briefed the cluster panel members on the NVAO-EAPAA assessment procedures in June. On behalf of Academion, Mark Delmartino and Esther Poort – both NVAO-certified secretaries – liaised with the institutions and assisted the panels before and during the site visits. Afterwards, they drafted the assessment reports in close co-operation with the chairs and panels.

Assessment of the research master programme

The master Research in Public Administration and Organisational Science is a two-year full-time 120 EC research master programme offered by Utrecht University in cooperation with Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR). Partners associated with the programme are Tilburg University (TiU) and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). USG is responsible for coordinating the programme, which has been embedded in the quality system of UU. For the purposes of renewing the accreditation of the degree programme at EUR, a dedicated document on EUR's contribution to the research master programme was included in the materials. While TiU and VU do not seek accreditation, they play an equal role in all other respects.

This report, therefore, treats the two research master programmes - at Utrecht University and Erasmus University Rotterdam - as if they were a single programme based in Utrecht, considering that this best reflects the context in which the programmes are offered. Both universities request accreditation for their programme based on the same report (this report). They took care that participants from both Utrecht and Rotterdam – as well as from Tilburg and Amsterdam – attended the site visit, and that realized learning outcomes for both institutions (even though students only register in Utrecht) were considered. This approach was discussed in a meeting with the NVAO and both universities on 4 September 2023.

Site visit

Preparing for the site visit, the panel studied the self-evaluation report and appendices USG had put at disposition. The materials also included information on the contribution of the Erasmus University Rotterdam to the research master programme, as well as indications on how the other partner universities are involved. An overview of these materials is provided in appendix 4. Furthermore, the panel reviewed a

sample of 15 research master theses, which were representative in terms of final grades and examiners. The theses were selected by the panel chair in consultation with the secretary. The selection was based on an anonymized list of students who had graduated in the academic years 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022.

The panel members studied the materials and reviewed the theses and their assessments, and reported their initial findings to the secretary. The secretary processed this input in a document, which served as a basis for discussion during the panel's preparatory meeting on 13 September 2023. During this meeting the panel identified the key strengths of the research master programme, the issues that required further discussion on site, and pieces of additional information to support the findings and considerations of the panel. On behalf of the panel, the secretary reported the outcome of this meeting to USG on 15 September.

The Open Consultation hour for students, teaching and support staff involved in the research master programme was scheduled alongside the preparatory meeting. Eventually, nobody used the opportunity to discuss individually and confidentially with the panel.

The site visit consisted of a mixture of internal meetings, stakeholder-specific sessions, multi-stakeholder thematic sessions and a guided tour through the USG building. Three sessions with management, students and staff focused exclusively on the research master programme. The panel wants to express its gratitude for the way these sessions were organized and for the enthusiasm and openness of the participants towards the panel. The panel has used the internal meetings to prepare sessions and to discuss its findings on the respective degree programmes. At the end of the site visit, the panel chair publicly presented the preliminary findings.

Report

After the site visit, the secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings. This report is structured along the five NVAO-EAPAA standards, and integrates NVAO's additional criteria for research master programmes (May 2016). The report was first submitted to the coordinator at Academion for peer assessment and then to the panel for feedback. After processing this feedback, the secretary sent the draft report to USG and EUR in order to have it checked for factual inaccuracies. The secretary discussed the ensuing comments with the panel chair, implementing changes where relevant. The panel then finalized the report, and the coordinator sent it to Utrecht University and Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Panel

The following panel members were involved in the cluster assessment:

- Prof. Andrew Massey, professor of Government, King's College London – chair;
- Prof. Monique Kremer, professor of Active Citizenship, University of Amsterdam – chair;
- Prof. Ernst ten Heuvelhof, emeritus professor of Public Administration, Delft University of Technology;
- Prof. Peter Bursens, professor of Political Science, University of Antwerp;
- Prof. Ellen Wayenberg, professor of Public Governance and Management at Ghent University and member of the EAPAA Accreditation Committee;
- Prof. Calin Hintea, professor of Public Administration and Management at Babes-Bolyai University and member of the EAPAA Accreditation Committee;
- Prof. Thurid Hustedt, professor of Public Administration and Management at Hertie School Berlin and member of the EAPAA Accreditation Committee;
- Dr. Hester Glasbeek, advisor Leadership Development at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, and Senior Partner of Reflect Academy: For Leadership in Learning;

- Anje-Margreet Woltjer MSc, director of SPO Utrecht;
- Prof. Ria Janvier, professor of Social Law, University of Antwerp;
- Prof. Leo Huberts, emeritus professor of Public Administration, Vrije Universiteit;
- Prof. Heinrich Winter, professor of Public Administration, University of Groningen;
- Wim de Boer MSc, lecturer Public Administration and Governance at Haagse Hogeschool;
- Prof. Tanja Klenk, professor of Public Administration and Public Policies, Helmut-Schmidt-University Hamburg;
- David Van Slyke PhD, professor of Public Administration, The Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs;
- Prof. Geske Dijkstra, emeritus professor of Governance and Global Development, Erasmus University Rotterdam;
- Prof. Esther Versluis, professor of European Regulatory Governance, Maastricht University;
- Prof. Zoe Radnor, professor of Service Operations Management, Aston University;
- Prof. Sophie Vanhoonacker, professor of Administrative Governance, Maastricht University;
- Prof. Kees van Paridon, emeritus professor of Economics, Erasmus University Rotterdam;
- Prof. Tannelie Blom, emeritus professor of European Integration, Maastricht University – referee;
- Tom Hillenaar BSc, master student Engineering and Policy Analysis, Delft University of Technology – student member;
- Sibel Gökbekir BSc, master student of Complex Systems Engineering and Management at Delft University of Technology, and of International and European Union Law at Erasmus University Rotterdam – student member.

The panel assessing the research master Public Administration and Organisational Science consisted of the following members:

- Monique Kremer, professor of Active Citizenship, University of Amsterdam – chair;
- Ellen Wayenberg, professor of Public Governance and Management at Ghent University and member of the EAPAA Accreditation Committee;
- Ernst ten Heuvelhof, emeritus professor of Public Administration, Delft University of Technology;
- Hester Glasbeek, advisor Leadership Development at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, and Senior Partner of the Reflect Academy;
- Tom Hillenaar, master student Engineering and Policy Analysis, Delft University of Technology – student member;
- Andrew Massey, professor of Government, King's College London – referee.

Mark Delmartino assisted the panel and drafted the assessment report.

In consultation with NVAO, it was agreed that a referee would be added to the panel to study the materials, review the research master theses and take part (at distance) in the panel deliberations. Professor Massey's input on the self-evaluation report and the thesis review has been taken on board during the preparation of the site visit and his findings were put forward during the sessions with programme representatives on site. The panel's internal deliberations after the sessions were shared with – and validated by – the referee.

