



M Urban and Regional Planning  
University of Amsterdam

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# Summary

## Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The panel appreciated the profile and goals of the master Urban and Regional Planning (URP) at the University of Amsterdam. The programme offers a balanced focus of critical analysis of spatial topics and hands-on intervention in real-world spatial challenges. The programme integrates perspectives from different fields, equipping students with a multidisciplinary skillset that is both broad and specialized. The recent addition of the Spatial Sustainability Studies track offers students an attractive and relevant specialization topic related to climate responsiveness. Furthermore, the panel appreciated that the programme, even though its main focus is on the Dutch spatial context, offers broader geographical perspectives in several of its courses. The location in Amsterdam offers an excellent background for making spatial challenges visible in practice, which is successfully exploited by the programme. The intended learning outcomes are formulated at the required academic master's level and reflect the profile of URP. In addition, the intended learning outcomes are well aligned with the academic and professional field through the domain-specific framework of reference, contacts with the field and an external Advisory Board.

## Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The panel found the curriculum of both tracks in the master URP to be well-structured and aligned with the intended learning outcomes. The curriculum balances theory and practical applications and problem-solving, with the opportunity for students to tailor the curriculum to their own preferences through the tracks, elective and thesis project topic. Teaching methods are varied, with small-scale and interactive sessions and group projects, including projects for external partners. The admission requirements are broad, fitting the multidisciplinary character of the programme. Aligning the research methodology courses and making these useful for all students is a challenge for the programme with this heterogeneous intake. The panel suggests investigating whether this can be addressed by adding additional elements regarding research methods in the knowledge expected of incoming students, and refer students with deficiencies to supplementary materials. Furthermore, the panel thinks that it is worthwhile to investigate whether the methodological courses can be more closely aligned with the thesis trajectory to maximize added value.

The choice for English as language of instruction is well substantiated and relevant considering the international nature of the programme and the use of an international classroom. Student support and guidance are strong, with the study advisors playing a key role. The programme is attentive to the needs of students with functional impairments, and information provision is of good quality. The panel encourages continued attention to the integration of international students. The curriculum is feasible, with a commendable number of students completing the programme within one year. The panel considers the teaching staff a major asset of the programme, with staff members being well qualified and engaged with the programme.

## Standard 3. Student assessment

The panel found the system of assessment in the master URP to be well structured. Assessment methods are varied and fit the programme goals, and appropriate measures are taken to promote reliability, validity and transparency of assessment. The Examinations Board functions well and checks the quality of course and thesis assessment. Thesis assessment is clear and works well in practice, with sufficient feedback and the involvement of two independent examiners. The thesis assessment process could be strengthened by requiring a written assessment of the individual examiners prior to the discussion on the final grade, and by making clear what role the oral defence exactly takes in determining the final grade. Finally, the panel recommends a formal instruction and professionalization process for external thesis supervisors.

#### Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The good level of the master theses and the careers of graduates in relevant jobs in a wide variety of sectors demonstrate that students in the master URP achieve the intended learning outcomes.

#### Score table

The panel assesses the programme as follows:

##### *Master's programme Urban and Regional Planning*

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

General conclusion positive

The assessment panel has reviewed the report and agrees with its contents. On behalf of the panel,

Prof. dr. E.M. (Ellen) van Bueren (chair)

P.A. (Peter) Hilderling MSc. (secretary)

Date: 10 September 2025

# Introduction

## Procedure

### Assessment

On 31 March and 1 April 2025, the master's programme Planologie (which will be referred to by the international name Urban and Regional Planning, or URP in short, in the remainder of this report) of the University of Amsterdam was assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment WO Sociale Geografie en Planologie (Human Geography and Planning). The assessment cluster consisted of 19 programmes, offered by the Radboud University, University of Amsterdam, University of Groningen and Utrecht University. The assessment followed the procedure and standards of the NVAO Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (April 2024).

Quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment upon request of the cluster WO Sociale Geografie en Planologie. Peter Hildering acted as coordinator and panel secretary. Jessica van Rossum and Mark Delmartino also acted as panel secretaries in the cluster assessment. They have all been certified and registered by the NVAO. Peter Hildering acted as panel secretary for the assessment of the programmes of the University of Amsterdam.

### Preparation

Academion composed the peer review panel in cooperation with the institutions and taking into account the expertise and independence of the members as well as consistency within the cluster. On 4 February 2025, the NVAO approved the composition of the panel. The coordinator instructed the panel chair on her role in the site visit according to the Panel chair profile (NVAO 2016).

The programme composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the coordinator (see appendix 3). The programme selected representative partners for the various interviews. It also determined that the development dialogue would be made part of the site visit. A separate development report was made based on this dialogue.

The programme provided the coordinator with a list of graduates over the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. In consultation with the coordinator, the panel chair selected 15 theses of the programme. They took the diversity of final grades and examiners into account, as well as the majors. From the track Urban and Regional Planning eight theses were selected from the track Spatial Sustainability Studies four theses were selected; and three theses were from the programme before the introduction of the two tracks. This selection reflected the number of graduates in each particular major/variant) proportionally. Prior to the site visit, the programme provided the panel with the theses and the accompanying assessment forms. It also provided the panel with the self-evaluation report and additional materials (see appendix 4).

