Netherlands Quality Agency BV

B International Business

Study programme assessment with recognition of institutional audit (ITK)

Netherlands Quality Agency (NQA)
March 2026

B International Business, Zuyd University of Applied Sciences

Summary

In December 2025, the existing International Business bachelor programme of Zuyd University of Applied Sciences was assessed by an NQA panel within the framework of the Dutch accreditation system. This English-taught, full-time programme (240 EC), offered in Maastricht and characterised by its international classroom and Student in the Lead philosophy, was evaluated against the NVAO standards.

The panel has assessed the overall quality of the programme as positive. It concludes that the programme meets all standards and presents a coherent, future-proof and practice-driven educational concept in which student ownership, sustainability and international orientation are firmly embedded. The Student in the Lead approach has been implemented consistently and supported by an engaged and professional teaching team.

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

The programme **meets** the basic quality requirements for this standard. The intended learning outcomes are clearly aligned with the national IB framework and positioned at bachelor level NLQF 6. The shift to four integrated Programme Learning Outcomes has strengthened focus, coherence and transparency. The programme presents a clear professional profile: future-oriented, internationally minded and sustainability-driven. The professional field is actively involved in validating and updating the learning outcomes, which enhances relevance and responsiveness to global developments.

Standard 2: Educational learning environment

The programme **meets** the basic quality requirements for this standard. The educational model is coherent and implemented consistently. The Student in the Lead philosophy shapes daily practice: students design their own learning pathways, work on authentic business challenges and build portfolios that document their development. The teaching team demonstrates strong ownership of this model and actively supports student growth. The panel encourages the programme to keep making explicit how core business knowledge and analytical foundations are developed across the curriculum.

Standard 3: Assessment

The programme **meets** the basic quality requirements for this standard. The programme applies a clear and well-structured system of programmatic assessment that aligns with the intended learning outcomes. Continuous feedback, portfolio development and multiple assessment moments contribute to robust decision-making. Calibration and structured governance support reliability. The panel recommends clarifying expectations regarding methodological depth and rigour in the graduation phase in order to enhance transparency and reduce uncertainty among students.

Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

The programme **meets** the basic quality requirements for this standard. Graduates demonstrably

achieve the intended learning outcomes at bachelor level. The graduation projects reviewed by the panel show professional relevance, adequate methodological quality and integration of knowledge domains. Alumni find employment quickly and progress successfully to master's programmes. Employers value graduates' independence, international orientation and reflective capacity.

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Introduction

This site visit report contains the evaluation of the existing International Business bachelor programme at Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. The panel that carried out the evaluation was appointed by NQA and commissioned by Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, in consultation with the programme. Prior to the site visit, the panel was approved by the NVAO.

The report describes the panel's findings, considerations and conclusions. It also includes a recommendation for the programme. The report has been drawn up in accordance with the *Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands*, *the Procedures for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands 2025* of the NVAO, and the *NQA Guidelines for Programme Site Visits in Higher Education 2025 – Programme Review with ITK Recognition*.

The site visit took place on 11 December 2025. The site visit panel consisted of:

Name	Role	Role description
D.J.N.M. (Nies) Rijnders	Chair	Until 2023, Senior Policy Advisor for Practice-Oriented Research at Avans University of Applied Sciences.
M.E. (Marise) Khemissi	Domain expert	Owner, Marise 1.4; Next Level Learning & Development Consultancy and Interim Management.
M.G.G. (Michel) Le Roux	Domain expert	Owner, Quinta do Mirante – agrotourism and cultural events.
D. (Daphne) van Bendegem	Student member	Student, Communication & Multimedia Design, NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences.

J.P. Spruijt, auditor at NQA, acted as secretary to the panel.

The International Business programme is part of the site visit cluster HBO IBMS group 3. Alignment between all sub-panels was first ensured through the instructions provided to panel members regarding the assessment framework. Prior to this, alignment had already been safeguarded through overlapping membership across all sub-panels. In addition, taking into account that each programme review constitutes an individual assessment, the overlapping members, wherever relevant, engaged in ongoing reflection on previous visits within this site visit cluster. Further alignment between the panels is ensured through the support of, as far as possible, the same auditor from NQA and other evaluation agencies, and through the appointment of trained chairs.

Panel procedure and process
For the programme review, the programme submitted a self-evaluation report and supporting appendices. For the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes, the panel examined fifteen graduation files of recent graduates. These fifteen files were selected based on a longlist of

alumni from the past two years. In the selection, consideration was given to variation in student grades, cohorts, curricula and graduation tracks, as included in Appendix 2.

Central to the assessment was the site visit by the panel, composed of expert peers. Three weeks prior to the site visit, a preparatory meeting and review of materials took place at the programme's location, during which the panel became acquainted with the programme; this meeting is referred to as the agenda-setting audit. During this meeting, the panel members were briefed on NQA's working method and the NVAO assessment framework, and preliminary findings were discussed. Throughout both the agenda-setting visit and the actual site visit, findings were continuously shared among the panel members. During the site visit, the panel met with various stakeholders of the programme, including students, lecturers (examiners) and representatives of the professional field, and reviewed the materials made available for inspection (see Appendix 2). At the end of the visit day, the information gathered by the panel was synthesised into an overall picture and a preliminary judgement with supporting arguments. During a concluding oral feedback session, the chair of the panel communicated the final judgement and key findings to the programme. Staff and students of the programme were given the opportunity to contact the panel by email outside the visit day (open consultation hour). Nobody made use of this opportunity.

Following the site visit, a draft report was prepared and submitted to the panel. Based on the panel members' input, a second draft was drawn up and submitted to the programme for verification of factual inaccuracies. The panel members took note of the programme's response and, wherever necessary, adjustments were made. The report was subsequently adopted in its final version. Based on all information provided, both orally and in writing, the panel was able to arrive at a well-considered judgement.

The site visit panel declares that the evaluation of the programme was conducted independently.

Utrecht, March 2026

Chair	Auditor
D.J.N.M. Rijnders	J.P. Spruijt

Programme outline

The International Business (IB) bachelor programme is offered by the International Business School Maastricht (IBSM), one of four schools within the International Business and Communication (IBC) domain of Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. In addition to the IB programme, IBSM hosts the Sustainable International Business (SIB) research centre, which contributes to the programme's academic and societal positioning.

