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Research Master Societal Resilience Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

*Report of the limited programme assessment
12 May 2023*

Utrecht, The Netherlands
October 2023
www.AeQui.nl
Assessment Agency for Higher Education

Colophon

Institution and programme

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Research Master

Location: Amsterdam

Programme duration: two years

Mode of study: full-time

CROHO: 69333

Language of Instruction: English

Result of institutional assessment: positive

Panel

Prof. dr. E. Giebels, chair

Prof. dr. M. Lubbers, domain expert

Prof. dr. M. A. Pedersen, domain expert

Prof. dr. B. Vedres, domain expert

M. Siebring BA, student member

Dr. J.M. Batteau, secretary

The panel was presented to the NVAO for approval.

The assessment was conducted under the responsibility of

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This document is best printed in duplex

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Summary

On 12 May 2023, an assessment panel of AeQui visited the research master programme Societal Resilience of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The two-year full-time programme of 120 ECTS can be characterised as a highly relevant, future-oriented course designed to train talented students as social scientists of the future who are able to investigate contemporary societal challenges through an interdisciplinary research lens. The panel judges that the programme meets the standards of the 2018 framework for limited programme assessment as well as the additional criteria for research master's programmes (2016); hence the overall judgment of the panel is **positive**.

Intended learning outcomes

According to the panel, the programme's profile and objectives meet the (inter)national expectations for a research-orientated master in the Social Sciences. The panel describes the programme as highly relevant, future-oriented, and appreciates the commitment to provide interdisciplinary knowledge with an emphasis on computational social science (CSS). The panel supports the proposed name change with a focus on digital society provided that the content of the curriculum is more fully aligned with this shift in orientation and course offerings (see also the separate report for the advice of part of the panel on 'Development Dialogue'). The assessment panel concludes that the programme **meets the standard**.

Teaching-learning environment

The panel is positive about the orientation, contents, and teaching philosophy of the programme: it offers its students a challenging, inspiring curriculum, closely informed by the research lines of the Faculty of Social Sciences and characterised by a thoughtful build-up with regard to theory, methodology and skills. The panel supports the programme in its reorientation towards digital social sciences, compliments the programme for its strong professional orientation, and appreciates that students can choose their own focus within the curriculum. The panel is positive about the co-teaching system, the guidance and support provided by the teaching staff, and characterises the staff as highly qualified and dedicated. Students are highly appreciative of their teachers and feel themselves to be very much part of a stimulating research community. The programme is selective in admitting students and has a clear and appropriate intake-procedure. The assessment panel concludes that the programme **meets the standard**.

Student assessment

The panel has established that the assessments of the programme are valid, objective, and transparent. Student assessment is based on carefully described and detailed procedures, rules, rubrics and course manuals, and there is good communication with students about the goals and objectives of the assessments. The panel is also positive about the involvement of the Examination Board, which fulfils its tasks and responsibilities in a dedicated manner. The panel is happy to hear that the board has initiated calibration sessions on the assessments of the theses and urges it to continue its work through the monitoring patterns and problems in assessment procedures in a systematic manner. The assessment panel concludes that the programme **meets the standard**.

Achieved learning outcomes

According to the panel, the level of the theses, internships and the careers of the students make clear that the programme is able to achieve its intended learning outcomes. The theses are generally of good quality, with a clear writing structure and style, and a good mastery of research methods. The theses address a wide range of topics relating to societal challenges and issues and are the outcome of a complete research cycle. The theses can be qualified as examples of advanced and independent research and prove that the students are well-prepared for research positions. The assessment panel concludes that the programme **meets the standard**.

Recommendations

To support the programme in its further development, the panel would like to make the following recommendations:

- the panel encourages the programme to sharpen its profile in this direction and to enhance its focus on integrative multi/mixed method and multidisciplinary training;
- the panel observes that more could be done to explicitly work with mixed-methods designs and implement integrative interdisciplinary approaches in the courses;
- the panel encourages the programme to continue to proactively engage with issues of diversity, equity and inclusion, ensuring a diverse staff composition and the teaching of intercultural skills;
- the panel expects that the change in name and the accompanying change in contents of the Master could lead to a larger interest and influx of candidates in the programme, but urges the programme to take remedial actions if this is not the case so that it can continue to offer the learning advantages of a diverse and international classroom;
- the panel believes that the final thesis assessment could be further improved upon, particularly with respect to the quantity and quality of the written feedback to students and its link with grading. The panel further recommends that the supervision of the theses be conducted by experienced researchers who have different methodological and/or disciplinary backgrounds;
- given the programme's emphasis on interdisciplinary, multi-method research, the panel believes that adopting interdisciplinary approaches or using a combination of qualitative, quantitative and computational methods in the thesis could be further encouraged also by challenging students more to engage with and apply different methodologies in their thesis project;
- given the societal orientation of the programme, the panel thinks that offering more venues for doing internships would increase the employability of the students in positions outside academia.

All standards of the NVAO assessment framework (2018) as well as the additional criteria for research master's programmes (2016) are assessed positively; the assessment panel therefore awards a positive recommendation for the accreditation of the programme.

On behalf of the entire assessment panel,
Utrecht, October 2023

prof.dr. Ellen Giebels
Chair

dr. Jesseka Batteau
Secretary

Introduction

This report describes the outcome of the assessment of the Research Master Societal Resilience of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, which took place on 12 May 2023. The Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) offers 53 bachelor programmes and 105 full time master programmes which are attended by more than 32.000 students, including around 19.000 bachelor students and circa 12.000 master students, and more than 5000 international students. The VU employs a total of 4.260 teachers and staff members. The Research Master Societal Resilience, with the subtitle 'Big Data for Society', is a two-year, full-time programme that trains students to become skilled social sciences researchers who can critically engage with complex societal challenges and issues.

The Faculty and the Research Institute

The Research Master Societal Resilience is embedded in the Faculty of Social Sciences, consisting of five scientific departments and focuses on six social scientific disciplines: Sociology, Social and Cultural Anthropology, Organization Sciences, Communication Science, and Public Administration and Political Science. In addition to the research master, the Faculty currently offers five bachelor programmes and seven one-year master programmes. Each department is led by a joint Management Team consisting of a head of department, the programme director(s), and the research manager.

The programme is based on research conducted within the research programmes Sociology, Social and Cultural Anthropology, Organization Sciences, Communication Science, and Public Administration and Political Science of the Faculty. In addition to the disciplinary research programmes, the Faculty hosts the Institute for Societal Resilience, a research institute in which all departments of the Faculty of Social Sciences collaborate.

The Programme

The programme offers a two-year, full-time research master curriculum, taught in English, amounting to 120 EC. The choice for an English taught programme is based on the international research orientation of the programme and the field of Social Sciences, the international networks of many of the staff members, as well as the aim

of the programme to attract international students. The panel considers this a well-founded decision.