Information on the programmes

Name of the institution:	Utrecht University
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Programme name:	M Research in Public Administration and Organisational Science
CROHO number:	60391
Level:	Master
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	120 EC
Location:	Utrecht
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Language of instruction:	English
Submission date NVAO:	1 May 2024

Name of the institution:	Erasmus University Rotterdam
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Programme name:	M Research in Public Administration and Organisational Science
CROHO number:	60391
Level:	Master
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	120 EC
Location:	Rotterdam
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Language of instruction:	English

Description of the assessment

Organization

Research master programme

This report covers one of the four degree programmes that are offered by the Utrecht School of Governance as part of the cluster assessment Public Administration. According to the introduction to the self-evaluation report, USG has opted for a single self-evaluation report covering all four programmes under review. It does so because at every level – bachelor, master, research master and executive master – its programmes share not only a single overarching objective, but also a common vision for teaching.

The research master programme, however, is also a common initiative of four universities: Utrecht University, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Tilburg University and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. On behalf of the participating institutions, USG is coordinating the research master programme, which is embedded in the quality assurance system of UU. All core courses – also those taught by staff from partner universities, are offered in Utrecht, while students can attend electives and seminars at the partner institutions.

In this report, therefore, the panel tries to do justice to both the particular inter-institutional set-up of the programme and to the programme's embedding in the educational and quality assurance context of USG and Utrecht University.

Previous accreditation

In the previous accreditation round, the panel issued a positive conclusion on the research master programme - including the judgement 'good' on the teaching-learning environment. Hence, it did not issue any strong recommendations but made only a few suggestions for improvement. The current panel noticed that these suggestions have been considered and integrated in the programme. The panel appreciates in particular the improvements made with regard to the independence of the thesis assessment. This and other adjustments will be reported in the respective standards.

Standard 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

Profile

The master programme Research in Public Administration and Organisational Science is offered jointly by Utrecht University (USG) and Erasmus University (Department of Public Administration and Sociology), with Tilburg University (Department Public Law and Governance) and VU Amsterdam (Faculty of Social Sciences, Political Science and Public Administration) as associated partners.

For the purposes of renewing the accreditation of the degree programme at EUR, a dedicated document on EUR's contribution to the research master programme was included in the materials.

During the site visit, the programme representatives of these institutions indicated that most departments are too small to set up a dedicated research master programme and that initially, more institutions had been invited to join the programme.

The programme representatives also mentioned that they do not find the governance structure to be complex, on the contrary: the institutions know and cooperate with each other already for a long time. The education is provided by lecturers from all four institutions and the content and structure of the curriculum are discussed and fine-tuned at regular meetings between the four institutions. The research master programme is coordinated by Utrecht University and all organizational and executive responsibilities, including quality assurance, have been delegated to USG. All partner institutions subscribe to the goals, learning outcomes and curriculum of the programme and respect UU's regulations for teaching and examination as laid down in the Education and Examination Regulations. The panel noticed that this point was explicitly confirmed by EUR in its written contribution to the self-evaluation report. As a result, the situation is clear and straightforward for students, who follow all core courses in Utrecht yet benefit from the breadth of research topics and expertise that is made available by the combined efforts of four institutions.

The panel gathered from the self-evaluation report that the research master programme aims at preparing students for the further practice of public administration and organizational science research, which is likely to take the form of either academic research or applied consultancy- and policy-oriented research. The programme builds on what was learned in the bachelor programmes at the partner institutions and extends and deepens this knowledge and skills.

The panel also established that it is the specific emphasis on research that distinguishes this two-year research master programme from one-year master programmes at USG and other institutions. The programme's primary focus is on the connection between conducting research and developing knowledge in the field of public administration and organization science. The panel noticed that this focus on research is also conveyed in the programme's stated objective "to educate motivated people who, based on their academic knowledge of research into public administration and organizational science, can carry out academic and applied research that contributes to the growing body of knowledge concerned with (addressing) public issues." In order to achieve this mission, students must acquire knowledge and understanding of the disciplinary and theoretical approaches within Public Administration and Organizational Science (breadth-wise), go theoretically into key themes in the field of public administration and organizational science research (depth-wise), and acquire competences in the field of policy-oriented and academically oriented research in public administration and organizational science.

Intended learning outcomes

The specific profile of the research master programme has been translated in three learning pathways connected to the public administration and organization of public issues: (i) substance, (ii) academic research, and (iii) applied research. Each learning pathway has its own learning objectives, which in turn coincide with the exit qualifications students are expected to achieve by the time of their graduation. The 16 intended learning outcomes of the programme are listed in Appendix 1 to this report. Compared to the previous accreditation round, the main adjustments concern the addition of two exit qualifications connected to the learning pathway applied research: one on managing stakeholder relationships and one on the ability to function in a research team.

The panel observed that the organization of the intended learning outcomes through three learning pathways is similar across all degree programmes at USG. However, the formulation of the exit qualifications stands apart for the research master programme because of its strong research focus. All learning outcomes

are formulated in an insightful way and reflect the substance (public administration and organizational science), level (master) and orientation (academic) of the programme. Moreover, the panel noticed that these outcomes are in line with the requirements of the Dutch domain-specific reference framework for Public Administration, Public Governance and Governance and Organisation programmes and constitute a strong and precise translation of what the programme stands for. The panel also established that the research oriented nature of the programme is explicitly reflected in the formulated learning outcomes.

In fact, the set-up of the programme objective with learning pathways and (intended) learning outcomes emphasizes five characteristics of the research master programme: the breadth of the field of study, the connection between research and education, the value of both academic and applied research, the methodological multiformity of the field of study, and the cooperation between lecturers and students within a master-apprenticeship relationship. The panel observed that these features are again a mixture of what USG stands for - breadth, research-education, methodology - and what sets this inter-institutional research master programme apart: the value of both academic and applied research and the master-apprenticeship relation.

Professional field

During the previous accreditation visit, the then panel advised that the programme could establish a work-field advisory committee that also includes (potential) employers from consultancy companies, authorities and think tanks. The current panel was informed that USG established an Advisory Council in 2022 to structurally embed the connection between its degree programmes and the professional field. This council consists of people holding senior positions across all facets of the public administration and organizational science field. While set up as an USG-wide advisory body for all programmes, its members can also be called upon to advise on the research master programme. The panel welcomes this development, which it was informed should have been established already a few years ago but was put on hold during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The panel understood from the thematic sessions that the Advisory Council has already provided relevant advice on some USG programmes. According to the panel, the Council could play a useful role in promoting/strengthening the applied research component of the research master programme towards students who envisage pursuing a professional career outside academia.

Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel considers that the research master programme has a clear and attractive profile. It combines the key features of the Utrecht/USG vision and mission on education with the depth of research methodological training and the breadth of topical expertise from four universities. The panel welcomes the disciplinary connection between the research master curriculum and the research units at the respective partner universities. In the future, programme developments may want to align also with the envisaged reforms of the PhD/doctoral schools.

Although Utrecht University is clearly in the lead in this programme, the panel has met with a team of coordinators from all partners who emphasized their long-standing cooperation and confirmed their commitment to this joint endeavour. In fact, the panel established during the visit that this research master programme was carried by a broad and senior management team, featuring a strong presence of the EUR representative.

The profile of the research master programme is adequately translated in three learning pathways and sixteen exit qualifications that align with the domain-specific reference framework and do justice to the

content, level and orientation of the programme. In this regard, the panel considers that the research oriented nature of the programme is very much present in the learning outcomes and set-up of the programme.

The panel welcomes the recent establishment of an Advisory Council, which could play an important role in promoting the programme's applied research component with students who do not envisage a career in academia.

Conclusion

The panel judges that the master programme Research in Public Administration and Organisational Science meets standard 1 of the NVAO-EAPAA framework.

Standard 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

Curriculum

The research master consists of a two-year full-time programme which amounts to 120 EC. It is designed to train students who, based on academic knowledge of research into public administration and organizational science, carry out academic and applied research. In order to achieve this goal, students get a substantive overview and understanding of the disciplinary and theoretical approaches in public administration and organizational science, acquire in-depth knowledge of a select number of theories and key themes in these domains, and gain advanced insight in both quantitative and qualitative methods. Students use these competences to conduct both applied and academic research, to familiarize with the requirements of scientific integrity as laid down in the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research 2018, and to comply with this code in their research.

The curriculum is built around three pillars - theory (30 EC), methodology (42 EC) and research (36 EC) – and an elective space (12 EC). These pillars and their respective course components were described in depth in the self-evaluation report and further clarified during the site visit. Apart from the elective courses, all core modules are taught either exclusively to research master students or to a combination of research master and PhD students. The panel found the structure of the curriculum coherent and the contents of the modules particularly relevant in view of the above-mentioned objective of the programme: throughout the two-year curriculum students are taught all disciplinary and methodological components one may expect from a Public Administration / Organisational Science programme, they perform academic and applied research, and pay explicit attention to the ethical dimension of conducting research. The materials and discussions, furthermore, allowed the panel to establish that there is a clear link between the individual course learning goals and the overall programme learning outcomes.

While some students indicated that they would have appreciated more elective space, all stakeholders emphasized during the visit that the curriculum is designed in such a way that students can specialize, also within the compulsory courses. For instance, the course assignments allow students to focus on one particular domain or angle of the course topic. This is particularly – but certainly not exclusively – facilitated in the first-year course Tutorial. Moreover, the range of electives to choose from is quite encompassing and

students often decide on a particular elective in view of the domain they want to investigate in their research master thesis. Others use the electives to familiarize with new substantive or methodological domains. Every year, the programme organizes an event in which all curricular options, as well as research foci for assignments and master thesis topics at the four partner universities are presented. Taking all these elements together, the panel established that the research master curriculum allows students sufficient freedom to tailor the study programme to their individual aspirations.

During the visit, the panel also discussed the formal absence in the curriculum of an internship period or a study period abroad. According to the programme team, including such components (as a mandatory part) in the curriculum would jeopardize the overall structure of the programme and its balance between theory, methodology and research. However, students who wish to do so can incorporate an internship period and/or a short study period abroad as an integral part of the curriculum: some students collect data for their thesis abroad, others follow a credited summer or winter school as part of their electives, and still other students attend a conference abroad to present their (preliminary) research findings. The panel welcomed these opportunities and encouraged the programme team to communicate these options more systematically to all students. In fact, the discussions with students revealed that notably international students do not always have the full picture of what is possible. Moreover, several examples of internship, study period and conference opportunities mentioned by students and staff seemed to rely on the specific network of an individual professor. Hence the suggestion of the panel to collect these opportunities and make them available to all research master students.

The research master programme is a common initiative of four universities. While USG is coordinating the multi-partner programme, all partners are involved in delivering the core and elective courses and in supervising the research master thesis. All core courses are taught in Utrecht, while students attend electives and thesis-related activities in the institutions of their respective staff/supervisor. The panel noticed that there is both trust and common understanding about the programme (ambitions) among the four academic representatives and the programme coordinator. Moreover, there are regular staff meetings at the level of courses and pillars. However, the wider group of staff members from the different institutions teaching on the programme do not (yet) form a team. According to the panel, this is a point of attention for the future development of the programme. Similarly, the panel gathered from the discussions on site that the scheduling of activities at partner institutions can be better aligned to the commitments of research master students at USG. Students who wish to attend optional or elective courses or research workshops at partner institutions, do not always manage to do so due to scheduling incompatibilities with their regular/compulsory study programme in Utrecht.

Language of instruction

The primary language of instruction in the research master programme is English, as well as the programme name. All compulsory courses are taught and assessed entirely in English. Students can choose to take courses taught in Dutch as part of their individual profile space. The panel gathered from the self-evaluation report that using English as language of instruction helps the programme to meet its aim of preparing students to contribute to the body of knowledge in public administration and organizational science. Making such a contribution requires the ability to engage with academic debates at the highest level, which nowadays largely take place in English. Especially for those students who aspire to an academic career, it is indispensable to be able to write, present and debate in English. This motivation was further elaborated in the discussion on site with the programme management: teaching in English also contributes to creating an international classroom where students become familiar with - and appreciate - different contexts and cultural backgrounds, which in turn makes for a deeper learning experience and prepares for a research career in the international setting of academia.

The panel endorses the motivation of the programme management to use English as primary language of instruction, as well as the use of an English name for the programme. The panel is convinced that the added value of this master programme as a two-year research-focused endeavour that brings together the expertise of four different institutions warrants a common vehicular language to attract as wide a variety of competent and motivated students as possible.

Learning environment

The research master programme is embedded in the vision on education of the school and the university. As it is the case for all USG degree programmes under review, the research master programme provides small-scale and intensive education and manages to create a community feeling among the cohorts. This community is growing organically through a lot of direct interaction between students and lecturers: several courses are offered to small groups of less than ten students; lecturers and coordinators are approachable for personal feedback, career advice and/or a discussion on student papers; and throughout the year many informal extra-curricular activities are held to reinforce this process. Moreover, first and second year students start bonding during a study trip at the start of the academic year, while students and local coordinators meet twice per year. All interviewees confirmed during the visit that the educational philosophy does not only exist on paper, but is a reality in the day to day delivery of the research master programme.

