



Report development conversation Master of Film

On 11 and 12 November 2021 an external assessment committee assessed the programme Master of Film of the Amsterdam University of the Arts. The committee had online conversations with the programme management team, the examination board, lecturers, student-researchers, alumni and representatives from the professional field. The assessment committee awarded a positive recommendation for the accreditation of the programme. This advice has been adopted by NVAO and has led to re-accreditation of the programme. In the assessment report we received, the panel formulated a number of valuable recommendations, including:

- to create an atmosphere necessary for valuable peer review within the group;
- to experiment with collective self-assessment in the peer group, including the teachers.

The aim of the development conversation, which was held on 12 April 2022 with two members of the external assessment committee (from now on referred to as 'the panel'), was to explore these recommendations. The focus thereby was on the collaborative aspect of the programme in relation to the assessment as this could offer a productive entry point to a set of pedagogical observations, challenges, and achievements.

We spoke about how the student-researchers find the formality of the exam cumbersome. The panel wondered if the pass/fail judgement could be at the center of this as it might bring about a different emotional tone. The panel suggested to take the emotional process of the student-researchers into account. Although the student-researchers have not mentioned the pass/fail decision this does not mean that it is not haunting them. The silence about it might not mean that it does not matter. It could help to emphasize that the exam is actually more a moment of taking stock where you are than a pass/fail exam.

The panel asked if there is some way of attuning the exam process to the Benammar method. Although the Benammar method is super formal, it has something of a reassuring choreography. But we have to keep in focus that there is a very on/off judgement to any exam: the learning outcomes have been met or they haven't been met. That judgement though needs to be understood as a judgement about a particular performance rather than a judgement about you ("you have failed"). The challenge thus is to keep the safety but at the same time to ensure the safety is also developing robustness.

One of the elements in the current Q&A part of the exam is that we ask the student-researchers: "What would you like to talk about, how would you like to frame the conversation?", which in a way is in the Benammar method a kind of a presenters' question. It would be great if we invite the student-researchers to set the terms of the conversation with "This is what I would like to be assessed on". We could use some of the elements of the Benammar method like "From the perspective of..., I would like to be assessed on...".

We also discussed the possibility of experimenting with conducting a final summative assessment of the group, so a pass/fail of the group as a whole by raising the question if the group collectively and individually reached all the learning objectives? This process could be designed as an experiment, run as a parallel with a spirit of play.

Another suggestion of the panel was to, via self-assessment, focus more on development of the individual along the learning outcomes, taking indicators from the semester and then think about steps for the next semester which can also be to redo the semester. The final learning outcomes can be presented as a scale and students can be asked to identify for themselves where they are on that scale. Pass/fail decisions are then avoided as the focus will be on development. This would mean though that all the learning outcomes must be incorporated in the programme from the start. At the beginning of the programme we could already look at the final learning outcomes ("So this is what we are heading for") and what that means for a particular person, in order to make these final learning outcomes less



abstract. Then, during the programme, students can have a regular review on what their progress is against the learning outcomes.

It could also be helpful to discuss the programme learning outcomes already in the selection: Where do you come from? Where are you already in relation to these learning outcomes? What do you want to learn, and How does your research plan relate to this? It sets the expectations already during the application: this is what you'll be doing, this is what it is about. It helps in defining the contract and it lets applicants discover if the learning outcomes allow them to do what they want to do in the programme.

Summarizing the development conversation the ideas to further investigate and develop are to:

- rethink the Q&A and bring it more in line with the Benammar method;
- experiment with the group evaluating itself rather than the group evaluating individuals because that's already embedded in the idea of the critical friend;
- rethink the final learning outcomes and how they can come back earlier into the semesters as a kind of thread and a contract with the student-researcher and how the student-researcher positions him-, her or themself in relation to those final qualifications and the indicators we can use for that positioning;
- use the concept of learning arches as a tool to further build the teaching team (as well): What are the learning arches in the programme, what is your contribution to this arch and how do you then refer back to what others are doing?

We would like to thank the experts from the assessment panel for their valuable and inspiring input during this development conversation.