The programme is offered as a full-time bachelor programme in Maastricht, leading to a Bachelor of Business Administration degree of 240 EC. Students may follow either the regular four-year track or an accelerated three-year track for pre-university (vwo) graduates or equivalent. The accelerated track also comprises 240 EC. On 1 October 2025, the programme had a total enrolment of 714 students. The intake for the academic year 2024–2025 was 228 students (the September and February intakes combined). The student population is internationally diverse: in 2024–2025, 39% of the students had a non-Dutch background, representing 54 nationalities. The programme is English-taught: all educational activities, learning materials and assessments are in English. Management anticipates a continued growth of the IB programme. The popularity of the programme, partly attributed by the program management to its didactical approach and its international positioning, requires careful management of staff capacity and facilities. Until July 2029, the programme remains housed in its current historical building while preparing for the move to the Landbouwbelang building.

A defining feature of the programme is the Student in the Lead (SitL) educational approach, introduced for the two most recent cohorts in 2021. SitL is grounded in programmatic assessment and the principle of assessment as learning. Students design their own learning pathways. SitL was introduced in response to the evolving demands placed on future business professionals, who require ownership, agility and self-management skills. The programme deliberately acknowledges that there is not one single way to learn and aims to recognise individual student needs early in the learning process. The programme implemented the revised national IB framework in 2023, transitioning to four integrated Programme Learning Outcomes. The transition took place through a phase-in/phase-out process, which started in September 2024.

Programme information

Institution	
Naam in RIO	Zuyd University of Applied Sciences
Adres	Nieuw-Eyckholt 300, 6419 DJ Heerlen
Website	www.zuyd.nl
BRIN-number	25JX
Status	Publicly funded
ITK	Positive

Programme	
Name as registered in RIO	International Business - Fulltime
Location	Maastricht
ISAT code	30029
RIO sector	Economics

Orientation and Level	Hbo
Language of instruction	English
All programme tracks, graduation profiles, specialisations	n/a
Joint Programme	n/a
Degree awarded and title designation	Bachelor
Study load in EC	240
Variant(s)	Fulltime
Submission date	1 May 2026
Date of site visit by the review panel	11 December 2025

Follow-up on the previous accreditation

In the previous accreditation, several recommendations were made regarding the programme's positioning, didactic approach, assessment and graduation phase:

- The previous panel recommended giving more exposure to the programme's EPAS accreditation. The programme now explicitly highlights its EFMD/EPAS accreditation in its external communication and positioning, presenting it as part of its international quality profile and external recognition.
- The previous panel recommended adding one or more Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) specifically addressing the Euregion context. Following the introduction of the 2023 national IB framework**,** which defines a common set of four PLOs for all IB programmes, the programme has not introduced an additional Euregional learning outcome. Instead, the Euregional context is embedded in the programme's positioning and interpretation of the national learning outcomes.
- In line with the earlier recommendation to strengthen its regional profile, the programme now more explicitly positions itself within the Euregion Meuse-Rhine. Cross-border cooperation, regional partnerships and the international classroom are presented as distinguishing characteristics of the programme.
- The previous panel recommended improving the information provided to students about the didactical approach. The Student in the Lead (SitL) concept has since been fully implemented and more explicitly documented. Supporting materials, including the Student Learning and Assessment Guide**,** clarify expectations regarding student ownership, portfolio-based learning and the learning cycle.
- The previous panel recommended establishing more smaller workspaces for students. While current facilities remain limited, the planned relocation to the Landbouwbelang building **is** presented by the programme as a structural improvement in learning spaces and student facilities.
- The previous panel recommended paying explicit attention to the assessment of students' individual performance within group assignments. Within the programme's system of programmatic assessment**,** summative decisions are taken at the individual level on the basis of individual portfolios and assessment interviews, also when learning activities take place in community or group contexts.
- The previous panel recommended introducing more flexibility in graduation products to allow for more practice-based work and creativity. The graduation phase now combines a full-time internship with a Research-Based Consultancy Product, allowing students to work on authentic organisational challenges within a structured framework.

Assessment of NVAO-Standards

Standard 1 Intended learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes are consistent with the level and orientation of the programme and are aligned with the expectations of the professional field and the discipline, as well as with international requirements.

Conclusion

The programme **meets** the basic quality requirements for this standard. The intended learning outcomes are clearly aligned with the national framework and demonstrably positioned at bachelor level. The panel observes that the transition to four Programme Learning Outcomes has significantly strengthened the coherence, focus and transparency of the programme. The programme profiles itself as an innovative and sustainability-oriented International Business programme that prepares students for leadership in a volatile global context, with a strong emphasis on student ownership, personal development and future-oriented human skills such as collaboration, critical thinking and intercultural awareness. Industry representatives, students and management consistently confirmed the programme as “future-proof”. The panel values the strong and visible involvement of the professional field in validating and periodically reviewing the intended learning outcomes, which enhances their relevance and forward-looking character.

The panel further considers the fully English-taught nature of the programme to be coherent with the international scope and communicative expectations embedded in the intended learning outcomes and proportionate to the professional demands of the International Business domain. In addition, the structural embedding of applied research within the academy, including the positioning of the lector in the management team, contributes to the integration of research, the professional practice and curriculum development.

Substantiation

Professional orientation
The programme explicitly positions the International Business professional as a future-oriented and responsible business leader who operates in a volatile and complex international context. In 2023, the national professional profile was revised in response to a broader vision on global developments, including geopolitical disruptions, technological acceleration and sustainability challenges. The programme refers to a VUCA-context (volatile, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) and frames its graduates as professionals who contribute to future-proof economies with a strong global mindset. IB professionals are described as identifying international opportunities, contributing to organisational transformation, building and managing relationships in culturally diverse contexts, and continuously developing themselves as reflective practitioners.