The panel members studied the information and sent their findings to the secretary. The secretary collected the panel's questions and remarks in a document and shared this with the panel members. In a preliminary meeting, the panel discussed the initial findings on the self-evaluation report and the theses, as well as the division of tasks during the site visit. The panel was also informed on the assessment framework, the working method and the planning of the site visit and reports.

## Site visit

During the site visit, the panel interviewed various programme representatives (see appendix 3). The panel also offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour. No consultation was requested. The panel used the final part of the site visit to discuss its findings in an internal meeting. Afterwards, the panel chair publicly presented the preliminary findings.

## Report

The secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to an Academion colleague for peer assessment. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel for feedback. After processing this feedback, the secretary sent the draft report to the University of Amsterdam in order to have it checked for factual irregularities. The secretary discussed the ensuing comments with the panel chair and changes were implemented accordingly. The panel then finalized the report, and the coordinator sent it to the University of Amsterdam.

## Panel

The panel assessing the master's programme Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Amsterdam consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. E.M. (Ellen) van Bueren, professor in Urban Development Management at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment of the TU Delft [panel chair];
- Prof. dr. F.J.A. (Frank) Witlox, senior full professor of Economic Geography at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. S. (Susan) Moore, professor of Urban Studies and Planning at the Bartlett School of Planning of University College London (United Kingdom);
- Prof. dr. M. (Mari) Vaattovaara, professor in Urban Geography at the University of Helsinki (Finland)
- M. (Maayke) Bouwhuis, bachelor's student Geography, Spatial Planning and Environment at the Radboud University [student member].

Each panel member and the panel secretary has filled out the Statement of Impartiality and non disclosure, as required by the NVAO.

Due to last-minute unforeseen circumstances, Prof. Susan Moore was not able to attend the site visit in person. She participated in all sessions of the site visit through video conferencing. Also due to last-minute unforeseen circumstances, Prof. Frank Witlox participated in person on the first day, and through video conferencing on the second day. This set-up was agreed upon prior to the site visit by both the panel and programmes.

## Information on the programme

Name of the institution:	University of Amsterdam
Address:	Spui 21, 1012 WX Amsterdam
Website:	<a href="http://www.uva.nl">http://www.uva.nl</a>
BRIN-number:	21PK
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Programme name:	M Planologie
ISAT number:	66622
Level:	Master (NLQF 7)

Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Professional requirements:	no
Specializations or tracks:	Urban and Regional Planning Spatial Sustainability Studies
Location:	Amsterdam
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Language of instruction:	English
Assessment group:	Sociale Geografie en Planologie
Awarded degree:	MSc
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2025

## Description of the assessment

### Organization

The MSc Urban and Regional Planning (URP) is offered by the Graduate School of Social Sciences and staffed by the Department of Human Geography, Planning and International Development Studies of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences (FMG) of the University of Amsterdam (UvA). Each programme is headed by a programme director who is responsible for the set-up, organization, execution and quality of the programme. The programme director is assisted by a programme manager, a support staff member who is concerned with administration, scheduling, and information provision to staff and students (together with the study advisor, see below). The BSc Human Geography and Planning, the MSc Human Geography and the MSc Urban and Regional Planning share a Examinations Board. Both master's programmes share a Programme Committee, which often shares forces with the related Programme Committee that covers the bachelor's programme. The programme admits an average of 70 students per year, 65% of which is from the Netherlands, 25% from other EU countries and 10% from non-EU countries.

### Recommendations previous panel

The previous accreditation panel provided several suggestions for improvement, such as addressing the differences in methodological skills background of students, create more opportunities for electives and better distinguishing between the first and second examiner in thesis assessment. The panel found that these recommendations have been considered carefully, leading to further improvement of the programme. See for further discussion the respective sections in the report on these topics.

### 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 MSc URP aims to equip students with the skills necessary to alleviate social problems by understanding the mutual relationship between social processes, governance structures and spatial form. Students gain an in-depth understanding of advanced and contemporary theories and methodologies of planning. After completion of the programme, they should be able to analyse and propose interventions in urban and regional development challenges, with a focus on metropolitan areas in the western world. This requires combining a thorough understanding of the physical and built environment, as well as in-depth understanding of social, economic and regional spatial policy-making and long-term planning. The typical profession of a graduate is that of urban or spatial planner (*planoloog*), working in an intermediary position with specialists such as architects, engineers and lawyers on urban and regional development topics.

The URP programme combines two key approaches and perspectives in planning theory and practice: analytical (understanding and critically assessing spatial dynamics) and interventionist (hands-on problem solving). It is strongly connected to practice and often uses real-life examples and cases in education. Furthermore, the programme also aims to provide students with high-level policy skills and state-of-the art knowledge of advanced and contemporary planning theories and methodologies.

Next to the main Urban and Regional Planning (URP) track, students can also opt for the Spatial Sustainability Studies (SSS) track, which is offered in collaboration with the MSc Human Geography and covers sustainability issues in geography and planning. It takes a spatial-temporal perspective to understand the interlinkages between environmental and social challenges, identify the main drivers and develop interventions to address them. Students that choose this track replace two URP courses with a track-specific course on Advanced Environmental Geography and Planning.