The programme aims to educate talented students as social scientists of the future who are able to investigate societal challenges and issues through research. The programme offers students a wide array of theories, methods, and skills which help them tackle complex societal topics, often from multidisciplinary and multimethod perspectives. The subtitle of the programme, 'Big Data for society', highlights that students learn computational social science techniques to analyse data with an engaged mindset. The programme also aims to prepare students for research careers in data-intensive organisations and positions in which they are likely to work in multidisciplinary and multimethod teams.

The programme gives students the opportunity to develop their own focus and topics of interest through interactive lectures, working groups, and final assignments in mandatory courses, as well as by way of elective courses in specialised methods and the research projects of their internships and theses.

Since its start in September 2019, the programme has taken active measures to improve the curriculum, including:

- enabling more exchange between students and researchers from the Faculty working on topics related to societal resilience;

- revising the electives to align with the research conducted at the Faculty;
- providing more training on mixed methods;
- enhancing exchange between disciplines and methodologies through assignments;
- adjusting the selection criteria for incoming students to fit better with the profile of the programme;
- improving the learning objectives of the 'Writing a Scientific Paper'-course and the thesis.

The programme has taken several additional measures in response to the internal review in 2022. It has strengthened the integration of disciplines and methods through in-course assignments and discussions; appointed an internship coordinator and included the internship report in the final work; actively involved the programme committee and examination board in the improvement of the programme and invested in the calibration and further standardisation of the thesis assessment rubric.

New Name

The internal review panel also advised the programme to change its name to better reflect the content of the curriculum as well as the shifting research focus within the Faculty as whole. The programme has taken this advice to heart and invested time in thinking about what name would be the best fit for the curriculum; all heads of departments, the programme committee, students and also staff members were involved in these discussions. The programme proposed a new name to the current panel members for their input and expert judgement. The name change was discussed during the site visit with different representatives of the programme as well as during the development dialogue (see below).

The Assessment

The Faculty of Social Sciences of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam assigned AeQui to perform a quality assessment of its Research Master Programme Societal Resilience. AeQui composed an

independent and competent assessment panel, in close co-operation with the programme management. The panel members are all experts in the field of Social Sciences and have the necessary expertise and experience to assess the research master programme in a knowledgeable and thorough manner.

In the spring of 2023, a preparatory meeting with representatives of the programme took place to exchange information and plan the date and programme of the site-visit. The site visit took place on 12 May. For an overview of the site visit programme, see attachment 2.

In the run-up to the site visit, the panel studied the self-evaluation report of the programme and its supporting documents, and also reviewed a sample of student work, a total of 13 theses and internship reports. The findings formed the basis and input for discussions during the site visit. The panel assessed the programme in an independent manner; at the end of the visit, the chair of the panel presented its initial findings to representatives of the programme and institution.

This document reflects the panel's findings, considerations and conclusions according to the NVAO framework for limited programme assessment (2018). It also takes into consideration the specification of additional criteria for research master programmes formulated by the NVAO (2016). A draft version of the report was sent to the programme management for a check on factual inconsistencies; this input has led to this final version of the report.

At the initiative of the programme, a development dialogue with the chair, one panel member, the panel secretary and representatives of the programme and the Faculty was conducted on 22 May 2023, which addressed the intended name change of the programme. The outcomes of this consultation, including the panel's recommendations, were drafted into a separate report which was sent to the programme for factual corrections. The final version served as the basis for the

formal request for a name change submitted to the NVAO. The results of this development dialogue did not affect or influence the assessment presented in this report.

Intended learning outcomes

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment panel concludes that the programme **meets the standard**. According to the panel, the programme's profile and objectives meet the (inter)national expectations for a research-orientated master's in the Social Sciences. The panel describes the programme as highly relevant, future-oriented, and appreciates the commitment to provide interdisciplinary knowledge with an emphasis on computational social science (CSS). It encourages the programme to sharpen its profile in this direction and to enhance its focus on integrative multi/mixed method and multidisciplinary training. The panel supports the proposed name change with a focus on digital society under the condition that the content of the curriculum is more fully aligned with this shift in orientation and course offerings (see also the separate report for the advice of part of the panel on 'Development Dialogue').

Findings

The aim of the Research Master Programme in Societal Resilience of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) is to educate talented students to become engaged social scientists, who are able to meet complex societal challenges from a multidisciplinary multi-method social science perspective, with an emphasis on computational social science. 'Societal resilience' is the overarching concept of the research institute of the Faculty of Social Sciences at VU Amsterdam, which is defined as: 'the mobilization of resources for the improvement of welfare in the face of adversity: how individuals and communities survive, adapt, and grow in the face of stress and shocks'. Students gain knowledge of societal problems related to dynamics of interconnectedness, forms of governance, social diversity and issues of care and welfare, and how groups in society can deal with these challenges resiliently. In this manner, the programme aims to prepare students for jobs in data-intensive organisations, within the corporate world (e.g., consulting), within the public sector (e.g., government ministries and international institutions), non-profit organisations (e.g., Red Cross Headquarters), and in academia.

With respect to knowledge and understanding (KU), students should gain:

1. specialist knowledge about complex social problems and solutions;
2. knowledge about societal resilience;

3. advanced knowledge about research proposals;
4. basic knowledge about qualitative, quantitative and computational social science methods;
5. advanced knowledge about either qualitative, quantitative, or computational social science methods.

With respect to the application of knowledge (AK), students should gain:

6. the skill to analyse social problems from multiple disciplinary perspectives;
7. basic skills to apply qualitative, quantitative, and computational research methods;
8. advanced skills in either qualitative, quantitative, or computational research methods.

The policy contexts in which students will conduct social research are complex. Therefore, the programme sets learning objectives with respect to judgment formation (JF), stating that students should gain:

9. the skill to critically analyse social problems;
10. the skill to critically reflect on the scientific and societal relevance of research;
11. the skill to reflect on the ethical aspects of social research and its use in practice.

With regard to skills in communication (C). Students should gain:

12. the ability to write scientifically;
13. the ability to present research in society.

Finally, with respect to learning skills (LS), students should gain:

14. the ability to work in an interdisciplinary and multi-methodological environment, and in cocreation with societal stakeholders;
15. intercultural skills, the student is able to collaborate in internationally diverse teams, has
 1. good communication skills and is able to establish international contacts;
16. knowledge of ethical values and codes of conduct that guide working in an international and diverse context;
17. the ability to reflect on their own learning skills and abilities.

