



**Maastricht University**



Faculty of Law

# **Self-evaluation report Master European Law School**



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## Administratieve gegevens



### Instelling

Naam instelling:	Universiteit Maastricht
Status instelling:	Bekostigd
Resultaat instellingstoets:	Positief geaccrediteerd voor de periode 2019-2024

### European Law School

Oriëntatie en niveau:	WO - master
Aantal studiepunten:6	0 EC
Specialisatiemogelijkheden:	European Business Law European Public Law Law of Sustainable Europe
Locatie:	Maastricht
Variant:	voltijd
Joint programme:	n.v.t.
Onderwijstaal:	Engels
CROHO registratienummer:	60017



## 1. Profile and ambition of the programme

The master programme European Law School (MA ELS) is a one-year, English-taught programme that attracts inquisitive, analytical, and internationally minded students. It aims to develop a community of engaged and critical legal professionals and global citizens with excellent knowledge of different areas of European law. The MA ELS graduates stand out, both professionally because of their analytical skills and quick legal reasoning, and societally as open-minded citizens with intercultural skills. Professionally, our graduates bring added value in, and compete successfully for, positions in European, transnational, or national public or private organisations.

The programme realizes these objectives through a carefully constructed curriculum, in which the Problem Based Learning (PBL) method takes center stage. More specifically, the programme offers students the possibility to either choose one of three specialisations (namely European Business Law, European Public Law, or Law of Sustainable Europe) or a general track without a specific focus.

**European Business Law** focuses on the legal aspects of both the economic and the social dimension of the EU's market integration project.

The **European Public Law** specialisation places emphasis on the institutional functioning of the EU as a system of multi-level governance. It focuses on the way EU law is created, applied, and enforced, and how it interacts with national law and international law.

**Law of Sustainable Europe** was introduced as a specialisation in AY 2023-2024 and explores how (European) law deals with sustainability challenges such as the depletion of natural resources, the development of innovative solutions to societal problems, and the realisation of rights in the context of the sustainable development goals.

## 2. Reflection on previous accreditation and midterm

As a follow up to the previous accreditation and mid-term review, we realised important action. We designed a reform of the Master programme during the academic year 2021-2022 that we have been implementing as of the current academic year 2023-2024. The following paragraphs recall the main recommendations of the panels and present the actions undertaken.

In light of the accreditation panel's recommendation to provide *more transparency to students regarding the extracurricular activities*, care has been taken to communicate more clearly on this element, e.g. during the Master's Open Day.

Both the accreditation and midterm review panels advised *reconsidering the February enrolment*. We subsequently abolished the February enrolment as of AY 2022-2023.

In addition, the panels advised *a more regulated thesis trajectory* that was introduced in AY 2022-2023 (under review). Work is underway on the adaptation of the assessment forms of the Master thesis (see also the SWOT analysis in the section below).



The accreditation panel recommended emphasizing to a greater extent *summative assessment*. Most MA ELS courses now rely on minimally two different assessment methods. However, further work is underway to ensure alignment with the new UM vision on assessment (see also the SWOT analysis in the section below). We are also working towards closer monitoring of assessment at curriculum level.

The midterm review panel noted that there is a *lack of a clear profile of the Masters' programmes* in general and *lack of a community feeling*, advising that the choice left to students to build their curriculum be narrowed. The reform of the MA ELS has addressed this point by reinforcing the profile of the specialisation tracks. In a nutshell, the specialisation tracks now only allow students to choose one 'free elective' (or 6 credits) instead of two 'free electives' (or 12 credits). In addition, we abolished the requirement to pick four courses from a broader set of specialisation courses. Instead, we foresee five pre-determined mandatory courses for each specialisation along the common core for all students enrolled in the programme consisting of two obligatory courses and the master thesis. Finally, we greatly reduced the choice of courses available under the general track.

Another recommendation of the accreditation panel was the formulation of a more pronounced vision on the MA ELS' *international orientation*. This was realized through the reform of the specialisations. Namely, the specialisations European Business Law and Law of Sustainable Europe include a number of courses that are shared with the Globalisation and Law master programme. Work is underway on a formal revision of the ILOs to reflect to a greater extent the program's international orientation.

The panel also advised an *increased focus on European law in the context of international and national law*. We realized this increased focus by asking course coordinators to streamline this element in their courses. To name some examples: European Environmental Law explores how EU climate policy is concretely implemented at national level; Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) assesses the impact that developments in EU law have for CSR obligations; and, European Fundamental Rights law explores the actual application of the Charter in domestic legal orders as well as the existence in those legal orders of national human rights institutions.

### 3. Evaluation according to the four standards

#### Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

The MA ELS is a one-year programme that aims to deliver informed and critical lawyers that possess the necessary practical skills to communicate correctly and effectively both in a professional context and as responsible and critical citizens. This implies that as lawyers and citizens they understand how law operates in its societal context. In the MA ELS, this goal is realised in an international and European context, where the focus is on EU law. By offering an advanced study of European law in a societal context, the MA ELS thereby typically allows its graduates to meet the requirements and expectations of the legal professional field in Europe.

