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Graduation



Manual for external partners



HOGESCHOOL
ECONOMIE EN
COMMUNICATIE

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Introduction

You are working with one or more students of the study programme International Communication Management at Fontys School of Business and Communication (FSBC). International Communication Management (ICM) is a broad bachelor's programme in communication, taught in English. We also offer this programme in Dutch, called 'Communicatie'.

Since we're a university of applied sciences, we are practice-oriented, which is why your contribution as a client or external expert is of great value. This guide gives an impression of the structure of the graduation year and of your role in it. We start with a general description of learning activities, supervision and assessment. After that, we describe the various roles you can fulfil as an external expert and what we can do for each other in this respect.

1. Structure of the graduation year

The entire fourth year is focused on graduation, not just the last six months. Students spend the year in a team of 12 students and two graduation coaches, who will guide and support the students throughout the year.

At the start of the academic year, the student is given just one assignment: show that you reach the required level in a number of core areas of communication. These core areas have been drawn up by the Landelijk Overleg Communicatie-opleidingen (LOCO). This is a collaboration between all communication study programmes at universities of applied sciences in The Netherlands.

As International Communication Management in Eindhoven, we have added a seventh qualification to the LOCO core areas: personal positioning, in which we zoom in on the student as a communication professional. We look at your qualities, points for improvement, ambitions, vision on the communication profession and the your own (future) role within this profession. The central question is: what distinguishes you from other starting communication professionals?

The LOCO core areas (plus the FHEC qualification) are the following:

1. Context & Strategy
2. Target Group & Behaviour
3. Concept & Creation
4. Planning & Organisation
5. Persuasion & Commitment
6. Connection & Facilitation

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7. Personal Positioning

Learning activities

In order to achieve and demonstrate the required graduation level in all core areas, the student will carry out learning activities. These often are communication assignments for clients, but that's not always the case. For example, you could conduct research into a current communication trend and publish an article in a magazine or organise a workshop to share the acquired knowledge. That is why we officially use the more complete term 'learning activities', although in this manual we also use the term 'assignments'.

The student is 'in the lead' in the graduation year, so they also determine which learning activities they will do. The following questions are the starting point:

- In which LOCO core areas can I develop myself with this learning activity?
- Does the learning activity match my qualities, points for improvement and ambitions?

Selecting learning activities and assignments is the student's responsibility. This means that there can be a lot of variation in assignments. From smaller assignments lasting a few weeks to large assignments lasting several months or even longer. Students often work simultaneously on several assignments. Sometimes individually, sometimes in pairs.

It is important to emphasise that they will not do an internship. The internship is part of year 3 and consists almost exclusively of operational tasks, such as maintaining social media. Creating content for social media could be a graduation assignment to develop the LOCO core area Concept & Creation, but it would have to be preceded by a context analysis and the content created would be assessed at graduation level.

Ideally, the assignments should be complex (a large organisation, many stakeholders, overlap with other disciplines) and require research into the target group. Moreover they require the development of a communication strategy and based on that they develop a concept, communication materials and/or content for various media and platforms. With such an assignment, students are able to demonstrate their development in several LOCO core areas simultaneously.

These types of assignments (research, strategy, execution) resembles a classic thesis. You could say that many of the assignments in the graduation year have the character of a thesis. The difference is that they often work on shorter assignments (mini theses) and not just one large assignment in the last five months of the fourth year.

An additional condition for the International Communication Management programme is that the majority of the assignments have an international and/or intercultural component. This does not have to be abroad or in English. Working with international or intercultural target groups in The Netherlands or any other country is also allowed.

Recruitment of assignments

When searching for learning activities, students look at their ambitions and dreams as well as the practical side: their own network. The student is supported by the graduation coaches to map out their network and to approach it in a smart way.

In addition, organisations themselves also offer their assignments to us. Companies can post their own graduation assignments on our portal. Then it's visible to students and they decide themselves whether they will choose one of these assignments. This means that we cannot guarantee that an offered assignment will actually be carried out. However, in consultation we can see if we can draw extra attention to the assignment.