As discussed in the introduction, the programme has submitted a request for a name change to the NVAO. The necessity for a name change arises from a shift in the research focus of the departments at the Faculty of Social Sciences, the ambition to develop a more distinct profile in the direction of computational and digital social sciences, and the low number of students currently enrolled in the programme. This change also needs to lead to adjustments in the courses and intended learning outcomes; however, the programme indicated that the core and structure of the programme will remain intact (see the panel's recommendations for changes in the separate report on name change: 'Development Dialogue'). All heads of the departments of the Faculty of Social Sciences are involved in this transition, and the programme has made sure to include the perspectives and input of other stakeholders as well, such as staff members, the programme committee and the professional advisory committee. It has already organised a retreat for lecturers, students and faculty management to discuss the future and revision of the programme.

Considerations

According to the panel, the objective of offering a research master that approaches complex social problems from a multidisciplinary, computational social science perspective is of great interest to students with a disciplinary social science background. The panel qualifies the programme as relevant, future-oriented, with an ambitious topical, methodological and epistemological vision, as well as an appropriate pedagogical ambition. The programme has a coherent and fitting set of exit qualifications, which are distinct from one-year master programmes in the social sciences with regard to level, complexity, and student independence. This is expressed in the level required in research skills, methodological competencies, and expectations with regard to research independence and self-management during the thesis project.

The professional orientation is also appreciated by the panel. The programme has strong connections with the professional field through the internships in the second year, during which students must conduct a research project either within an external organisation, or in an academic research group.

The panel values that the development of the programme and shift in the profile is a collective endeavour of the whole Faculty, and that all heads of the departments feel responsible for the shared programme. In its discussions with management, teachers and students during the site visit, the panel could observe that there is a shared vision of the direction of the programme, and that the increased focus on digital and computational social sciences is supported by those involved. The panel encourages the programme to sharpen its profile and enhance its focus on integrative multi/mixed method and multidisciplinary training, which will enable relevant research across methods and approaches, for example, by ensuring that the pairs of thesis supervisors have different disciplinary backgrounds and, ideally, have expertise in multi/mixed-method approaches. The panel stresses that the name

change will necessarily require curricular changes. It also points out that technological and digital developments need not only to be seen as challenges or problems but might also be viewed as opportunities for engaging with complex societal issues in new and exciting ways.

With regard to the ability to work in an interdisciplinary and multi-method environment (skill 14), the panel suggests that the programme needs to do more to teach students mixed-methods designs (see the following section).

With regard to intercultural skills (skill 15), the panel recommends that these skills are taught actively, as the students' international profile alone is not sufficient for guaranteeing the acquisition of intercultural skills. (see following section).

Based on the documentation and the discussions with the representatives of the programme the panel concludes that the programme's profile and objectives meet the requirements of the international standards of a master in the Social Sciences. The specific research orientation and that its profile, already distinct from comparable research masters in the Netherlands, will fully benefit from the intended name change and shift in orientation, provided that the name change is accompanied with a clear change in substance and course offerings in the direction suggested by the name change.

In conclusion, the panel judges that the programme **meets this standard**.

Teaching-learning environment

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment panel concludes that the programme **meets the standard**. The panel is very positive about the orientation, contents, and teaching philosophy of the programme. According to the panel, the programme offers its students a challenging, inspiring curriculum, which is closely informed by the research lines of the Faculty of Social Sciences and characterised by a thoughtful build-up with regard to theory, methodology and skills. There is a strong research orientation throughout the whole of the curriculum, and an active engagement with current debates regarding societal challenges. The panel supports the programme in its reorientation towards digital social sciences. The panel observes that more could be done to explicitly work with mixed-methods designs and implement integrative interdisciplinary approaches in the courses. The panel compliments the programme for its strong professional orientation through the internships, and its investment in field days, guest lecturers from the professional field and career orientation days. The panel appreciates that students can choose their own focus within the curriculum through interactive lectures, working groups, and final assignments in mandatory courses, as well as by way of elective courses, internships and theses.

The panel states that students receive the necessary guidance and support for their studies, but also observes that students could be challenged more to engage with and apply different methodologies in their projects. The panel characterises the teaching staff as highly qualified and dedicated researchers and educators. It is very positive about the co-teaching system in which each course is taught by at least two lecturers with complementary interdisciplinary or methodological expertise. Students are highly appreciative of their teachers and feel themselves to be very much part of a stimulating research community. The panel encourages the programme to continue to proactively engage with issues of diversity, equity and inclusion, ensuring the diversity of staff as well as the teaching of intercultural skills. The programme is selective in admitting students and has a clear and appropriate intake-procedure that ensures that the level and qualifications of incoming students are aligned with the content and goals of the programme. The panel also expects that the change in name and the accompanying change in contents of the Master could lead to a larger interest and influx of candidates in the programme, but urges the programme to take remedial actions if this is not the case.

Content

Findings

The Research Master in Societal Resilience is a two-year, full-time programme, consisting of 120 EC. The programme is divided over six periods and consists of three categories of courses, focusing on methodology, theory, and skills. All courses were newly developed for the initial accreditation of the programme in 2018 and have a research master level; they are not open to students from one-year master programmes. The curriculum is structured in such a way that students follow parallel courses on theory (24 EC), methodology (42 EC), and skills (18) during each

period, thus allowing for an integration of knowledge and application. In the second year of the programme, students follow a Societal or an Academic Internship (24 EC) and complete a research project for their thesis (30 EC).

In the **theory** courses, students learn about the value and application of multidisciplinary approaches to societal issues, and about resilient responses to them. Students engage with research areas covered by the Institute of Societal Resilience and meet scholars actively working on research in these areas with different methodological orientations and disciplinary backgrounds.

In the **methodology** courses, students first learn basic knowledge in three methods: 1) qualitative methods for in-depth interviews and ethnographic observation; 2) quantitative methods for the analysis of numeric data from experiments, registers, surveys or social media; and 3) computational social science methods for the collection and analysis of large-scale textual data. These are also the three research methods in which students can specialise. After the basic courses, students can deepen their knowledge and hone their skills in one of these directions, for example, through following methods electives and tutorials. In this way, they can prepare for the research methods they want to deploy in their academic internships and thesis projects.

The **skills** courses train students in critical reflection, communication, and learning skills. One of the unique features of the programme is the Peer Group Learning course, which runs as a ribbon throughout the entire curriculum with two meetings per month. In this continuous course aimed at building a community of learners, students discuss and reflect on learning experiences and future choices. The peer group learning sessions consist of four types of activities: (1) interactive lectures with guests, (2) group sessions with the complete cohort discussing individual and group assignments from parallel courses, (3) smaller group sessions with thematic interest groups, and (4) intervision in small groups. Skills courses also include courses on writing a research proposal, research integrity, data management and research ethics, science communication and writing a scientific paper.

