

NVAO • NETHERLANDS

SPECIFICATION OF ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR RESEARCH MASTER'S PROGRAMMES

30 MAY 2016



NVAO • NETHERLANDS

SPECIFICATION OF ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR RESEARCH MASTER'S PROGRAMMES

30 MAY 2016



Content

1	Profile of research master's programmes.....	4
2	Assessment of research master's programmes	5
3	Panel composition.....	6

1 Profile of research master's programmes

Research master's programmes are research-oriented in nature, i.e., they are specifically focused on preparing students for the conduct of research in a PhD trajectory or another research-related position. Under Article 7.4a, fifth paragraph, of the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (WHW), the statutory duration of the programmes is 120 ECs.

Research master's programmes must meet a number of additional criteria, supplementary to and as a further specification of the regular assessment framework. The point of departure is the research-oriented nature of the programme and its link to researchers or research groups that have been rated as clearly above average (good or excellent). The programme may have a highly specific focus and be linked to a single researcher or research group, or cover a wider field of research.

The institution is free to make its own choices or place emphases with respect to the operationalisation of the programme's research-oriented nature in terms of content and structure of the curriculum. This involves, inter alia, the choice between a narrow-based or more comprehensive profile, and the positioning vis-à-vis regular master's programmes, PhD trajectories, or national research schools.

2 Assessment of research master's programmes

New and existing research master's programmes are assessed on the basis of the assessment framework for regular academic master's programmes. For research master's programmes, the following aspects are considered additionally as supplementary to this framework.

1. The manner in which the research-oriented nature of the programme has been substantiated in the intended learning outcomes, taking account of how graduates make their way in the professions, and in society at large.
2. The programme is provided in a context of research that has been rated, from both a national and an international perspective, as clearly above average (good or excellent), that has a distinct bearing on the contents of the programme, and that also trains PhD students and other junior researchers. In principle, this is referenced by the outcomes of external assessments (according to the SEP protocol), and if so required supplemented with information regarding the track records of the most closely involved senior researchers and professors.
3. In the content, structure, and composition of the curriculum, the programme has substantiated in a concrete fashion the research-oriented nature of the programme and its embedding in the research context. The assessment considers, as a minimum, the following aspects:
 - the admission requirements enforced by the programme and the manner in which the programme selects prospective students;
 - the coherence of the curriculum across both years of the programme, and the inter-relationship of educational content and research skills in the entire curriculum;
 - the proportion of curriculum components specific to the research master's programme;
 - whether, and if so, which additional requirements have to be met by students enrolled in a research master's programme when following subjects in regular master's programmes;
 - the involvement of senior researchers and professors in teaching and the supervision of graduation trajectories;
 - the opportunities for students to incorporate specific individual components into their programme curriculum without compromising their nominal study progress, in order to deepen or broaden their research or research capacities;
 - the attention devoted within the curriculum to academic and scientific methodologies generally accepted in the discipline, and the ethics of conducting research.
4. The programme is concluded with a substantial test of research competence that can be deemed of value in the respective academic or scientific discipline. The assessment considers, as a minimum, the following aspects:
 - the size of the final project, in relation to the structure of the curriculum;
 - the relationship between the choice of final project topics and the research context;
 - the extent to which the final project is deemed publishable;
 - the extent to which the entire research cycle is completed within the graduation trajectory.

3 Panel composition

Research master's programmes are subject to the following supplement to the requirements in force with respect to the composition of panels assessing regular master's programmes (academic orientation).

The composition of the panel reflects the specific research-oriented nature of the programme. A panel assessing a research master's programme has a minimum of four members, one of whom is a student. The student-member may also be a PhD student who is conversant with the training of junior researchers. The other panel members command the following competences, distributed across the panel:

1. they are independent, academically authoritative researchers;
2. they have an overview over the discipline and are able to independently judge the quality of the research context, based on the sources listed in the framework;
3. they are able to judge with critical detachment whether the programme is substantiating its distinctive nature and whether the achieved final learning outcomes are up to standard for a research master's programme;
4. they are familiar with and experienced in research-oriented educational pathways, while at least one of the panel members distinguishes him/herself for his/her experience and insight, which may also have been gained outside the specific discipline of the programme to be assessed.