A distinctive element of the professional profile is the view of IB graduates as self-directed and reflective professionals who take ownership of their development and professional conduct. The programme portrays the IB professional as someone who is intrinsically motivated, driven by curiosity and capable of shaping their own learning and career path. Personal responsibility,

resilience and the ability to continuously develop themselves in a changing environment are considered essential characteristics of the graduates. Sustainability and human skills form another clear accent within the professional orientation. Collaboration, critical thinking and intercultural awareness are repeatedly mentioned as essential competences for the future IB professional. The programme emphasizes the importance of nurturing students' individual talents and passions. The panel recognises a strong internal commitment to sustainability and future-oriented skill sets. During the site visit representatives from the professional field, students and management consistently confirmed that the programme prepares graduates in a way they perceive as "future proof", particularly in relation to sustainability, human skills and adaptability in a rapidly changing context.

In the light of recent developments in artificial intelligence (AI) and the rapidly changing nature of professional research and decision-making, the panel considers it relevant that the programme continues to reflect on the technological dimension of the IB professional profile. The programme acknowledges that the increasing impact of AI and data-driven practices will influence the profession and may require a further strengthening of students' technological awareness, and adaptability. The panel views this as a natural next step in further future-proofing an already forward-looking professional profile.

Intended learning outcomes
The intended learning outcomes of the programme are directly derived from and aligned with the National Qualifications Framework International Business 2023. The Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) adopted in 2023 reflect the collective standards set by the National Platform International Business. The panel establishes that the intended learning outcomes are demonstrably positioned at NLQF-level 6 and correspond to the Dublin Descriptors for first-cycle qualifications.

The current framework comprises four integrative Programme Learning Outcomes that represent aggregate professional activities rather than subject-specific competences. PLO 1 (International Business Opportunities) focuses on identifying international opportunities and recommending sustainable strategies based on systematic international environmental analysis. PLO 2 (Business Transformation) concerns contributing to organisational transitions and optimising sustainable international business practices. PLO 3 (Relationship Management) addresses cultivating and managing relationships with culturally diverse stakeholders in dynamic contexts. PLO 4 (Self-Management) defines the graduate as a reflective and self-directed professional capable of operating autonomously in complex surroundings. Together, these PLOs integrate traditional business disciplines into broader professional actions, enhancing coherence and professional relevance.

The transition from the former framework of 23 PLOs to the current set of four represents both structural consolidation and substantive repositioning. The earlier framework consisted of more specific, task-oriented outcomes organised around domains such as "Ways of Thinking" and "Tools for Working and Management". The 2023 framework shifts towards broader, integrative professional activities, reducing fragmentation and strengthening transparency. In addition to consolidation, the revision places a stronger emphasis on sustainability, intercultural competence and personal professional development. Under the former system, students specialised in one thematic area at end level; in the current system, students are required to demonstrate mastery

across all four PLOs. A phase-in and phase-out arrangement ensures an orderly transition between cohorts. The panel considers this transition orderly and transparent.

International orientation is intrinsically embedded in the intended learning outcomes. The fully English-taught nature of the programme is consistent with the international scope, intercultural communication requirements and global sustainability context embedded in the Programme Learning Outcomes and it reflects the professional reality of the International Business domain, particularly within the cross-border and international business environment of the Maastricht region. Given that graduates are prepared to operate in multinational and cross-border contexts, to engage with culturally diverse stakeholders and to function in organisations where English is the dominant working language, the panel considers the language of instruction to be both coherent with the intended learning outcomes and proportionate to the professional demands of the field.

Alignment with the (international) professional field.
The programme demonstrates a structural and multi-layered alignment with the professional field. The Work Field Advisory Board (WFAB) meets several times a year and is consulted on curriculum development and major programme changes. Representatives indicate that the interaction has evolved from a more formal and one-directional structure in the past to a more interactive and thematic collaboration in recent years. Full-day working sessions and regular topic-based meetings have strengthened the quality of dialogue. The board consists of approximately ten members. In addition, a Business World Coordination Group has recently been established to professionalise and coordinate partnerships with the industry. The panel observes that this reflects a conscious effort to systematise external relations rather than relying solely on individual contacts. The involvement of the professional field was also visible in the transition from 23 to 4 PLOs. The 2023 National Framework was developed through national consultation with work field representatives and alumni, in which IBSM management participated. Current developments such as sustainability, digitalisation, AI and geopolitical shifts are explicitly reflected in the PLOs. Recent sparring sessions with practitioners resulted in a renewed emphasis on human-centred skills as a counterbalance to increasing technological influence. While the programme is strongly anchored in the Euregion Maas-Rhine and collaborates with partners such as Brightlands and regional incubators, multinational corporations regularly serve to provide internships and challenges. The programme maintains an extensive network of international partner universities and double degree agreements.

Applied research is structurally embedded in the programme via the positioning of the research centre within the academy. The lector is part of the academy’s management team, which strengthens the integration of research, education and the professional practice. Students are regularly involved in applied research activities. The panel notes that living lab and incubation initiatives are promising and offer opportunities for students to work on innovation challenges together with start-ups and regional innovation partners.

Standard 2 Educational learning environment

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

Conclusion

The programme **meets** the basic quality requirements for this standard. The panel concludes that the teaching and learning environment is coherent, innovative and has been implemented consistently. The Student in the Lead philosophy is not only visible in the educational design but is clearly embedded in the daily practice of the learning environment. The portfolio-based structure, the use of authentic challenges and the strong emphasis on feedback and reflection create a learning environment that actively stimulates students' ownership, initiative and professional growth. The vertical communities and the international classroom further strengthen peer learning and intercultural development. The panel advises the programme to continue making explicit where and how core business knowledge and analytical foundations are addressed within the challenges and portfolios, in order to further clarify the underlying knowledge base of the curriculum. Overall, the panel considers the programme well-designed, well-developed, and strongly supported by an engaged and professional team.

Substantiation

Educational model
The programme is built around a Student in the Lead philosophy that is consistently translated into a learning-focused environment. Students are positioned as owners of their development: they plan their learning, formulate individual learning objectives (ILOs) and select or acquire authentic business challenges that serve as the core learning vehicle. The digital portfolio (MyPortfolio) functions as the backbone of the model by integrating study planning, ILOs linked to the programme learning outcomes (PLOs), feedback moments, evidence of learning and a holistic reflection that prepares students for the high-stakes (summative) assessment. In practice, students described the cycle as: study plan (based on prior feedforward and PLO expectations), formulation of ILOs, learning by doing through challenges combined with self-study, events and community learning, continuous feedback and loop closure, followed by holistic reflection and assessment.