Students complete the programme with two final projects: a societal or academic internship and a research master thesis (For more on internships and theses, see Standard 4).

Considerations

The panel reviewed the current curriculum and spoke with students and teachers about its content and goals during the site visit. The panel observes that the courses are of the required re-

search master level and meet the objectives formulated by the programme. The design of the programme offers a good build-up in theory, methodologies, and skills. The complexity and required independence self-management of students increase as they progress through programme and allow for a productive integration of theory, methods, and skills in the final projects: the internships and theses. The panel is positive about content which is derived from the research lines of researchers/lecturers of the Faculty of Social Sciences. It applauds the strong dedication of all the departments to contribute to the curriculum.

At the same time, the panel observes that more could be done to explicitly work with mixed-methods designs. In the current programme, courses either focus on qualitative or quantitative methods, and teaching staff tend to come from either a qualitative or a quantitative background, hindering the adoption of “multimethod” (and especially mixed-methods) approaches. This also holds for implementing a more integrative interdisciplinary approach within the courses, which indeed offer readings from different social sciences, but do not (yet) provide training in productively navigating interdisciplinary contexts, including those beyond the social sciences.

The panel could establish that students are very satisfied with the design, content and coherence of the programme, as also became clear from the student chapter in the Self-Evaluation Report. In particular, students appreciate that they can follow their own interests and incorporate prior skills acquired either in previous studies or professional experiences. The programme also provided the opportunity to fill some of the methodological and theoretical gaps they had prior to joining the programme. Students however also indicated that the emphasis on qualitative methods could be higher and that the programme could do more to encourage them to deepen their knowledge and skills in this direction.

The panel supports the programme in its reorientation towards digital social sciences, which comes in the place of the 'resilience' concept and framework. It encourages the programme to embed this shift better in the programme by adjusting existing courses and the overall curriculum design.

Orientation

Findings

Research orientation in the programme

The programme clearly has an advanced and international research orientation, in line with the additional criteria formulated by the NVAO (2016). The difference between the one-year master and the two-year research master is reflected in content and design, as well as in its outcomes; the teaching of research skills and methodologies is integral to the programme, both within the core courses and in the tutorials/electives. Students are challenged to critically reflect on a wide variety of societal challenges and learn weigh the advantages and disadvantages of different methods and approaches when tackling these complex issues.

Management and teaching staff in the programme are actively engaged in state-of-the art research from all departments in the Faculty, and represent the full range of disciplines and methods within the Faculty. They possess expertise in quantitative, qualitative, and computational social science methodology relevant for the courses they are teaching. Courses such as Writing a Research Proposal and Writing a Scientific Paper, help students hone their research skills in preparation for research positions within, whether in or outside of academia. In their final research projects, the internships and theses, students are expected to conduct independent research and complete the full research cycle.

In the programme, students learn about the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integ-

ity and receive formal training in data management as well as ethics review in the course Research Integrity and Responsible Scholarship. They are also acquainted with the different advantages and risks of the use of artificial intelligence tools for the automation of research tasks. Students are also taught how to apply data mining, machine learning and algorithms responsibly and ethically. They are also acquainted with data science algorithms and open science principles.

Research environment

The programme is based on and informed by research conducted at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The programme invests in creating a learning community of students and teachers through its small-scale, continuous Peer Group Learning and the opportunity for students to follow courses and electives with PhD-students from the Faculty's graduate school.

External evaluations of the research programmes in Social and Cultural Anthropology, Communication Science, Organization Sciences, Political Science, Public Administration, and Sociology in 2020 and 2021 assessed these research programmes to be good or very good with respect to viability, and very good or even outstanding with respect to research quality. With respect to societal relevance, two programmes were qualified as very good, four programmes as outstanding.

In addition to the disciplinary research programmes, the Faculty hosts the Institute for Societal Resilience, a research institute in which all departments of the Faculty of Social Sciences collaborate. Students in the programme Societal Resilience learn about current research in the departments and particularly about research conducted within the interdepartmental research and innovation labs of the ISR. The ISR hosts six topical labs: Social Analytics, Digital Society, Digital Democracy, Social Unrest, Cocreation for Impact, and Ethnography. Each lab actively involves societal stakeholders. The Social Analytics lab focuses

on providing a digital infrastructure for researchers from different disciplines. In the Peer Group Learning and Resilience Cafe meetings students meet professors and researchers from the labs, which they can later choose as the venue for their internship.

Professional research orientation

The programme also has a strong focus on the professional field because it is aware of the scarcity of research positions in academia. It invests in its professional network of organisations in order to provide students with suitable internship positions. It also organises field visits, guest lectures, career orientation days to prepare student for (research) positions outside of academia. The research master has also installed a field advisory board to provide input on the relevancy of its goals, ambitions, and the content of the curriculum. The field advisory board consists of prominent experts from relevant domains of the working field.

Considerations

According to the panel, the research orientation is evident from the design and content of the curriculum. The panel observes that students acquire the necessary research skills, as well as the required knowledge and experience in research methodologies for the execution of the research conducted during the Academic or Societal internship as well as in the thesis project, and that students are well prepared for research positions after graduation. The panel is positive about the attention paid to research ethics and integrity and issues relating to AI, the use of data mining, machine learning, algorithms, as well as open science. Students indicated that they are encouraged to reflect critically on their fields of research, as well as on their academic development and personal growth.

On the basis of the self-report and interviews, the panel understands that the low number of students currently enrolled challenges Peer Group Learning and the offering of elective courses. In

line with the programme's expectations, the panel also expects that the change in name and the accompanying change in contents of the master could lead to a larger interest of candidates in the programme, but urges the programme to take remedial actions if this is not the case to ensure that students' learning is not affected.

Overall, the panel concludes that the programme offers students a good research environment due to the active and dedicated involvement of all the departments of the Faculty, the interdepartmental ISR labs and the opportunities students have for interaction with senior and junior researchers. The panel compliments the programme for its strong professional orientation through the internships, and its investment in field days, guest lecturers from the professional field, and career orientation days.

Structure

Findings

The programme's teaching vision is aligned with that of VU Amsterdam and the Faculty of Social Sciences. The core values of the VU mission are responsibility, openness, and personal engagement. Teaching at VU aims to foster responsibility and critical engagement with society. The didactic philosophy of the programme can be described as activating, research-based and student-centred. The programme employs active learning and 'flipped classroom' principles to give students autonomy and responsibility for their own learning process. Students take the lead in interactive lectures and working groups by presenting and discussing insights they gained in preparation of course meetings by reading assigned literature and completing assignments. Students can determine topics of their own interest for interactive lectures, working groups, and final assignments in mandatory courses, and can choose elective courses in specialised methods.