The recent reform rolled out as of this AY 2023-2024 has greatly simplified the MA ELS design. The program offers three specialisations where the curriculum is built in function of specific interests (EU Public Law, Business Law, Law of Sustainable Europe). In these tracks there are only pre-determined compulsory courses and one free elective course. The program also allows a high degree of flexibility through the general track, where students are given the freedom, within the confines of the courses offered in the three specialized tracks, to tailor their curriculum complemented with one free elective. The reduced freedom of choice for students as of AY 2023-2024



(both when they choose a specialisation track and when they opt for the general track) allows the programme to better ensure that all ILOs are properly covered by each student's individual curriculum. Notably, as the matrixes in the Appendix illustrate, the ILOs of the programme are comprehensively covered by the different courses at the programme level.

A full list of intended learning outcomes per track and per course is included at the end of this report as the Appendix. The list also includes the two generally mandatory courses that is Advanced European Law and Foundations of European Institutionalisation, as well as the master thesis.

The ILOs of the MA ELS align with the Dublin descriptors ensuring compatibility within the European Area of Higher Education, as the Appendix which includes ILOs per each course contained under each specialisation illustrates in detail. The program offers a well-balanced combination of academic knowledge and insights into the content of the law, as well as academic and professional skills. As outlined in detail below, the depth of knowledge provided, the embedment of the objects of study in a societal and political context, combined with the teaching environment (e.g. expertise of the teaching staff, see standard 2) respond to a master level course. Maastricht's unique educational model and multitude of teaching methods, as well the program's strong links with practice allow students to develop professional skills that are expected in the labour market. The concrete success of graduates in the labour market (see standard 4) attests to this alignment between the expectations of the labour market and the program's ILOs.

In terms of academic knowledge, the program courses provide in-depth and up-to-date knowledge of EU law in a multi-level and political setting, thus also exploring the links between international, EU, and national levels, as well as providing an understanding of the political context in which EU law is shaped, applied, and enforced.

In terms of academic and professional skills, every course relies on PBL and live lectures, complemented by a plethora of teaching methods. These methods are a way of forging a strong connection with the professional field. In many courses, the problems which the students address in the PBL tutorials or simulations (moot courts, negotiation simulations) are current legal problems which they will be called to deal with in a professional setting. The courses where room is made for guest lectures by practitioners evidently further facilitate connecting the programme to the professional world.

The master thesis also allows for the developments of a number of academic and professional skills, such as sound legal analytical skills, as well as clear argumentation and critical positioning.

## Standard 2: Educational learning environment

The master ELS offers **three specialisations**: European Business Law, European Public Law, and the Law of Sustainable Europe. Under the specialisations two courses are generally compulsory (Advanced European Law and Foundations of European Institutionalisation) and so is the master thesis. In addition, there are five pre-determined mandatory specialisation-specific courses, and one 'free elective' (as in not restricted to the courses offered as part of the MA ELS program) per specialisation.

Alternative to the specialisations, students can also opt for **the general track**. In this track students must follow the two generally compulsory courses (Advanced European Law and Foundations of European Institutionalisation) and undertake a master thesis. For the rest, they are allowed to construct their own curriculum drawing five courses from any of the mandatory courses of the three specialisations and one 'free elective' (as in not restricted to the courses offered as part of the MA ELS program).



For all tracks, the 'free elective' can consist of an internship (subject to prior approval).

As previously outlined under the sections 'previous accreditation and midterm' and 'SWOT analysis', the choice to reinforce the profile of the specialisation tracks by narrowing their curriculum through a recent reform serves to further define the profile of the program and to cultivate a feeling of community. This reform responds to the advice of the accreditation and mid-term review panels that had noted a lack of a clear profile and of a community feeling.

At the same time, as previously analysed under the same sections, the choice was made to retain a general track offering more flexibility, i.e. allowing students to construct their program choosing from any of the mandatory courses of the three specialisations. This caters for the needs of students who value flexibility and the possibility to combine expertise in different subfields of EU law. They currently constitute approximately half the cohort of the Master ELS.

The MA ELS is taught in English. This is the natural choice for a programme that aims to prepare its graduates for the legal profession in the international labour market (or for positions in the national labour market with a significant international orientation). Both internationally and Europe wide, English is the lingua franca of the legal profession and in international (nongovernmental) organizations.

Sufficient prior knowledge of English can be attested through having received a secondary or higher education diploma in an exclusively English taught program; having followed a program where a significant portion of the instruction was in English; having been professionally active in an English-speaking environment; or, eventually possessing an English language certificate such as IELTS. The criteria are based on a pragmatic and flexible approach for a case-by-case assessment of English language proficiency. As of the AY 2021-2022 the Faculty of Law has rolled out the implementation of the UM language policy, requiring staff that teaches in English to also have a demonstrably sufficient knowledge of English.

All education in the MA ELS follows the problem-based learning approach, outlined in detail in the general chapter, whereby the programme aligns with the core principles of PBL (learning being constructive, contextual, collaborative, and self-directed- CCCS principles).

A very concrete illustration of the self-directed learning principle can be seen in the reform of the thesis trajectory. Since, under CCCS, students remain responsible for their own learning trajectory, the problem of the excessive average time to complete the degree was addressed by communicating proactively and more intensively to the students and by suggesting a model trajectory, rather than by imposing a mandatory trajectory.

