

Research Master Sociology of Culture, Media and the Arts
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Summary

On 26 November 2025, the research master's (RMA) programme Sociology of Culture, Media and the Arts (SCMA) of the Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) was assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment WO OZM Mediastudies (research masters Media Studies). The panel judges that the programme meets all four NVAO standards. Moreover, it establishes that it fulfils all additional aspects of the assessment framework that apply specifically to the quality of a research master programme. As a result, the panel's assessment of the programme is positive.

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The SCMA at EUR stands apart from other RMA programmes in Media Studies through its social scientific lens with which it approaches art, media and culture. It has a coherent and distinctive research-oriented profile at the intersection of sociology, media studies, and arts and culture research. The intended learning outcomes (ILOs) do justice to the domain, level and orientation of the programme. Moreover, its research-oriented nature is properly substantiated in the ILOs, as are its international, intercultural and interdisciplinary scope. The programme explicitly caters to students who envisage positions in either academic or non-academic research. Hence, it is important that the ongoing relevance of the learning outcomes and curriculum contents are monitored and validated in the recently established Professional Advisory Board. As points for attention in the future, there is room for a more explicit articulation of the unique selling proposition of the SCMA in both communication materials and ILOs. Moreover, the programme may want to broaden the notion of what constitutes research as it explicitly prepares students for research-oriented positions outside academia.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The panel endorses the English name of the SCMA programme, as well as the decision to offer the RMA in English. Its international orientation has been evident from the outset in the course contents and is now also visible in the geographical and cultural diversity of the student cohorts. The panel also endorses the abridged programme, a one-year variant for master graduates in a similar discipline with good research capacity. The SCMA programme operates in a strong teaching-learning environment. The curriculum consists of a solid mix of theoretical, methodological and practice-oriented courses, progressing from foundational theory to advanced empirical inquiry. If anything, the programme may want to offer a broader choice of electives notably in courses offered by the Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences. The educational philosophy of the RMA SCMA aligns with the principles of the university and the School: teaching methods are varied and provide for a rich and engaging learning experience, while students take responsibility for their own trajectory. Such autonomy is possible because of the small classrooms, the intensive supervision, and the interactive student-centred learning processes. The admission and selection process is robust and implemented meticulously. The consistently high completion rates, moreover, indicate that the programme is effective in recruiting and supporting capable students. Nonetheless, the panel encourages the team to continue looking for ways to mitigate the study workload and spread it equally across the entire curriculum. The SCMA team consists of highly qualified, internationally recognised, didactically qualified and research-active teaching staff. Students appreciate their expertise, availability and the extensive thesis supervision. As points for attention in the future, the programme team may want to pay more attention to the ethical aspects and positionality of research and make the international exchange an optional component in the curriculum.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The SCMA programme relies on a robust system of assessment that is embedded in relevant policies and practices of the School. The assessment framework is comprehensive and transparent, and the assessment

methods ensure broad coverage of the ILOs. The programme has a solid view on the role of AI in education, and how it is integrated in assessment protocols. Furthermore, course and thesis assessments are of good quality. The sample review demonstrates that thesis assessment is well structured and rigorously implemented in an insightful way. If anything, assessors should account for the oral defence part of the thesis in an equally informative way. The quality assurance system for assessment is both comprehensive and effective. The Examining Board is to be commended for their expertise and pro-active commitment. As points for attention in the future, the panel advises the programme team to develop alternative forms of assignments and assessments to prepare students even better for professional life in and outside academia.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The ILOs are assessed and demonstrated in a systematic way: students who graduate the RMA SCMA have effectively acquired all ILOs, while programme graduates invariably find suitable employment in research informed positions inside and outside academia. The research master thesis constitutes a substantial test of research competence that covers all components of the research cycle and is of value to the academic and scientific discipline. The thesis review demonstrated that graduation projects are of good quality. Furthermore, SCMA graduates display a strong trajectory into both academic and professional research. They find jobs that are commensurate with the domain and the level of their study, and do so in a variety of positions and with a broad range of public, private and non-governmental employers. The number of graduates who eventually pursue a PhD is high. As a point for attention in the future, the programme could encourage students and supervisors to pay more attention to positionality in the thesis.

Score table

The panel assesses the programme as follows:

Research master's programme Sociology of Culture, Media and the Arts

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. Daniël Biltereyst, panel chair

Mark Delmartino MA, panel secretary

Date: 20 March 2026

Introduction

Procedure

Assessment

On 26 November 2025, the research master's programme Sociology of Culture, Media and the Arts (SCMA) of the Erasmus University Rotterdam was assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment WO OZM Mediastudies (research masters Media Studies). The assessment cluster consisted of three programmes, offered by the Erasmus University Rotterdam, the University of Amsterdam 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), as well as the Specification of Additional Criteria for Research Master's Programmes (2016).

Quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment upon request of the cluster WO OZM Mediastudies. Fiona Schouten acted as coordinator in the cluster assessment and Mark Delmartino acted as panel secretary for the assessment of all programmes in the cluster. They have been certified and registered by the NVAO.

Panel composition

Academion composed the peer review panel in cooperation with the institutions taking into account the expertise and independence of the members. In order to strengthen the mutual consistency between the assessment panels within the cluster, the Academion coordinator ensured joint instruction for the panel members and a consistent assessment method across all site visits. This consistency was also a point of attention at all concluding panel meetings during the site visits. Finally, overlap in assessment panels across the various site visits in the cluster further strengthened consistency. The composition of the panels was designed so that at least two panel members also served on another assessment panel in the cluster.

On 18 July 2025, the NVAO approved the panel's composition. The coordinator instructed the panel chair on his role in the site visit according to the Panel chair profile (NVAO 2016) on 2 September 2025. Moreover, a common introductory briefing was held on 30 September 2025 for all panel members in the cluster. At this online meeting, the coordinator informed the panels on the assessment framework, the working method, and the planning of the site visits and reports.

Preparation

In the run-up to the site visit, the programme team at the Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the coordinator and the secretary, and selected representative partners for the various interviews (see Appendix 3). It also determined that the development dialogue would be held during the site visit. The findings from this session did not impact the outcome of the accreditation exercise and have been captured in a separate report.

Furthermore, the programme team produced a self-evaluation report that outlined the key elements of the programme per accreditation standard, and included a student chapter. It also made available an extensive portfolio of programme-specific and faculty-wide documents on a dedicated online drive. Prior to the site visit, the panel reviewed a sample of 15 graduation works among the 37 master theses which had been successfully submitted since the academic year 2020-2021. The sample was representative of the final scores and the examiners involved in thesis supervision across all theses. It included six theses of students who had followed the abridged programme. The list of materials put at the disposition of the panel, as well as details on the thesis review are provided in Appendix 4.

The panel members studied the programme information, reviewed the thesis selection and submitted their first observations to the secretary, who compiled the input. This compilation served as a basis for the preparatory online meeting on 19 November 2025, when the panel identified the programme's key strengths, challenges, and questions. On behalf of the panel, the secretary reported the main outcomes of this meeting to the team in Rotterdam on 20 November 2025. An Open Consultation Hour for students, teaching and support staff involved in the programme was scheduled alongside the panel's preparatory meeting. Eventually, nobody used the opportunity to discuss individually and confidentially with the panel.

