



NVAO • NEDERLAND

INITIAL ACCREDITATION

ACADEMIC MASTER
SCIENCE FOR SUSTAINABILITY
Radboud University

SUMMARY REPORT
JUNE 4 2024



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 planned curriculum, 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 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. More information on NVAO and peer reviews of new programmes can also be found there.

2 Panel

Peer experts

- Prof. dr. Rik Leemans (chair), emeritus professor of Environmental Systems Analysis at Wageningen University;
- Dr. Frauke Behrendt, Associate Professor Transitions to Sustainable Mobility, Eindhoven University of Technology;
- Dr. Ron Cörvers, Associate Professor Governance for Sustainable Development, Maastricht University; and
- Mark Alexander Dzoljic, student MA Political Science University of Amsterdam

Assisting staff

- Anne Martens MA (secretary); and
- Julia van Proosdij-de Bruijn (NVAO policy advisor and process coordinator)

Site visit

Nijmegen, 15 April 2024.

3 Outcome

The NVAO-approved Panel reaches a positive conclusion regarding the quality of the master's programme Science for Sustainability that is proposed and developed by Radboud University in Nijmegen. The institution intends to offer the programme of 120 ECTS credits as a fulltime programme.

The ambitious programme intends to educate 'sustainability navigators': applied scientists and academic professionals who facilitate dialogues about sustainability and thus guide and contribute to the transition towards a sustainable society. They apply and integrate scientific knowledge from a various fields in a multi-stakeholder context to develop a shared understanding of environmental sustainability challenges, explore potential solutions, set direction and guide the transition process. The programme meets regional, national and international requirements and educates professionals who aim to connect disciplines and stakeholders, and consider different perspectives, while keeping sustainability goals in mind.

Interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity are key concepts in the programme. Students develop a strong knowledge base in the natural, management and sustainability sciences, and learn to deal with actor-specific knowledge and values. These skills are combined with skills that enable graduates to collaborate with colleagues from other disciplines and other societal actors.

The curriculum of the programme is well structured and offers students the opportunity to specialise in a particular direction and add their own emphasis to the programme to create the desired personal sustainability navigator profile. The programme aims to attract a heterogenous student population to create a diverse and international classroom where students and teachers learn from each other's disciplinary and cultural perspectives. The programme positively pays ample attention to personal and professional development. The Panel appreciates the regular self-reflection and the development of feedback skills, which support students' individual learning process.

The programme deploys a suitable variety of assessment modes. Students finish the programme with a substantial thesis, which is an individual academic research report on a specific sustainability challenge within a transdisciplinary context. The thesis addresses the programme's key topics while also reflecting the academic master's level.

The programme has been developed by the Faculty of Science in close cooperation with Nijmegen School of Management. Although Science for Sustainability is their first joint programme, staff members already collaborate in ample joint research projects. The programme's qualified and dedicated staff members have collaborated intensely to develop the programme and are a real team.

The Panel concludes that Science for Sustainability is a relevant, ambitious, innovative and well-elaborated programme. The Panel agrees with the programme's argumentation regarding its choice for an English-taught curriculum and a study load of 120 ECTS credits.

4 Commendations

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

1. Profile – Interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity are key concepts. Students develop a strong disciplinary knowledge base in the natural, management and sustainability sciences, learn to deal with actor-specific knowledge and values, and acquire skills that enable graduates to collaborate with colleagues from other disciplines and other societal actors;

2. Curriculum – The curriculum is ambitious, innovative and well elaborated. The second year allows students to specialise in a particular direction and to create a personal sustainability navigator profile;
3. Teaching staff – The Panel appreciates the programme’s qualified and dedicated staff members. All staff members are active researchers and all teaching staff will have a university teaching qualification (UTQ) when the programme starts. The teachers are ambitious, enthusiastic and internationally recognised, and have ample experience in disciplines relevant to this broad programme;
4. Cooperation– The programme is offered jointly by the Faculty of Science and Nijmegen School of Management, and has a clear governance structure. It is well anchored in existing research cooperation and benefits from best practices of other (joint) programmes at Radboud University. The staff members showed an impressive collaborative process and are a real team; and
5. Reflection – Regular self-reflection and the development of feedback skills support students’ individual learning process. The use of a reflection report is innovative and supports students’ personal and professional development.