The panel observes that this educational model is not only conceptually well-articulated but also operationalised in a consistent manner. The logic of planning, acting, reflecting and evidencing learning is clearly visible in student behaviour and in the coaching practice. Students are not positioned as recipients of assignments: they are expected to justify their choices, connect activities to outcomes and demonstrate development over time. This creates a learning environment in which taking responsibility and accountability are structurally embedded. The challenge ecosystem further reinforces the practice-based character of the model. The breadth and diversity of real-life challenges illustrate the programme's strong external orientation.

Programme
The programme is structured around a vertical portfolio progression rather than traditional subject-based blocks. Students complete three portfolios at Level 1 (15 + 15 + 30 EC), three at Level 2 (30 + 30 + 30 EC, including the internship abroad) and two at Level 3 (30 + 30 EC, including graduation). The programme also includes a free study space which includes a minor or exchange (30 EC). Complexity and autonomy increase progressively across these levels, in line with the AuCom logic underlying the programme design, which structures learning progression along the dimensions of increasing student autonomy and task complexity. Across all levels, the integration mechanism is consistent: students formulate ILOs linked to the four PLOs, select or design challenges, collect structured feedback and demonstrate their holistic development in the portfolio assessment.

At Level 1, the focus lies on building foundational business competencies. The smaller portfolio units (1A and 1B, each 15 EC) function as onboarding structures before students move to the 30 EC portfolio 1C. Students begin working in mixed-level communities and participate in “base camp” sessions twice a week, where peers and coaches collaborate across levels. Professional skills are embedded from the start through group-based challenges in groups that typically contain around five students. Examples of challenges include the MAECONOMY project, where students explore opportunities for a blockchain-based platform aimed at enabling circular use of construction materials, the HaloLock marketing challenge focused on developing a market strategy for an innovative helmet lock, and the National Hackathon Circular Economy, where student teams develop solutions to reduce waste at large-scale events such as festivals or stadiums. These challenges require students to engage with real external stakeholders, collect data, design solutions and present outcomes in professional formats. At this level, research skills are not taught as separate methodological modules but integrated into problem-solving cycles: students identify business problems, collect and analyse data and justify decisions in their portfolio evidence. Internationalisation is already structurally present through the international classroom and intercultural teamwork. At this level, students begin working with authentic challenges in groups and learn to integrate professional skills within real-life assignments. Finance workshops and tool-based sessions are available, yet several students indicated that they would benefit from a more explicit and structured introduction to core business concepts and practical tools in the early stages. The programme has recently introduced a GPT-supported tool to assist students in working with their ILOs, for example by helping them formulate ILOs and by providing suggestions on how these can be achieved. This illustrates the programme’s proactive stance towards integrating AI in the learning process and reducing unnecessary cognitive load in the portfolio design phase.

At Level 2, the portfolios increase in scope (each 30 EC) and complexity. Students engage more intensively with external companies and in professional contexts. The internship abroad institutionalises international immersion. Challenges such as the Medtronic Supply Chain redesign, the DSM-Firmenich M&A strategic analysis or the Almería Sustainability field research illustrate the interdisciplinary nature of the assignments: in these projects students must integrate finance, strategy, supply chain, marketing, sustainability and stakeholder analysis. Here, professional skills, research and internationalisation are fully intertwined. Students conduct applied research to inform consultancy advice or strategic proposals. The work field confirmed that graduates demonstrate a strong capacity to analyse real-life challenges and provide practical, well-structured solutions. For example, an external coach from pension administrator

APG explicitly noted that students are better equipped than before to solve authentic business problems.

At Level 3, students are expected to demonstrate holistic mastery of the four PLOs in complex professional environments. Portfolio 3A consolidates senior-level competence, while Portfolio 3B (graduation) requires students to execute a research-based consultancy product within an international business context. The programme explicitly stimulates diverse and practice-oriented outputs beyond traditional academic papers. Coaches indicated that they encourage formats that are relevant to business environments. Nevertheless, both documentation and discussions suggest that students often revert to written consultancy reports in high-stakes contexts. While these reports can be robust, the intended diversity of formats, such as strategic plans, business cases, implementation roadmaps or professional presentations, is not yet fully realised in practice. The panel encourages the programme to more explicitly realise its ambition regarding diverse output formats in graduation products.

Across all levels, the programme integrates knowledge, skills and a professional attitude within authentic challenges. The Body of Knowledge is not organised as a fixed sequence of subject modules but accessed in a contextual and need-driven manner, which strengthens relevance and ownership. However, external feedback from the professional field and the panel's own review of portfolios indicate that the cumulative and explicit articulation of core disciplinary knowledge and its application in relevant concepts and sources is not always equally visible across student work. The panel notes that this is partly related to the programme's challenge-based and demand-driven didactical approach, in which knowledge development is often embedded in authentic contexts rather than presented in a fixed sequence of disciplinary modules. While the panel has seen sufficient evidence that applied competence at bachelor level is achieved, the underlying knowledge base is not always equally explicit or systematically articulated across portfolios. The panel therefore advises the programme to continue making the development of core business knowledge and analytical foundations more explicit across the curriculum, in order to further strengthen transparency of how students' applied competences are underpinned.

Moreover, the open architecture of the challenge system requires careful alignment with PLO expectations. Challenges are not pre-linked to specific PLOs, but their alignment is established by students and coaches during study plan approval sessions. While this approach offers flexibility and contextual relevance, the panel notes that clearer selection criteria or a structured checklist for challenges could enhance consistency and transparency. This does not undermine the concept, but it indicates that the quality assurance of externally sourced challenges requires continued attention. The panel therefore advises further formalising the selection and quality assurance process for challenges, for example by introducing clearer alignment criteria with PLO requirements and portfolio expectations.

Internationalisation is structurally embedded through English as the working language, a diverse and multicultural student population, cross-cultural teamwork and the mandatory international internships. Global business contexts are reflected in many challenges and in the composition of project teams. The programme thus emphasises international collaboration and global business exposure as primary vehicles for developing students' international competence. At the same time, several work field representatives noted that foreign language development has become less explicitly embedded in the current curriculum compared to the previous programme design.