A particularity of the research master programme is the master-apprentice relationship: students learn from lecturers by seeing and experiencing the staff working on their own applied and academic research; right from the start, students are placed in the role of researcher, gaining greater independence throughout the programme. Observing the enthusiasm of both students and staff for the highly interactive approach, which fuels their commitment to the programme, the panel established that students and staff form an academic community, a safe learning environment in which experimentation and making mistakes are seen as natural parts of the learning process.

Student admission and intake

The panel gathered from the written materials that every year around 12 students enrol on the research master programme. In recent years at least a quarter of these students have been non-Dutch, originating from EU countries (Germany, Hungary), non-EU countries (Belarus) and beyond (Canada, United States). Roughly half of the students have no connection to any of the four partner institutions. The programme has a clear international character but is also very well aware that a higher number and share of international students would boost the intercultural dimension of the programme, as well as the impact of the international classroom on the respective cohorts.

While the programme can accept up to 25 students per year, the number of students effectively enrolling is lower. The programme management indicated during the visit that it has no clear answer as to why the yearly intake remains rather limited: the admission criteria are selective but not extraordinarily severe, and the programme is also open to students with a background in adjacent fields to public administration and organizational science, such as political science or sociology. In the past two years, about half of the applicants eventually enrolled on the programme. Applicants who were not selected either did not have enough content-related knowledge or had not performed (bachelor level) research before. In its contribution to the self-evaluation report, EUR indicated that over the past two years, five of its bachelor graduates enrolled in the research master programme, which corresponds to about 20% of the intake. EUR has its own dedicated webpage for prospective students and the programme is part of the bi-annual EUR master information days for prospective students.

Having studied the admission and selection criteria, the panel appreciates that the programme does not intend to lower the bar for enrolment. In fact, the panel found the current admission and selection criteria to be highly relevant because they test that the content and form of the curriculum are effectively aligned with the skills and interests of the candidates, which in turn ensures that selected students can successfully complete the curriculum. The proof of the pudding being in its eating, the panel observed in the discussion with the research master students that they were certainly up to the challenges of the programme, and thus had been well-chosen based on the admission and selection criteria.

While in the self-evaluation report there were hints as to revise the design of the research master programme in order to attract more students, the panel indicated during the visit that more communication and better marketing might be a better solution given the quality of the current programme. These outreach efforts could start with the four partner institutions as the number of bachelor students from these institutions who even envisage pursuing this research master programme is very/surprisingly low. In this regard, the panel suggested to emphasize in the communication to prospective students that the programme prepares for a wide range of research-informed positions, in academia but equally well with private and public bodies.

Academic progress

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that both the individual courses and the programme as a whole are feasible, but that this feasibility is not reflected in the share of students who graduate within the nominal duration of two years. Students confirmed to the panel that there are no structural obstacles in the curriculum that systematically delay graduation. Nonetheless, there can be several reasons for extending the research master study period. Some students incur a delay because they spend out of their own free will too much time on course assignments they can tailor to their interest, others struggle with the writing of the master thesis. Furthermore, some students feel the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was still around when they started the research master. And still other students are particularly motivated to take additional courses, include an internship or study period abroad, and/or extend their work on a high-quality thesis.

The panel was informed that the programme is actively monitoring the study progress and the success rate of its individual students and their cohorts. It recently initiated a tutor programme for all students, while its study advisor and coordinator keep an eye in particular on those students who experience issues in the personal domain such as stress and performance pressure, and/or in the academic sphere such as thesis writing flaws. These efforts seem to pay off as a considerable part of the student cohort who started in September 2021 is well on track to complete their studies within 2,5 years. The panel gathered from the discussions on site that in every cohort there is at least some degree of performance-driven competition among students. According to the panel, the programme may want to monitor carefully that this competition does not assume unhealthy dimensions.

Staff

The research master programme is embedded in the research programmes of the four participating institutions. The panel gathered from the most recent Research Review Public Administration (2021) that all programmes are highly valued on the criteria research quality, relevance to society, and viability, as well as on the aspects PhD training programme, research integrity and diversity. It also noticed that key researchers of these programmes are directly involved in the courses, tutorials and thesis supervision of the research master programme.

Prior to the visit, the panel received extensive information on the lecturers involved in the research master programme. These teaching staff have been selected for their specific substantive and / or methodological

expertise. All staff fulfil the institutional requirements with regard to English language. The panel observed that by involving staff from all four partner universities, the research master programme can offer a wealth of individual specialist disciplines and methodological expertise. In its contribution to the self-evaluation report, EUR emphasized that it delegates several senior staff to all three programme learning lines: theory, methodology and research projects. All lecturers are active researchers and have a good reputation both nationally and internationally. Most course coordinators are full professors. The panel established from the materials and the discussions that each of the partner institutions makes available a sufficient number of staff to deliver the programme. On average a cohort consists of twelve students and staff teach research master classes of at most 15 students. Depending on the study load, staff are allocated 80 or 120 hours of teaching time. The guidance and supervision of the Tutorial and the master thesis is organized on an individual basis. Staff supervising a master thesis receives 40 hours of supervision time (including time for being a second assessor for a different thesis).

Students indicated that they appreciate the quality of the lecturers, as well as their commitment and availability. The English language skills of the staff are very good, according to the students. They also experience the master-apprenticeship relationship as both effective and pleasant: students are encouraged to be a researcher and study 'on-the-job' with lecturers working on their own applied and academic research. The panel noticed in this regard that irrespective of their institutional affiliation, the involvement of the lecturers on the research master programme complies with the educational principles at USG: they play a central role in implementing the substantive and didactic principles of the degree programme and fulfil a wide range of roles in education, such as teaching classes, overseeing seminars, developing courses and supervising research. Further to the testimonials by students, the panel observed that the staff of the research master are very enthusiastic about the programme, their courses, their research and – above all – the students.

Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel considers that the teaching-learning environment of the research master programme is strong. This appreciation applies not only to the curriculum, but also to the educational approach, the selected students and the staff. The programme structure is coherent, the course contents reflect the objectives of a research master and align with the overall learning outcomes, and the teaching approach is conducive to forming a safe learning environment and a community of staff and students. The curriculum is feasible; students who encounter obstacles in their academic progress are monitored and supported. The students are well selected and resourceful, while each of the teaching staff brings a lot of complementary substantive, methodological and research expertise to the programme. The panel thinks highly of the enthusiasm of both students and staff for the programme, the courses and each other. If anything, the programme could dedicate more specific attention in its curricular and extra-curricular activities to career pathways outside academia in order to offer an equally attractive experience to students who do not envisage a PhD trajectory after their studies.

The panel furthermore observes that the programme fulfils all specific requirements for the teaching and learning environment of a research master programme. It brings student competencies up to an academic master level and uses the 120 EC in an effective way to add a distinctively research orientation to the curriculum. The panel is convinced that the length of the (two-year) curriculum allows students to connect education and research. During the programme they are trained as researchers, and treated in this way by the teaching staff.