The student population is highly international, although recent political shifts in the Netherlands

may limit the attraction of international students in the future. In the Peer Group Learning course, students reflect on their learning activities, personal development, and their future ambitions. This course contributes to student well-being where they can share personal reflections and feel seen and heard.

Considerations

The panel fully endorses the didactic approach of the programme. It considers the 'flipped classroom' approach to teaching a very good fit with the ambitions of the programme and observes that the programme can indeed realise its teaching vision due to its small-scale and student-centered approach. The small scale of the programme facilitates intensive and close contact among students and between students and teachers, and students feel themselves to be part of the research community of the Faculty. Also, international students indicate that they feel quite welcome. These positive evaluations are confirmed and reflected in the National Survey of Education (NSE): the programme was rated very positively in all aspects, averaging 4 out of 5. The programme received higher scores than other master programmes in the Netherlands on almost all indicators, and also higher scores than other VU master programme on subjects such as international orientation, possibilities for remote education, scientific skills gained in the programme, and the challenging nature of the programme.

With regard to diversity, equity, and inclusion, the panel urges the programme to develop a protocol for dealing with any incidents of racism and ableism, even if they are isolated. The transparency and active endorsement of such a protocol will contribute to generating a welcoming intercultural learning environment and contributes to the acquisition of the intended learning outcomes.

The panel encourages the programme to continue to proactively engage with issues of diversity and inclusion, and further invest in the diver-

sity of its staff members. The panel also encourages the programme to keep challenging students, pushing them to move out of their comfort zone and to engage with and apply different methodologies in their projects.

Incoming students

Findings

Students interested in the programme apply with a CV, a motivation letter, a transcript of academic performance, descriptions of relevant courses, a substantial piece of writing (e.g., the BA thesis) and, if applicable, proof of English language competency. The admission committee consists of two members of the sub-committee of the examination board. Selection by the committee is based on:

- a high academic level, as demonstrated by a Bachelor's degree completed with a GPA of at least 7.5 (Dutch grading system) or an international equivalent;
- knowledge of (social science) research methodology as demonstrated by research methods courses of at least 12 EC in total and the candidate's Bachelor's thesis;
- a clear interest in social issues, as demonstrated by a motivation letter and relevant elective courses, minors, internships or other extra-curricular activities.
- Because the programme is international, a good command of English is a prerequisite.

The international office supports the admission committee with the evaluation of resumes, diplomas and course transcripts of students from international universities.

The programme has faced some challenges with regard to the number of enrolments in the past years, most likely due to the COVID-19-related uncertainties and the difficulty of finding affordable housing in Amsterdam. The programme expects that the name change and reorientation will boost enrolment numbers because of its greater appeal and exposure. The programme also put a stronger emphasis on intrinsic motivation in the

selection procedure for subsequent cohorts. Incoming students are recommended to follow a short course before they start the programme, so that they are at least familiar with coding. The number of students who dropped out has subsequently gone down in the second and third student cohort of the programme, as is evident from the documentation.

Considerations

The panel observes that the programme has a clear and selective admissions procedure in place, which not only ensures a high entry-level, but also aligns competencies of incoming students with the profile and requirements of the programme. The student chapter and conversations with student representatives during the site visit confirm that students are very much aware of the goals and requirements of the programme. They actively seek out this programme because of their research interest in combining the social sciences with insights and methods from digital and data sciences. The panel expects that the name change and shift in orientation towards digital social sciences will have a further positive effect on the number of students applying in the future, but encourages the programme to adopt remedial measures if this is not the case, to ensure students can meet the learning objectives, in particular when it comes to peer-learning within the international classroom. The panel observes that the required number of EC in (relevant) social sciences methods courses followed prior to entry could perhaps be higher, particularly in view of the planned shift in orientation in the direction of digital and computational social sciences.

Staff

Findings

The research master programme is taught by staff members of the Faculty of Social Sciences. The management team of the programme consists of a programme director and programme coordinator, researchers in Sociology and Organisation Sciences.

The programme director reports to the Faculty Board and is responsible for the development and maintenance of the programme's mission, vision, and quality. The programme coordinator is responsible for the creation and communication of the teaching load model with heads of department, contacts with teachers, the student-mentor, and with communication and marketing. Because the programme coordinator is also the teacher for the Peer Group Learning course the lines between the students and programme management are short. The programme director and coordinator meet weekly with the internship and thesis coordinator to discuss ongoing matters.

As indicated, courses in the programme are taught by teams of teachers from different departments and disciplinary backgrounds, with complementary expertise in research methods. Teaching staff represents the full range of disciplines and methods within the Faculty. They possess advanced expertise in quantitative, qualitative, and computational social science methodology relevant to the courses they are teaching. Furthermore, lecturers have the necessary didactic and pedagogical qualifications: 85% of teachers have a basic teaching qualification, and 23% have a senior teaching or education leadership qualification.

Full professors and senior researchers from all departments are involved as course coordinators and supervisors of master thesis projects. The programme started out with a team of primarily male senior researchers but has over the past years invested in improving the composition of the staff members in order to include more female researchers in different stages of their careers.

Considerations

The panel is impressed by the quality and dedication of teachers and staff of the research master. It confirms that the lecturers involved in the programme have a high level of expertise and are fully qualified to teach, support and guide the stu-

dents in the programme. The expertise and research experience of the lecturers enable them to introduce students to many current research approaches and insights within the chosen social sciences fields. Researchers have excellent research output, a good track record in teaching, and experience in the supervision of PhD candidates.

The panel values the strong commitment of the Faculty of Social Sciences to the programme and the ample teaching resources available to realise the research master. It is also positive about the way staff members are involved in developing and fine-tuning the programme. The programme having room for co-teaching is a great advantage and very productive. In its conversations with students and teachers, the panel could establish that the research master is very much enjoyed by both. Overall, the collaboration between management, teachers and students is excellent, and the panel commends the programme for this. The panel encourages the programme to continue investing in the co-teaching approach and include lecturers and researchers with distinct expertise in mixed-methods or multi-methods in social sciences, and to also to keep improving the diversity of the team members involved.

Language and international orientation

Findings

The programme is taught in English. The choice is based on the international research orientation of the programme and the field of Social Sciences, the international networks of many of the staff members, as well as the aim of the programme to attract international students.

The programme ensures that its staff members and students meet the language requirements. 92% of teachers acquired an English Proficiency Qualification To be admitted to the English-taught Master's programme, all students from abroad and from non-native English speaking countries must meet the following requirements for the English language test, no older than 2

years: an IELTS score with a minimum of 7.0, TOEFL score in an internet based test of at least 100, or a score on the VU TOEFL-ITP of 600 (only valid for VU Amsterdam), a Cambridge Certificate in Advanced English (CAE): A or B or a Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE): A, B or C.