While English proficiency is well secured, opportunities to acquire or maintain additional foreign language skills appear more limited. This signals a shift in the interpretation of internationalisation from a multilingual competence towards the intercultural and globally oriented professional practice.

As the programme is delivered fully in English, the panel also considered the English language proficiency of the teaching team. During the site visit most of the meetings were conducted in English, which enabled the panel to observe staff communication directly. The panel observed that lecturers communicate comfortably in English in both educational and professional discussions. This corresponds with the programme's recruitment policy, which requires a strong command of English, and with the international profile of the team.

Student intake and guidance
Admission follows the national legal framework, with two intake moments per year, including a substantial February influx: Dutch applicants must hold a havo, vwo or mbo level 4 diploma, while the accelerated three-year track requires a vwo diploma or equivalent. International qualifications such as the Abitur, Zeugnis der Fachhochschulreife or International Baccalaureate are assessed in cooperation with NUFFIC. All applicants must demonstrate sufficient prior knowledge of economics and/or mathematics as well as English language proficiency, and candidates who do not meet the standard requirements may qualify through a 21+ entrance examination, after which no additional selection is permitted under Dutch law.

The programme also attracts students who consciously opt for the Student in the Lead concept. Students that the panel talked to indicated that the educational approach is a conscious choice: they enrol specifically because of the Student in the Lead concept. The onboarding structure is clearly designed to facilitate transition into a model that requires a high degree of autonomy. An onboarding week introduces students to the portfolio logic and challenge-based learning. In particular, HAVO students were mentioned as requiring more structured support in the initial phase. The "first 100 days" approach and early coaching interactions are intended to help students develop the capacity to formulate study plans and ILOs independently. The panel observes that more senior students play an active role in supporting this process, which further strengthens peer learning within the community structure. The panel also observes that while the system is demanding in the beginning, most students adapt within the first few months and learn to navigate the framework effectively. Dropout rates in the first year have decreased in comparison with previous cohorts, suggesting that flexibility and ownership may contribute to retention.

A distinctive feature of the programme is the organisation into vertical communities in which students from different levels work together. Each community consists of approximately 110 students and is supported by multiple coaches. The community is both a pedagogical concept and a physical space: during fixed base camp time slots, students and coaches work together in shared environments designed to mirror professional settings. This structure facilitates peer learning and the development of soft skills such as collaboration, communication and feedback literacy. Junior students benefit from interaction with more advanced peers, while senior students take on mentoring roles. Students positively referred to the international and mixed-level character of the community. However, the large size of communities and shared spaces can create practical challenges in terms of concentration and accessibility of coaches, particularly

during peak periods. Planned relocation to new facilities is expected to address spatial constraints.

Guidance is organised through a dual coaching model. Personal coaches focus on process, personal development and study planning, while business coaches provide content-related expertise within challenges. Students reported that they receive support in aligning their ILOs with PLO expectations and rubrics, and in exploring their professional interests and strengths. The panel notes that coaching intensity is substantial. Students can book individual meetings, and alignment of study plans is formally required before progression, but several students indicated that coach availability is experienced as uneven. With more than 30 students per coach in some communities, weekly individual contact is not always feasible. Differences in scheduling practices between coaches were also mentioned. High-level students sometimes experience reduced access due to early booking by lower-level students. The panel advises the programme to further optimize coaching availability and scheduling practices across communities, to ensure equitable and predictable access to guidance for students at different levels.

The panel observes that the model intentionally avoids over-structuring and offers considerable flexibility in pace and route. Students design their own study trajectories within the portfolio framework, and a facilitated pathway exists for those who require more structure. Acceleration is possible, although rarely used. A small number of students follow a minor in parallel with other portfolio elements to shorten their trajectory. The flexibility of the model appears to reduce early dropout in comparison with the previous curriculum. Accordingly, study progress in later years remains a point for attention. High autonomy can result in delayed decision-making or loss of momentum for some students. Dedicated support structures exist for students nearing graduation, including additional coaching for those from previous cohorts.

The panel confirms, based on the Education and Examination Regulations and supporting documentation, that formal procedures are in place for students with disabilities or other personal circumstances. The EER explicitly provides the possibility to request additional provisions through the student counsellor and Examination Board, in line with institutional regulations on studying with an impairment. During the visit, it became clear that within the Student in the Lead model, many forms of support are embedded in regular practice: students determine their own pace, choose the moment of assessment readiness and work with personalised study plans under guidance of a coach. This flexibility can reduce pressure compared to fixed examination moments. At the same time, the panel emphasises that transparency regarding available provisions and timely referral to specialised support remain essential to ensure that students with specific needs are adequately facilitated within this highly self-directed learning environment.

Teaching staff

The panel is highly positive about the teaching team. The core teaching team consists of 34 lecturers (29.4 FTE), of whom eight hold a PhD and the remainder a master’s degree; 29 lecturers hold a BKE qualification and six hold an SKE qualification. In addition, the programme is supported by a Community Office team of six staff members (5.2 FTE). The team demonstrates strong ownership of the educational concept and has clearly taken the lead in developing and refining the programme. Across all stakeholder groups, a consistent narrative is visible: Student in the Lead is not merely a didactical label but a shared practice. Staff explicitly indicated that the transition required substantial professional development and a redefinition of their role from

lecturer to coach. Over time, this has led to a deliberate alignment process: colleagues who did not feel at home within this philosophy left the programme, while new staff were recruited based on affinity with coaching and the SitL approach. This has resulted in a motivated and engaged team that actively embraces the innovative character of the programme. As noted during panel deliberations, the team “walks the talk”.

The staffing model is organised around communities. The core staff members support six vertical communities, each guided by a team of four to five coaches who combine personal coaching and business expertise. The majority of staff have substantial international and professional experience, and a significant proportion is affiliated with applied research activities. Within the coaching model, the distinction between personal coach and business coach gives structure to the responsibilities while maintaining collective ownership. Students described the relationship with coaches as collaborative rather than hierarchical: they experience working “with” coaches rather than “for” them. This reflects a professional culture characterised by accessibility and openness to mutual learning.