The Master ELS is adequately staffed. Each course is assigned a coordinator, who is an expert in the scientific field of the course and responsible in the main for the course design and delivery. However, given the level of resource intensiveness of PBL, in several courses the teaching team is complemented by more staff members who are responsible for a number of tutorial sessions. Other than the coordinators, the composition of the course teaching teams could vary every year. Nonetheless, these staff members are also specialised in the topics that they teach, e.g. they are (assistant or associate) professors or lecturers/PhD candidates whose research is focused in the field of the respective courses. They are fully inducted into the course content and educational philosophy through dedicated and tailor-made alignment sessions and tools (e.g. tutor notes, weekly tutor meetings) under the guidance of the course coordinator.

In terms of prerequisites to enter the program, students who hold a Dutch university bachelor's degree in European Law School, Dutch Law, or Tax law automatically qualify for admission. In addition, the Board of



Admissions can consider a non-Dutch university bachelor's degree in Law as equivalent. In what concerns students whose prior degrees are not considered as qualifying them for admission to the program, as of AY 23-24 and as a result of a change to the Dutch law on higher education (WHW), there is a different option.

The WHW requires programmes to allow prospective students to make up for reasonable deficiencies in a reasonable time period by offering a pre-master programme (see Article 7.30e WHW). The decision was therefore made to do away with the option of an intake exam and require certain prospective students to follow a pre-master programme, whose specifications are analysed in the general chapter. As for UM's unique learning model, there is no requirement for students to be previously acquainted with PBL.

Given the international character of the cohort, students are acquainted with different educational models. In addition, there are variable levels of experience with conducting independent research—a necessary component for successfully completing a master thesis. Therefore, the program contains different elements of student guidance. First, there is an onboarding component to UM's educational model and the PBL approach at the start of the program. Next, the newly introduced structured thesis trajectory also contains more enhanced components of student guidance on the necessary skills to design and undertake independent research. Finally, each student benefits from personalised guidance through a thesis supervisor who is a staff member with the requisite scientific expertise in the field of the thesis. The supervisor will adapt to the needs of each individual student, providing more enhanced support to students with less experience in conducting independent research as part of an educational program.

More broadly there has been continued professionalization of the educational support structures at the faculty. The Board of Admissions (bringing together the admission officers and programme coordinators) has been meeting more regularly as of AY 2022-2023; the educational support office has seen its capacity in FTEs increase; and the single function of Director of Studies of the programmes offered at the faculty has been split up in three (Dutch Bachelor programmes, Bachelor ELS, Master programmes). These changes potentially allow for more coherence in implementing the UM vision on education while also facilitating greater specialisation.

### Standard 3: Assessment

The program meets the standard of a reliable, valid, and transparent system of assessment. Assessment in the master ELS follows the new UM vision on assessment which identifies three key elements for the development of 'diverse fit-for-purpose assessment formats' (see also elaboration in greater detail in the general chapter). These key elements are that i) assessment should be meaningful for the learning process of the student (assessment for learning); ii) it should support the CCCS principles of PBL; and iii) it should be coordinated at the programme level (constructive alignment).

At the time of writing of this report, there is no comprehensive assessment plan for the Master ELS yet, however, it is at the process of being developed. Nonetheless, already *individual course assessment methods are linked with the UM vision on assessment*. For example, course assessment methods are in line with the Education and Examination Regulations (EER), each course coordinator ensures there are two assessment points in the course, and that the course assessment aligns with the course ILOs. Within this framework, the baseline within the programme is to leave course coordinators some freedom to choose the most appropriate method of examination. The resulting freedom may pose challenges but 'who does what' is monitored at the programme level by the programme coordinator and the director of studies.





The balance at programme level between periodical and non-periodical assessment is in favour of the latter. In terms of assessment methods, various methods are used, but currently the emphasis is on closed book written exams and assignments. With the development of a comprehensive assessment plan for the entire Master ELS, this will be taken up at programme level since open book exams seem more appropriate in achieving constructive alignment with ILOs of a Master's programme. In terms of types of questions, very few courses rely on closed questions and emphasis is put on open questions, essay questions, and case questions as is appropriate for a Master's programme in law.

*A robust quality assurance system is in place.* When designing assessment instruments, course coordinators need to submit to the four eyes principle, i.e. they must ask at least one other colleague's advice. In line with the EER, the method of assessment (and calculation of the final grade) is communicated to students in the beginning of the course. Any subsequent changes in the chosen assessment method must always be approved by the Board of Examiners and the Director of Studies. The Master ELS is more broadly supported by the Board of Examiners and the Director of Studies of master programs whose role is detailed in the general chapter. Every course is also subject to student evaluation after every period both in relation to the course's content, as well as its assessment method, feeding into the work of the programme committee.

The assessment of master theses and the concrete role of the second assessor and main assessor (who is also the main supervisor), as well as their interaction in assessing the theses are outlined in the general chapter. The general chapter also outlines what happens in borderline cases (where additional motivation is necessary), as well as when a thesis is considered as excellent (when recourse should also be had to an additional, third assessor). Excellent MA ELS programme master theses are also eligible for publication in the MCEL Master Working Paper Series, where around 2-3 ELS theses per year are published. The master theses assessment revolves both on elements of content (depth of analysis, correct comprehension and use of sources), as well as on elements of technique (such as the thesis structure, use of language, and quality of referencing).