The panel notices that the long-standing cooperation between the four partner universities ensures that there is a common understanding on the programme ambitions, as well as a good level of trust between the

central and local programme representatives. If anything, the panel advises the management to instil a similar kind of team spirit among the teaching staff on the programme. Moreover, the programme may want to collect the opportunities offered through the specific networks of individual lecturers and share these with all research master students, in particular the international students.

The panel acknowledges that the size of the current student cohorts allows for small-scale and intensive education, yet realizes that the intake is not at full capacity. Wondering why there are so few (international) applicants for this good quality programme, the panel subscribes to the programme's decision not to lower the admission and selection criteria. The panel suggests to enhance the outreach efforts notably but not exclusively among the bachelor students at the four partner institutions. When doing so, the programme may want to emphasize in the communication to prospective students that the programme prepares for wide range of research-informed positions, in academia but equally well with private and public bodies.

Conclusion

The panel judges that the master programme Research in Public Administration and Organisational Science meets standard 2 of the NVAO-EAPAA framework.

Standard 3. Student assessment

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

Findings

Assessment system

As mentioned before, Utrecht University – and in particular USG – is responsible for the quality assurance of the inter-institutional research master. This means that the policies and provisions of UU apply to all components of assessment in the research master programme – system of assessment, courses, master theses and quality assurance – including those elements that are delivered by staff belonging to one of the partner universities.

The panel gathered from the written materials that the system of assessment in the research master programme is embedded in well-established university-wide policies and practices. Hence, the panel findings and considerations regarding assessment apply equally to the research master as to the three other degree programmes under review. The research master programme ensures good, reliable and valid assessment using different testing formats for different courses because the learning objectives call for this. Within the programme, assessment is based on four key principles: (i) the testing format depends on the knowledge and skills described in the learning objective; (ii) assessment corresponds to the structure of the curriculum; (iii) assessment is an essential part of learning; and (iv) it is vital to have a valid and reliable measurement of students' knowledge and skills.

Since the previous accreditation visit, these principles have led to the elaboration of periodically revised testing plans. The plans establish a link between the course learning goals and assessment; by doing so, they complete the process of constructive alignment from the level of programme outcomes via the individual course learning goals to their translation into assessment. The panel was informed that the elaboration and revision of the testing plans have led in some courses to adjusting the assessment formats. Furthermore, USG finds it important to assess both the potential for cooperation between students and their individual contribution; hence, it upholds the principle that group assessment may not account for more than 50% of

the total course grade. The panel has looked into the current testing plan of the research master programme and found it comprehensive and relevant. Each course features several assessment formats and across the curriculum students are exposed to a variety of formats. The most common format is a paper, which according to the panel aligns with the explicit research dimension of this master programme.

Students appreciate the way courses are assessed: while tests require a lot of work from students, they also notice that testing is taken seriously by the teaching staff. Moreover, research master students recognize that through the assessment formats they learn to do different things, such as producing a scientific poster, writing a book review, making presentations and holding debates. While across the curriculum there is a clear focus on writing papers, research master students appreciate that they can often choose the angle of the paper they want to write, even if this means that eventually they spend (too) much time deciding on the topic and on writing extensive in-depth assignments. Furthermore, students informed the panel that the programme takes care not to schedule too many peak moments of concurring deadlines. While the study load is particularly tough during the first semester, the other periods are more feasible from a course and assessment perspective. At all times, students are informed timely about the requirements, formats and evaluation criteria of the respective tests. Finally, students indicated that they are satisfied with the amount and quality of feedback they receive on their assignments and exams. They also appreciate that professors are available to provide additional feedback if students would ask for this.

Thesis assessment

Research master students conclude their studies by carrying out a large graduation research project to demonstrate the achievement of the programme learning outcomes. In this project students pass through all stages of the research cycle and are assessed on their capacity to address these stages and complete the entire cycle. As part of its external review, the panel studied a representative sample of 15 research master theses submitted in the academic years 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. While the quality of the theses is addressed in the next section on Achieved Learning Outcomes, the panel also looked at the completed evaluation forms.

Overall, the panel was very satisfied with the way research master theses had been assessed. This appreciation covers both the scores students obtained for the overall thesis product and for the individual assessment criteria, and the assessors' written feedback on the evaluation form. According to the panel, the research master programme takes thesis assessment seriously with almost all assessors putting in good efforts to make feedback extensive, meticulous and insightful. In fact, the feedback informs students – and external reviewers – not only about the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis execution but also provides insight in how assessors arrived at the overall/criteria scores. Furthermore, the panel noticed that the programme has taken on board the recommendation of the previous assessment committee to ensure that each thesis is assessed independently by the supervisor and by the second reader. For each thesis, separate evaluation forms are now completed before the two assessors meet and converge theses into a shared assessment.

The programme coordinators and teaching staff from all four partner institutions emphasized that they follow the assessment criteria stipulated by USG and Utrecht University. By now, they have a clear and common understanding of the quality expectations because each thesis assessment duo, consisting of a thesis supervisor and a second reader, features at least one staff member who is familiar with the research master programme. The panel noticed this common understanding when it reviewed the thesis sample because it thought the scores on all theses were precise, justified and calibrated.

Assuring assessment quality

USG has a single Board of Examiners for all four degree programmes, including the research master. The Board consists of six internal members (USG lecturers) and one external member, an education expert from UU's Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences. The internal members also make up the Assessment Committee. The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the Board of Examiners consists of experienced and dedicated members who fulfil their different tasks as Board and Committee competently and meticulously. The Board of Examiners had a vital role in implementing the testing policy during the COVID-19 period. During the pandemic, the Board of Examiners was very much involved in adjusting the exams to ensure that the quality of assessment remained intact. Also after the lockdown, the Board remained involved in all assessment-related aspects of courses and curriculum adjustments.

During the visit, the Board of Examiners confirmed that - in line with the Annual Reports from previous years - also recently there have been no specific issues to report with regard to ensuring the assessment quality of the research master programme. The Board does not have many requests for individual study programme approvals because almost all research master students take elective courses that have been validated by the programme and the Board of Examiners before. The Board members mentioned that all core courses are taught at research master level, with some courses being open to PhD students. Students take at most two elective courses that could be offered at regular master level. In this case, research master students are not required to take on additional tasks, according to the Board. The programme director, moreover, indicated that very often such an elective course has a direct connection to the theme of the individual student's research master thesis.

The panel noticed furthermore that the Assessment Committee plays an important role in safeguarding the quality of assessment and examinations. The Committee systematically monitors the quality of testing in all USG courses by means of a six-year cycle. The panel thought highly of the Committee's practice to review every year the research master thesis with the lowest passing grade in terms of quality, grading and completed assessment form. The panel has looked at some of the Assessment Committee reports on the quality of course and thesis assessments and found these elaborate and useful as they point exactly to those flaws an external committee would notice after a sample review. According to the panel, these reports are taken seriously - flaws are repaired and suggestions are followed up - because it did not find any flaws in the research master thesis assessment.

