

## **Outcomes Development Dialogue Research Master International Development Studies (RMIDS), Research Master Social Sciences (RMSS) & Research Master Urban Studies (RMUS)**

held on April 1 17:00-17:45 2021, online

In line with the NVAO assessment framework, each study programme or cluster of study programmes conducts a 'development dialogue' (*ontwikkelgesprek*) with the assessment panel during the assessment visit. During this development dialogue, possible improvements are discussed from a development perspective, the agenda is drawn up by the study programme. Although the development dialogue is part of the programme review, the recommendations are not part of the accreditation assessment. Pursuant to the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act, Article 5.13, paragraph 6, we publish the recommendations that follow from this development dialogue with this document.

The most recent results of the programme accreditation can be consulted at <https://www.nvao.net/nl/besluiten/opleidingen> or <https://www.nvao.net/en/decisions/educations>

*Please note that the dialogue was held for three programmes together. Recommendations often concerned all three programmes. Therefore, there is one document for the three programmes.*

The dialogue took place on April 1, 2021, between the expert panel, the programme directors, the director of the College and the director of the Graduate School of Social Sciences (chairing the meeting), the chair of the department of Geography and Planning and International Development Studies (representing the other departments), the chair and other members of the examinations board, chairs and other members of the programme committees, the programme coordinators/ study advisors of the programmes and other interested staff. The meeting took place online, as was the whole location visit (due to Covid-19).

The dialogue was held directly after the feedback on the accreditation standards proper, in which the panel expressed appreciation for the interesting courses, fantastic students, committed teachers and experienced researchers. The panel also complimented the programmes on the way they have handled the difficult circumstances due to Covid-19 and the open atmosphere during the location visit. The panel suggested improvements, which included a better methods profile and alignment (RMIDS, RMUS) and a recalibration in the way electives are offered and assessed, when sharing with other programmes (RMIDS, RMUS). High workload for students (RMSS) and lecturers (esp. RMUS) was also mentioned as point of attention. Finally, there were suggestions for a better follow-up on the findings of the Examinations Boards on assessment practice and procedures, and about the lack of transparency of thesis assessment (supervisor/second reader) and the high proportion of cum laude degrees (all programmes).

### ***Agenda for the dialogue***

- a) Ad hoc in depth specification of issues that have come up during the site visit, if necessary
- b) How we can improve the preparation for the non-academic labour-market?

*Notes below are made by the secretary of the Certified panel.*

#### **a) Ad hoc in depth specification of issues that have come up during the site visit (initiated by programme directors)**

##### Research Master International Development Studies

The panel recommends to organise pathways for students for methods courses, thereby allowing students to achieve more depth in expertise in methods. The question of the programme director is how this may be reconciliated with the specific methods knowledge and skills students will need for their master thesis. The panel's recommendation is not to organise obligatory pathways, but to schedule logical pathways students may take to achieve more depth in training of methods. The panel suggests to reimagine the methods courses in this sense.

The panel recommends to strengthen the quantitative methods training in the programme. The question of the programme director is which parts of the curriculum the panel would advise to replace. The panel takes the opportunity to applaud the mixed methods approach offered in the programme as one of the unique selling points of the programme, not only in the Netherlands but across Europe. In this context, the panel recommends to further specify the methods offered in the programme: qualitative, quantitative and mixed

methods, as this may add to the clarification of the programme identity. In the panel's opinion, to have the chance to strengthen the quantitative methods training in the programme, the balance the substantive courses and methods courses may be looked at or the number of final projects in the programme, which are currently four, may also be looked at.

#### Research Master Urban Studies

The panel recommends to try and reduce the staff workload. The programme director asks whether this means programmes management and staff in the programme should work more efficiently. The panel explains this is not what is meant. The panel is convinced programme management and staff in the programme work very efficiently already. In the panel's view, the limits of efficiency seem to have been reached. The panel observed the well-being of staff members to be largely dependent upon the well-being of the students. In line with one of the suggestions made by teachers in one of the site visit meetings, the panel recommends for staff members to concentrate as a research team their research on focus points and to resist demands made on them to do research on all fronts.

#### Research Master Social Sciences

The panel recommends to differentiate the intended learning outcomes of the programme more over the courses or, in other words, to address not all but a specific number of intended learning outcomes in courses. The programme director asks what the panel means by that. The panel does not intend to say watersheds should be put between courses. The panel recommends to highlight a number of specific intended learning outcomes in courses, thereby making clear to staff and students what is to be achieved in these courses. Management and staff can specifically make clear what is taken on board in these courses and what is not.

#### **b) How we can improve the preparation for the non-academic labour-market?**

The director of the Graduate School asks the panel how the programmes may better prepare students for non-academic careers. The panel observed programmes are doing more to prepare students for non-academic careers and appreciates these efforts. The panel distinguishes between academic research positions or PhD-positions, non-academic research positions, and non-research positions in the professional field. The latter positions, how knowledge-intensive they may be, are not the positions research master programmes should prepare for. Non-academic research positions are, however, positions research master programme may very well prepare for. The programme ought to have a clearer view on non-academic research positions, and take the academic and non-academic research positions together in reporting on their graduates' careers. Career guidance of students, from early on in the programme is important. Meetings of students with alumni who have non-academic research positions are very useful for students to obtain views on these careers. The panel advises to have meetings of the three programmes to exchange best practices in preparing students for non-academic research positions. Best practices are the Portfolio in the International Development Studies programme and the Urban Studies in Practice course in the Urban Studies programme.