## Standard 4: Realised learning outcomes

The profile of the MA ELS graduate is attractive in the labour market and satisfaction among graduates is high. The three master specialisations aim at slightly different segments of the labour market. The European Business Law specialisation delivers graduates who are well suited to work in the private sector (such as law firms, companies, lobbying groups, NGOs). The European Public Law specialisation primarily results in graduates who are well equipped to a career in the public sector (such as EU institutions, national administrations). The new Law of Sustainable Europe specialisation will deliver graduates who are well attuned for work in the public or private sector, such as NGOs working on sustainability, public organisations developing or implementing sustainable development goals, private organisations' compliance departments.

The graduates of the programme are concretely successful on the international labour market. This is reflected in the data collected from the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market of the UM School of Business and Economics. These aggregate data show that for 50% of graduates, the MA ELS is their final study (whereby starting a PhD counts as a further study). Five years after graduation, 97% of the MA ELS graduates are employed, 83% have a job at master's level and 85% have a job in their field of study. 85% of the graduates thereby indicate that they would choose to enrol in the MA ELS again.

The staff involved in the programme also receive this message from their informal contacts with our graduates, and from practitioners in the professional field who interact with our graduates.



## 4. Student chapter

This student chapter aims at presenting a student evaluation of the European Law School Master programme. The content of this student chapter is based on the evaluation provided by a representative section of the 2022-2023 cohort through a survey circulated among all students. Therefore some elements, as in the specialisation structure and assessment methods, have since been updated. The survey was inter alia shared in formal networks of the university's platform Canvas but also in informal networks such as WhatsApp-groups where alumni were part of. The questions were developed on the line of the four NVAO-standards' aims and objectives. The student representatives used the answers to orient and specify their contribution to the report. Both the questionnaire and the results are available upon request.

### Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes of the programme are to provide its students with a deep understanding of EU law as well as how EU law interacts with national law. Such intended learning outcomes are considered to have been clearly set in the beginning of the programme. Moreover, the ELS Master programme also aims at teaching its students legal argumentation skills, analytical skills, and quick legal reasoning. Most students feel content with the level of professional and academic skills taught in the programme.

Additionally, the programme aims at preparing its students for a legal/academic profession in an integrating Europe, both in an institutional setting and/or in the world of private practice. While the vast majority of students agrees that the programme reflects such an aim for the institutional setting, no such strong feeling has been expressed with regards to the private setting.

### Standard 2: Educational learning environment

#### International student environment

The programme offers an international student environment. This learning environment is seen by the near entirety of the cohort as helping in achieving the intended learning outcomes of gaining a deep understanding of EU law, and for more than the majority of the students it was a reason to choose this programme. Most of the students do interact with each other and deem the student atmosphere in general to be supportive and constructive. This is particularly due to the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) system, which brings students together in sharing their own views and solutions to the given tasks, allowing them to build upon each other's knowledge.

The effects of students' different educational backgrounds is, however, mainly to be seen in tutorials where students who are already acquainted with the PBL method tend to be more expressive and engaging, while those that come from a more 'passive' teaching environment, find it more difficult to speak up in tutorials and need to adapt to the system quickly. Nevertheless, it was underlined that the constructiveness of the student environment is well experienced in tutorials themselves. Projects such as moot courts and negotiation simulations that entail structured preparation prior to tutorials, could increase the constructiveness of the student environment also during the phase of self-preparation for class.

With regards to the cohesiveness of the student cohort, students expressed the need to create greater "student spirit" by organising networking activities where students can get to know each other and foster support among themselves. Nevertheless, the majority of students believe that the programme creates a common and shared "level playing field" among students.



## Content and coherence of the curriculum

The name “Master European Law School” seems appropriate to the majority of students. However, a considerable part of the cohort has expressed that the denomination of “School” should be omitted since it would undermine the master level of the programme.

Moreover, students are in general quite satisfied with the content of the curriculum. The curriculum allows to tailor the degree according to the students’ interests and ambitions. This was, for the majority of the cohort, one of the reasons to choose this programme. This element of flexibility has been retained in the current program under the general track. The then only compulsory course for all tracks “Advanced European Law” was deemed appropriate by the students to the programme and necessary to complete the degree successfully. Finally, as regards the content of the curriculum, the overall cohort of students believes that the courses touch upon topics that are currently being actively discussed in academia and in society, and the vast majority of students deems courses to be specific enough which again stresses the overall satisfaction with the curriculum and represents a great plus of the European Law School Master.

The structure and the content of the programme is generally perceived as clear and consistent. Students are aware in the majority of cases of the courses that they can follow and how the academic year is arranged. However, students expressed that the overview of the classes and exam schedules should be released more in advance in order to allow for better individual organisation and outlook on the academic year. The majority of students seem content with the specialisations provided in the programme. However, they put forward multiple remarks on the wording “general programme” since it seems that the demands are lower compared to the other specialisations, which is not the case. The fact that one can choose courses from the different specialisations does not mean that the courses do not go into depth, which can potentially be inferred from the term “general”. Students thus suggested to change the denomination “General Programme” into “Generalist or “Comprehensive Legal Programme”.

As the possibility to choose among electives and specialisation courses is left to students, the majority believes it is sufficient to correspond to their interests and ambitions. Some students, however, would have preferred a different offer of courses that would have better matched their interests. In that vein, courses such as health law, or skills courses, e.g., argumentation skills, have been mentioned. The number of courses offered is, however, also seen as a downside for students who intend to complete the programme in one year as they have to choose between courses which are offered in the same period. This could, according to them, be remedied by providing the courses twice a year or by extending the programme to two years. Moreover, the average student’s interest in each course could be taken into consideration in order to avoid having periods where students are interested in multiple courses, while in other periods they struggle to find something they are interested in. Several of these concerns are addressed through the new structure of the specialisations as of AY 2023-2024.