Site visit

During the site visit on 26 November 2025, the panel interviewed various programme representatives and held internal meetings to discuss the outcome of these sessions. It used the concluding meeting to deliberate on the programme quality according to the assessment framework. Afterwards, the panel chair publicly presented the panel's preliminary findings, general observations and suggestions for further development.

Report

After the site visit, the secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to the coordinator for peer assessment. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel for feedback. After processing this feedback, the coordinator sent the draft report to the programme team in Rotterdam for a check on factual inaccuracies. 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 Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication and the Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Panel

The panel assessing the research master's programme Sociology of Culture, Media and the Arts at the Erasmus University Rotterdam consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. D. (Daniël) Biltereyst, full professor in Communication Sciences at the Department of Communication Sciences of Ghent University Gent (Belgium) [panel chair];
- Prof. dr. S. (Sarita) Malik, associate Pro Vice-Chancellor of Research Impact and professor in Media, Culture and Communication, Social and Political Sciences at Brunel University of London (United Kingdom);
- Prof. dr. G.E.E. (Ginette) Verstraete, visiting professor in Comparative Arts and Media at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam;
- Dr. U. (Unni) From Andreasen, associate professor in Media and Journalism and head of the School of Communication and Culture of Aarhus University (Denmark);
- A. (Aengus) ten Cate-Schulte BA, student of the research master's programme Media, Art and Performance Studies at Utrecht University [student member].

Each panel member, the panel secretary and the programmes have filled out the Statement of Impartiality and non-disclosure agreement, as required by the NVAO. They can confirm that the assessment was carried out in complete independence.

Information on the programme

Name of the institution:	Erasmus University Rotterdam
Address:	Burgemeester Oudlaan 50, 3062PA Rotterdam
Website:	http://www.eur.nl
BRIN-number:	21PE
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Programme name:	M Media Studies (research)
ISAT number:	60832
Orientation of the programme:	Academic
Level of the programme:	Master (NLQF7)
Number of credits:	120 EC
Language of instruction:	English
Professional requirements:	no
Specializations or tracks:	none
Location:	Rotterdam
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Assessment group:	WO OZM Mediastudies
Awarded degree:	MSc
Submission date NVAO:	1 May 2026

Description of the assessment

Organization

The research master (RMA) programme Sociology of Culture, Media and the Arts (SCMA) was established in 2009 and is offered by staff from the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (ESHCC) and the Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences. The Department of Media and Communication (M&C) at ESHCC is responsible for the coordination of the programme.

ESHCC is led by a management team, which includes the dean, the vice dean research, the vice dean education, the director of operations and a student member. The School hosts a faculty-wide examination board, which ensures the quality of the organisation and procedures around tests and examinations. M&C is managed by the head of department, the education programme director (EPD), and the research programme director.

The SCMA programme has a dedicated academic coordinator, who works alongside the EPD to manage and safeguard the quality of the curriculum. A designated programme coordinator from the School's Educational Office is responsible for the practical organisation and day-to-day administrative support of the research master. The EPD consults regularly with the Programme Committee for Media and Communication, which consists of five students and five teaching staff, and meets around six times a year. The SCMA is represented in the programme committee by one student and one teaching staff.

Recommendations previous panel

In the previous accreditation round, the then panel issued a positive conclusion on the RMA SCMA. It highlighted several strengths and issued one recommendation, i.e. to substantiate in a more elaborate way the exemptions granted for the abridged programme. The current panel noticed that the School and the programme team have taken good care in selecting the courses for the abridged curriculum to ensure that all abridged students meet the ILOs of the research master. The panel also learned that since the previous accreditation visit, students enrolling on the abridged programme have not made requests for additional exemptions.

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 RMA Sociology of Culture, Media and the Arts (SCMA) aims to prepare talented and motivated Dutch and international students with a bachelor degree in the humanities or social sciences for positions in academic or non-academic research. As a two-year full-time programme, the SCMA focuses on training students to conduct research at an advanced level, both theoretically and methodologically. It also provides students with professional skills that are useful in academia and beyond, such as the ability to analyse and solve complex problems, creative and strategic thinking, teamwork and collaboration, and an independent, professional and critical mindset.

The SCMA partly overlaps with other programmes in media studies, arts and culture studies, sociology, social sciences, and communication science. Compared to RMA programmes under the broad label 'media studies' or in the domain of culture and the arts, the MSc programme in SCMA at the EUR distinguishes itself through its social-scientific orientation aimed at empirical research on culture, media and the arts. The SCMA differs from RMA programmes in sociology and the social sciences more generally through its substantive focus on culture, media, and the arts.

Based on the written materials and the discussions on site, the panel establishes that the SCMA has a unique profile at the intersection of sociology, media studies, and arts and culture studies. It stands apart from other Media Studies RMA programmes through its social sciences orientation and its focus on empirical research. The programme draws extensively on the available expertise at EUR in media and communication, arts and culture studies, as well as public administration and sociology. The panel appreciates in particular the sociological lens through which art, media, and culture are approached.

The panel acknowledges that the SCMA aims to educate for a broad labour market that includes - but also goes beyond - academia. In fact, SCMA graduates can fulfil various roles in society, in line with the international and advanced research-oriented nature of the curriculum, such as consultancy or policy positions. While this dual focus is clearly present in the current programme, the panel sees room for including more explicit attention to non-academic career trajectories. The programme team concurs with this remark. During the site visit, the repositioning of the programme was tabled as a topic for the Development Dialogue. The panel endorses the plans of the programme team to highlight and reinforce the relevance of the SCMA for other (i.e. non-academic) types of employment.

Furthermore, the panel notes that the programme's unique selling proposition is clear at the level of the profile, in the written self-evaluation report and in the discussion with programme representatives. However, there is some more work to do in operationalising the sociological lens in art, media and culture, and in communicating and highlighting the value of distinctiveness of social sciences and humanities coming together. In sum, there is room according to the panel for clarifying what is described in the intended learning outcomes as the programme's 'field of study'.

Intended learning outcomes
The SCMA programme's overarching goal is to train students to become skilled, critical, versatile, and internationally oriented researchers who can succeed in PhD trajectories as well as other positions demanding advanced research skills and experience. To this end, the programme has formulated eleven intended learning outcomes (ILOs), which are listed in Appendix 1 to this report.

The ILOs reflect the dual focus of the SCMA programme, combining a solid grounding in disciplinary knowledge and research methodology with broader academic and professional skills. Students acquire knowledge of, and insight into, the disciplinary and theoretical approaches in the social sciences (i.e. the breadth of the field), gain extensive theoretical knowledge of the sociology of culture, media, and the arts (i.e. the depth of the field), and develop competencies in both academically oriented and applied social scientific research.

Having studied the set of programme ILOs, the panel acknowledges that there is a clear link between the eleven ILOs and the four Dublin Descriptors for master programmes: all ILOs cater to at least one descriptor, and each descriptor is addressed by multiple ILOs. These learning outcomes, moreover, are formulated in such a way that they do justice to the substance (Media Studies), level (research master) and orientation

(academic) of the SCMA programme. Hence, it is fair to state according to the panel that the ILOs are in line with the requirements for master programmes as described in NLQF level 7.