The panel examined in depth how the shift from traditional teaching to intensive coaching impacts feasibility and workload. Community days are scheduled twice per week from 10:00 to 15:00, creating extended periods of availability. Outside these fixed moments, coaches organise individual meetings, events and administrative tasks with considerable flexibility. Both staff and management acknowledged that the absence of fixed class schedules requires active boundary setting. The feedback-intensive character of the model and the formal requirement of loop closure before assessment increase time pressure for some colleagues. The programme has introduced targeted coaching training, calibration sessions and process optimisation initiatives, and staff satisfaction data indicate improvement compared with previous years.

The programme operates within the standard lecturer–student ratio and institutional budget. This means that the sustainability of the coaching model depends on careful capacity planning and consistent working practices across communities. Weekly calibration sessions (“boosters”) and coordination groups support shared standards and collective ownership. The panel recognises the strong commitment and professionalism of the team as a central strength, while noting that safeguarding team capacity remains essential for the continued feasibility of this intensive educational model.

Standard 3 Assessment

The programme has an adequate assessment system.

Conclusion

The programme **meets** the basic quality requirements for this standard. The programme has a clear and coherent assessment policy that is aligned with the intended learning outcomes and supported by an adequate safeguarding structure. The chosen approach to programmatic assessment is well understood within the programme and has been translated into a structured and workable system. In the daily practice of assessment, the programme works with multiple assessment moments, which enhances the robustness of decision-making compared with single written examinations. Calibration sessions among lecturers and short communication lines between coaches and management contribute to shared standards.

The panel observes that some students experience uncertainty regarding the required level of methodological depth at graduation level. The panel therefore recommends further clarifying expectations regarding methodological depth and rigour at graduation level, in order to enhance transparency and reduce uncertainty among students.

Substantiation

Assessment policy
The programme has explicitly chosen for programmatic assessment, grounded in the concept of assessment as learning, which is clearly reflected in the structure of the assessment design. The focus is on continuous development towards the intended learning outcomes (PLOs), rather than on isolated testing moments. Assessment is organised in successive portfolios that progressively build towards the four PLOs through explicitly formulated ILOs. The assessment rubric, which is described by the programme itself as “the” rubric, integrates all PLOs and performance requirements and serves as the central reference point for both formative and summative judgement. The panel observed that the rubric is clearly recognised by students as the central framework guiding their development. A clear distinction is made between the formative process and the summative decision. Students collect evidence and feedback during the portfolio, reflect holistically on their development, and only then apply for assessment. Summative assessment moments allocate credits, while the formative phase is designed to generate rich information about student growth. The panel notes that the distinction between formative and summative judgement is conceptually well articulated within the programme. Nevertheless, students indicated that formative feedback can sometimes feel summative in character, which may influence how freely they experiment and learn.

The programme has operationalised quality requirements for feedback through the VARTA criteria (Variety, Authenticity, Relevance, Topicality, Amount). These criteria are embedded at policy level and function as minimum conditions for portfolio completeness. If a portfolio does not meet these criteria, it cannot lead to a positive summative judgement. The panel considers this a

strong design choice, as it translates abstract notions of “rich feedback” into concrete and auditable standards.

Professionalisation of staff supports the assessment policy. The programme has developed a tailored BKE-trajectory focused on programmatic assessment, and one of the coaches completed an SKE-trajectory on this theme, including the integration of VARTA. The panel values this explicit investment in assessor expertise, as programmatic assessment requires a different mindset and judgement culture than traditional exam-based systems. The programme is currently in a transition phase, with cohorts working under both the former 23 PLO framework and the new 4 PLO framework. While the system appears coherent within each track, the coexistence of frameworks requires paying continued attention to clarity and consistency.

Assessment practice
In execution, assessment is organised around a structured learning cycle recorded in MyPortfolio. Students formulate ILOs, link them to challenges, collect feedback, reflect on their development and submit their portfolio for assessment once all feedback loops have formally been closed. Coaches first approve the formulation of ILOs at the start of the portfolio. Later in the process, they formally confirm in MyPortfolio that sufficient evidence and feedback have been collected for each ILO, indicated by green checkmarks, which signals readiness for assessment. The panel observed that the use of MyPortfolio contributes to traceability. Feedback from coaches, peers and external professionals is documented, and students demonstrate how they reflect on this input. Students showed how they receive external feedback and link it explicitly to their ILOs and personal development. The weekly routine of identifying an achievement point and an improvement point supports reflection and makes growth visible over time. Feedback practices are diverse. External feedback is often more extensive, while internal coach feedback tends to be more concise and focused. Students appreciate the feedforward orientation of feedback and the emphasis on development. Weekly calibration “booster” sessions are organised to discuss student work and align interpretations of performance levels. These sessions function as an explicit mechanism to reduce variation in judgement and strengthen shared standards in a system that relies on holistic assessment. The panel nevertheless observed variation in the quantity, depth and emphasis of feedback across portfolios and coaches. Students indicated that it can be difficult to prioritise when multiple feedback points are provided. While the programme views variation as inherent to professional practice, inconsistency in guidance may reduce clarity regarding expected standards. The panel also encourages the programme to keep feedback practices clear and focused, and to continue strengthening the alignment of feedback practices across coaches and to further develop feedback literacy among students and external feedback providers, in order to enhance consistency and support students in translating feedback into focused developmental actions.

The summative assessment of portfolios is conducted by two assessors (four-eyes principle), typically including the personal coach and a second examiner. Summative assessment of the portfolios takes place either in the form of a Moment of Shine (a community-based presentation) or an Assessment Team Interview (a structured dialogue with two assessors). In both formats, students are required to present and substantiate a holistic reflection on their development in relation to the PLOs. Prior to the assessment conversation or Moment of Shine, the portfolio is checked for completeness and compliance with the VARTA criteria. This stepwise approach enhances procedural clarity. The holistic reflection forms a central component of the assessment

interview. Students consistently described reflection as the core of their learning. An exchange student emphasised that “this is where the learning happens.” The panel recognises that this strong emphasis on reflection fosters ownership and meta-cognitive development, particularly in relation to PLO 4 (Self-management).

In response to developments in generative AI, the programme has introduced an “IB Roadmap for Assessing Authenticity of Student Work.” This reflects awareness of risks related to authorship and fraud in a portfolio-based system. The panel appreciates this proactive stance, although continued monitoring remains necessary.