According to the majority of students, the length of one year for the European Law School Master is deemed appropriate to achieve a deep understanding of EU law. Nevertheless, some have voiced that a one-year master’s degree appears to be stressful suggesting either an extension to a year and a half (potentially combined with the possibility to increase the number of courses available, an offer of language courses to be followed and an adequate time period to work on the thesis) or even a potential prolonging to two years.

## Didactic approach, study methods and study load

Almost the entirety of the students considers the PBL system an asset to the European Law School Master. However, it has been pointed out that the intended learning outcomes in a PBL system very much depend on the composition of the tutorial group.



Besides that, a considerable number of students would favor methodological approaches to the curriculum, for example by providing for a new course such as 'Methodology of EU Law' comprising methods and content of legal argumentation, analytical skills and quick legal reasoning in the field of EU law. This has been addressed through the establishing a new metajuridical compulsory course as of the AY 2023-2024. In the same vein, some students have also voiced the need for voluntary-attendable 'skills courses' in order to receive relevant and sufficient information and appropriate basic training in all the methods employed, particularly also with a view to the drafting of a master thesis. The new enhanced thesis track that has since been introduced addresses this concern.

In general, students are extremely content with the teaching methods, assignments and instructions of the curriculum. Nearly the entirety of the cohort deems the proportion between content-based lectures and tutorial sessions to be balanced. As regards the contribution of both lectures and tutorials to the achievement of the ILOs, however, the overall opinion of the students seems to be split. While the majority considers that both contribute in the same manner, some students deem tutorials to be the most decisive factor. In this respect, it has also been pointed out that content-based lectures and tutorials would not only differ in their nature but also in their purpose and therefore contribute to achieving the ILOs in a different manner, in the sense that lectures provide for an overview and first access to the course, while tutorials are supposed to discuss the content in a more specific and detailed way.

Criticism is being raised with a view to the diversity of assessment methods. In this sense, it has been claimed that no course should have a 100%-exam based assessment, but also taking other assessment methods such as papers and presentations into due account. This criticism has since been addressed through the implementation of the new UM vision of assessment that precludes a single assessment moment.

As regards the option to follow an internship during the European Law School Master programme, more than two third of the students are content with such a possibility. Nevertheless, the vast majority is neither planning on following, nor following an internship during the programme. This is possibly due to some criticism that has been raised that particularly concerns internship periods potentially overlapping with courses that are deemed interesting by students. As such courses are only offered once per academic year, students therefore prefer to forego completing an internship and choose to follow the courses they deem interesting instead. Furthermore, students wish for more transparent and available information on potential internships including internship announcements and previous student's experiences. This could potentially be complemented by networking events, guest lecturers in courses seeking trainees, course trips to institutions offering internships, and meetings with alumni giving insights into possibilities of internships. As the organisation of an internship is solely left to the students and the completion is ultimately dependent on the consent of the internship coordinator, there is a wish for more encouragement or help offered on this front.

The curriculum dedicates 6 EC to each course which, according to the students, in most times represent the amount of work requested. However, in reference to diverse courses, students believe that the workload required was more than 6 EC. This opinion is also shared among students with a view to extracurricular activities. On the one hand, the cohort considers the possibility to participate in a Moot Court or one of the honours programmes neither advantageous nor disadvantageous to their studies. On the other hand, however, the majority of students believe that the extracurriculars should contribute to the necessary EC due to the great amount of workload, which is additional to the general study path of the European Law School Master.

### **Programme staff**

Nearly the entirety of the cohort is very satisfied with the staff involved in the programme. Their availability, enthusiasm, and field-specific knowledge were very welcomed by students. Not only is the programme staff approachable, but they are also open to questions and discussion. The staff is deemed to be always available for



study guidance and advice on individual research issues and obstacles that students might face during the programme. In this regard, nearly all students consider that the teaching staff has a solid expertise both in content and didactics. More than one third of the cohort believes that they are adequately involved in the teaching staff academic activities in order to be connected with the professional field.

When it comes to the thesis, students are in general quite satisfied with the procedure to find a supervisor and the guidance and supervision they receive during the thesis period. Students appear to be mostly content with writing the thesis along the study path and the majority of the cohort believes that the time framework of one year is feasible to eventually finish the thesis upon the end of the academic year.

### **Programme-specific facilities**

Students from the European Law School Master programme are generally happy with the access to scholarship related to the programme. However, on some occasions students had been faced with difficulties in accessing literature required for relevant courses. This is due to the fact that sometimes there are no digital sources available via the UM library libsearch function, or books at the UM library are non-lendable and the library only provides limited exemplars. This was felt crucial when courses included several mandatory readings from such a source, and students eventually felt compelled to buy the book. In that regard, it has been suggested to improve and expand the content accessible, inter alia, by providing for copies and scans via Canvas.