The panel notes that the ILOs describe the competencies required for a research career: the integration of methodological sophistication with intercultural and interdisciplinary competencies ensures that graduates are prepared for professional research roles in both academic and applied contexts. The panel also welcomes the explicit attention to the international, intercultural and interdisciplinary scope of the programme in two learning outcomes.

The panel appreciates that the set of ILOs is very clear and explicit in describing the level, orientation and research character of the programme. However, the field of study is described in very general terms, without paying much attention to the (unique selling proposition of the) SCMA profile. In fact, apart from the introductory text to the ILOs there is no direct reference to (the breadth or depth of the field of) Media Studies in the eleven formulated learning outcomes. In line with its comment on the SCMA profile, the panel advises the programme team to be more specific in the formulated learning outcomes as to what constitutes the distinctive character of SCMA at EUR and its field of studies. In addition, there could be more attention in the ILOs to competencies that prepare for other research-informed career opportunities, beyond academia.

Professional field
The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the teaching staff involved in the programme are well informed about the current domain-specific developments in the field. Several staff play an active role in international associations and research networks, and maintain close relationships with departments and degree programmes at partner universities across the world. In this way, the teaching staff ensures that that the contents of the SCMA programme (continue to) reflect the state-of-the-art in the domain of Media Studies.

Moreover, a Professional Advisory Committee (PAC) consisting of teaching and professional staff members, was established in 2017 to liaise between the M&C department, its degree programmes, and the professional field of media and communication. The panel was informed that the PAC has made the professional field more visible in the respective programme curricula, including the SCMA. This exposure to the professional field is furthermore ensured through frequent guest lectures in SCMA courses, through the participation of students in the Netherlands Research School for Media Studies, and in their attendance of an international conference. In addition, each year alumni share their experiences with SCMA students on how to enter the labour market in a PhD trajectory and in a research-informed positions outside academia.

Since the previous accreditation visit, the PAC has been complemented with a Professional Advisory Board (PAB). This group of professionals from the field also operates at department level and meets twice a year to discuss the respective curricula and to advice on how to keep the programmes future proof. During a roundtable in January 2025, for instance, the PAB brainstormed about the types of knowledge, research, analytical and digital skills it would expect an M&C graduate to possess. The panel welcomes the creation of the PAB: while its remit is department-wide, its advice and input are of direct relevance to the SCMA programme in general and the validation of its learning outcomes in particular.

Considerations
Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the RMA programme has a clear profile: the SCMA at EUR stands apart from other RMA programmes in Media Studies through its social scientific lens with which it approaches art, media and culture. It has a coherent and distinctive research-oriented profile at the intersection of sociology, media studies, and arts and culture research.

The panel considers that the intended learning outcomes do justice to the domain, level and orientation of the SCMA programme. Moreover, the research-oriented nature of the SCMA programme is properly substantiated in the ILOs, as are its international, intercultural and interdisciplinary dimension and scope.

The programme explicitly caters to students who envisage positions in either academic or non-academic research. Hence, it is important that the ongoing relevance of the learning outcomes and curriculum contents are monitored and validated. In this regard, the panel acknowledges the expert position of the teaching staff, and welcomes the establishment of a Professional Advisory Board.

In addition to these considerations that altogether warrant a positive judgement on this standard, the panel suggests the SCMA programme to make its unique selling proposition more explicit, and to spotlight the distinctive value of combining social sciences and humanities in its communications and marketing. Moreover, the programme team may want to adjust the formulation of some of the programme ILOS to better reflect the programme's unique selling proposition from a substantive point of view. Finally, there is room to broaden the notion of what constitutes research in an RMA programme that explicitly prepares students for research-oriented positions outside academia.

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

Programme

The RMA SCMA is a two-year full-time 120 EC master programme taught in English. Each academic year lasts 42 weeks and consists of four terms of equal size (15 EC). The core courses in the first three terms of year one set the scene, bring all students on par and provide them with a solid foundation on which to build their more individualised research trajectory as of term 4. The second year enhances theoretical and methodological specialisation and enriches the academic outlook and international experience of the students. A total of 12 courses amounting to 85 EC are specifically designed for - and exclusively available to - SCMA students.

In addition to the 'full' programme, the SCMA also offers an abridged variant of 62,5 EC, which enables talented master graduates from the departments of Sociology, Arts and Culture Studies, and Media and Communication at EUR to strengthen their research skills and profile. The abridged variant consists entirely of courses that are also offered in the full variant and have been selected to allow students with a one-year master's degree to achieve the same learning outcomes as their two-year research master fellows. Abridged students are exempt from the international exchange, the research traineeship, the international conference participation, the research school elective and a second research master seminar. All but one course (the 5 EC second elective in term two) in the abridged curriculum is specifically designed for SCMA students.

The curricula of both variants are presented in Appendix 2 to this report. The panel notes that in both variants the programme's core principle is research-based: the courses are set up in such a way that they

follow advancements in relevant fields and subject areas, and ensure that students develop knowledge and skills for academic research. The contents and structure of the curriculum are very good. The programme is well-balanced and rigorously research-driven, offering clear progression from foundational theory to advanced empirical inquiry. According to the panel, the curriculum is coherent across both years of the full programme, as well as in the abridged variant. In both cases there is a clear connection between the educational content and the research skills to be acquired.

The curriculum fulfils all requirements concerning analytical and methodological skills, awareness of current developments in the field, and pressing societal issues. The inclusion of courses focused on research design, advanced methods, and sociology of media and the arts establishes strong methodological and theoretical grounding. Furthermore, the panel establishes that there is a clear alignment between the course learning goals and the ILOs at programme level. It was also informed that almost all courses in the full and in the abridged programme are offered at research master level. Prior to going abroad, SCMA students obtain validation of the courses they will take during their international exchange. Moreover, there are clear arrangements that they take on extra study load in the elective research workshops and/or advanced methods course they share with regular master students.

During the site visit, the panel discussed several issues related to the curriculum. First, students from both variants indicated to the panel that they have a considerable degree of freedom to tailor the programme to their individual interests: two-year students build their own research profile and portfolio through elective courses, international exchange, conference participation, research papers, projects and the master thesis; the abridged students write course papers on a topic of their interest, have two elective courses, and choose their own thesis topic. Hence, the panel establishes that the SCMA programme allows students to incorporate specific individual components in the curriculum that broaden their research interests and capacities. Nonetheless, students indicated in their student chapter and during the site visit to the panel that they would like to have a broader choice of electives and be able to take up courses that are currently offered by the Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences.