Assessment of the graduation phase
The graduation phase is positioned as the final 30 EC unit of the programme and is explicitly linked to the mastery of the four PLOs at NLQF 6 level. In contrast to earlier portfolios, students use the predefined Level 3 learning outcomes from the assessment framework instead of their own ILOs. This choice strengthens standardisation and provides additional assurance that the end level is directly aligned with the intended learning outcomes.

Students described the graduation phase as substantially different from the earlier levels. The research component is more prominent and requires narrowing down complex issues, selecting appropriate methods and substantiating recommendations with evidence. Several students referred to a stronger “academic” burden in the graduation project, reflecting an increased emphasis on methodological rigour and depth. At the same time, students indicated that it is sometimes unclear what constitutes “sufficient depth” and when the work is considered good enough. The panel considers this an important signal with regard to transparency of expectations at end level. The panel therefore recommends further clarifying expectations regarding the required level of depth and methodological rigour at graduation level, in order to enhance transparency and reduce uncertainty among students.

The graduation assessment consists of two sequential components. First, the submitted portfolio (including the research-based consultancy product, holistic reflection and documented evidence of development) is checked for completeness and alignment with the predefined Level 3 learning outcomes. If the portfolio meets the formal requirements, the student proceeds to the oral assessment interview. The oral assessment interview forms the decisive summative moment. During this interview, students defend their consultancy product and substantiate their professional judgement in relation to the PLOs. The interview also serves to verify authenticity and ownership of the submitted work. The panel considers this an adequate and proactive measure to safeguard validity in a portfolio-based assessment system.

The assessment procedure is organised according to a six-eyes principle. The assessment team consists of the graduation coach (examiner), a second internal examiner and an external professional from a fixed pool of trained assessors. External assessors are familiar with the programme’s assessment system and receive training in its criteria and procedures. The panel values the structural involvement of the professional field as a strong mechanism to enhance objectivity and alignment with professional standards. A clear separation exists between supervision and assessment. A graduation coach may act as business coach and be involved in the formative feedback loop but cannot simultaneously serve as assessment coach for the same student. This separation strengthens independence in high-stakes decision-making. Judgements

are reached by consensus within the assessment team. In case of disagreement, additional examiners can be consulted. Decisions must be substantiated on assessment forms that are explicitly structured around the PLOs. The panel observed that this enhances traceability and makes the reasoning behind grades more transparent than in previous iterations of the assessment forms. The involvement of external assessors, the oral defence and the structured assessment forms collectively contribute to validity and reliability. Calibration sessions also include discussion of graduation standards. The panel considers these mechanisms essential in a holistic assessment framework, where shared interpretation of level descriptors is critical.

Quality assurance of assessment
The quality assurance of assessment is organised through a clear governance structure in which the Examination Committee, Educational Support and Advice Committee (ESAC), the Assessment Coordination Group and the School Participation Council (SPC) each fulfil distinct roles. The Examination Committee operates independently and is formally responsible for safeguarding the quality of assessment and the achieved end-level, in accordance with the Education and Examination Regulations (EER). The chair of the Examination Committee also chairs two other examination committees within Zuyd, which contributes to cross-programme standardisation and shared interpretation of assessment standards. The Examination Committee appoints examiners based on institutional criteria. Examiners must meet minimum qualification standards (including BKE certification), demonstrate subject expertise and assessment competence, and are formally appointed. New staff members first participate under supervision before being appointed as examiners. Specific criteria apply to graduation supervisors. The panel considers the appointment and professionalisation procedures appropriate and aligned with institutional regulations.

The Examination Committee indicated that earlier sampling activities had revealed inconsistencies in documentation and portfolio completeness, which affected the traceability of assessment decisions. According to the Examination Committee, this signal led to concrete improvement measures, including monthly sampling after the registration of results. The committee reports that recent checks show improved completeness and traceability. Calibration plays an important role in safeguarding reliability. Graduation standards are discussed in calibration sessions, and so-called “SGE” sessions (‘Sessie Gerealiseerd Eindniveau’: Realised End-Level sessions) are organised in which sets of graduation portfolios are reviewed to sharpen interpretation of the end level. The panel considers these procedures an appropriate mechanism for safeguarding traceability, consistency and reliability within a holistic assessment framework. The panel also recognises that safeguarding in a programmatic assessment context is inherently more complex than in traditional exam-based systems. The Examination Committee acknowledged that ensuring completeness, traceability and consistency is “different and more demanding” in this model. The panel concludes that the programme has developed a structured and increasingly robust approach to quality assurance.

The Assessment Coordination Group monitors the coherence of the assessment system and formulates annual objectives. These objectives are translated into goals at coordination group level and evaluated within a structured PDCA cycle. The Examination Committee has also formulated an explicit annual safeguarding agenda, identifying priority areas for monitoring. The panel observes a maturing quality cycle, with clear structural follow-up of identified risks.

Standard 4 Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes have been achieved.

Conclusion

The programme **meets** the requirements for this standard. Based on the review of final works and discussions with students, alumni and representatives of the professional field, the panel concludes that graduates achieve the intended learning outcomes at bachelor level (NLQF 6). The graduation projects are aligned with the IB profile and demonstrate an adequate level of complexity, professional relevance and applied research capability. Alumni find employment quickly and progression to master's programmes proceeds without obstacles. Representatives from industry and alumni describe graduates as confident, solution-oriented, creative and broadly competent professionals. Alumni express a clear wish for more systematic involvement in the programme. The panel encourages the programme to strengthen and structure alumni engagement, also with a view to their potential role as ambassadors on both mentoring and hiring levels.

Substantiation

Products of graduates
The panel studied fifteen graduation portfolios prior to the site visit. Ten portfolios originated from the previous graduation framework based on 23 PLOs and five from the new framework based on four national PLOs. This distribution reflects the proportion of graduates, as most students are still completing the programme under the former framework. Within the 23 PLO framework, the sample covered all thematic specialisations: Supply Chain Management, Marketing, Management, Finance and Entrepreneurship. The selection was proportionally spread across grades and cohorts.