Considerations

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel considers that the research master programme has a robust assessment system, which is embedded in the provisions and policies of the school and the university. Since the previous accreditation visit, the programme has elaborated a testing plan to link the course learning goals to relevant assessment formats. This plan has led to some courses adjusting their assessments and to a current practice in which students can demonstrate their competencies in different ways. The course assignments and exams are transparent in terms of requirements, formats and evaluation criteria, and students receive proper and insightful feedback on their tests.

The assessment of the research master thesis is organized in a similarly transparent and meticulous way. Based on its sample review of 15 theses and their evaluation, the panel considers that assessors take thesis evaluation seriously and put in a lot of effort to ensure that the quality of the thesis is reflected properly in the scores, which in turn are motivated in the insightful written feedback.

Furthermore, the panel thinks highly of the expertise and operational capacity of the Board of Examiners and the Assessment Committee. The Board is clearly on top of issues with regard to the research master programme, while the regular quality reviews of course and thesis assessments by the Assessment Committee ensure that possible flaws are picked up swiftly and repaired accordingly.

In sum, the panel is convinced by the way assessment is organized at USG in general and in the research master programme in particular. Having read the materials, two panel members shared the following impressions: “there is a constant attention and discussion regarding assessment types, grading and feedback, as well as an acute awareness of the need to ensure connection between course content and the different types of assessment”; and “the institution brings a convincing story about how it assures that assessment fulfils the general quality requirements. Assessment is seen explicitly as a part of education with attention for the learning dimension of assessment. Giving and receiving feedback has its place as part of education and as a professional skill.” These positive impressions have been confirmed during the visit and were eventually validated by the entire panel.

Conclusion

The panel judges that the master programme Research in Public Administration and Organisational Science meets standard 3 of the NVAO-EAPAA framework.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

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 panel has looked at both elements when assessing the end level qualifications of the research master programme.

Thesis quality

As part of its external review, the panel studied a sample of 15 research master theses submitted in the academic years 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. The sample was representative in terms of final scores and included a variety of thesis supervisors from all four partner institutions. Further to what was mentioned in the previous section on assessment quality, the panel found that all theses fulfilled at least the minimum standards of a final product at academic research master level. Moreover, the panel agreed in all fifteen cases to the final score given by the assessors: theses with a high score were indeed of better quality than those who received a lower (pass) mark.

In most cases the panel found the quality of the theses to be more than satisfactory, and thought they were good to very good. The panel referee, who reviewed more than half of the thesis sample, indicated that the theses included several that are of an exceptionally high academic standard and worthy of being published in peer reviewed journals. They represent the works of skilled and well-taught cohorts of students who have grasped and applied the importance of theory, research and data analysis. In addition, the theses at the lower end of scoring were well-written and showed that these students were able to research, write and deliver comments on theories and empirical data to a good standard. The panel was informed through EUR’s written contribution that several master theses supervised by EUR staff have led to publications.

In this regard, the panel's impressions confirm some of the statements in the self-evaluation report: as the thesis quality of research master students is generally high, their results are sometimes used to the benefit of organizations and institutions, such as one thesis that explored the relationship between crisis preparation at the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the real-world practice during crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, several theses have been modified and published as articles in leading international peer-reviewed journals, or won thesis awards. The panel was informed that many of the well-performing research master students had done their undergraduate studies at one of the partner universities.

Performance of graduates

Several research master students the panel spoke to during the site visit had graduated the programme very recently. Their reflections on the curriculum and the future career plans were very relevant for the panel to grasp the importance and the relevance of the research master programme. In fact, the students/graduates confirmed the panel's impressions from reading the self-evaluation report section on labour market perspectives. Research master graduates usually pursue one of three career pathways: 40% go on to conduct academic research in a PhD position at partner institutions and beyond (e.g. University of Leiden or KU Leuven); 45% pursue applied research careers at private (consultancy) companies such as Deloitte, VNG or the Rathenau Institute; and 15% end up in research-informed positions at public organizations like the Netherlands Court of Audit. In its contribution to the self-evaluation report, EUR confirmed that research master graduates with a bachelor from EUR typically find employment as researcher, advisor or at public organizations. Moreover, several research master graduates became PhD students in Rotterdam while a few senior alumni are now part of the Department's faculty.

While students indicated that they – and their fellow students – usually enrol for the research master programme having the more or less explicit ambition to pursue an academic career afterwards, several students did change plans during their study. One recent international graduate for instance told the panel that throughout his studies he had kept open all career options and eventually accepted an offer from a Netherlands-based international consultancy company.

Asked for suggestions for improvement, research master students mentioned that the programme pays good and varied attention to professional life beyond the study, but that this attention is (still) too much focused on the academic pathway. If anything, the programme could invite testimonials from alumni who are now working in consultancies or public bodies. The panel subscribes to this suggestion and shared it with the programme management, who was welcoming the idea.

In line with its positive findings on the thesis quality, the panel found that the research master graduates pursue relevant careers. Almost half of the graduates remain in academia to pursue a PhD position, while all graduates continue with a career where research constitutes a considerable part of the job description.

Considerations

Based on the written materials, the thesis sample and the discussions on site, the panel considers that students who eventually graduate the research master programme have effectively achieved all learning outcomes. The clear link in the programme set-up between course learning goals and programme learning outcomes also applies to the thesis trajectory where students demonstrate their competencies as academic master level graduates with a specific focus on research.

The panel establishes that the research master thesis is the result of an extensive exercise covering the entire research cycle and addresses a topic that is related to the research context of the programme. The panel thinks highly of the quality of the works it reviewed in the thesis sample: each thesis clearly reflected the requirements of a final research master's product.

Furthermore, the panel concludes that upon graduation students find a job that is in line with the objective of the programme. This consideration is based on the enthusiasm of the alumni who indicated that this programme formed an important lever for their career: because of its attention to both academic and applied research, the programme is providing a good basis for each graduate to pursue a research oriented career. In this regard, the panel welcomes both the considerable share of graduates who move on to an academic career and the fact that all graduates find employment in research-informed positions.

Conclusion

The panel judges that the master programme Research in Public Administration and Organisational Science meets standard 4 of the NVAO-EAPAA framework.

Standard 5. Diversity

Staff and student populations should adequately reflect society, in various ways. The programme has an adequate strategy for dealing with the diverse backgrounds of students.

Findings

The panel gathers from the written materials and the discussions on site that in terms of diversity, the research master programme is embedded in the principles, policies and provisions of the school and the university.