Second, the international exchange ‘course’ of 20 EC in the first half of the second year is a compulsory component of the full programme. Students spend approximately five months at a foreign partner university where they take elective courses based on their research interests. The panel discussed the compulsory character of this course component with all stakeholders on site, including during the Development Dialogue where the programme team presented its intention to allow students to go on exchange at a university in the Netherlands. All stakeholders concurred in praising the opportunity for a study period abroad and in making the international character of the exchange optional. The panel also understood that there are various reasons why an international exchange can be an obstacle rather than an opportunity: some students need to work alongside their studies to finance them, while others may have difficulties finding affordable housing twice. Moreover, some foreign students do not see the added value of going abroad again after having travelled to the Netherlands for the SCMA. Finally, several students and alumni indicated that the international exchange adds to the workload of the two-year programme and constitutes an additional element that may jeopardise their timely graduation. By making the international exchange optional, students will be able decide for themselves how to finance their studies and arrange their housing, as well as how to manage their workload and ensure (timely) graduation. According to the panel, the international exchange component is well conceived; once optional, it will become an important selling proposition for prospective applicants.

Third, the abridged programme variant is well designed according to the panel and constitutes an important element to ensure the long-term sustainability of the SCMA programme. Given the - recently confirmed -

'rule' by the Dutch Inspectorate that a one-year full-time programme consists of 60 EC, the panel wonders why the abridged version amounts to 62.5 EC. According to the programme team, the abridged variant is not so much conceived as a one-year programme, but rather starts from the full variant of 120 EC whereby abridged students are exempted for components that add up to 57.5 EC. The programme team, however, indicated that it would verify the current set-up against the legal provisions, and, where necessary, adjust the size of the abridged variant.

Finally, the panel wondered to what extent ethics and positionality are part of the curriculum. The teaching staff informed the panel that ethics is addressed among others in the research seminar course, while students indicated that their research proposal should be handed in to the Ethics Committee. According to the programme team, there is no explicit policy on positionality but it is left to the students and their individual supervisors to pay attention to positionality in the master thesis. The panel therefore suggests the programme team to pay more explicit attention to ethical aspects of research throughout the curriculum, to communicate this accordingly in the course manuals, and to consider embedding positionality as an integral component of the master thesis.

Graduation trajectory
All SCMA students write an individual master thesis, under the supervision of a teaching staff member. The thesis has the form of a research article for an international peer-reviewed journal of maximum 10.000 words. The master thesis amounts to 25 EC and includes the research proposal, supervision meetings, conducting research, thesis writing and oral defence. As part of the 5 EC international conference component, students present their research project to an academic audience. The panel gathered from the written materials and the on-site discussions that the thesis trajectory is a well-structured process, communicated transparently to students and meticulously implemented by the teaching staff/supervisors. The requirements are systematically described, and in their thesis SCMA students address important research-related elements: theory, analysis, methodology, linguistic precision, and correct formatting.

Students and alumni indicated to the panel that they were able to pursue a thesis topic of their own interest, and that they were invariably satisfied with the quality and amount of supervision. Their statements confirmed the very high scores graduates had given in the annual curriculum evaluation (and mentioned in the self-evaluation report) to the thesis process, the amount of supervision, the support with formulating the research question and research methodology, and the feedback they received during the entire trajectory.

In terms of workload, the panel notes that the master thesis constitutes an important deliverable: SCMA students who are intrinsically motivated and ambitious go to great lengths to deliver a high-quality product. In their curriculum evaluation, however, graduates were less enthusiastic about the study load allocated to the master thesis as many students tend to spend way more time on the thesis than 25 EC. The panel did notice, moreover, that because students also want to excel in other courses, there often is a workload peak around the middle of year two (or halfway the curriculum for the abridged programme): students are still completing the assignments for their second term courses, possibly while abroad, but are also already starting the preparations for the thesis. While the master thesis is formally scheduled in the second half of the final year, students are encouraged to identify a thesis topic, meet their supervisor and start preparing for the research proposal as of November (i.e. well before term 3). The panel agrees to the size of the master thesis and to spreading the thesis trajectory over eight months (instead of two terms). However, the programme team may want to balance the effective workload in the respective curriculum components across the different terms.

As part of its external assessment, the panel reviewed a sample of master theses. The outcomes of this review will be discussed in dedicated sections of standards 3 and 4. In so far as the graduation trajectory is concerned, the panel establishes that it is coherently designed and academically rigorous. Students effectively have the opportunity to complete the entire empirical research cycle within their thesis, from conceptualisation and design to data collection, analysis, thesis writing and dissemination. The sequential structure, beginning with proposal design and leading to full empirical execution allows students to apply the skills they developed across the curriculum. According to the panel, the size of the thesis and the credits allocated to it allow students to work with empirical rigour and benefit from sufficient supervision and feedback.

Language of instruction
Since its initial accreditation, the SCMA programme has been taught in English. The panel understands that this was a conscious decision to reflect the strong international orientation of the programme and to prepare students for a labour market (inside and outside academia) that is becoming increasingly international. By offering the programme in English, students are equipped to engage with global academic standards and participate in international professional networks. In addition, the English language makes the programme accessible to a diverse student body and enriches the learning environment with a variety of cultural perspectives.

The current panel endorses the English title of the programme, as well as the decision to offer the research master programme in English. The written materials and the discussions on site have convinced the panel that the SCMA programme is embedded in an internationally oriented teaching and research environment at the intersection of the humanities and social sciences. Its international orientation has been evident from the outset and has further increased throughout the years in the courses and the programme structure, as well as in the teaching staff and the students.

Learning environment
The SCMA programme is closely aligned with the educational philosophy of EUR, ESHCC and ESSB. The programme reflects the ambition of the university to develop global citizens with expertise, critical thinking and an entrepreneurial mindset. It does so by training students to analyse and understand culture, media and the arts through a social scientific and empirical lens in real-world contexts. In line with the School's strategy plan, the SCMA fosters awareness of the social role of media and culture, builds students' analytical and methodological capacity, and encourages them to engage with pressing societal questions such as cultural inequality, diversity, participation, and the impact of digitalisation.

The university and the School are committed to education that makes a difference. In the case of SCMA this is realised in a supportive and enriching learning environment featuring small-scale teaching, intensive research training, interdisciplinary collaboration, and opportunities for international exchange and applied research. This, in turn, enables SCMA students to develop the knowledge, mindset and capacity to have an impact when addressing complex challenges at local, national and global levels.

The SCMA programme promotes active and independent learning, encouraging students to take responsibility for their own education within a structured framework. This framework is shaped by a teaching approach that combines interactive methods, critical thinking and the application of knowledge. The objective is to implement a learning process and teaching methods that facilitate and encourage both active and cooperative learning, for example by encouraging in-class discussion in small-scale seminars and workshops. Throughout the two-year curriculum, there is a gradual shift from instructions in mandatory

classes to group-based instructions in elective classes, and finally to individual and independent research work, culminating in the master thesis.

The on-site discussions confirmed the above statements from the self-evaluation report. The panel notes that the teaching methods are varied and provide students with a rich and engaging learning experience. Moreover, the panel welcomes the emphasis on student independence, freedom and autonomy in taking responsibility for their own trajectory. The programme does indeed realize this independence thanks to small classrooms, intense supervision, and interactive student-centred learning processes. Students from their side applauded the above-mentioned principles, notably the freedom to focus on their own interests in assignments and the thesis, the small-scale character of the courses, and the engagement from teaching and supervision staff, which makes the research master education experience worthwhile. In addition, alumni mentioned to the panel that the capacity to process materials and the critical mindset they acquired during their study constituted major takeaways from the programme for their professional career. If anything, the panel sees room to integrate more case-work and involve more external experts from academia and the professional field in the curriculum.