5 Recommendations

For further improvement to the programme, the Panel recommends a number of follow-up actions:

1. Stakeholders – Explicitly mention cooperation with external stakeholders in the programme's final qualifications, and reflect more strongly on communication with and connecting to stakeholders in assignments and assessment forms;
2. Advisory Board – Formalise connections with external stakeholders by installing an Advisory Board that periodically evaluates the programme, amongst other input to the programme;
3. International classroom – Develop specific educational activities to ensure an international environment also when the programme attracts a rather homogenous student population; and
4. External thesis project – If the thesis project is carried out externally, provide the necessary contracts to formally arrange responsibilities for all parties involved (student, university and external organisation).

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

¹ <https://www.nvao.net/nl/besluiten>

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 activities are also part of the following peer-review report. For more information, visit the institution's website.²

7 Samenvatting

Het NVAO-panel oordeelt positief over de kwaliteit van de wo-masteropleiding Science for Sustainability van Radboud Universiteit in Nijmegen. De instelling is voornemens de opleiding van 120 EC (studiepunten) als voltijdse opleiding aan te bieden. De opleiding voldoet aan de drie standaarden van het NVAO beoordelingskader. Voor deze beoordeling heeft het panel gesprekken gevoerd met vertegenwoordigers van de opleiding op 15 april 2024 te Nijmegen.

De ambitieuze opleiding beoogt 'duurzaamheidsnavigators' op te leiden: toegepaste wetenschappers en academische professionals die dialogen over duurzaamheid faciliteren en zo bijdragen aan de overgang naar een duurzame samenleving. Zij passen wetenschappelijke kennis uit verschillende vakgebieden toe en integreren deze in een multistakeholdercontext om een gedeeld begrip te ontwikkelen van uitdagingen op het gebied van duurzaamheid, mogelijke oplossingen te verkennen, richting te bepalen en het overgangsproces te begeleiden. De opleiding sluit aan bij de regionale, nationale en internationale behoefte aan mensen die disciplines samenbrengen, belanghebbenden betrekken en rekening houden met verschillende perspectieven, zonder duurzame doelen uit het oog te verliezen.

Inter- en transdisciplinariteit zijn sleutelbegrippen in de opleiding: studenten ontwikkelen een sterke disciplinaire kennisbasis in de natuur-, management- en duurzaamheidswetenschappen en actor-specifieke kennis en waarden. Deze worden gecombineerd met vaardigheden die afgestudeerden in staat stellen om samen te werken met collega's uit andere disciplines en met andere maatschappelijke actoren.

Het curriculum van de opleiding is goed gestructureerd en biedt studenten de mogelijkheid om hun eigen accenten aan het programma toe te voegen. Zo creëren ze hun eigen profiel. De opleiding streeft ernaar een heterogene studentenpopulatie aan te trekken om een diverse en internationale leeromgeving te creëren waar studenten en docenten kunnen leren van elkaars disciplinaire en culturele perspectieven. Het is positief dat het programma ruime aandacht besteedt aan persoonlijke en professionele ontwikkeling. Het panel waardeert de regelmatige zelfreflectie en de ontwikkeling van feedbackvaardigheden, die het individuele leerproces van studenten ondersteunen.

Het programma maakt gebruik van verschillende toetsvormen. Studenten sluiten de opleiding af met een substantiële thesis: een individueel academisch onderzoeksrapport over een specifieke duurzaamheidsuitdaging binnen een transdisciplinaire context. De scriptie richt zich op de belangrijkste onderwerpen van het programma en weerspiegelt tegelijkertijd het academische masterniveau.

De opleiding is ontwikkeld door de Faculteit der Natuurwetenschappen, Wiskunde en Informatica in samenwerking met de Faculteit der Managementwetenschappen. Science for Sustainability is hun eerste gezamenlijke opleiding, maar medewerkers hebben ruime ervaring in onderzoekssamenwerking. De gekwalificeerde en toegewijde docenten hebben intensief samengewerkt om het programma te ontwikkelen en vormen een echt team.

² <https://www.ru.nl/en>

Het panel concludeert dat Science for Sustainability een relevante, ambitieuze en goed doordachte opleiding is. Het panel onderschrijft de keuze voor een Engelstalig curriculum en een studieduur van 120 EC.

Meer informatie over de NVAO-werkwijze en de toetsing van nieuwe opleidingen is te vinden op www.nvao.net. Voor informatie over de Radboud Universiteit verwijzen we naar de website van de instelling.³

³ <https://www.ru.nl/>

The summary report was written at the request of NVAO
and is the outcome of the peer review
of the new master's programme
Science for Sustainability
offered by Radboud University

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