## **Standard 3: Assessment**

The programme provides for an appropriate system of student assessment. The assessment criteria for intermediate and final examinations were clearly specified and communicated to the students in advance through the syllabus of the respective courses and eventually further explained during the courses. However, some students have indicated that for transparency reasons a standardised table of assessments included in the curriculum would be desirable, which, besides time and weighing, would also determine whether or not a future exam would be open book. Besides that, it is commonly shared among the cohort that the assessment is based on objective criteria and that assessment formats are adequate and suitable for the respective courses and their related content. Criticism has emerged, however, regarding the time allocated for examinations. While half of the cohort deems the time framework to be appropriate, the other half claims for more considerable time during examinations to properly address complex questions or topics. Furthermore, most of the students consider the assessment very fair in the sense that they were asked questions only that have been covered during classes. Nevertheless, more than the majority of students still feels not sufficiently provided with extensive feedback along with the award of the grades. The provision of such feedback, however, is particularly crucial in order to identify potential strengths and weaknesses and improve future work. Yet, the evaluation complaint mechanism is deemed to be sufficiently accessible and transparent, although not all students make considerable use of it and do not consider it to be beneficial for making improvements to the assessment methods.

## **Standard 4: Realised learning outcomes**

Students feel that there is a good match between the ILOs and the output in courses and theses. In general, the European Law School Master programme is a highly sought Master degree.

When it comes to the preparedness to enter the job market, a considerable number of students feel well prepared for a professional career, and more than half of the students considers themselves aware of the employability opportunities. Nevertheless, there is almost a unanimous desire among the cohort for more specific events,



possibilities for exchange of best practices in learning, researching and job orientation, and meetings with alumni who pursued different careers such as writing a PhD, working in consultancy, governments, or NGOs in order to be better prepared to enter the job market.

## Final Remarks

Overall, the program assessment by students is very positive. At this point, almost all students would not only choose the European Law School Master again, but also recommend it to further contacts and prospective students. Program ILOs are deemed to be clearly set in the beginning and to be achieved during the course of the academic year, evidencing that the students feel that their understanding of EU law has been advanced to a master level. The curriculum has a fully satisfying coherence and provides for the achievement of a deep understanding of EU law due to the enthusiasm, field-specific knowledge, and solid expertise both in content and didactics of the programme's staff. The programme has an appropriate system of student assessment. In general, criticism has been met with great understanding. Nevertheless, students still wish for an extension of the current curriculum by providing for additional courses such as voluntary skills-related or language courses. Occasionally, it has been voiced that the workload during courses exceeds the 6 EC threshold and that the supposed one-year master comprising eight mandatory courses with diverse assessment methods, non-counting extracurriculars and writing a thesis, should provide for an optional prolongation period.

## 5. Global SWOT analysis

### Strengths

The MA ELS boasts several strengths that can be summarized as providing excellent education in EU law in a genuinely European context with an international orientation.

### Intended learning outcomes

In terms of intended learning outcomes, the programme fully aligns with the Dublin descriptors, ensuring compatibility with the European Higher Education Area. The program offers a well-balanced combination of academic knowledge and insights into the content of the law, as well as academic and professional skills.

The recent reform rolled out as of this AY 2023-2024 has greatly simplified the MA ELS design. The program offers three specialisations where the curriculum is built in function of specific interests (EU Public Law, Business Law, Law of Sustainable Europe). In these tracks there are only pre-determined compulsory courses and one free elective course. The program also allows a high degree of flexibility through the general track, where students are given the freedom, within the confines of the courses offered in the three specialized tracks, to tailor their curriculum complemented with one free elective. The combination of three specialised tracks with a general track that allows more flexibility in constructing a curriculum becomes an attractive feature in an internationally competitive LLM market characterized by increasing specialisation.

### Educational Learning Environment

The programme is fully taught in English contributing to its internationally attractive profile, which is reflected in the diverse nationalities making up the student population. Overwhelmingly, the typical profile of the MA ELS



student is the (non-Dutch) EU national with a prior BA degree in law. Among these students a significant number have even obtained a prior MA degree.

The PBL approach, outlined in detail in the general chapter, is a distinctive strength of the program, and has also been identified as such by the students who follow the program (see below section 4).

The course coordinators, who develop and deliver education in the main in the MA ELS, are internationally acknowledged experts in their respective fields, while all staff who contribute to teaching as part of their teams, focus their research in the course areas. In addition to this substantive expertise, the faculty's teaching staff is also adequately trained and remains updated on education science and the UM's teaching approach, while the quality of education is also evaluated on a continuous basis, through the mechanisms and processes that are outlined in detail in the general chapter.

A further strength of the programme is the possibility for students to participate, without the award of credits, in one of the several moot court competitions in different areas of law that the faculty participates in. Only highly motivated students participate in these moot court competitions and the faculty encourages and facilitates their efforts by providing support and by making available staff to coach and mentor them. As of AY 2023-2024 there is a dedicated member of staff tasked with coordinating the faculty's moot court component. 'Mooting' thereby aligns perfectly with the MA ELS overall emphasis on PBL.

## Assessment

Assessment in the master ELS follows the new UM vision on assessment which identifies three key elements for the development of 'diverse fit-for-purpose assessment formats'. These key elements (that are elaborated in greater detail in the general chapter) are that:

- i. assessment should be meaningful for the learning process of the student (assessment for learning);
- ii. it should support the core principles of PBL (learning being constructive, contextual, collaborative, and self-directed- CCCS principles); and,
- iii. it should be coordinated at the programme level (constructive alignment).