The panel appreciated the profile and goals of the master URP, particularly the balanced focus on core skills of conducting research and analyzing problems on the one hand, and initiating plans and strategic interventions on the other hand. The panel feels that this combination of academic rigour and real-world application makes graduates highly adaptable to different roles in planning and urban development. The emphasis on multidisciplinary approaches—integrating perspectives from geography, sociology, governance, and environmental studies—ensures that students develop a broad yet specialized skill set. The recent addition of the Spatial Sustainability Studies track provides students with an interesting specialization option focusing on planning related issues in climate responsiveness, showing the adaptability of the programme in response to developments in the field. The programme makes excellent use of its location in Amsterdam, where spatial challenges are highly visible on both the local and the global level. Through examples, fieldwork, and assignments, students engage with their environment in Amsterdam, resulting in an engaging, further cementing the connection between theory and practice.

Given the emphasis of the programme on western metropolitan areas, the panel discussed during the site visit to what extent other contexts, such as the Global South, are covered in the programme. It found that in the courses focusing on spatial planning, the Dutch context is usually used as a starting point, given that this is the context in which the programme is situated, and this provides connections to real-life examples in the direct environment. On the other hand, several courses, particularly those in the SSS track, use broader examples from other geographical contexts, such as the western versus Global South perspectives in the climate change debate and sustainable and inclusive economics. The panel welcomes this inclusion and appreciates that the Dutch spatial planning perspective is combined with broader perspectives.

#### *Intended learning outcomes*

The profile and aims of the programme have been translated into a set of five intended learning outcomes (see appendix 1), structured according to the five Dublin descriptors for academic master's programmes. Each learning outcome is split into several elements describing knowledge, skills and competencies relevant for a URP graduate. Amongst others, these include critical knowledge and understanding of planning practices in the dynamics within which they were produced, research skills and using these to perform academic research as well as solving societal problems, critically assess divergent normative assumptions behind planning interventions, and professional skills relevant to planning and urban consultancy practice. The ILOs are identical for both tracks, save for one addition specific for the SSS track in the knowledge and understanding section.

The ILOs are aligned with the academic field through the domain-specific framework of reference which was jointly composed by the Dutch programmes in human geography and planning. This framework lists the content and learning outcomes that are deemed essential for bachelor's and master's programmes in the field. In an overview shared with the panel, the programme demonstrated how the ILOs are aligned with this framework. To align the ILOs with the professional field, the programme uses the input of an external advisory board. The Graduate School, together with the College of Social Sciences, has an Advisory Board consisting of external experts, many of whom are alumni, that advice the programmes upon request or upon

their own initiative regarding the quality of the programme in relation to society and the labour market. This Board convenes twice per year, and meets with staff, students and programme directors to gather input.

After studying the ILOs of the programme, the panel found that these are appropriate for an academic master's programme. They reflect the master's level as formulated in the Dublin descriptors and the Dutch Qualification Framework (NLQF 7). The ILOs are clearly formulated and echo the combination of the analytical and interventionist approach. The emphasis on hands-on problem solving in planning practice ensures that students not only acquire theoretical knowledge but also learn to apply it in practical situations. The alignment with the domain-specific framework of reference and the frequent interaction with the professional field through guest lecturers, research (in practice), and the Advisory Board keeps the ILOs aligned with the requirements from the academic and professional field.

### Considerations

The panel appreciated the profile and goals of the master Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Amsterdam. The programme offers a balanced focus of critical analysis of spatial topics and hands-on intervention in real-world spatial challenges. The programme integrates perspectives from different fields, equipping students with a multidisciplinary skillset that is both broad and specialized. The recent addition of the Spatial Sustainability Studies track offers students an attractive and relevant specialization topic related to climate responsiveness. Furthermore, the panel appreciated that the programme, even though its main focus is on the Dutch spatial context, offers broader geographical perspectives in several of its courses. The location in Amsterdam offers an excellent background for making spatial challenges visible in practice, which is successfully exploited by the programme. The intended learning outcomes are formulated at the required academic master's level and reflect the profile of URP. In addition, the intended learning outcomes are well aligned with the academic and professional field through the domain-specific framework of reference, contacts with the field, and an external Advisory Board.

### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 1.

## 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 60 EC curriculum consists of core courses (18 EC), a track-specific course (12 EC), a restricted-choice elective (6 EC) and the master thesis project (24 EC).

- The *core courses* are followed by students from both tracks. These include the general course Planning: a Theory of Praxis (6 EC), a choice between the practical projects Master Studio or Future Societies Lab (6 EC) and two research methodology courses (3 EC each). The Planning course provides students with a shared knowledge base in the field of planning, including historical and contemporary approaches and methodologies. The practical projects allow students to apply their knowledge in a group project with a practical focus, either a policy advice on a planning use for the city of Amsterdam (Masterstudio) or a consultancy project for one of the department's societal partners (Future Societies Lab). By default, students from the URP track take the Masterstudio course and SSS student the Future Societies Lab course, but students can also choose the other

course upon request. The research methodology courses cover quantitative or qualitative research methods (first course – students choose a focus based on their planned thesis topic, and GIS training (second course). The research methodology courses are shared with students from the MSc Human Geography.

- The *track-specific courses* for the URP track consists of two 6 EC courses that represent two key issues central to contemporary planning that are important for the department's research. These are the role of the housing market and planning in urban development (Contemporary Approaches in Property-led Urban Planning) and urban environmental planning with a focus on climate adaptation and mitigation (Climate Proof Development of Cities and Strategic Planning). Students in the SSS track follow one large, 12 EC course Spatial Sustainability: Advanced Environmental Geography and Planning, which combines geography and planning topics around sustainability issues.
- The *restricted choice elective* was recently added to the curriculum, based on both student's requests as well as a recommendation from the previous accreditation panel. Students choose from a list of courses offered within the department with a focus on either geography, international development studies or planning.
- The *master thesis project* is an individual thesis, organized thematically in supervision groups. Groups of 5-6 students work under one supervisor on a specific theme related to the student's track. The project is divided into a research proposal, data collection and thesis writing. Students choose a project from a list of themes and supervisors communicated by the programme in the first semester. A master thesis coordinator oversees the organization of the projects, including student assignment to projects, supervisor instruction and mediating supervision issues. The written thesis is submitted in June and completed with an oral defence where the supervisor and a second examiner are present.