Considerations

The panel fully supports the choice of English as language of instruction, which is aligned with the orientation and ambitions of the programme. On the basis of the documentation and its conversations during the site visit, the panel could establish that lecturers and students indeed have excellent proficiency in the English language.

Mentoring and guidance

Findings

The programme coordinator plays an important role in the mentoring and guidance of students. This coordinator supervises the progress of students, primarily in the context of Peer Group Learning. The programme coordinator also supervises the choice of electives in the first year. First-year students receive guidance from a second-year student who acts as a student mentor. This student mentor helps with practical issues, study skills, or otherwise. The student mentor co-organises the annual alumni & career event and facilitates intervision meetings.

A separate internship and master thesis coordinator for the second year organises the placement of students at host organisations offering internships, and the allocation of supervisors for the master thesis. The internship and master thesis coordinator monitors student progress in the second year, regularly consulting with the programme coordinator. Both coordinators refer students with special needs or health-related issues to student counsellors.

Considerations

Based on the documentation, the student chapter and the discussions conducted during the site visit, the panel concludes that the programme indeed succeeds in offering students good supervision and guidance to be able to finish the programme successfully. Students are also positive about the personal approach of their teachers, supervisors and tutors, and indicate that they receive the support and encouragement they need to follow and develop their own research interests. The panel compliments the programme for the Peer Learning Group method, which is very supportive of students and contributes to a close-knit learning community.

Conclusions

As can be derived from the above, the panel is very positive about the different aspects of the teaching and learning environment. The panel has much appreciation for the content and orientation of the curriculum and the way students are guided and supported in following their own research interests. The programme has a clear research orientation and a good build-up in level, complexity, and student independence. The curriculum is aligned with what is expected from an international research master programme in social sciences, which is reflected in the content of the core courses, the electives and tutorials, internships, as well as in the dynamics of the international classroom. The thesis projects could show a greater multi-method, interdisciplinary orientation, such that the presented theses are

more in line with the distinctive elements of the programme and show less similarity to disciplinary theses. In this sense, the panel encourages the programme to develop clear criteria for the RM thesis.

The panel supports the programme in its reorientation towards digital social sciences, which comes in the place of the 'resilience' concept and framework. It recommends that the programme invest more in offering students training in mixed-methods designs and integrative interdisciplinary approaches in the courses.

The panel highly appreciates the 'flipped classroom' approach to teaching and qualifies this as a very good fit with the profile and ambitions of the programme. The quality and level of staff members are high. They prove themselves to be skilled educators and expert researchers and are appreciated as such by the students. The panel encourages the programme to continue to proactively engage with issues concerning diversity, equity and inclusion, ensuring the diversity of staff members and the teaching of intercultural skills. The panel is appreciative of the selective admissions procedure and concludes that the programme succeeds in enrolling students that meet the high demands of a research master programme.

With these considerations in mind, the panel judges that the programme **meets this standard**.

Student assessment

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment panel concludes that the programme **meets the standard**. The panel has established that the assessments of the programme are valid, objective, and transparent. Student assessment is based on carefully described and detailed procedures, rules, rubrics and course manuals, and there is good communication with students about the goals and objectives of the assessments. The panel is also positive about the involvement of the Examination Board, the members of which fulfil their tasks and responsibilities in a dedicated manner. The panel believes that the written feedback to students and their link with grading could be improved. Therefore, the panel is happy to hear that the board has initiated calibration sessions on the assessments of the theses and urges it to continue its work through the monitoring patterns and problems in assessment procedures in a systematic manner. The panel encourages the programme to further streamline the feedback on the theses and recommends that the supervision of the theses be conducted by experienced researchers who have different methodological and/or disciplinary backgrounds.

Findings

Quality of assessments

The assessment policy for the programme follows the general policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the VU. It has drawn up several documents setting out the regulations concerning testing and assessment: the Teaching Examination Regulation (TER) and an Assessment Plan. In the design of its assessments, the programme uses the principles of constructive alignment and applies a variety of assessment methods, tailored to the learning objectives.

The programme's assessment system is aligned with the didactical vision of constructive alignment, that is to say, the assessments and tests are matched with the increasing complexity and level of the courses. In general, students complete courses with a set of formative assignments followed by a final larger end product, either in the form of a written examination, research report or essay. For courses with learning objectives in the lower parts of the learning pyramid (first semester), students complete written examinations that demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved these objectives. In the second semester of the programme, the learning objectives increase to higher levels of the learning pyramid, such as applying, analysing and creating, the

types of assessments shift to research reports and essays.

For each course in the programme, students receive a clear description of the learning objectives, the learning activities, and assessment methods (and their weighing) in a course manual presented in the electronic learning environment. Teachers provide individual formative feedback to assignments that students complete as preparation for course meetings. In courses where students produce a final paper, teachers also provide formative assessments and feedback on intermediate products. Teachers provide drafts of exams and grading instruments to colleagues for peer-review and improve them before students take the exams. Rubrics are used for a systematic and fair evaluation of course products. Module evaluations help to determine whether the assessments were indeed transparent to the students.

Examination Board

During the site visit, the panel spoke with members (of the subcommittee) of the Examination Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences. The Examination Board consists of five bodies: the Secretariat, the Central Examination Board, the three-person Core Committee, nine special sub-committees for the degree programmes and the Examination Board's Chair. The Central Examination

Board is responsible for policy matters throughout the faculty. In addition to its independent task of regulating policy, this body advises the Faculty Board concerning educational issues.

The sub-committee for the research master Societal Resilience checks the quality of the assessment plan as well as its application in practice. Once per year, the sub-committee discusses the assessment plan with the programme management, collecting feedback from students and teachers through the programme committee into account. The programme management revises the assessment plan if needed, and reflects on the effects of the revisions in the subsequent year. Furthermore, the sub-committee evaluates the quality of the assessment by reviewing the course files for all courses, by in-depth review of assessment materials for one course, and by reviewing the assessment of a sample of master theses and internship reports. In response to the findings and recommendations of the recent annual report of the sub-committee, the programme has organised calibration sessions for examiners of the master thesis and appointed two examiners from the Faculty of Social Sciences for the internship reports.

Assessment Thesis and Internship

The thesis is always assessed by two lecturers: the supervisor of the thesis programme and a second examiner. These examiners are appointed by the Examination Board. The two examiners provide independent assessments of the quality of the master thesis using a rubric. The rubric defines criteria for the research question, theory and relevant work, data and methods, description of results, conclusion and discussion, as well as style and consistency of writing. In addition, thesis supervisors evaluate the creativity and independence of students. For each criterion, the assessor is presented with a detailed description per criterion to promote consistency across assessors. If the examiners cannot agree on whether the thesis meets the required standard, or if separate grades

differ more than two points, the Examination Board appoints a third, independent, examiner.