Student guidance and information
The panel gathered from the written materials and the onsite discussions that the EUR and the School have a comprehensive system of support facilities in place, which allows the SCMA programme to provide appropriate guidance and information to all its students. These facilities and staff also cater for the needs of specific groups, such as new or international students, as well as students with a functional impairment.

In addition, the programme can rely on dedicated staff members who provide targeted support to the SCMA students: the tasks and responsibilities of the education programme director, the academic coordinator, and the programme coordinator were described aptly and extensively in the self-evaluation report. The discussions on site have convinced the panel that these team members, as well as the teaching staff, play an important role in turning the study period of the SCMA students into a success. Students and alumni indicated to the panel that the teaching and support staff genuinely care about the SCMA students and about their academic and personal growth. Staff members clearly take their (informal) mentoring role seriously. Moreover, students and alumni were equally positive about the information and guidance they received prior to enrolment.

Admission, intake and success rate
The SCMA is a selective RMA programme targeting motivated students with a strong academic record and a demonstrable interest in conducting research in the fields of culture, media and the arts. The admission requirements and the application procedures are clearly stipulated on the programme website. In order to be admissible for the full SCMA programme, applicants need to have a bachelor's degree in humanities or social sciences, a Grade Point Average (GPA) of at least 7.5, a basic knowledge of social scientific research methods, solid academic writing and analytical skills, an international orientation, a sound motivation, and proper English language proficiency. Students who have earned an MSc in Sociology, an MA in Arts and Culture Studies or an MA in Media Studies at EUR with excellent results (GPA 8.0 and MA thesis 8.0) can apply for the abridged programme.

The data on application, admission and enrolment numbers in the self-evaluation show that the programme features a rigorous admission system, which is administered meticulously. Over the years the share of applicants who met the admission criteria has been growing. Those who were rejected often did not have the appropriate bachelor degree or the required GPA. Moreover, the panel gathered from the data and the discussions on site that applicants who meet the SCMA criteria tend to be particularly resourceful and often

are also admitted in other programmes. Hence, at most half of the admitted students eventually enrol in the programme. The panel welcomes the efforts of the SCMA programme to stipulate in a transparent way both the admission requirements and the application process, and to keep track of the reasons why an applicant is rejected or why a selected student declines the offer.

Since the previous accreditation, 17 students were admitted to the abridged programme where they joined a total of 51 full programme students. On average, the yearly student intake is just below ten students. Around 40% of the students are Dutch, 40% are EU citizens, and 20% have a nationality outside EEA. The drop-out has been limited (less than one student per year on average), while most students finish their – full or abridged – programme in time. These numbers show according to the panel that the programme is effective in attracting the envisaged students, i.e. Dutch and international students with an interest in humanities and social sciences research. The success rate moreover demonstrates that the admitted and enrolled students are consistently talented and motivated.

During the visit, the panel discussed the concern of the programme team that the intake has been and continues to be rather limited. While the composition of the respective cohorts is sufficiently diverse, the programme team would like to attract around 12 students per year for the full programme. The sustainability of the programme intake was a topic during the Development Dialogue (see dedicated report). The panel endorses the ideas of the programme team to attract more students and sees room for a more precise definition of the field of study and a better marketing of the unique selling proposition of the SCMA (see section on profile).

Furthermore, the panel discussed the feasibility of the programme with several stakeholders. While the success rate is very high, it was clear from the student chapter and the discussions that students are very ambitious. Studying a two-year research master programme is challenging anyway (the programme is very transparent in announcing on the website that the programme requires 40 hours of study per week), but the fact that SCMA students strive for excellence adds on to the challenge. This then translates into a workload that is perceived as high, which leads in certain cases to stress and anxiety among students. Students indicated to the panel that - in addition to the previously mentioned third semester - the first semester combines a high workload with high expectations. The panel understands both positions: the workload requirements of a two-year full-time study and the ambition of SCMA students to excel by exceeding these requirements. It therefore supports the efforts of the programme team to examine the students' workload across the curriculum and welcomes its plans to mitigate the workload by decreasing the amount of required literature, as well as the size or number of course assignments. The panel also suggests raising awareness about workload, expectations and ambitions in the very beginning of the programme, including during the introduction week.

Staff

According to the staff overview, the SCMA programme involves 23 teaching staff members. Such a number allows for a student-centred teaching approach, small-scale education and a high level of interactivity that is central to the programme's didactic concept. All teaching and supervision are provided by qualified faculty, ensuring that the aims, objectives, content, didactics and organisation of the programme are achieved.

The panel notes that all lecturers are active researchers with a solid track record in terms of scholarly publications, training and supervision of PhD students, and the acquisition of external research funds from Dutch and European research funding bodies. Many teaching staff direct or take part in international research programmes and projects, are members of recognised research and graduate schools in the field, and are active in relevant international associations and research networks. The panel was informed that in

the most recent external research assessment (conforming to SEP protocol), the research units at EUR to which the SCMA lecturers and supervisors belong, have been rated as very good to excellent.

The overview moreover indicated that all tenured staff members in the SCMA have the University Teaching Qualification (UTQ), while eight staff also obtained the Senior Teaching Qualification and nine staff took the university's Academic Leadership course. Given its international dimension, the programme also deploys international teaching staff. Currently, about 20% is non-Dutch. The panel advises increasing this share so that the SCMA programme more accurately reflects the international diversity of its student body.

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions with students and alumni that they very much appreciate the expertise and dedication of the teaching staff. Students described their teachers as very skilled and engaging. Moreover, most teachers are empathetic and understand the challenges students face. Staff also obtains high scores in the curriculum evaluation and the National Student survey with students being particularly satisfied with the English language proficiency, the subject expertise and the availability of the SCMA staff.

Staff, students and alumni moreover confirmed during the visit the statement in the self-evaluation report that there is a genuine SCMA community, a strong bond between the programme, its students, lecturers, and professional services staff. Staff likes to work in the programme because of the international character of the cohorts and their motivation and ambition. Moreover, the teaching staff is open to the diversity in the student group and actively draws on their variety in backgrounds, experiences, skills and experiences.

In sum, the panel establishes that the SCMA is part of an internationally oriented teaching and research environment at the crossroads of humanities and social sciences. Teaching staff has good substantive and didactical experience, and is also appreciated by the students for their availability and empathy. A good number of staff is international, and many are highly qualified, internationally recognised, and research-active in the domains that underpin the sociological and empirical profile of the RMA. Their expertise and contacts foster interdisciplinary interaction and give students access to a broad variety of methodological and theoretical perspectives. Because courses integrate research, students are consistently exposed to cutting-edge knowledge and methodologies in the field. Thesis supervisors are invariably experienced researchers who uphold disciplinary alignment and methodological rigour. As a result, students benefit from direct engagement with experts who not only convey theoretical knowledge but also model rigorous analytical and methodological approaches. The involvement in the SCMA of accomplished researchers represents according to the panel both a strength in terms of academic quality and a key factor in preparing students for advanced professional or academic trajectories.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the research master SCMA operates in a strong teaching-learning environment. This appreciation applies to the relevant curriculum, the befitting learning environment, the appropriate admission criteria, the pertinent support services, the transparent information provision, and the expertise and commitment of the teaching staff on the programme.