Teaching methods in the courses vary from lectures to interactive workshops where students participate in role-playing, playing different roles in societal debates, engage in story-telling and serious gaming, discuss literature and work in projects on real-world challenges, and communicate their results in written and oral form. In courses, students do not only study academic literature, but also so-called 'grey literature', such as government documents, technical reports and evaluations. The programme aims to pursue an international comparative approach, contrasting and comparing theoretical debates and planning practices within and outside the Netherlands. The city of Amsterdam is extensively integrated into teaching with readings, field trips and in-class discussions contrasting the city with other cities worldwide.

The panel found the curriculum of the master URP and the associated two tracks to be well-structured and aligned with the intended learning outcomes. The first semester builds a solid foundation in planning theories, research methods, and key urban challenges, while the second semester shifts the focus towards practical applications, problem-solving, and the master thesis. The core courses provide students from both tracks with the required core knowledge and skills as formulated in the ILOs, whereas the specialization opportunities offered in choice between two tracks, the practical project, the elective and the thesis project allow students to tailor the curriculum to their own interests. In response to the previous accreditation, the programme added elective space to the curriculum, which was welcomed by students. The teaching methods are varied, and often of a small-scale and interactive character. This is particularly the case in the track-specific courses, which constitute of a series of small-scale sessions, and the Masterstudio and Future Societies Lab courses in which students work on projects for external partners. The panel considers these courses to be excellent examples of the interventionist and integrative approach which is key to the programme. Other courses regularly use real-world challenges and examples, often inspired by the direct

environment in the city of Amsterdam. This aligns well with the connection between research and practice embraced by the programme.

One possible area for improvement mentioned by students is that they would like more opportunities for connecting the thesis to a research internship at an external organization. The panel heard that the programme is open to this in principle, and that it has been done in the past, but that the additional arrangements and supervision required to ensure the academic quality of the projects made it too time-consuming, especially compared to the group supervision for internal projects. The panel understands these considerations, but also encourages the programme to remain open to this possibility, especially when students come with their own ideas and suggestions. It believes that, given the programme's focus on linking research and practice, additional investment in this area would be worthwhile.

During the interviews, the panel and programme representatives discussed the research methods courses related to the master thesis project. In response to the recommendation of the previous accreditation panel to address differences in the level of methodological skills of admitted students, the programme has introduced more differentiation in methodological courses. It offers differentiated levels of instruction in the qualitative course and provides two levels of teaching in the quantitative and GIS courses, offering more challenge to students with pre-knowledge in methodology. The panel appreciates this change. At the same time, it has learned that despite these changes, students still have different experiences in these courses. Some find them very useful, while others find them superfluous. Students also mentioned that the parallel scheduling of the research methods course with the preparation phase of the master thesis project sometimes caused misalignment, since the choice of research design and methodology for the thesis must be made before the course is completed. The panel recognizes that heterogeneity of the student population is partly unavoidable in a one-year, multidisciplinary master's programme. On the other hand, it feels that there is room for improvement through additional adjustments to the courses. The panel recommends investigating this. Possible directions to explore include adding research methodology skills to the admissions requirements (see below) and more closely linking the research methodology courses to the thesis trajectory, for instance by reshaping it into a thesis preparation course.

#### *Language of instruction*

The programme is offered in English. The programme aims for an international classroom in which experiences and insights from different countries and cultures can be discussed, adding to the contextual reflection that is crucial to the field of urban and regional planning. This includes discussing and comparing issues in different geographical locations and cities worldwide. In addition, many graduates can be expected to work in internationally oriented organizations, both in professional and academic careers. The majority of the teaching staff has been teaching and working in an English-speaking environment for many years. Furthermore, the English proficiency of the staff has been assessed recently as part of the shift to a bilingual bachelor's programme in the department, and any identified language proficiency gaps were addressed through training. New teachers are required to demonstrate an adequate command of English as part of the hiring requirements.

The panel agrees with the programme's rationale for using English as the language of instruction believes that this is consistent with the international nature of the programme, as well as the expected labour market position of graduates. English language proficiency of staff is well monitored and included in hiring requirements. The internationally diverse classroom is an asset of the programme, providing students with the opportunity to discuss spatial challenges from multiple perspectives and providing a view beyond the Dutch spatial planning practices.

### *Admission*

Students are admissible to the programme after following the BSc Human Geography and Planning at the UvA or a similar programme at another university. Students from related fields can also enter the programme provided they can demonstrate sufficient planning and social research methodology courses. If they do not meet this requirement, they can follow a minor in urban and regional planning at the UvA prior to enrolment to remedy this. Students with a bachelor's degree from a university of applied sciences (hbo) can follow a 60 EC premaster's programme focused on the URP master's programme. International students with a geography degree from a foreign academic institution can register after approval from the programme, if necessary, after a crash course in the summer or a pre-approved online course in the case of a small deficiency in research methods skills.