We have also recruited a number of assignments, so students who did not find an assignment yet at the start of the year, can also start working for clients immediately. An account team of lecturers recruits these assignments and makes them available on our portal. In this case too, it is up to the student to respond, but we can also assign an assignment to a graduation team. Subsequently, students from a team will decide among themselves who will take on this assignment.

The most important requirement for a learning activity is that the student develops one or more LOCO core areas. That is why approval is always needed from the graduation coach. When a client gives their approval, the student fills in the form 'Approval learning activity' and discusses it with the graduation coach. After the coach signs the form, the student registers the learning activity on our portal. A confirmation e-mail is then automatically sent to the client. This email also serves as a contract.

In principle, there is no direct contact between the client and the graduation coaches. The student themselves maintains contact with both. If a client or graduation coach does feel the need for a brief consultation, this can always be arranged of course.

Work place

The graduation team meets on campus one day a week. That day is called an 'agency day'. The graduation team functions as a communication agency and they get together for intervision, knowledge sharing, feedback and sessions with graduation coaches and each other. The agency day is one fixed day (for example, Tuesday) for the entire academic year. This means that on the other four days of the week, students are free to choose their own work place. Students work in the place that suits the assignment, the client and students themselves.

Of course, the student is free to find a workplace on campus on the other days of the week as well. But the student can also work on learning activities from home.

A logical option is to work internally at the client, for example one or two days a week at client A and two other days at client B. But that is not an obligation, after all it is not an internship. Neither do clients have to provide an internal workplace to graduation students.

Usually there are advantages to having an internal workplace with a client. For example, to get to know the company and its employees better, to be able to consult with the client quickly or to assist in the organisation of an event.

A workplace at the client can also be a pitfall. The danger is that the client sees the student as an intern, performing mostly operational tasks, with the result that the student does not have enough time for the actual assignment at bachelor level.

Coaching, guidance and supervision

Students have a great deal of freedom during the graduation year, but they are supported and coached by several people. Each student is supported by graduation coaches, expert lecturers, peers, and clients, but also by other external communication professionals.

As mentioned earlier, each graduation team is linked to two graduation coaches. They coach, but the student is 'in the lead'. Graduation coaches mainly ask questions about the process, progress and content of the assignments, and the student asks the coaches for feedback.

In addition to the graduation coaches, students can also consult expert lecturers. These lecturers have specific expertise in (aspects of) communication, for instance in research, communication strategies, or internal communication.

Support is also provided by clients. These are not necessarily communication professionals, but they are perfectly capable of giving feedback on whether an advice is useful and whether the student acts in accordance with the core values of the organisation. In some core areas, the opinion of a client is even more valuable than a professional product. That is why feedback from a client is required in every learning activity (if there is a client).

Students can also consult other communication professionals (other than the client) for feedback. Students may use their own network or use the relations of the study programme and its lecturers.

In the graduation year it is crucial that the student asks for feedback from communication professionals, but students also learn from the hundreds of communication experts from the past and present who have shared their knowledge and experience in publications. Theories on positioning, behavioural change, internal communication. Models of engagement, organisational structures, identity and image. A student cannot do a graduation assignment without using theory.

Assessment

In terms of assessment, there is a distinction between formative and summative assessments. During the graduation year, students receive feedback on the quality of their work and their role as a communications professional. This is formative feedback. The assessment at the end of the year, resulting in a grade and credits, is summative.

The student will receive a (formative) assessment twice during the graduation year, in November and in February. The student will be assessed by an examiner, which is a graduation coach from another graduation team. This 'mirrored' assessment is done to separate supervision from assessment to guarantee objectivity.

At the end of the graduation year, the final, summative assessment takes place. The student hands in a portfolio, which demonstrates the required bachelor level in all LOCO core areas and personal positioning. The student portfolio will be reviewed by the first examiner, a graduation coach from the other team. Their own graduation coach is the second examiner, whom will provide insights into the student's personal learning development.

If the portfolio review is sufficient, a graduation assessment follows. This interview is held with the examiner from the other team, the student's own graduation coach, and an external expert. This communication professional assesses whether the student is competent and ready to enter the communication profession (or to further their studies).

