

Summary Development Dialogue Research Master Societal Resilience Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

22 May 2023

Participants

Panel: prof. dr. Ellen Giebels (chair) and prof.dr. Morton Pedersen (panel member)

Secretary: dr. J.M. Batteau

Representatives programme and faculty:

Prof. dr. René Bekkers	Programme Director
Dr. ir. Tijs van den Broek	Programme Coordinator
Prof. dr. Peter Kerkhof	Vice-dean for Education
Dr. Sylvia Vink	Director of Education
Prof. dr. Wouter van Atteveldt	Lecturer and member of the Programme Committee (OLC)
Denise Roth	Student
Loes Wijnen MSc	Policy Officer for Education

Introduction

The development dialogue of the Research Master Programme Societal Resilience was focused on the intended request to NVAO by the Executive Board of VU University Amsterdam to change the name of the current programme (ISAT 69333) to Research Master 'Social Sciences for a Digital Society'. The aim of the VU was to have the name approved by 1 September 2023, so that recruitment for the programme can be started in the next academic year, 2024-2025.

On 22 May a meeting was convened with two representatives of the panel and representatives of the programme and the Faculty of Social Sciences of the VU to discuss the name change.

NVAO has asked the panel to substantively review the proposed name change on the basis of the four criteria, discussed below.

Criterion 1: With the name change, the programme aims to better align with what is customary within the assessment group or sector.

According to the panel, the proposed name change indeed meets the first criterium. It agrees with the programme that the current name, 'Societal Resilience', is not a commonly used title for an educational programme and does not directly make clear what the programme has to offer with regard to content, structure, orientation and methodologies. Furthermore, it does not convey the multiplicity of social science research methods that are taught in the programme, nor is the presence of computational social science courses evident from the term.

The panel and representatives of the programme and Faculty considered the (dis)advantages of two options: either 'Digital Society' or 'Social Sciences for a Digital Society'. The panel agrees to both proposed titles but prefers the latter because it establishes a clear connection with the disciplinary and methodological orientation of the social sciences.

Criterion 2 The new name offers sufficient insight into the content of the programme.

The panel has several recommendations with regard to the content of the programme which will allow a good fit between the new name and what students are offered.

The name change aligns with developments in the Faculty where the focus is shifting towards digital society and digital methods. The panel stresses the importance of making sure the students pick topics for their final thesis project that fit the (new) focus of the research master.

To ensure that the name is not only a rebranding, the panel urges the programme to use its new name as a catalyst for developing and implementing a vision on the relation between society, technology and digitalization. This should include a vision on the relationship between social sciences and technology, and how this applies to societal issues: the panel advises to not only focus on societal problems occurring because of digitization (e.g. the digital divide, polarization), but also on the potential of digitalization to resolve societal problems.

The panel also encourages more emphasis on teaching a variety of methodologies, qualitative, quantitative and computational methodologies, as well as a strong focus on developing mixed methods research practices. That is, the panel stresses the importance of the *integration* of research methods within the curriculum, which will challenge students to move beyond the methodologies they have learned in their BA.

Criterion 3. The content of the degree program does not change in such a way that it is in fact a new degree programme. If that is the case, NVAO will not agree to the name change, because the institution must submit an application for this via the New Education Assessment procedure (TNO). The panel judges that the programme meets this criterion. The programme has made clear to the panel what changes it wishes to make in order to legitimize the name change. The changes do not lead to a new degree programme, according to the panel, but can be seen as a more demarcated prism through which societal issues are approached.

Criterion 4. The name change does not lead to a different CROHO classification.

The panel concludes that the programme meets the fourth criterion. The new title will not lead to a different CROHO classification and can remain within 'Algemene Sociale Wetenschappen'.

Based on the above, the panel concludes that the proposed name change meets the four criteria provided by NVAO, albeit with a critical comment on criterion 2.