The internship is evaluated by the supervisor at VU based on the internship report and a personal reflection report. A second examiner also grades the internship report. The host organisation provides feedback on professional performance, and the value of the research for the organisation. This provides input for the final grade.

Considerations

The panel concludes that the assessment system of the programme meets the required standard, and ensures that assessments are transparent, objective and valid. The course manuals give clear information about assessment forms, timing, criteria, weighing and feedback. The programme uses different kinds of assessments in alignment with the learning goals per course unit and ensures that the assessment criteria are indeed aligned with the research master level. The transparency, objectivity and validity of the assessments are ensured through the use of good course information, clear guidelines/protocols for assessments, constructive assessment forms, course evaluations and the application of the four-eyes principle in the assessments of the internships and theses.

The panel received a positive impression of the way the sub-committee of the Examination Board fulfils its duties and concludes that the board members take their responsibilities in the quality assurance of assessments very seriously. The panel is happy to hear that the Examination Board has initiated calibration sessions on the assessments of the theses and urges it to continue its constructive work by monitoring patterns and problems in assessment procedures in a systematic manner. This will help to streamline and further calibrate the assessments of the theses and internships.

In preparation for the site visit, the panel reviewed 13 internship reports and theses of the most recent graduates (three cohorts) of the programme.

According to the panel, the programme makes use of structured and constructive assessment forms. It observes that, overall, the assessments of the theses and internship reports are clear, transparent and objective, although the written feedback to the student could in some cases be improved. Consequently, it is also not always clear why a student receives the grade in question. Additional comments are in most cases highly constructive, and the panel urges the programme to give more written feedback in addition to verbal feedback, to further improve transparency and traceability. Students show themselves to be quite satisfied with the feedback they receive and

indicate that the assessments indeed help them in their academic development and support their progress in the study programme. The panel recommends that the written feedback in the thesis assessments should be further streamlined; a standardisation of written feedback will contribute to the transparency and objectivity of the thesis assessments.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the panel establishes that the programme **meets this standard**.

Achieved learning outcomes

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment panel concludes that the programme **meets the standard**. According to the panel, the level of the theses, internships and the careers of the students make clear that the programme is able to achieve its intended learning outcomes. The theses are generally of good quality, with a clear writing structure and style, and a good mastery of research methods. The theses address a wide range of topics relating to societal challenges and issues and are the outcome of a complete research cycle. The theses can be qualified as examples of advanced and independent research and prove that the students are well-prepared for research positions. Given the programme's emphasis on interdisciplinary, multi-method research, the panel believes that adopting interdisciplinary approaches or using a combination of qualitative, quantitative and computational methods in the thesis could be further encouraged, also by challenging students more to engage with and apply different methodologies in their thesis project. Given the societal orientation of the programme, the panel thinks that offering more venues for doing internships would increase the employability of the students in positions outside academia.

Findings

Societal or Academic Internship

In the first semester of the second year, students complete an academic or research-focused societal internship (24 EC). The societal or academic internship allows students to get acquainted with a field of work that fits their aspired area of specialisation, through an internship at one of the research groups within the Faculty of Social Sciences or at one of the societal partners of the programme (e.g., the Red Cross Headquarters in The Hague).

Students must find their own placement and write an internship proposal, including learning goals related to research skills and their personal development. Students who would like to specialise further in advanced research methods can take additional elective courses offered by the Graduate School. Supervision of internship research is in the hands of a supervisor of the host organisation and a member of the research master teaching staff at the Faculty of Social Sciences who has experience in PhD candidate supervision. The internship is concluded with the writing of a research report as well as a self-reflection report in which students reflect on their performance and learning process during the internship and how

their career plans have changed. Students present their research at a research symposium at VU Amsterdam.

The programme has appointed an internship coordinator to support and guide students in finding internships and arranging agreements with prospective internship organisations, and organises an event with researchers from the Institute for Societal Resilience, and a career day with potential employers.

Thesis project

To complete the programme, the students must conduct a research project for their master thesis (30 EC). For their thesis project, students must conduct independent research and go through the full empirical cycle, starting with the formulation of the research question, choosing the theoretical framework and conducting a literature review, designing the research approach and methodologies, collecting and analysing data, and ending with the conclusion and discussion of research implications for theory and practice, and suggestions for future research. The thesis is supervised by a senior researcher at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

Considerations

As indicated in the previous section, the panel studied thirteen theses and their assessments, as well as thirteen internship reports and their assessments, in preparation for the site visit. The panel is positive about the quality of the theses and internships reports: they convey outstanding research skills, are based on good formulations of the research problem, are sufficiently complex and address a wide variety of relevant and contemporary topics that deal with societal challenges, connected to the topic societal resilience and/or more broadly with societal challenges, often relating to issues of technology or digitalisation. The research level distinguishes itself from one-year master theses in the sense that students need to demonstrate a high degree of independence and critical reflection.

The panel qualifies both the theses and the internships as examples of advanced and independent research, proving that the students are well-prepared for a research position, whether in academia as a PhD-student or outside of academia in data-intensive, non-profit, or organisations in the public sector. Not all theses adopted interdisciplinary approaches and multi-method methodologies, and the panel encourages the programme to stimulate students to adopt the taught theories and methods in their work. Panel members indicated that these students would certainly be eligible for a PhD-trajectory. In this sense, the programme lives up to its profile as a research master.

The panel is impressed by the internship projects of the students, which take place in important and powerful organisations. The internship reports demonstrate that students have performed well in terms of the application of advanced research methods. The panel concludes that students succeed in doing challenging research on hard-to-reach populations such as refugees and employees of intelligence agencies. The panel is also positive about the personal reflection reports the students write for their internship projects. They

demonstrate that students are able to critically reflect on their personal growth and career goals and that they are able to organise their learning process.

The appreciation of the student's performance in the internships by external internship supervisors provides evidence of the quality of their work. Graduates of the programme primarily find employment in for-profit and non-profit consulting firms, at the national government, at large international NGOs, at universities, and at research institutes. Four alumni have continued their career as a PhD-candidate. Graduates also act as ambassadors for the programme at their employers and encourage them to offer internships.

The panel judges that the students in the programme achieve the intended learning outcomes. The end level is high, given the good quality of the theses and the manner in which students are prepared for a career as researchers in the social sciences. In light of the programme's emphasis on interdisciplinary, multi-method research, the panel believes that adopting interdisciplinary approaches or using a combination of qualitative, quantitative and computational methods in the thesis could be encouraged. The panel encourages the programme to continue to think of ways to enhance the career perspectives for students for example by broadening its network of internship organisations.