The panel assessed the admission requirements and found them to be appropriate to the goals of the master URP. They are formulated in an open and broad way, allowing students from different social science backgrounds to participate. This reflects the multidisciplinary nature of the field and the challenges being studied. At the same time, the panel appreciates the requirement to demonstrate sufficient prior knowledge of planning, which it feels is necessary to keep the programme focused on spatial planning. As discussed above, the broad intake of students presents the programme with challenges related to the heterogeneity of the student population. Some students feel that the research methods courses could be more challenging if the entry level of students were at a more comparable level. The panel suggests investigating whether additional elements regarding research methods could be included in the knowledge expected of incoming students. Students with deficiencies could be referred to supplementary materials, such as an additional course, compulsory reading or online courses.

### *Guidance and support*

During the programme, master's students are supported by a study advisor and a programme manager shared with the HG programme. The study advisor maintains regular contact with students to discuss academic progress, curriculum choices and personal matters, both on the study advisor's initiative and upon student request. For the thesis project, students choose a project from a list of themes and supervisors communicated by the programme in the first semester, and are guided both in a group and in an individual setting by their supervisor. The programme manager and study advisor also provide students with all necessary information relevant to the curriculum. The main information channel is the Canvas digital learning environment. The study advisor is also the first point of contact for students with functional impairments. In consultation with the programme director and/or the Examinations Board, solutions are found on a case-by-case basis, such as recording of lectures or providing a student buddy. Specialized GIS facilities are available to all students in the form of a computer lab with high performance computers and staff to assist students as needed.

Based on the information provided and the discussions during the site visit, the panel is impressed by the strong student guidance in the master URP. Information provision prior to and throughout the programme is up to standard. The study advisors help with making curriculum choices, planning, career choice and other issues. The panel found the supervision process of the thesis to be well-organized, with clear expectations, regular feedback moments, and structured deadlines. Students feel well supported in finding an appropriate thesis project, and are positive on the guidance they receive during the thesis trajectory. Furthermore, there is sufficient attention to students with functional impairments through tailored solutions depending on the situation. The panel also appreciates the GIS facilities available to students. A point of attention that arose from the discussions during the site visit is to keep onboarding and integration of international students on the agenda, as some students mentioned that this could be improved. The programme is very aware of the challenges of mixing the Dutch and international student groups into a coherent student population. There

are already several initiatives, such as the student association explicitly focusing on attracting international students to its activities. The panel advises to keep paying attention to this and create further opportunities for mixing Dutch and international student groups wherever possible.

### *Feasibility*

The design of the curriculum aims to promote feasibility. The programme uses relatively large courses of 6 and 12 EC to prevent fragmentation: students usually follow only one or two courses at the same time. Furthermore, the final week of the eight-week periods (after the exams in week 7) is focused on resits of the previous period; this gives students a full week to either focus on their repairs or enjoy an education-free week to focus on non-study related activities. Furthermore, the study advisor is available for counselling on study progress and any issues that might hinder this. The average study duration over the past cohorts is slightly more than one year (14-15 months), with approximately 75% of students graduating in one year, and around 90% within two years.

Based on the discussions during the site visit and the high and steady success rates with an upward trend, the panel concludes that the curriculum is feasible. A commendable percentage of students finish the curriculum within one year. The curriculum design with larger courses and room for resits promotes timely completion. Students mention that study delay is often associated with taking extra courses, or pursuing extra-curricular activities.

### *Teaching staff*

The teaching staff of URP is predominantly employed by the Department of Human Geography, Planning and International Development Studies. Currently, 48 staff members are involved in URP, either as course coordinator, lecturer or thesis supervisor. The large majority of teaching staff members is tenured or in a tenure track, of which 100% hold a PhD and 85% has a University Teaching Qualification (UTQ) or is in the process of acquiring this. For professionalization of all staff members, the department organizes four departmental meetings per year focused on development in education, such as generative AI or innovative teaching methods. The programme aims for a strong connection between research and teaching. All staff members are active researchers and bring this into the classroom, most prominently in the interactive small-scale track-specific courses and the thesis projects, but also in the other courses.

The panel considers the teaching staff to be a strength of the master URP, with the teaching staff to be highly qualified and actively engaged in research, ensuring that students are taught by experts in urban and regional planning. The staff members are not only well-versed in planning theories and methodologies but also have experience working with external organizations such as municipalities, planning agencies, and international organizations, offering students understanding of both academic and practical aspects of urban planning. Students appreciate the expertise of their teachers, and their close involvement and engagement with the programme. The panel found the programme to be well organized with attention to coherence and collaboration between teaching staff members. The team is balanced with a mix of junior, mid-career and senior staff. All have a PhD and almost all an UTQ, and there is sufficient attention to ongoing professionalization. One point of attention that the panel noted during the discussion is that all elements of the programme are so well thought out by the teaching team that students sometimes feel that the points for improvement they raise are explained away. The panel is sure that this comes from a well-intentioned belief in the rationale behind the curricular decisions, but advises that this should not lead to overlooking potential points for improvement. The panel was also reassured to learn that students usually find and use sufficient opportunities to provide feedback, and that the programme is open to receiving it.

