

Report on the development dialogue with the assessment panel Environmental Sciences

A 'development dialogue' is part of the 2016 assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands (NVAO, 2016). Programme management consults the assessment panel during this development dialogue, in which possible improvements from a development perspective are discussed. The development dialogue was held at 23 April 2018, during the site visit of the programmes: B Global Sustainability Science, and M Environmental Sciences at Utrecht University.

Preceding this development dialogue programme management had prepared two questions for the assessment panel:

1. How can we attract more international students for the Global Sustainability Science bachelor's programme?
2. How can we further develop our attention for the 'professional perspective' of our students in an academic programme (especially the master's programme)?

Because the number of international students showed a positive development at the time of the development dialogue, the conversation was mostly focused at question 2: more attention for the professional perspective of our students.

Background to the question:

In the National Student Survey (NSE) the questions about the professional perspective of the students has scored lower than the ambition of the programmes. As a consequence several activities were initiated related to 'career services'. This only seemed to have a minor positive influence at the NSE scores related to this topic. We asked the panel to discuss with the programme management the possibilities of further activities to strengthen the attention for the professional perspective of our students. An additional problem is that our programmes do not have one singular professional perspective and that the academic focus in the programmes are to be retained.

From the development dialogue we learned that the integration projects could be the focal courses for contacts with the professional field. It is a good idea to better use the contact moments between our students and the professional field, and to also give more attention to soft skills. It would also help to ask our students directly at which topics they don't feel confident and what they would want to learn there. The idea was mentioned to let our students reflect on their own professional skills, possibly in the form of a portfolio in which they track their progress.

The introduction of an (elective) internship is also a possibility to generate more attention to the professional perspective. Furthermore, the programme management was advised to increase the contacts between our students and our alumni.

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Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development
Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University