

NVAO  THE NETHERLANDS

PEER REVIEW NEW PROGRAMME
RESEARCH MASTER
WATER AND SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
(RESEARCH)

IHE Delft

SUMMARY REPORT
30 June 2021



1 Peer Review

The quality of a new programme is assessed by means of peer review. A panel of independent peers including a student reviews the plans during a site visit to the institution. A discussion amongst peer experts forms the basis for the panel's final judgement and the advisory report. The focus is on the curriculum and intended learning outcomes, the teaching and learning environment, and student assessment.

The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) takes a formal decision on the quality of the new programme proposed based on the outcome of the peer review. This decision can be positive, conditionally positive or negative. Following a positive NVAO decision with or without conditions the institution can proceed to offer the new programme. Upon completion of the programme graduates are entitled to receive a legally accredited degree.

This summary report contains the main outcomes of the peer review. A full report with more details including the panel's findings and analysis is also available. NVAO bases an accreditation decision on the full report.

Both the full and summary reports of peer reviews are published on NVAO's website www.nvao.net, once accepted officially. There you can also find more information on NVAO and peer reviews of other new programmes.

Because of COVID-19 temporary measures apply for this peer review.

2 Panel

Peer experts

1. Prof. dr. Isa Baud (*chair*), University of Amsterdam, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences;
2. Prof. dr. Jaap Kwadijk, University of Twente, Faculty of Engineering Technology;
3. Dr. Karin Rebel, University of Utrecht, Faculty of Geosciences, Senior Fellow Center for Academic Teaching;
4. Aldo Zamarroni Peralta (*student*), Wageningen University, MSc student International Land and Water Management.

Assisting staff

- Dr. Marianne van der Weiden, secretary
- Drs. Henri Ponds, NVAO policy advisor and process coordinator

Site visit

19-20 April 2021 (online)

3 Outcome

The NVAO approved panel reaches a conditionally positive conclusion regarding the quality of the Research Master Water and Sustainable Development offered by IHE Delft. The 120 EC master programme offers a fulltime curriculum in Delft.

The Research Master Water and Sustainable Development targets early- and mid-career professionals from the global South who wish to pursue a research career by offering them an interdisciplinary programme. The institute offers a strong research environment with emphasis on analytical and critical skills and scientific reflection, adequately expressed in the learning objectives. Students are supervised by experienced researchers and choose thesis topics that are linked to the institute's international research projects. The curriculum is student-centered: students choose their study path in consultation with a coach, selecting modules and a thesis topic that fit their background and ambitions. The panel notes that the admission procedure is not geared to the requirements for a Research Master and should be adapted to assess critical thinking and problem solving. The first year mainly consists of taught modules, the second year focuses on the research project and courses on research methods and specific disciplinary knowledge. In the modules students of the Research Master are grouped together with students of the regular (1 year) Master, without including higher learning objectives or additional assignments. The research orientation of the programme is therefore not visible from the beginning. The level of the elective courses should also be more clearly guaranteed to be at an appropriate level for a Research Master. The thesis project and the translation of its results to stakeholders and society (valorisation) are a strength of the programme. The Exam Board actively monitors the qualifications of examiners and the quality of the assessment system. External examiners ensure that theses reach levels accepted by the discipline and professional field.

All in all, the panel assesses the quality of the programme as conditionally positive. The two conditions relate to the admission criteria and the level of first-year modules and elective courses. Both should be more in line with the character of a Research Master.

4 Commendations

The programme is commended for the following features of good practice.

1. Research context – The programme is offered in a strong research environment, said to be rated highly in a recent research assessment. Students choose thesis research topics that are linked to the research projects of the institute and are supervised by professors actively involved in research.
2. Valorisation – In the final module, students create an action plan and related communication output to make their thesis research accessible to society, increasing its societal impact.
3. Interdisciplinarity – The programme provides students with knowledge in the wide domain of sustainable water management and the skills to work on research projects in interdisciplinary, trans-disciplinary and multi-cultural teams.

4. Mixed weeks – Between modules in the first year, time is built in for students to reflect with the coach on their study progress and to learn useful academic skills that they can apply and practice in the following modules. Second year students are involved in organising these weeks.

5. Student-centred programme – With the help of a coach, students design their own study path based on their background knowledge and their career ambitions. Within one of the four tracks they choose a profile and select a number of modules and a thesis topic that is linked to the research projects of senior staff members.

5 Recommendations

For further improvement to the programme, the panel recommends a number of follow-up actions.

1. Student guidance – Make sure that the available mechanisms (coaches and portfolio) to ensure that students make informed choices when designing their individual study paths are fully formalized recognized positions and activities and meet student expectations.

2. Preparatory courses – Urge students to complete the preparatory courses before they start the programme if there are knowledge gaps, and utilize the new role of coaches to emphasise the importance of this. Add a preparatory course on research methodology.

3. Didactic toolkit – Complete the process of utilising the didactic toolkit in the design of modules and assessment across the programme for complete alignment, and support staff by training them in its use.

4. Assessment committee – Establish an assessment committee under the responsibility of the Exam Board to help the Exam Board to check the quality of all programme assessments.

6 What comes next?

NVAO grants initial accreditation to a new programme on the basis of a panel's full report. The decision is valid for a maximum of six years. For conditional accreditation other regulations apply. Upon accreditation the new programme will follow the NVAO review procedures for existing programmes. NVAO publishes the accreditation decision together with the full report and this summary report.¹

Each institution has a system of quality assurance in place ensuring continuous follow-up actions and periodic peer-review activities. Peer reviews help the institution to improve the quality of its programmes. The progress made since the last review is therefore taken into consideration when preparing for the next review. The follow-up

¹ <https://www.nvao.net/nl/besluiten>

The summary report was written at the request of NVAO and is the outcome of the peer review of the new programme Research Master Water and Sustainable Development of IHE Delft

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