## Considerations

The panel found the curriculum of both tracks in the master URP to be well-structured and aligned with the intended learning outcomes. The curriculum balances theory and practical applications and problem-solving, with the opportunity for students to tailor the curriculum to their own preferences through the tracks, elective and thesis project topic. Teaching methods are varied, with small-scale and interactive sessions and group projects, including projects for external partners. The admission requirements are broad, fitting the multidisciplinary character of the programme. Aligning the research methodology courses and making these useful for all students is a challenge for the programme with this heterogeneous intake. The panel suggests investigating whether this can be addressed by adding additional elements regarding research methods in the knowledge expected of incoming students, and refer students with deficiencies to supplementary materials. Furthermore, the panel thinks that it is worthwhile to investigate whether the methodological courses can be more closely aligned with the thesis trajectory to maximize added value.

The choice for English as language of instruction is well substantiated and relevant considering the international nature of the programme and the use of an international classroom. Student support and guidance are strong, with the mentors and study advisors playing a key role. The programme is attentive to the needs of students with functional impairments, and information provision is of good quality. The panel encourages continued attention to the integration of international students. The curriculum is feasible, with a commendable number of students completing the programme within one year. The panel considers the teaching staff a major asset of the programme, with staff members being well qualified and engaged with the programme.

## Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 2.

## Standard 3. Student assessment

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

## Findings

### *System of assessment*

Assessment of URP is aligned with the central UvA Assessment Policy Framework, which details the assessment philosophy and procedures to be used in each educational programmes. This is translated into an assessment plan drafted by the programme director, that includes an overview that maps course assessment to the exit qualifications. The Examinations Board provides guidelines for this, and annually checks the assessment plan. Over the years, the programme has developed several practices to ensure validity, reliability and transparency of assessment. These include communicating assessment criteria to staff and students in advance, a mix of individual and group assessment and the use of answer models to provide students with feedback afterwards.

Most courses use a combination of assessment methods, such as short multiple-choice test to check for understanding of concepts, individual essays and team presentations. Written assignments are the most prevalent assessment method, and include position papers, reflections and research papers. The practical projects are assessed through group presentations of the research design and outcomes. The programme puts emphasis on teaching students to defend their position and verbally articulate themselves; therefore presentations, debates and discussions are usually included as one of the assessment methods in courses.

The Examinations Board (EB) of the programme covers the MSc URP as well as the bachelor's programme Human Geography and Planning, and the master's programme Human Geography. The Board evaluates course assessment, advises on assessment procedures, and monitors assessment quality. This includes annual checks of a random selection of theses. Evaluation of course assessment can be initiated by the Board itself, as a result of student feedback or upon request of lecturers of the programme director. The Board organizes the annual test assessment days, where two EB members assisted by an external assessment expert evaluate assessment on programme level as well as on for several specific courses. The findings are discussed with the programme management and at staff meetings. Thesis checks are performed annually, and aimed at ensuring that students have the required exit level and that theses are assessed appropriately.

The panel found the system of assessment to be very well structured and considered. The system had appropriate checks and balances to ensure validity, reliability and transparency of assessment. Assessment methods in the courses and practical projects are varied, with attention to the balance between group and individual work, and requiring different types of knowledge and skills from students.

Based on the documentation and interview with the Examinations Board, the panel concludes that the Board fulfils its legal duties. The annual test assessment days and the annual course and thesis reviews add to the validity and reliability of assessment in the programme. The Board mentioned during the site visit that one of their main concerns currently is the use of generative AI in assessment for students. The UvA is currently composing policies for the use of generative AI on the level of the university. The panel appreciates that these policies are underway, but at the same time encourages the Board to already evaluate potential issues and look for solutions where this is already possible. The panel saw some good examples of this already, such as using real-life challenges for projects and essays in which generative AI is less useful.

#### *Thesis assessment*

The master thesis is assessed by the student's supervisor, and a second examiner not otherwise involved in the process. This second reader is appointed by the thesis coordinator based on regulations by the Examinations Board, such as sufficient assessment experience and limiting recurring couples. Both examiners assess the written thesis prior to the defence on each of the assessment criteria laid down in the assessment form. The defence is a meeting in which the student answers questions and critiques of mainly the second reader, which is also part of the assessment. Both examiners formulate a joint assessment after the defence on each of the five assessment categories (Content and theory, Data, methods and techniques, Argumentation, Presentation and Process). The two examiners jointly agree on a grade based on the performance on the criteria, and substantiate this qualitatively on the assessment form.

In response to the previous accreditation, the programme made a clearer distinction between the first and second examiner. The thesis coordinator makes the teams of first and second examiner, ensuring that there are no hierarchical ties or recurring couples. Furthermore, the second examiner is giving the lead in the discussion with the student during the oral defence. The previous accreditation panel also recommended to make the comments of both examiners more distinguishable. After careful consideration, the programme decided to maintain the joint assessment. Experiences in other programmes showed that separate assessment by both examiners created more conflicts between students and examiners, and between examiners themselves. Instead, the programme focused more on the deliberative process and grading culture, such as calibration sessions between examiners, to address this comment.

According to the panel, thesis assessment is well-developed and also works well in practice. The assessment categories used on the assessment form are comprehensive and sufficiently cover the programme's ILOs.