The panel endorses the English name of the programme, as well as the decision to offer the research master programme in English. Its international dimension and orientation have been evident from the outset in the course contents and are now also visible in the diversity of students and teaching staff.

In addition to the two-year SCMA, the panel also endorses the abridged programme, a one-year variant for master graduates in a similar discipline with good research capacity.

The panel considers that the SCMA offers a solid mix of theoretical, methodological and practice-oriented courses. It offers progression from foundational theory to advanced empirical inquiry. The course descriptions are comprehensive and provide students with a clear understanding of the scope, the objectives, and the expectations associated with each module.

The educational philosophy of the programme aligns with the principles of the university and the School: teaching methods are varied and provide students with a rich and engaging learning experience. The panel welcomes the emphasis on the autonomy of students who take responsibility for their own trajectory. Such independence is possible because of the small classrooms, the intensive supervision, and the interactive student-centred learning processes.

The admission and selection process is robust and implemented meticulously. The consistently high completion rates, moreover, indicate according to the panel that the programme is effective in recruiting and supporting capable students who are well-prepared to meet its demands.

The panel considers that the SCMA programme is offered by a highly qualified, internationally recognised and research-active team. Staff invariably has good research expertise and is didactically qualified. Students appreciate the expertise of the staff, their availability and the extensive thesis supervision.

In addition to these considerations that altogether warrant a positive judgement on this standard, the panel recommends the SCMA to make the international exchange an optional component of the programme, to pay more attention to ethical aspects of research in the curriculum, and to consider embedding positionality as an integral component of the master thesis. Furthermore, it advises the programme to mitigate the workload across the curriculum and to offer a broader choice of electives notably in courses offered by the Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences.

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

Assessment system

Assessment in the SCMA programme is embedded in the assessment policy of the School and follows the principle of constructive alignment: course assessments are directly linked to the course learning goals, which in turn relate to the intended learning outcomes of the programme as a whole. This alignment is laid down in an assessment plan, while lecturers account in an assessment matrix how and at what level every learning goal is assessed in their course.

Throughout the programme there is a balance between formative and summative assessments, while feedback constitutes an important part of the student's learning journey: students receive and lecturers provide feedback in both forms of assessment in order to allow students to reflect on their achievements and use it for their future development.

The panel has studied the School's assessment policy and finds it of good quality and exhaustive as it covers a wide variety of topics that are relevant to academic assessment practices. The principle of constructive alignment, moreover, ensures a high degree of transparency and fairness in assessment. The panel also welcomes the division of labour in assessment: the education programme director ensures that the curriculum meets the objectives set in the ILOs. The academic coordinator monitors that that there is alignment between the assessment modes and the learning objectives in every course, and ensures that different types of assessment are used across the curriculum. Lecturers provide information about the courses and their assessment modes in the course guides, which include grading rubrics, assessment criteria and their respective weights, and submission deadlines. These rubrics help students understand what they can expect from the assessment. Every year, the education programme director reviews the draft course guides and provides feedback to the lecturers.

Students and alumni indicated in the student chapter and during the visit that they are overall satisfied with the day-to-day implementation of the assessment framework. There is sufficient variety in the assessment modes: essays are a good way to learn about course content in depth, while creative assignments (presentations, proposal submission, pitching research ideas) improve skills that are useful in their professional career. Students and alumni also appreciate that they can focus on their own interests in the assignments. If anything, students would like some more elaborate feedback on some of their course assignments. The feedback on the different stages of their thesis trajectory, however, is always sufficient and very often comprehensive.

During the visit, the panel discussed three issues in relation to assessment. First, the panel wondered about the way GenAI is addressed in both education and assessment and learned that the school and the programme have a policy on GenAI that is implemented in practice. An AI Task Force was established in 2023, which developed recommendations on how to responsibly address GenAI in teaching and assessment. Several of these recommendations have in the meantime been implemented: there are no longer take-home exams; the Learning & Innovation team tests exam questions using ChatGPT for AI robustness; and students now have to include page numbers in their in-text references. Moreover, the panel was informed that there are specific AI guidelines for lecturers in the school's assessment policy, and SCMA students are trained how to use GenAI in a responsible and informed way.

Second, the panel discussed how course contents, teaching formats, deliverables and assessment methods prepare students for professional life outside academia. While it gathered from different stakeholders that this is on the radar of the programme team, the panel also sees room for developing alternative forms such as blogs, podcasts, vlogs, wikis, etc. that would prepare students even better. It therefore invites the programme team and its expert support staff such as the Learning & Innovation team to reflect how some of the current assignments could be replaced by alternative tests and grading rubrics. By experimenting with - and eventually implementing - assignments with a broader reach, the programme will also better meet its aim to have societal impact.

Third, the panel discussed the workload for both students and staff in relation to assessment. It noticed that the assessment plan forms a good basis for and overview of the different course assessments in the curriculum. However, the panel missed a clear rationale for choosing and timing the assignments. Hence, it advises the programme team to develop a helicopter view that will allow to balance and calibrate the high and low points of assignment and assessment pressure throughout the curriculum. As a concrete example, the panel notes that SCMA students are expected to deliver two publishable papers for two different courses, which seems too much work and too one-sided as a competency test.

Thesis assessment

To ensure the quality, reliability and transparency of the thesis assessment, the programme follows a structured and uniform system. All students independently write a master thesis, which is based on a research proposal. The research proposal is assessed on four substantive criteria and results in a pass/fail judgement, while supervisor and second reader assess the thesis product according to six criteria. These assessment criteria cover the different stages of the research cycle.

As part of its external assessment, the panel reviewed a sample of 15 research master theses and their assessment. While the quality of the master thesis will be addressed in the next standard, the panel found the quality of the thesis assessment very convincing. In almost all cases, the panel agreed to the final score and thought that the evaluation form had been completed in an informative and insightful way. Hence, the overall thesis assessment process appears to be well-structured and effective. The completed thesis assessment forms demonstrate an excellent level of feedback and evaluation, and the process followed is exemplary. The panel welcomes in this regard the good quality assessment forms with clear evaluation criteria which are graded systematically and individually. While it endorses the decision to include an oral defence of the thesis, the panel advises the programme to account for this part of the thesis in an equally informative way in the evaluation form.

Quality assurance

The School's Examination Board is an independent entity tasked with ensuring the quality of assessments in each degree programme offered by the school. It comprises two members from each of the three departments, plus one external member. The Examination Board ensures that all examinations and tests comply with the requirements set out in the Teaching and Examination Regulations, which in turn are a prerequisite for students to obtain their degree.

The board's primary responsibilities include evaluating the overall assessment structure to ensure it meets final qualifications, conducting regular reviews of the quality of exams and final assignments, appointing examiners and providing them with guidelines for creating, administering, and grading assessments. Each year, the Examination Board conducts targeted reviews of a sample of courses across all ESHCC programmes and specialisations, examining aspects such as the use of assessment matrices, the presence of clear grading rubrics and the clarity of test instructions. In addition, the board yearly reviews a sample of ten master theses across the school, focusing on the completeness of assessment forms, consistency between feedback and grades, compliance with assessment procedures, plagiarism checks and adherence to formal requirements.

