

## NVAO-EAPAA Development Discussion

28 November 2023

11:45 – 12:30

MSc Public Policy and Human Development  
Maastricht University, School of Business and Economics

### Participants:

**Prof. Dr. Andrew Massey**  
**Prof. Dr. Peter Bursens**  
**Prof. Dr. Ellen Wayenberg**  
**Prof. David Van Slyke, PhD**  
**Em. Prof. Dr. Geske Dijkstra**  
**Sibel Gökberik**  
**Esther Poort**

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Erasmus University Rotterdam  
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**Dr. Julieta Marotta** (chair)  
**Prof. Dr. Wilko Letterie**  
**Prof. Dr. Franziska Gassmann**  
**Dr. Mark Vluggen**  
**Dr. Bruno Martorano**  
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Academic Programme Director  
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Associate Professor, Specialisation Social Protection Policy  
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### Discussion topic 1: Implications of AI

*The programme's EER states that using AI (e.g., ChatGPT) for assignments is considered an act of fraud; however, AI is increasingly used as a tool to produce output in a faster and better way. This academic year, we will offer training to instructors to learn how to use AI in a meaningful way. We also aim to include training for students on AI tools in the near future. What is the panel's advice to support students and teaching staff in critically engaging with new technologies while fostering their critical thinking skills? Is there any relevant national legislation or guidance from, e.g., the Ministry of Education that would shape how education may or should engage with AI?*

#### Panel advice:

Using AI is a great opportunity and should be seen as a skill students will need—and are expected to have—in the future. However, a structured approach that emphasizes critical thinking should be in place.

The use of AI should be looked into at the individual and class/group levels. One approach is to use formative assessment emphasizing critical thinking. Coursework can be made more demanding by challenging students to identify accurate or inaccurate information, by asking them to use multi-level problem-solving instead of offering only one solution or by comparing the advantages and disadvantages of different solutions. In addition, teams can be asked to devise different solutions to a problem. Teachers can also provide answers created by Chat GPT and ask the students to analyze what is wrong with these solutions.

Universities should ensure that their graduates can offer employers something beyond what any AI/robot can do.

### Discussion topic 2: Programme curriculum: Skills track

*The programme revised the Fall semester's skills track to improve students' learning process and to ensure that students learned the methods necessary to start their specialisations. This revised track was implemented in Fall 2023 and will be evaluated in January 2024. What is the panel's view regarding the revision after the panel sessions*

*with staff, students, and graduates? Do you have any suggestions for consideration during the evaluation phase?*

**Panel advice:**

The revised skills track seems to work well. However, even though the programme does have courses supporting the development of economic skills, statistics skills, etc., some students have commented that they needed more statistics skills.

If some students expect to complete their studies doing primarily qualitative research, they should realise that quantitative research is also needed, especially in policy advice. The equal value of quantitative and qualitative research should be emphasised.

In general, data literacy is an important skill. Students should be strong consumers of data, including numerical data. The balance between consuming and producing data should be considered when formulating research questions. Furthermore, students should be aware of the limitations of any chosen research method used in their work.

**Discussion topic 3: Fostering Alumni Network**

*The programme implemented several activities to foster the alumni community and engage with them (e.g., coffee chats, guest lectures, mentor track). We also tried a life-long learning initiative by inviting graduates to some of our open lectures, seminars, and workshops. However, this initiative did not flourish due to a lack of funding and low attendance. What is the panel's advice on innovative ways to continue involving graduates in the programme and to promote life-long learning?*

**Panel advice:**

Due to busy professional lives, the distance between Maastricht and where the alumni are based, and the limitations in hiring externals, bringing alumni to teach in the programme can be challenging. However, you can ask them to join online as guest speakers. It is also beneficial for the alumni to hear from the students – this can offer them fresh perspectives and can provide feedback to companies.

It is important that the alumni office has a sufficient budget to organise activities so that alumni can exchange with each other and students. For example, TU Delft has a 'UniBuddy' programme which allows alumni and student to exchange.

Alumni are interested in keeping their knowledge and skills up to date. One suggestion is to offer some 'Life-Long Learning' courses.

**Discussion topic 4: Internationalisation & Shift in Language Policy**

*With the ongoing national dialogue about the role of the Dutch language in the higher education system and a pause on international recruitment, the nature and focus of the MSc PPHD may need to shift. Given the labour markets for which students are being prepared and the profile of our student body, we are uncertain how to prepare for a potential inward-facing policy. Can the panel reflect on how other programmes with a similar focus on international labour markets and diverse student profiles consider adapting to this?*

**Panel advice:**

When a programme aims to attract a diverse student body, it should be able to steer away from official, general recommendations.

Other countries have also seen shifts due to changes in policies. For instance, Brexit has changed the balance of the students' nationalities in the UK, which is seeing a decline in EU students and an increase in students from China, Canada, India, and the US. We are also seeing more criticism of international students in the UK.