As fully outlined below (see standard 3) the programme meets the standard of a reliable, valid, and transparent system of assessment.

## Realised learning outcomes

The graduates of the programme are concretely successful on the international labour market (see detailed statistics below under standard 4).

Satisfaction among graduates and students is also high with a considerable number of students feel well prepared for a professional career (see also students' chapter below).

## Weaknesses

The program is dependent on international students, with most ELS students holding a pre-education outside The Netherlands. The inflow of students coming from UM's own BA ELS is relative stable (between 20 and 26 students over the past years) and the inflow of students with a BA degree from other institutions in The Netherlands is also stable but negligible. Nonetheless, given the focus of the curriculum and the program's European and international orientation, this type of cohort composition is to be expected. In addition, the ongoing effect of Brexit makes Dutch universities attractive to international students helping to ensure the requisite numbers.



Secondly, the potential of establishing the MA ELS as a brand has not been fully exploited since a structured approach in keeping contact with alumni is lacking. Nevertheless, the central UM level has organised contacts with alumni and there are informal contacts between alumni and teaching staff.

Thirdly the lack of a clear profile in the general track, a track that typically accounts for more than half of the students enrolled in the MA ELS, makes it more difficult to create a genuine community between students. However, it has been a conscious choice to retain a general track as it offers further flexibility to students to construct their program. Several students consider flexibility an asset of the program.

A fourth identified weakness is the average time needed to complete the programme. For example, in the period 2018-2022 the average registration years per student in the one-year MA ELS programme were 1,7 years. This reality puts strain on teaching staff and resources. The changes in the master thesis trajectory have sought to address this challenge and their impact is being evaluated in the current AY 2023-2024.

Finally, given the limited number of students with a BA in law from The Netherlands, only the specialisation track in EU Public Law automatically gives 'civiel effect', that is access to the legal profession in the Netherlands. For students in the other specialisations and in the general track to qualify for 'civiel effect', they must select specific courses. This problem, however, concerns a minority of students, given the international composition of the cohorts.

## Opportunities

As of AY 23-24 we created a new specialisation track focusing on the law of sustainable Europe. This allows the programme to respond to increasing demand from the students' side for education on the law governing the ecological challenges which will confront humankind in the 21st century, a pressing societal challenge.

The reduction of individual freedom of students to construct their curricula also creates an opportunity to ensure greater coherence at programme level in terms of teaching approach and assessment. This in turn has the potential to enhance educational quality at program level.

In addition, a reinforced thesis trajectory was introduced in AY 22-23. This offers an opportunity to reduce the average length of study, limiting the pressure to staff and resources and thus raising the quality of education.

The pre-master program entails opportunities since it may ensure that the student cohort starts at a more uniform (and overall higher) level, improving the quality of education. This would also help in reducing the average time needed to complete the programme.

A further opportunity to increase educational quality is the increased professionalisation of the educational support structures at the faculty which have seen the roles of the Board of Admissions, the Educational Office, and the Director of Studies strengthened.

In 2021 the UM adopted a new (updated) vision on assessment whose content and operationalisation are outlined in detail in the general chapter. As a result, for example, within the programme, it is already the ambition that every course entails two assessment methods.





## Threats

The national consensus on attracting a high number of international students is increasingly under pressure. This could impact the master ELS due to the composition of its cohort. Nonetheless, even the most restrictive policy proposals under discussion seem to concern undergraduate rather than postgraduate education. The university is closely following developments at central level and seeking to influence national policy.

Another potential threat is the challenge of devising an effective admission policy, including a pre-master component. A balance needs to be struck between ensuring the quality of education and remaining attractive in an environment where students are incentivized to compare programmes, opting for the university that allows direct access to master programmes. Policy is being debated at faculty level for English speaking master programs.

In terms of assessment and admissions, the rise of AI capable of writing coherent texts is a challenge, as outlined in the general chapter. Relevant policy is being adopted at faculty level.

In terms of both teaching and assessment a further threat seems to be students' dwindling participation in course evaluations. It should be noted though that this is not a threat unique to the MA ELS, the Faculty of Law, or even UM. Potential solutions, such as the creation of student focus groups on assessment, are being considered at faculty level.