In the graduation assessment, students first briefly present their personal positioning in a 'positioning statement'. Then, examiners ask questions about their learning activities, the professional products, the link with the LOCO core areas, feedback obtained and the student's

personal development. The final grades (per core area) are determined on the basis of this assessment.

Assessment criteria

The LOCO describes the profile and the required knowledge and skills of a bachelor in communication. For each core area, various assessment criteria are described in an assessment rubric. The rubric is used as a base for the summative assessment (but also for the formative assessment). While using the rubric we look at the following formula:

$$\text{Assessment} = \text{Complexity} \times \text{independence} \times \text{quality} \times \text{quantity}$$

- Complexity. The student works on a variety of assignments and/or learning activities that have no standard approach or solution. The context is complex because, for example, many stakeholders are involved. The student has to learn new knowledge or new skills and apply these in the learning activities.
- Independence. The student works without much direction or guidance from graduation coaches and/or the client. They are able to work individually, but also in a team and in both cases, they are able to take initiative and decide on an approach and the content of the learning activity.
- Quality. The student is assessed at the graduation level of a bachelor's in communication (hbo). This means that the student can work on communications issues in a tactical, strategic and operational manner.
- Quantity. The student demonstrates the required graduation level multiple times by carrying out various assignments and learning activities in different situations and contexts several times.

Assessment deliverables

The student submits several documents for the assessment:

- Portfolio: The document in which the student connects the learning activities to the LOCO assessment criteria. The student indicates per core area how the required level has been reached. It also contains short descriptions of the learning activities themselves. This makes it easy for assessors to quickly see what you have done in your graduation year.
- Professional products: Together with the portfolio, the professional products are the proof that the student has reached the required level. Examples of professional products are: research reports, advice reports, created content, event plans, or videos of workshops performed. Some core areas are proved For some core areas, the proof is less in professional products, but more in the judgements and feedback by those involved, such as clients and experts.
- Positioning product: For the Personal Positioning qualification, the student delivers a separate document called 'Positioning product'. In this document the student shows themselves as a communication professional and what distinguishes them from others.

Important aspects are their vision on the communication profession, their qualities, points for improvement and ambitions.

Study credits

After reviewing these documents plus the subsequent graduation assessment, the assessors provide seven final grades. This helps students gain a picture of what their qualities are. It pictures a profile of what type of communication professional they are.

There is also a distribution of study points (ECs, European Credits) across the core areas. In International Communication Management and the Dutch-taught equivalent 'Communicatie', the division is as follows:

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|-----------------------------|-------|
| 1. Context & Strategy | 13 EC |
| 2. Target Group & Behaviour | 13 EC |
| 3. Concept & Creation | 7 EC |
| 4. Planning & Organisation | 7 EC |
| 5. Persuasion & Commitment | 7 EC |
| 6. Connection & Persuasion | 7 EC |
| 7. Personal Positioning | 6 EC |

The reason that Context & Strategy and Target Group & Behaviour generate more credits has to do with the fact that these core areas are indispensable in the professional field. And also as a study programme, we find these core areas the most important. In almost every communication assignment it is necessary to map out the context, to determine a strategy and to have a good picture of (the current and desired behaviour of) the target group.

2. Role of external partners

The description of the graduation year already shows that the professional field occupies an important place in our study programme, as clients, feedback providers and quality controller. These roles often overlap, but in this chapter we have described them separately to make clear how we interpret these roles.

Client

The communication issue of you as the client is the starting point for the learning activity. The student connects the learning activity to the LOCO core areas. They will write down how they will develop these core areas during the learning activity. Students ask the graduation coach for approval to start the new project / learning activity. It may be that the assignment requires further refinement or expansion of its scope to be suitable as a communications project at bachelor level.

After the coach's approval, you as the client will receive a confirmation (which serves as a contract) and a link to this manual. Direct contact with the study programme can be organised on request, but generally students complete the assignment independently under the condition that it's their task to keep both the client and the study programme informed.