During the site visit, the panel spoke to several Examination Board members, who indicated that the SCMA programme is doing well in terms of assessment quality. The panel notes that the board members are well aware of their tasks, and implement these in a proactive way and with much expertise. Every year, they report on their activities in a comprehensive and insightful way. According to the panel, the Examination Board functions well and reflects the overall quality of the programme's and school's assessment policy and practices.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the research master SCMA can rely on a robust system of assessment that is embedded in relevant policies and practices of the School. The assessment framework is comprehensive, transparent, and aligns with the School's assessment policy and the programme's learning outcomes. The SCMA programme employs different assessment methods, including empirical research reports, data analysis projects, essays, presentations, and a master thesis,

ensuring broad coverage of the ILOs. The panel appreciates moreover the solid view on the role of AI in education, and how it is integrated in assessment protocols.

The course assessments and the thesis assessment are of good quality. Course assessments are designed to evaluate students' advanced research skills, analytical capacity, and theoretical integration. The assessment criteria are clearly communicated in course manuals, and rubrics are standardised across modules. Its sample review of thesis assessment forms demonstrates according to the panel that thesis assessment is well structured and rigorously implemented in an insightful way. As a point for attention in the future, the assessors could account for the oral defence part of the thesis in an equally informative way in the evaluation form.

Furthermore, the panel thinks highly of the quality assurance system for assessment, which is both comprehensive and effective. It commends the Examining Board for their expertise and pro-active commitment.

In addition to these considerations that altogether warrant a positive judgement on this standard, the panel recommends the SCMA programme team to develop alternative forms of assignments and assessments to prepare students even better for professional life in and outside academia.

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

There are two ways to establish whether the intended learning outcomes have been achieved: by reviewing the quality of the final projects and by looking at the professional whereabouts of the alumni after their graduation. The panel has looked at both elements when assessing the quality of this research master programme in Media Studies.

Thesis quality

All courses in the SCMA programme are designed in such a way that they contribute to achieving the intended learning outcomes, with all eleven ILOs being covered and assessed in the compulsory components of the curriculum. The master thesis is the final and integrative component in which students demonstrate their ability to conduct independent academic research. It reflects the knowledge and research skills acquired throughout the programme and covers the entire research cycle: from formulating a clear research problem and question, selecting and applying appropriate theoretical and methodological approaches, conducting empirical analysis, to writing and drawing well-founded conclusions.

The panel found that in all 15 cases, the theses were of sufficient quality. They all reflected a level one can reasonably expect of a research master programme and their overall quality ranged from good to excellent. Hence, according to the panel it is fair to conclude that students who successfully pass the master thesis have effectively achieved the programme learning outcomes.

Reflecting on the quality of the thesis sample, the panel notes that the thesis topics selected by the students are relevant and intellectually meaningful within the programme's research domain. They reflect a solid understanding of the field's key questions and demonstrate that students are able to identify relevant research questions with both academic and societal significance. The theses provide evidence that students reach a good level of analytical, methodological and theoretical sophistication, and show strong empirical competence and methodological awareness. The students rigorously apply appropriate methods and link empirical findings to theoretical frameworks in a coherent way. The panel is therefore convinced that the SCMA programme succeeds in developing the ability of its students to conduct independent, research-based work of high academic quality.

According to the self-evaluation report, each thesis should take the form of an article for an international peer-reviewed journal and contain an adequate description of the scientific background of the research question, data collection methods and analysis, research findings, and scientific relevance of these findings. Without questioning the quality of the research, which was invariably sufficient to warrant publication eventually, the panel notes that not every thesis was developed to such extent that it could be published right-away as a journal article. While several theses were undoubtedly of such publishable quality, others required additional work in developing the theoretical and conceptual foundations, strengthening the discussion sections, or in articulating the methodological frameworks.

Furthermore, the panel wonders if every master thesis should take the form of an article. In fact, there could be potential value in further emphasizing the societal relevance of student projects/research questions. By explicitly addressing how the research-based student work in the master thesis contributes to broader societal issues and challenges, the SCMA programme could strengthen the visibility and impact of its academic output beyond the university context. Highlighting this connection, in turn, would help illustrating how the analytical and methodological competencies developed throughout the programme can translate into tangible contributions to public, organisational, or policy-related problem-solving. Hence, and in line with its suggestions to develop alternative assignment and assessment formats, the panel encourages the programme team to reflect if the current system allows to reward research master thesis work that is more experimental, exploratory, or original in nature.

Finally, the sample review showed that issues of positionality and ethical reflection were present in some – but not all – graduation projects. According to the panel, reflexivity does not only strengthen the methodological integrity of the work but also aligns with contemporary academic standards that emphasize transparency and critical self-awareness. Hence, the panel advises the programme team to encourage both students and supervisors to pay more attention to positionality in the research master thesis.

Graduate performance
A total of 119 students graduated from the SCMA programme since its launch in 2009, including 42 students who did so since the previous accreditation visit. Approximately half of these graduates have obtained or are pursuing a PhD degree, and several alumni have in the meantime progressed into post-doc or tenured professorship positions. The panel gathered from the written materials and the on-site discussions that SCMA graduates are widely deployable in the academic field and are now connected to various fields of study and disciplines, both in the Netherlands and abroad.

SCMA alumni who are not enrolled in a PhD programme hold positions where they apply the skills acquired as empirical researchers and successfully use the analytical, research, and presentation skills developed during the programme. These graduates have secured roles in research institutes, cultural organisations and the creative industry as policy researchers, university lecturers, editors, market researchers, consultants, or

analysts. The discussions during the site visit revealed that SCMA students and alumni are increasingly making a conscious choice to pursue careers outside academia.

The panel was informed that the career trajectories of the research master alumni are monitored in a yearly survey conducted by the School's alumni officer. The alumni the panel spoke to, confirmed the statements in the self-evaluation report and the curriculum evaluation that the SCMA programme has equipped them to conduct independent research and prepared them for future research-oriented careers. Nonetheless, current students and recent alumni also mentioned to the panel that they feel better prepared for careers within rather than outside of academia. While the SCMA programme caters for both career options, the team indicated to the panel that the emphasis has been more on the academic pathway in the past, but now wants to reposition the programme in such a way that it also highlights and reinforces the relevance of the SCMA programme for other types of employment. The panel welcomes the intention of the team to support students in developing greater insight and confidence in their theoretical knowledge and academic skills for a future career beyond academia. The panel advises the programme to look for alternative teaching and assessment methods that connect to the non-academic research career opportunities of the RMA students.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the intended learning outcomes are assessed and demonstrated in a systematic way: students who graduate the research master SCMA have effectively acquired all intended learning outcomes, while programme graduates invariably find suitable employment in research informed positions inside and outside academia.

The panel considers that the research master thesis constitutes a substantial test of research competence that covers all components of the research cycle and is of value to the academic and scientific discipline. The thesis review demonstrated that graduation projects are consistently of good quality, and that thesis topics are mostly original, creative and well aligned with the thematic scope of the programme.

