Research Master's programmes

Research Master's programmes are academic master's programmes that prepare students to conduct research in a PhD trajectory or another research-related position. The research orientation of the programmes may be substantiated in several ways. Programmes may focus on a specific research theme or cover a broad research spectrum.

GENERAL INFO

Universities are free to select students for admission to a Research Master's programme. Under Article 7.5c, second paragraph, of the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (WHW), the statutory workload of a Research Master's programme is 120 EC. The programmes can be identified by their name, in which the designation of the discipline is followed by 'research'.

Additional criteria

Research Master's programmes must meet a number of additional criteria, supplementary to the regular assessment framework. These criteria pertain to the research-oriented nature of the programme and the research context within which the master's programme is taught. NVAO has formulated additional requirements for the panel that assesses a Research Master's programme. During an external assessment procedure, a Research Master's programme is reviewed on the basis of the relevant standards of the Dutch accreditation framework, as well as the additional criteria for Research Master's programmes included in the Implementation Rules. The panel report explicitly addresses these criteria.

The additional criteria are also taken into consideration in the initial accreditation of Research Master's programmes. A university that has been granted initial accreditation of a new programme by NVAO must still apply to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science for approval of the extended statutory course duration.

Validity

The accreditation of an existing Research Master's programme is valid for an indefinite period, as is that of other master's programmes. The programme must be assessed every six years.

NVAO will process external assessment reports on existing Research Master's programmes within three months. Applications for the initial accreditation of a Research Master's programme will be processed within six months. NVAO decisions are subject to internal and external appeal procedures.

STEPS

1

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF ASSESSMENT PANEL

When applying for approval of the panel composition, the institution must indicate clearly that the assessment involves a Research Master's program...

When applying for approval of the panel composition, the institution must indicate clearly that the assessment involves a Research Master's programme. The panel reviewing a Research Master's programme must meet several additional requirements. The panel members are academically authoritative researchers who are familiar with and experienced in research-oriented educational pathways. Most of the Research Master's programmes have been grouped in separate clusters.

2

PREPARATION FOR ASSESSMENT

In order to prepare for the assessment, the panel takes note of the additional requirements to be met by Research Master's programmes. NVAO offers ...
In order to prepare for the assessment, the panel takes note of the additional requirements to be met by Research Master's programmes. NVAO offers to explain the additional criteria to the panel and the institution in order to further clarify the specific nature of the assessment of Research Master's programmes.

3

ASSESSMENT

The panel conducts its assessment and takes the additional criteria into consideration in its conclusion. The assessment of a Research Master's pro...
The panel conducts its assessment and takes the additional criteria into consideration in its conclusion. The assessment of a Research Master's programme includes a development interview.

4

ACCREDITATION

By no later than the submission deadline, the institution submits an assessment report to NVAO in which the research orientation of the programme i...
By no later than the submission deadline, the institution submits an assessment report to NVAO in which the research orientation of the programme is clearly described and reviewed. The submission deadlines for the clusters of Research Master's programmes are listed in the external assessment timetable.

5

RETENTION OF ACCREDITATION

Within three months, NVAO decides on the programme's retention of its accreditation and informs the governmental implementation agency for the educ...
Within three months, NVAO decides on the programme's retention of its accreditation and informs the governmental implementation agency for the education sector (DUO) accordingly.

RATES

In 2026, the rate charged by the NVAO for the assessment of an existing research master's programme amounts to €2,678, while the rate for a new research master's programme amounts to €25,717.

Different rates apply to other or alternative procedures. Costs related to international site visits or the deployment of external experts, advisory services, or additional requirements are invoiced separately.

FAQ

Are all Research Master's programmes academic programmes?

Under current legislation (Article 7.5c, second paragraph, of the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (WHW)), Research Master's programmes are academic master's programmes.

Are all 120-EC master's programmes Research Master's programmes?

No, only programmes for which NVAO has established their satisfaction of the requirements set for a Research Master's programme may call themselves "Research Master's programmes". On the Register of Higher Education Programmes (RIO), the name of such programmes is followed by "(research)". Programmes that carry a statutory workload of 120 ECs for other reasons do not automatically qualify as Research Master's programmes.

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