The thesis assessment forms that the panel studied in preparation for the site visit were clear and comprehensive, providing student with sufficient feedback and substantiation of the grade. The involvement of two examiners, with one not involved in the process, adds to the robustness of the procedure. During the site visit, the panel spoke with programme representative on the choice to not document the separate assessment of both examiners, and the way in which the examiners reach consensus on the thesis grade. The panel appreciates that attention to distinction between the role of the first and second examiner in response to the previous accreditation. At the same time, it feels that further streamlining this process would make it more robust. The panel understood that even though both examiners separately assess the thesis before the defence, only the joint assessment afterwards is stored. It thinks that requiring both examiners to submit a written assessment of the thesis separate from each other beforehand and storing this in the assessment file, would add to the transparency of the process. This safeguards the system against an inappropriately large influence of one of the examiners in determining the final grade, as the underlying individual assessment of both examiners remains available. As is currently the case, the joint assessment form can remain the final version that is presented to the student. Furthermore, the panel recommends making explicit what role the oral defence plays in thesis assessment. At the moment, it is not separately graded but can influence the final grade in the discussion between the examiners in the case of an exceptionally good or poor performance of the student. The panel thinks that the programme should make this explicit to promote consistency between examiners.

The panel learnt that the programme sometimes makes use of external thesis supervisors as first examiner. External supervisors are long-term partners of the programme that are affiliated with external academic or professional organizations, hold a PhD, and have been appointed as examiner by the Examinations Board to add supervision capacity to the department. This usually works well in practice, although the panel noted that these supervisors are less connected to the internal discussions on assessment in the department. The panel recommends investing in a formal instruction and professionalization process that covers both assessment and supervision to safeguard that external supervisors operate in the same way as internal supervisors.

#### Considerations

The panel found the system of assessment in the master URP to be well structured. Assessment methods are varied and fit the programme goals, and appropriate measures are taken to promote reliability, validity and transparency of assessment. The Examinations Board functions well and checks the quality of course and thesis assessment. Thesis assessment is clear and works well in practice, with sufficient feedback and the involvement of two independent examiners. The thesis assessment process could be strengthened by requiring a written assessment of the individual examiners prior to the discussion on the final grade, and by making clear what role the oral defence exactly takes in determining the final grade. Finally, the panel recommends a formal instruction and professionalization process for external thesis supervisors.

#### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 3.

## Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

### Findings

#### *Thesis quality*

As part of the preparation for the site visit, the panel studied a selection of 15 recent master theses of the programme. It concluded that all the theses were of good quality for both tracks. The theses showed high quality analytical work and problem-solving capabilities. Students came up with field-specific solutions and applied their skillset for responsive thinking.

#### *Performance of graduates*

A recent labour market inventory performed by the programme shows that most students find a job either in the private sector (consultancy firms, often aimed at advising government organizations) or at a governmental organization (sometimes as trainee) and researcher/lecturer (inside or outside a university). The panel found the employability of graduates in the field to be a compelling argument for the high exit level of graduates. Students find relevant work in, for instance, planning agencies, consultancy forms and government bodies, in a wide range of career paths. According to the panel, this demonstrates that the programme provides students with a versatile and relevant skill set for a variety of professional opportunities in urban and regional planning. The panel noted that despite the mandatory GIS training in the curriculum, very few theses actually incorporated GIS techniques. It suggests that the programme might investigate why this is the case, and whether additional encouragement or support is needed in the use of these techniques.

### Considerations

The good level of the master theses and the careers of graduates in relevant jobs in a wide variety of sectors demonstrate that students in the master URP achieve the intended learning outcomes.

### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 4.

### General conclusion

The panel's assessment of master's programme Urban and Regional Planning is positive.

### Recommendations

1. Ensure that the research methodology courses are useful for students of all backgrounds. A possible solution could be to investigate whether the methodological courses can be more closely aligned with the thesis trajectory to maximize added value. Furthermore, the programme could include additional elements regarding research methods in the knowledge expected of incoming students, and refer students with deficiencies to supplementary materials.
2. Further streamline the thesis assessment process by requiring a written assessment of the individual examiners prior to the discussion on the final grade, and by making clear which role the oral defence plays in the final grade.
3. Introduce a formal instruction and professionalization process for external thesis supervisors.

## Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

### **Knowledge and understanding (DD1)**

#### *1. Knowledge and understanding (DD1)*

The graduate has acquired knowledge and understanding:

- a. of urban and regional planning and policymaking and their institutional conditions.
- b. of qualitative or quantitative and spatial research methods that are relevant for and build on the entrance level to urban and regional planning research.
- c. of the interconnectedness of societal dynamics, urban and regional planning, policy and institutional processes.
- d. of urban and regional planning, theories, and spatial planning approaches and policy analyses at a level that properly reflects the current state of the art in theory and policy.

(for SSS): of contemporary theories and empirical approaches within the field of spatial sustainability studies.

### **Applying knowledge and understanding (DD2)**

#### *2. Applying knowledge and understanding (DD2)*

The acquired knowledge and/or understanding enables the graduate to apply:

- a. approach, identify and deal with urban and planning problems from a scientific habitus in a systematic, analytical, reflective, critical and creative manner.
- b. thoroughly analyse urban and regional planning issues, using current theoretical and empirical insights as they pertain to these issues.
- c. trace, collect and analyse primary and secondary data as they pertain to such issues in the field of urban and regional planning, to present arguments, both verbally as well as in written form, to defend these arguments, and to actively contribute to the theoretical and policy-based debate.
- d. independently design and execute urban and regional planning research, report systematically on this research and draw scientifically appropriate conclusions.
- e. make a calculated, well-reasoned choice in the chosen research methods and techniques, taking into account the nature of the subject of the urban and regional planning research and taking into account ethical considerations of this research.
- f. link the results of urban and regional planning research to the theoretical and societal debates on the subject.
- g. translate results of urban and regional research in a constructive and critical manner into scientific and societal discussions about the issue in question and to translate this for spatial interventions.