Based on the interviews and examination of the underlying documentation, the assessment panel establishes that the programme **meets this standard**.

Attachments

Attachment 1 Assessment Panel

prof.dr. E. (Ellen) Giebels, chair

Ellen Giebels is full professor Social Psychology of Conflict and Safety at University of Twente

prof.dr. M.A. (Morten) Pedersen, domain expert

Morten Pedersen is director of the Copenhagen Centre for Social Data Science at Copenhagen University

dr. M. (Miranda) Lubbers, domain expert

Miranda Lubbers is associate professor at the department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB)

prof.dr. B. (Balazs) Vedres, domain expert

Balazs Vedres is professor Network and Data Science at Central European University (CEU) in Austria

M.W. (Martijn) Siebring, MA, student-member

Martijn Siebring is research master student Arts, Media and Literacy Studies at University of Groningen

The panel was supported by **dr. J. (Jesseka) Batteau**, independent NVAO-certified secretary.

Attachment 2 Programme Site Visit on May 12, 2023

Time	Part	Information
08.30u	Walk-in and welcome	
09.00u	Discussion programme management Including short presentation by programme director	Programme Director
		Programme Coordinator
		Teaching Portfolioholder
		Director of Education
		Dean
10.00u	Break	
10.10u	Presentation (presentation research current students, walk around)	
10.30u	Discussion students (including students programme committee)	Second year student & PC
		First year student & PC
		First year student
		Second year student
11.30u	Break	
11.35u	Discussion examination board	Examination Board Chair
		Examination Board Members (2)
		Subcommittee EB Members (2)
12.20u	Lunch	
13.10u	Discussion lecturers (including lecturers programme committee)	Lecturer & PC
		Lecturer – Political Science and Public Administration
		Lecturer & PC – Sociology
		Lecturer – Organization Sciences
		Lecturer – Political Science and Public Administration
		Lecturer – Communication Science
14.10u	Break	
14.15u	Workfield and alumni (possibly online)	2 members FAB (Field Advisory Board) WWII Refugee Wellbeing and Integration Initiative
		Goed Geschud – organizational consulting firm/alumna
		Rode Kruis Volunteer coordinator in the 510 team
		HERoS project VU (Horizon Europe project)
		Alumnus applying (and succeeded) for PhD position
15.00u	Internal discussion	
16.30u	General feedback	
17.00u	Drinks	

Attachment 3 Documents

- Self-evaluation report (SER)
- Teaching and Examination Regulations
- Overview curriculum
- Overview academic staff and CVs
- Thesis guidelines and assessment form
- Internship guideline and assessment form
- Teaching and Examination Regulations
- Assessment Plan programme
- Evaluations forms and rubrics
- Overview internship organisations
- Student satisfaction scores in the National Survey of Education 2022
- Overview members Field Advisory Board
- Evaluation assessments of the Research Master Societal Resilience 149
- Annual report of the Programme committee
- Current employment of graduates
- Theses of 13 students
- Internship reports of 13 students

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
College van Bestuur
De Boelelaan 1105
1081 HV Amsterdam

Betreft: NVAO vragen voor aanvullende informatie inzake het visitatierapport van de Research master Societal Resilience

Utrecht, 23 februari 2024

Geacht College,

Op 23 januari 2024 heeft de NVAO om een aanvulling verzocht op het beoordelingsrapport van de onderzoeksmaster Societal Resilience. Dit beoordelingsrapport gaf aanleiding tot nader intern beraad door de NVAO, dat resulteert in enkele aanvullende vragen aan het panel.

De aanleiding voor de vragen is dat de NVAO aan de hand van het ingediende dossier niet kan vaststellen op welke wijze het panel de uitkomsten van de TNO en toets voorwaarden in 2019 heeft meegenomen in haar overwegingen en aanbevelingen op het onderwerp van de multi-method mix. De NVAO verzoekt daarom een aanvulling op het rapport. In deze brief worden de vragen van de NVAO beantwoord.

Vraag: Op welke wijze heeft het panel de uitkomsten van de TNO en toets voorwaarden meegenomen in haar overwegingen en aanbevelingen op het onderwerp van de multi-method mix? Kan het panel een reflectie geven op hoe de opleiding zich sinds 2019 heeft ontwikkeld met het toepassen van de multi-method mix?

As part of its assessment, the assessment panel has taken note of the outcome and recommendations of the TNO and 'toets voorwaarden' regarding the further development and integration of mixed-methods approaches in the curriculum of the Research Master Societal Resilience of the VU. To answer the concerns of the TNO-panel in 2018, the programme had designed hands-on empirical work in the relevant courses, requiring that students link insights from substantive theories in a variety of disciplines to methodological choices. With these improvements, the NVAO provided unconditional accreditation of the programme in 2019.

In its study of the documentation and during the site visit in May 2023, the current panel paid ample attention to the topics of multi/mixed-methods and interdisciplinarity. It concluded that in the years following the initial accreditation, the research master continued to improve and develop mixed-method approaches in various ways. The programme:

- added an explicit discussion of the value of mixed methods for computational social science in one of the central modules, Big Data, Small Data;

- introduced a new elective course Advanced Methods II providing training in mixed methods;
- strengthened the exchange between disciplinary and methodological perspectives through assignments and the involvement of teachers with different disciplinary and methodological backgrounds;
- added empirical assignments to the thematic courses.

The panel established that students receive training in qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as in new computational social science methods at a basic level and choose at least one method for advanced training. Each course is taught by a team of at least two teachers with complementary expertise in terms of disciplinary background and methodological training. In the course meetings, teachers illustrate how their distinctive disciplinary traditions affect their approach and analysis of societal issues. In course assignments, students also actively combine ideas from different disciplines and different methods.

The panel supports these measures taken by the programme to strengthen multi/mixed-method approaches but also sees opportunities for further development and improvement in this regard, particularly since the programme is in the process of revising its profile and aligning its curriculum accordingly. To firmly embed multi/mixed-method approaches in the curriculum, the panel urges the programme to involve more teachers who have experience in combining methods in their research projects, and whose work and/or background is emphatically interdisciplinary. Furthermore, to underline the multi-mixed method focus of the programme, the panel believes that students should be encouraged to explore methods they are not already familiar with and to engage with multi/mixed-methods in their thesis projects.

The panel concludes that many positive improvements have been made since the initial accreditation, which have indeed led to a stronger focus on multi/mixed-method approaches in the relevant courses and a better balance between qualitative, quantitative and computational methodologies. It thinks the programme will benefit from the involvement of experienced multi/mixed-method researchers and a focus on multi/mixed-methods in the thesis-project.

On behalf of the panel,

Prof. dr. Ellen Giebels
Chair

dr. Jesseka Batteau
Secretary