Furthermore, the panel considers that SCMA graduates display a strong trajectory into both academic and professional research. They find jobs that are commensurate with the domain and the level of their study, and do so in a variety of positions and with a broad range of public, private and non-governmental employers. The number of graduates who eventually pursue a PhD is high.

In addition to these considerations that altogether warrant a positive judgement on this standard, the panel suggests the programme team to encourage students and supervisors to pay more attention to positionality in the thesis, and to adjust curriculum delivery in such a way that it includes assignments which connect specifically to non-academic research-oriented career opportunities.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 4.

General conclusion

The panel judges that the programme meets all four NVAO standards: intended learning outcomes, teaching-learning environment, student assessment, and achieved learning outcomes. Moreover, it establishes that the programme fulfils all additional aspects of the assessment framework that apply specifically to the quality of a research master programme. The panel's assessment of the research master's programme Sociology of Culture, Media and the Arts is therefore positive.

Recommendations

In addition to its overall positive judgement, the panel recommends the SCMA programme to:

1. make its unique selling proposition and its distinctive field of study more explicit in communications and in the intended programme learning outcomes;
2. consider alternative forms of theses, assignments and assessments that prepare students for research-oriented positions outside academia;
3. make the international exchange period an optional component of the programme;
4. pay more attention to ethical aspects of research in the curriculum, and embed positionality as an integral component of the master thesis.

Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

Graduates have in-depth knowledge, comprehensive understanding and critical awareness of:

1. the main theoretical insights, academic debates and approaches, as well as the current state of research in their field of study (Dublin Descriptor 1).
2. current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at the forefront or informed by their academic discipline (Dublin Descriptor 1).
3. methods and techniques applicable to their own research/advanced scholarship (Dublin Descriptor 1).
4. different academic contexts and academic cultures (Dublin descriptor 1, 4 and 5).

Graduates have the ability/inclination to:

5. apply theoretical knowledge and research methods in an original and innovative way, combined with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in their field of study (Dublin Descriptor 2).
6. apply their knowledge and research skills in new or multidisciplinary settings related to their field of study (Dublin Descriptor 2 & 5).
7. critically evaluate current research and advanced scholarship in the field, evaluate methodologies and assess them critically, and, where appropriate, propose new hypotheses, concepts, and approaches (Dublin Descriptor 2 & 3).
8. deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively and make sound judgments in the absence of complete data (Dublin Descriptor 2 & 3).
9. communicate their viewpoints and findings in a clear and responsible manner to scientific and non-scientific audiences (Dublin Descriptor 4).
10. collaborate and communicate effectively with people who have diverse (e.g. national, cultural, disciplinary) backgrounds and function adequately in internationally and culturally diverse professional and academic settings (Dublin Descriptor 5).
11. advance their knowledge and understanding and to develop new skills to a high level in a largely self-directed and autonomous manner and continue to look across the border of their own field of study, home countries and cultures (Dublin Descriptor 5).

Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

Year 1

<table>
<tr><th>Term 1</th><th>Term 2</th><th>Term 3</th><th>Term 4</th></tr>
<tr><td>Cultural Sociology
CS5001 (5 EC)</td><td>Consumer Culture
CS5010 (5 EC)</td><td>Globalization, Digitalization & Culture
CS5009 (5 EC)</td><td rowspan="3">Research Traineeship
CS5008 (15 EC)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sociology of Media & the Arts
CS5002 (5 EC)</td><td>Research Workshop (5EC), choose from e.g.:
1. Television Audiences (CM4351)
2. Vigilant Audiences, Visibility and Reputation (CM4252)
3. Media and Migration (CM4254)
4. Production Cultures in the Streaming Industries (CM4356)
5. Innovating the Music Business (CM4359)
6. Disruptions in the Film Industry (CM4360)
7. Creative and Sustainable Cities (CC4029)
8. Cultural Participation and Taste (CC4030)</td><td>Elective at Research School (5 EC):
For course offer see:
https://www.rmes.nl/curriculum/rma-students-education/</td></tr>
<tr><td>Research Design
CS5003 (5 EC)</td><td>Advanced Quantitative Methods
CS5005 (5 EC)</td><td>Advanced Qualitative Methods
CS5007 (5 EC)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">Research Master Seminar I
CS5016 (2.5 EC)</td></tr>
</table>

Year 2

<table>
<tr><th>Term 1</th><th>Term 2</th><th>Term 3</th><th>Term 4</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2" rowspan="3">International Exchange
FC6000
(max. 20 EC + optional Advanced Methods Course of max. 5 EC to replace the Advanced Methods Course in Term 3 of Year 2)</td><td>Advanced Methods Course (5 EC), e.g.: Roaming the Digital World: Data Analytics for Business and Society (CM4104)</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Research Master Seminar II
(CS5017) (2,5 EC)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Master Thesis
(CS5050) (25 EC)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">International Conference Participation
(CS5021) (5 EC)</td></tr>
</table>

Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

Wednesday 26 November 2025

08.30	09.00	Arrival panel + set-up
09.00	09.45	Interview Programme Management
09.45	10.00	Break – panel discussion
10.00	10.45	Interview Students
10.45	11.00	Break – panel discussion
11.00	11.45	Interview Teaching staff
11.45	12.00	Break – panel discussion
12.00	12.45	Interview Alumni / professional field
12.45	13.30	Lunch – internal panel discussion
13.30	14.00	Interview Examination Board
14.00	14.15	Break – panel discussion
14.15	15.00	Development Dialogue
15.00	15.30	Break – panel discussion
15.30	16.00	Final interview Programme Management
16.00	17.00	Internal panel deliberations
17.00	17.30	Plenary feedback

Appendix 4. Materials

Self-evaluation report research master Media Studies. Sociology of Culture, Media and the Arts, Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication, September 2025.

Appendices:

- Intended learning outcomes
- Teaching and Examination Regulations ESHCC 2024-2025
- Project Book Research Traineeship 2024-2025
- ESHCC Assessment Policy
- Research Master Thesis Project Book 2024-2025
- Overview teaching staff
- Report Research Assessment 2020
- Assessment Plan
- Quality Assurance Report – course evaluations and national student survey 2023-2024
- Quality Assurance Report – curriculum and internship evaluations 2023-2024
- Research Master thesis – assessment form research proposal
- Research Master thesis – assessment form thesis
- Rules and Guidelines ESHCC Examination Board 2024-2025
- Annual Report ESHCC Examination Board 2023-2024
- Follow-up recommendation previous accreditation
- Overview recent graduates 2020-2024
- Data on student application, admission, enrolment, drop-out and success rate
- Overview of prior education of the student intakes 2023, 2024 and 2025

Prior to the site visit, the panel reviewed 15 graduation works among the 37 master theses which had been successfully submitted in the academic years 2020-2021, 2021-2022, 2022-2023, 2023-2024 and 2024-2025. The sample was representative of the final scores and the examiners involved in thesis supervision across all theses. It also included six graduation works of students who had followed the abridged programme. Information on the thesis review is available from Academion upon request.