The small student cohorts of 11 -12 students per year are balanced in terms of gender and feature both Dutch and international, European and non-European students. The admission and selection criteria are such that they facilitate the enrolment of students with a relevant bachelor education that is however not limited to the domain of public administration or organizational science. The inter-institutional set-up of the programme, moreover, ensures that the yearly intake also consists of students who obtained their bachelor degree at different Dutch universities. Notwithstanding this degree of diversity, the panel subscribes to the statement in the self-evaluation report that larger enrolment numbers would contribute to diversifying even more the composition of the cohorts.

While the majority of students is Dutch and/or has a background in PA/OS, the students the panel spoke to thought the intake was sufficiently diverse. They also indicated that international students and/or students with a different background managed to blend into the Dutch/USG education approach and quickly levelled up any possible flaws in knowledge or skills. In their view, the diverse intake contributed to the attractiveness of the educational delivery (international classroom) of the curriculum.

Both core and elective courses are taught by professors from one of the partner institutions. The panel noticed that the composition of the teaching team resembles somewhat the diversity of the student cohorts: the majority of staff is Dutch, with a considerable minority being non-Dutch. While there are still more male than female staff on the programme, there is a trend towards more gender balance in the team. During the previous accreditation visit, the then panel advised that course contents could be more inclusive with regard to non-European issues. The current panel observed that – also in line with comments from former and

current students and in line with the teaching staff's own aspirations – there is growing (but nonetheless still limited) attention in class for publications from non-Western scholars. While there is already ample use in the courses of literature which is published by researchers from around the world, it is a point of explicit attention in the current teacher team to increase the share of non-Western ideas, theories and literature.

Considerations

The panel considers that diversity is on the radar of the programme, the school and the partner institutions. It welcomes the initiatives taken so far, acknowledges the progress made since the previous accreditation visit, yet encourages all responsible bodies to step up their efforts in recruiting a more diverse student body that is taught by a more diverse faculty.

While there is clearly room for more profound diversity, the current composition of the student cohorts in terms of gender, nationality and educational background contributes to the attractiveness of the programme and allows for relevant international and intercultural exchanges. Acknowledging the programme's recent efforts, the panel does encourage the staff team to make course contents more inclusive with regard to non-European issues.

Conclusion

The panel judges that the master programme Research in Public Administration and Organisational Science meets standard 5 of the NVAO-EAPAA framework.

General conclusion

The panel has established that the master programme Research in Public Administration and Organisational Science meets all five NVAO-EAPAA standards under consideration: intended learning outcomes, teaching-learning environment, assessment, achieved learning outcomes and diversity. As a result, the panel's overall assessment of the quality of the research master programme is **positive**.

Development points

Given its overall positive conclusion, the panel does not issue any strong or binding recommendations. However, the materials and discussions have revealed a number of areas where the panel sees room for improvement. Hence the following suggestions:

1. Map the networks of individual staff and share it as a source of (extra-) curricular study, research, internship and conference opportunities with (international) students;
2. Enhance outreach efforts to attract more yet equally qualified students in general, and among bachelor students at the four partner institutions in particular;
3. Emphasize in communication to prospective students that the programme prepares for a wide range of research-informed positions in academia and with private and public bodies;
4. Dedicate specific attention in (extra-) curricular activities to career pathways outside academia;
5. Extend the team spirit among programme representatives to the other staff members who teach on the programme;
6. Continue efforts in recruiting a more diverse student and staff body, and in making course contents more inclusive with regard to non-European issues.

Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

The Research Master in Public Administration and Organisational Science (PAOS) aims at preparing students for the further practice of public administration and organisational science research either in the form of an advanced PhD programme and PhD research, or in the form of consultancy- and policy-oriented research.

The main goal of the Research Master PAOS is to educate motivated people who, based on their academic knowledge of research into management and organisations, can carry out academic and applied research which contributes to the growing body of knowledge concerned with (solving) public issues.

To achieve this mission students must acquire knowledge and understanding of the disciplinary and theoretical approaches within Public Administration and Organisational Science (breadthwise); to go theoretically into key themes in the field of public administration and organisational science research (depth wise) and to acquire competences in the field of policy-oriented and academically oriented research in public administration and organisational science. The student knows, understands and complies with the requirements of scientific integrity as laid down in the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research 2018.

To achieve this, the programme has three learning pathways:

1. The substance of the public administration and organisation of public issues: Knowledge and understanding which are important for the carrying out of contextualised research into (solving) public issues. Cognitive skills to use this knowledge to set up a research project based on critical analysis.
2. Academic research into the public administration and organisation of public issues: The skills to research the public administration and organisation of public issues using a variety of approaches to generate scientifically relevant insights.
3. Applied research into the public administration and organisation of public issues: The necessary skills and attitude to use relevant knowledge and research skills to carry out applied research which generates new insights into public administration and organisation practices.

This leads to the following teaching objectives for each of the learning pathways in the Research Master PAOS.

Exit qualifications for 'The substance of the public administration and organisation of public issues'

The graduate has:

1. A broad knowledge and understanding of the disciplinary and theoretical approaches to the question of change in both the public domain and public organisations, including their relation to macro-sociological and political change.
2. An in-depth understanding of selected key themes in the field of public administration and organisational science research.
3. An in-depth understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of empirical research in public administration and organisational science research, as well as the ability to position oneself in corresponding debates.
4. Insights into the ethical aspects of fundamental and applied research in public administration and organisational science research.

Exit qualifications for 'Academic research into the public administration and organisation of public issues'

The graduate has:

1. The ability to derive research problems from theoretical insights in the field of public administration and organisational science.
2. The ability to translate these into a sound research design.
3. An in-depth understanding of the main low-control and high-control methods and techniques of data collection and analysis for fundamental research in public administration and organisational science research, as well as the ability to use these.
4. The ability to conceptualise and operationalise theoretical concepts.
5. Insight into key quality criteria for academic research, and the ability to use these.
6. Insights into the possible strategies for dissemination of fundamental research findings, and the capacity to implement these in a real-life research context.
7. The ability to effectively communicate about knowledge and research of public administration and organisational science, both verbally and in writing.

Exit qualifications for 'Applied research into the public administration and organisation of public issues'

In addition to their skills in academic research, the graduate has:

1. The ability to derive research problems from experiences of stakeholders in the field of public administration and organisational science.
2. The ability to develop and negotiate effective terms for applied research.
3. Insight into the relations with project stakeholders during applied research, and the capacity to manage these.
4. Insights into the strategies for disseminating research findings to direct stakeholders in applied research, and the capacity to implement these in a real-life research context.
5. The ability to work effectively in a research team.

Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

Research master Public Administration and Organisational Sciences

Track	Year 1				Year 2		
	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4	Period 1	Period 2	Periods 3 & 4
Theory (30 ECTS)	Public Policy & Governance (9 ECTS)	Leadership & Organisation (9 ECTS)	Tutorial (6 ECTS)		Transformation of Society & Governance (6 ECTS)		
Methodology (42 ECTS)	Philosophy of Science (6 ECTS)	PAOS Research in Context (6 ECTS)	Data Analysis (1): From Numbers to Stories (6 ECTS)	High-control Designs: Experiments and Surveys (9 ECTS)	Qualitative Research: Fieldwork and data collection (9 ECTS)	Data Analysis (2): From Notes to Stories (6 ECTS)	
Research (36 ECTS)				Applied Research Project (6 ECTS)			Research and Master's Thesis Track (30 ECTS)
Electives (12 ECTS)			Elective course (3 ECTS)			Elective course (9 ECTS)	
Note: the elective schedule here is indicative; during the two years, students may use their elective space to take courses, including in Summer or Winter School, or to do an applied research internship.							
120 ECTS	15 ECTS	15 ECTS	15 ECTS	15 ECTS	15 ECTS	15 ECTS	30 ECTS

Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

Monday 25 September 2023

- 09h30: Arrival of the panel and internal meeting to prepare the morning sessions
- 10h30: Session with management Utrecht School of Governance (USG)
- 11h30: Thematic session: *Bestuurskunde van de toekomst in de BK-opleidingen van nu* (Public administration of the future in the public administration programmes of today)
- 12h30: Lunch and internal panel meeting to prepare the afternoon sessions
- 13h30: Session with students of the bachelor programme
- 14h30: Thematic session: *Betrokken bij studentenwelzijn* (Involved in student wellbeing)
- 16h00: Thematic session: *Studenten voorbereiden op hun bijdrage aan het oplossen van publieke vraagstukken* (Preparing students for their contribution to solving public issues)
- 17h00: Internal panel meeting and wrap-up of the day with the USG Director of Education
- 17h30: End of day 1

Tuesday 26 September 2023

- 09h00: Arrival of the panel and internal meeting to prepare the morning sessions
- 09h45: Session with students of the master programme
- 10h45: Thematic session: *Ontwikkeling van toetsing* (Development of assessment)
- 11h45: Session with Exam Committee and Assessment Committee
- 12h30: Lunch and internal panel deliberation on the bachelor and master programmes
- 13h30: Guided tour through USG building
- 14h15: Internal panel meeting to prepare the sessions on the research master programme
- 15h00: Session with management of the research master programme
- 15h45: Session with students of the research master programme
- 16h30: Session with teaching staff of the research master programme
- 17h15: Internal panel deliberation on the research master programme
- 17h45: Wrap-up of the day with the USG Director of Education
- 18h00: End of day 2

Wednesday 27 September 2023

- 09h00: Arrival of the panel and internal meeting to prepare the morning sessions
- 09h45: Session with management of the executive master programme
- 10h30: Session with students of the executive master programme
- 11h30: Thematic session: *Ontwikkeling executive programma's* (Development of executive programmes)
- 12h15: Thematic session: *Doel en opzet afstudeerscriptie* (Scope and format of the thesis)
- 13h00: Lunch and internal panel deliberation on the executive master programme and preparation of the USG management session
- 15h00: Final session with USG management
- 16h00: Internal panel deliberation
- 16h30: Plenary feedback
- 17h00: End of site visit

Appendix 4. Materials

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 research master theses. Information on the selected theses is available from Academion upon request.

In the run-up to the site-visit USG put at disposition the following materials:

- Leren bij USBO. Zelfevaluatie onderwijs Bestuurs- en Organisationswetenschap 2023.
- Learning at USG 2023. Self-evaluation of education at Utrecht University School of Governance

The self-evaluation report contained the following annexes:

- Organogram faculteit REBO en samenstelling opleidingsbesturen en overlegorganen van USBO
- Onderzoeksevaluaties USBO en EUR / Research review USG and EUR
- Bijdrage Research Master vanuit EUR / Contribution Research Master EUR
- Opleidingsdoelen OER art. 3.1 / Aim of the programme EER article 3.1
- Koppeling leerdoelen aan Dublin descriptoren, PAGO en Anderson & Krathwohl / Aim programme – Dublin descriptors, PAGO framework and Anderson & Krathwohl
- Domeinspecifiek referentiekader (PAGO framework) / Domain specific Frame of Reference PAGO
- Onderzoeksprogramma USBO 2021-2026 / Research Strategy USG 2021-2026
- Overzicht keuzecursussen en minoronderwijs USBO 2022
- Regeling selectiecriteria en selectieprocedure bacheloropleiding B&O
- Publicaties ResMa studenten / Publications by Research Master students
- Toetsplannen/Assessment plans Bachelor, Master, Executive Master en Research Master programmes
- Begeleiding en beoordeling eindwerkstukken B&O / Supervision and assessment of BA and MA theses
- Samenstelling adviesraad (composition of Advisory Council)
- Curriculumoverzichten B&O opleidingen / Curriculum overviews PAOS programmes
- Cursusteksten per opleiding / Course descriptions per programme
- Kerndocenten USBO – TiU EUR en VU tbv research master / Core lecturers USG – TiU, EUR and VU concerning Research Master
- Onderwijs- en Examenreglement / Education and Examination Regulation
- Overzicht bespreking diversiteit in zelfstudie / Overview diversity in self-evaluation report
- Scripties en beoordelingen BO 2019-2022 / Theses and assessments PAOS 2019-2022
- Studentenbijdragen / Student contributions
- Docent-student ratio USBO / Lecturer to student ratio USG
- EAPAA completion tables
- English translation self-evaluation report
- BKKI criteria in Leren bij USBO zelfevaluatierapport 2023

The self-evaluation report also included a portfolio of documents to illustrate and clarify the report contents:

- Tutoraat in de master; inventarisatie en afspraken
- Betrokken bij ontwikkelingen ontwikkelagenda Bachelor 2019-2024
- Doorontwikkeling SPV programma: vaardighedenontwikkeling en versterking tutoraat
- Evaluatie internationalisering in de bachelor
- B&O Academie en activiteiten 21-22 en 22-23
- Ontwikkeling APV in de master
- Studentenbrochure onderzoeksseminarie en afstuderen in de master

- Ontwikkelagenda executive masterprogramma's
- Productscripties en beoordeling in de master
- Jaarverslagen Examencommissie

Following its preparatory meeting, the panel asked for USG for the following additional materials to be made available on site:

- Regeling selectiecriteria en -procedure bachelor
- Toelating en selectie executive master
- Voldoende vereisten bachelor- en masterscripties (minimum criteria bachelor and master theses)
- Three examples of Product theses and their assessment
- Mastervolgopleidingen van bachelorafgestudeerden 2020-2021 en 2021-2022
- Intake bachelor- and research master cohorts 2022 and 2023
- Bachelor rendement USG en landelijk
- Diploma's en uitval in bacheloropleidingen USG en landelijk