During the learning activity, we expect the student to have an independent and positive-critical attitude. Not the attitude of an intern, but more that of a freelancer, hired communications consultant or advertising agency. The client is more of an external customer than an internal supervisor.

This (semi-)professional relationship may also have a financial aspect. A fee for the student is possible, but not compulsory. It is up to the student to bring this up, but you, as the client, can also bring it up.

The study programme is not a party in this, but it does have an opinion about it. After all, remuneration rightly creates expectations about the quality of the work, while the graduation year is a period in which students are still learning, also from their own mistakes. Moreover, paid students have a greater tendency to partake in the regular work rather than focus on their own assignment. That is why the programme is hesitant towards remuneration for graduation assignments, unless clear agreements are made between the student and the client.

Students learn from feedback. This feedback can be related to the advice itself, but also process-related (e.g. professional attitude). As a client, you provide feedback during the course of the assignment (so that the student can improve) and at the end. The student will invite you through our online platform to give feedback on their work and the process of the assignment.

The feedback form for clients does not count as an assessment. The final assessment lies with the examiners, but students can add the feedback to their portfolio and use it to develop themselves. For the more process-oriented core areas (particularly Persuasion & Commitment), professional products are not very suitable to prove their development and level. For those core

areas your opinion as the client is important input for the summative assessment by the examiners.

External expert

Besides the client, students can also ask for feedback from other external experts. Communication professionals from the work field or from the academics can be asked for advice. Again, they don't assess and grade the students' work, but rather provide feedback to help the student with their next steps.

As an external expert, you may be consulted for feedback on an individual basis, but you may also be asked to be a guest speaker or to provide a workshop for one or more graduation teams. Students are asked to organise knowledge-sharing sessions on the joint agency days on the campus. They can bring in experts on a particular theme.

Another option is that a student has conducted research without a client. For example, about a communication trend or a current topic. In this case, the student may wish to publish the acquired knowledge or discuss it with experts. You may be consulted in the research phase, but you may also be consulted to discuss the outcomes of the research, for example because the topic is relevant to your organisation or industry.

At International Communication Management, we encourage students to ask for feedback from experts outside school, as well as their own clients. This is not always easy, because the student does not have a large network yet and because there is no direct benefit for you as an external expert. Therefore, we also try to organise feedback sessions in which students are able to receive feedback from experts in an efficient manner. In these sessions you can give feedback to multiple students, so it takes less time for you as an expert.

External expert at the graduation assessment

During the graduation assessments, we greatly value the practical perspective and the independent opinion of external experts. After all deliverables (portfolio, professional products and personal positioning) of the student have been reviewed and graded as sufficient, the graduation assessment is scheduled. The graduation assessment takes place with the first and second examiner (another coach and the student's own graduation coach) and an external expert.

To prepare, you examine the portfolio (without all the professional products) and the personal positioning. This gives a good picture of the student's development and level. In the graduation assessment in the form of an interview you discuss the six LOCO core areas and the personal development and positioning of the student.

Your added value as an external expert lies in answering the (implicit) question: 'Is this student ready for a job as a communications professional at bachelor's level? Or: 'Would I employ this student in my organisation?' Your opinion provides important input when determining the final grades per core area. However, it is the first examiner that decides on the final grades.

We need clients and external experts throughout the academic year (from September to May), but the greatest need for external experts is during the graduation assessments in June and at the beginning of July and the end of August for the resits. At International Communication Management, the graduation assessments are in English and we are looking for experts with an international perspective and of course language skills too.

Possibilities

You probably take on one of the roles described above as an external partner. Hopefully, this guide will also provide insight into the other roles. We are always looking for interesting clients, experts and external consultants to help our students in the graduation year.

And not only in the graduation year we have good connections to the work field. In year 1 and 2, students also work for clients from the work field. Multiple groups of students work on the same assignment. And in year 3, students are looking for an interesting internship, so you can also offer internships.

In short, there are plenty of opportunities to work together to inspire and immerse students in the world of professional communication. Feel free to contact us to discuss these possibilities.