The current graduation product consists of a Research-Based Consultancy Product developed during a full-time international internship (30 EC), supplemented by a holistic reflection and documented feedback. Students demonstrate their ability to address a complex international business problem in an authentic professional context. The professional products show a clear problem definition, an adequate research design, systematic data collection, analysis from multiple perspectives and substantiated strategic recommendations, often including financial underpinnings and implementation plans. Under the former 23-PLO framework, the graduation dossier consisted of a more extensive portfolio. In addition to the Research-Based Consultancy Product, students submitted four separate reflection reports (Collaboration, Personal and Professional Development, Ethics and Social Responsibility, and Intercultural Proficiency), a holistic reflection, a documented study plan, structured feedback evidence based on the VARTA criteria, formal internship approval documents, and proof of English proficiency at C1 level. The 23 PLOs were grouped into four domains and, for the graduation phase, clustered into ten overarching reflection items. Within the domain "Tools for Working and Management," students demonstrated one thematic specialisation at level 3 (Supply Chain Management, Marketing,

Management, Finance or Entrepreneurship), while evidencing the remaining themes at level 2 earlier in the programme. This structure resulted in a substantial and highly documented graduation portfolio, with explicit traceability of learning outcomes across domains. The new four-PLO framework shows a more integrated structure, clustering learning evidence around the four national PLOs and reducing fragmentation, while maintaining the requirement to demonstrate complexity, autonomy and integration at bachelor level. The panel experienced the graduation dossiers under the former framework as substantial in volume. At the same time, the panel understands the rationale behind this detailed structure and recognises that the transition to the four-PLO framework already contributes to greater coherence and clarity.

The panel observed that the products demonstrate bachelor level (NLQF 6) in terms of complexity, autonomy and integration of knowledge domains. Students combine analytical depth with professional applicability and demonstrate that their work is grounded in relevant disciplinary concepts and sources. They also show awareness of intercultural, ethical and sustainability dimensions. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods are applied in a methodologically sound manner. The grades awarded are consistent with the observed quality of the work. The transition from the former 23-PLO framework to the new four-PLO structure does not negatively affect the achieved level. Under both frameworks, students demonstrably realise the intended learning outcomes in an integrated way.

Graduates' functioning
Graduates' functioning is supported by quantitative data, external validation and feedback from alumni and representatives of the professional field. A total of 89% of graduates find employment immediately upon graduation and 95% within three months. Approximately 24% of alumni work outside the Netherlands, confirming the international orientation of the programme. The progression rate to master's programmes is high. A total of 53% of graduates continue with a master's degree, which significantly exceeds the national benchmark of 39% for comparable programmes. The established pre-master pathway to Maastricht University facilitates this transition.

Employers and those providing internships confirm the professional relevance and the high level of graduates. Representatives of the professional field express satisfaction with the knowledge, skills and professional attitude of graduates and confirm the practical relevance of their graduation work. They also state that graduates demonstrate independence, initiative and a reflective attitude. In the panel discussion, employers emphasised qualities such as self-reliance, proactiveness, personal leadership, networking ability and strong soft skills. Alumni active in consultancy, financial services and entrepreneurship confirm that the programme's emphasis on intercultural competence and feedback literacy contributes directly to their professional functioning.

Overall, the panel concludes that graduates function well in the labour market and in subsequent master's programmes, and that the achieved learning outcomes are recognised and valued by the professional field.

Overall conclusion on the programme

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Standard 1 Intended learning outcomes	Meets the generic quality requirements
Standard 2 Educational learning environment	Meets the generic quality requirements
Standard 3 Assessment	Meets the generic quality requirements
Standard 4 Achieved learning outcomes	Meets the generic quality requirements

The judgements have been weighted in accordance with the decision rules of the NVAO. Based on these rules, the visitation panel assesses the quality of the existing bachelor programme International Business at Zuyd University of Applied Sciences as positive.

Recommendations

Based on its findings, the panel formulates the following recommendation for the continued development of the programme.

Standard 3

- The panel recommends further clarifying expectations for students regarding the required level of depth and methodological rigour in the graduation phase to enhance transparency and reduce uncertainty among students.

Appendices

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1. Site visit programme

10.00	Reception of the Panel & Demonstration of MyPortfolio
10.30	Meeting with lecturers
11.15	Break
11.30	Meeting with students
12.15	Lunch
13.00	Discussion on quality assurance
13.40	Break
13.55	Meeting with management
14.40	Meeting with representatives of the professional field and alumni
15.25	Break
15.40	Pending issues
15.55	Panel deliberation
17.00	Feedback session

2. Documents Reviewed

Documents reviewed:

- Self-Assessment Report International Business (2025)
- Educational Vision International Business (2025)
- IBSM Ambition Plan 2025–2026
- IBSM Long Term Plan 2025–2029
- EFMD Programme Accreditation Self-Assessment Report (2025)
- Assessment Plan IBSM 2025–2026
- Education and Examination Regulations (2025–2026)
- National Qualifications Framework International Business (2017; 2023)
- IB Learning Outcomes per Level (mapping documents 2017 and 2023 frameworks; 4 documents)
- Programme structure documentation (Overall Programme Structure; List of Courses; IB infographic; 3 documents)
- Portfolio documentation Levels 1–3 (guides, assessment forms, ILO templates, study plan templates, holistic reflection templates; approx. 20 documents across 2017 and 2023 frameworks)
- Graduation documentation (Graduation Guides 4-PLO and 23-PLO; Appendix C PLO overview; Level 3 ILOs; Assessment Forms 3B; 6 documents)
- Internship documentation (internship agreements, workplace scan, internship assessment forms; 5 documents)
- Student Learning and Assessment Guides (full and short version; 2 documents)
- AI and authenticity documentation (including IB Roadmap for Assessing Authenticity; 2 documents)
- Annual Reports Examination Committee 2023–2024 and 2024–2025
- Governance and quality assurance documentation (ESAC, SPC and related monitoring documents; 4 documents)
- Fifteen graduation portfolios (cohorts 2023–2024 and 2024–2025)

As part of the evaluation of Standard 4, the panel reviewed a representative sample of graduation projects to assess the achieved learning outcomes.

	Cohort 23/24	Cohort 24/25
4 PLO Framework		5
23 PLO Framework – Marketing	2	1
23 PLO Framework – Supply Chain Management	2	
23 PLO Framework – Management	2	
23 PLO Framework – Finance	1	1
23 PLO Framework – Entrepreneurship	1	
Total	**8**	**7**

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