## Appendix

### Matrix List of intended learning outcomes (AY 2023-2024)

#### European Business Law

Dublin descriptors	Learning outcomes	Advanced European Law	The Foundations of European Institutionalization	International Commercial Law	Corporate Social Responsibility	Comparative Company Law	European Competition Law	State Aid and Public Procurement in the EU	Master Thesis
A. Knowledge and understanding	Graduates have in-depth and up-to-date knowledge of EU law, specifically the fields/topics covered by the courses/ specialisation of their choice	E	E		E		E	E	Depends on thesis topic
	Graduates have excellent understanding of the interaction between EU law and national law	E	E	X		E	X	X	
	Graduates have knowledge and understanding of the political context in which EU law is shaped, applied and enforced, so as to understand its dynamics and successes or failures	E	E		X	X	E	E	
B. Applying knowledge and understanding	Graduates can apply knowledge to identify and solve concrete/ complex problems that arise in the shaping, application or enforcement of EU law	E	E	X			E	E	E
	Graduates possess analytical skills which enable them to identify and solve concrete/complex problems that arise in the shaping, application or enforcement of EU law	E	E	X	E	X	E	E	
C. Making judgements	Graduates are able to translate knowledge (from textbooks, primary legal sources) into sound legal arguments or their own legal points of view	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
	Graduates are able to develop their own views or position in legal debates or disputes	X	E	E	E	E	E	E	
D. Communication	Graduates are able to express their legal arguments clearly, both orally and in writing	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
	Graduates are able to express their legal arguments clearly, in proper legal English	E	E	E	E	E	X	E	
E. Learning skills	Graduates possess the skills that legal experts need as regards the gathering, selecting, analysing, interpreting and synthesising of information from primary sources of EU and national law (treaties, legislation, case law) as well as secondary sources (textbooks, law journals, etc.)	E	X	X			E	E	E
	Graduates are able to deliver legally sound, well-researched papers (academic articles, commentaries, pleas, recommendations, etc.) on complex legal issues in the context of Europeanisation	E	E	X			E	E	
	Graduates can work both independently and in group settings	X	E	X	X	X	E	E	
	Graduates have an open-minded but critical and academic attitude	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	

E = both in teaching and examination

X = only in teaching



## European Public Law

Dublin descriptors	Learning outcomes	Advanced European Law	The Foundations of European Institutionalization	European and National Constitutional Law	European Fundamental Rights Law	External Relations of the EU	Internal Market Law and Governance	European Migration and Asylum Law	Master Thesis
A. Knowledge and understanding	Graduates have in-depth and up-to-date knowledge of EU law, specifically the fields/topics covered by the courses/ specialisation of their choice	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	Depends on thesis topic
	Graduates have excellent understanding of the interaction between EU law and national law	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	
	Graduates have knowledge and understanding of the political context in which EU law is shaped, applied and enforced, so as to understand its dynamics and successes or failures	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	
B. Applying knowledge and understanding	Graduates can apply knowledge to identify and solve concrete/ complex problems that arise in the shaping, application or enforcement of EU law	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
	Graduates possess analytical skills which enable them to identify and solve concrete/complex problems that arise in the shaping, application or enforcement of EU law	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	
C. Making judgements	Graduates are able to translate knowledge (from textbooks, primary legal sources) into sound legal arguments or their own legal points of view	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	
	Graduates are able to develop their own views or position in legal debates or disputes	X	E	E	E	E	E	E	
D. Communication	Graduates are able to express their legal arguments clearly, both orally and in writing	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	
	Graduates are able to express their legal arguments clearly, in proper legal English	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	
E. Learning skills	Graduates possess the skills that legal experts need as regards the gathering, selecting, analysing, interpreting and synthesising of information from primary sources of EU and national law (treaties, legislation, case law) as well as secondary sources (textbooks, law journals, etc.)	E	X	E	E	E	E	E	
	Graduates are able to deliver legally sound, well-researched papers (academic articles, commentaries, pleas, recommendations, etc.) on complex legal issues in the context of Europeanisation	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	
	Graduates can work both independently and in group settings	X	E	E	E	E	E	X	
	Graduates have an open-minded but critical and academic attitude	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	

E = both in teaching and examination

X = only in teaching



## Law of Sustainable Europe

Dublin descriptors	Learning outcomes	Advanced European Law	The Foundations of European Institutionalization	European Environmental Law	Global Environmental Law	Corporate Social Responsibility	European Fundamental Rights Law	Global Tax Policy and Sustainable Governance	Master Thesis
A. Knowledge and understanding	Graduates have in-depth and up-to-date knowledge of EU law, specifically the fields/topics covered by the courses/ specialisation of their choice	E	E	E	E	E	E		Depends on thesis topic
	Graduates have excellent understanding of the interaction between EU law and national law	E	E	E	E		E		
	Graduates have knowledge and understanding of the political context in which EU law is shaped, applied and enforced, so as to understand its dynamics and successes or failures	E	E	X	X	X	E	E	
B. Applying knowledge and understanding	Graduates can apply knowledge to identify and solve concrete/ complex problems that arise in the shaping, application or enforcement of EU law	E	E	E	E		E	E	E
	Graduates possess analytical skills which enable them to identify and solve concrete/complex problems that arise in the shaping, application or enforcement of EU law	E	E	E	E	E	E		
C. Making judgements	Graduates are able to translate knowledge (from textbooks, primary legal sources) into sound legal arguments or their own legal points of view	E	E	E	E	E	E		
	Graduates are able to develop their own views or position in legal debates or disputes	X	E	E	E	E	E	E	
D. Communication	Graduates are able to express their legal arguments clearly, both orally and in writing	E	E	E	E	E	E	X	
	Graduates are able to express their legal arguments clearly, in proper legal English	E	E			E	E	E	
E. Learning skills	Graduates possess the skills that legal experts need as regards the gathering, selecting, analysing, interpreting and synthesising of information from primary sources of EU and national law (treaties, legislation, case law) as well as secondary sources (textbooks, law journals, etc.)	E	X	E	E		E		
	Graduates are able to deliver legally sound, well-researched papers (academic articles, commentaries, pleas, recommendations, etc.) on complex legal issues in the context of Europeanisation	E	E	X	X		E		
	Graduates can work both independently and in group settings	X	E	X	E	X	E	E	
	Graduates have an open-minded but critical and academic attitude	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	

E = both in teaching and examination

X = only in teaching