### **Formulating judgement (DD3)**

#### *3. Formulating judgements (DD3)*

Concerning the ability of formulating judgements, the graduate should be able to:

- a. critically assess different theoretical and policy-based sources and analyses on planning issues, as well as their use in theory building and policy analysis.
- b. bring to the foreground any (hidden) presuppositions and normative positions in theoretical and policy views on planning issues.
- c. formulate an independent opinion and reflect on the nature of, and approach to planning issues.

### **Communicative skills (DD4)**

#### *4. Communicative skills (DD4)*

The graduate should be able to use the following communicative skills:

- a. the ability to deliver a structured and correctly written presentation at academic level of urban and regional planning problems and research.
- b. the ability to give a professional oral presentation of planning problems and research using relevant presentation techniques in English.
- c. the ability to (re)formulate and present arguments, both verbally as well as in written form, to defend these arguments and critically reflect on them.
- d. the ability to participate in and contribute to discussions within the policy and theoretical domain of urban and regional planning in a constructive and reflective professional manner.
- e. the ability to do group work.

**Competencies/ learning skills (DD5)**

*5. Learning skills (DD5)*

The graduate has acquired the following learning skills:




- a. can independently follow and comprehend developments within the discipline of urban and regional planning.
- b. can identify societal problems and develop solutions that are based on scientific analysis and reflection.
- c. can work as a qualified professional in the field of Urban & Regional Planning.
- d. can continue studying at post-master level, including PhD trajectory.

## Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

Track Urban and Regional Planning					
Semester 1			Semester 2		
Period 1 Sept - Oct	Period 2 Nov - Dec	Period 3 Jan	Period 4 Feb - Mar	Period 5 Apr - May	Period 6 Jun
Planning: a Theory of Praxis (6 EC)	Restricted-choice electives (6 EC)	1 out of 2 (6 EC): Future Societies Lab OR Master Studio	Research Methodologies I (3 EC)	Master Thesis Urban and Regional Planning (24 EC)	
Climate Proof Development of Cities and Strategic Planning (6 EC)	Contemporary Approaches in Property-led Urban Planning (6 EC)		Research Methodologies II (3 EC)		

Track Spatial Sustainability Studies					
Semester 1			Semester 2		
Period 1 Sept - Oct	Period 2 Nov - Dec	Period 3 Jan	Period 4 Feb - Mar	Period 5 Apr - May	Period 6 Jun
Planning: a Theory of Praxis (6 EC)	Restricted-choice electives (6 EC)	1 out of 2 (6 EC): Future Societies Lab OR Master Studio	Research Methodologies I (3 EC)	Master Thesis Urban and Regional Planning (24 EC)	
Spatial Sustainability: Advanced Environmental Geography and Planning (12 EC)			Research Methodologies II (3 EC)		

### Course legend

	Core course
	Track-specific course
	Restricted-choice elective

### Restricted-choice electives (6 EC)

- Critical Development Theory & Social Movements
- Current Debates in Geography
- Rethinking Urban Transportation Planning
- Sustainable and Inclusive Economics
- The Capitalocene: Understanding Unequal Exchange and Environmental Conflict
- Urban Perspectives in Development

## Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

### **Monday 31 March 2025**

11.00 - 11.30	Arrival and preparation
11.30 - 12.30	Interview management
12.30 - 13.15	Lunch break
13.15 - 14.00	Interview B SGP students
14.15 - 15.00	Interview B SGP teaching staff
15.00 - 15.30	Internal panel discussion
15.30 - 16.15	Thematic session bachelor
16.15 - 16.30	Break
16.30 - 17.00	Interview Examinations Board
17.00 - 17.30	Internal panel discussion

### **Tuesday 1 April 2025**

08.30 - 09.00	Arrival and preparation
09.00 - 09.45	Interview M SG students and alumni
10.00 - 10.45	Interview M SG teaching staff
10.45 - 11.15	Internal consultation
11.15 - 12.00	Interview M P students and alumni
12.15 - 13.00	Interview M P teaching staff
13.00 - 14.15	Lunch and internal panel discussion
14.15 - 15.00	Thematic session masters
15.00 - 16.00	Internal panel discussion
16.00 - 16.30	Final discussion management
16.30 - 17.15	Internal panel discussion
17.15 - 17.30	Oral feedback

## Appendix 4. Materials

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 theses of the master's programme Urban and Regional Planning. Information on the theses is available from Academion upon request.

The panel also studied other materials, which included:

- Reaction to previous accreditation
- Domain-Specific Framework of Reference
- Dublin Descriptors and Exit Qualifications
- Relations Exit Qualifications to Curriculum (Learning Outcomes Courses)
- Curriculum Overview
- Course Information and a selection of course materials (incl. assessment)
- Teaching and Examination Regulations 2024-2025 (TER)
- Core Staff Overview
- Data on Student Intake, Population and Success Rates
- Lecturer-Student Ratio & Staff Composition
- Research Proposal and Thesis Assessment Forms
- Examination Board reports
- Programme Committee reports
- Memo Quality Assurance 2023
- Ethical Guidelines for Students
- Thesis manual
- Research proposal and assessment forms
- Alumni career inventory