BA Digital Society
Maastricht University

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Project code P2312

Contents

Summary

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

According to the panel, the profile and the aims of the BA programme Digital Society are clear. It is an interdisciplinary programme that aims to educate students about the relationship between digitalization and society, and how they influence and create each other. The programme has a broad scope, using theories from humanities and social science disciplines such as philosophy, history, media studies, sociology, science and technology studies (STS), combined with elements of data science to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to become 'T-shaped' with generalist knowledge and skills, deepening by critical reflection. Critical reflection on digitalization runs throughout the programme. The intended learning outcomes reflect the interdisciplinarity and the aims of the programme, and are well aligned with the level of an academic bachelor's degree. The intended learning outcomes are well aligned with the expectations of the professional field, by maintaining contact with external stakeholders and inviting them for guest lectures in the courses. The panel recommends that this alignment could be further strengthened by revitalizing the External Advisory Board, which has been dormant for some years.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The panel concludes that the programme has a balanced, interdisciplinary curriculum. It appreciates the way in which this interdisciplinarity is achieved throughout the courses and it finds the structure of the parallel content and skill courses to be an appropriate way of integrating the theoretical knowledge with a more practical approach. It appreciates the balance between critical reflection on digital technologies and the responsible use of these technologies. The panel considers that the emphasis on internationalization is in line with the expectations from the professional field. It notes that this international aspect could be strengthened, for example by including the development of digital societies in the Global South and legal and policy aspects outside of Europe. The panel appreciates the didactic approach of Problem-Based Learning (PBL), and the different ways in which the four underlying key characteristics are integrated into the courses. The panel is positive about the connection with external stakeholders, and suggests to further strengthen the alignment of the programme to the professional field by involving them even more at course level.

The panel was pleased to note that both the programme's support system, with the tutor, mentor and student advisor providing guidance, and the structured curriculum make the programme feasible for students. The panel recommends setting up a structural way to also guide students in their orientation towards a possible career path or master's degree. The panel found the teaching staff to be well qualified and committed to the programme and its students. It appreciates the continuing professionalization and the balance between technical and social science expertise within the staff. The panel is positive about the teaching- and research facilities at the Plant, and considers this laboratory to be an asset to the programme and the university. It suggests that this space could be used as a stepping stone to further involve external stakeholders in the programme.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The panel concludes that the quality of the programme's assessment procedures is appropriate and reliable. The assessment methods are varied and creative and are aligned with the intended learning outcomes and the learning goals of the courses. The panel recommends further embedding the PILO on interactional expertise into the assessment with mandatory curriculum elements. The panel has studied the thesis assessment procedures, and finds the framework to be reliable and solid, ensuring the validity of the assessment. According to the panel, the writing standards for the thesis are consistent with what is expected

of at bachelor's level. It finds the thesis rubric helpful and appropriate. The panel concludes that the Board of Examiners fulfils its legal obligations in ensuring the validity and quality of the assessment procedures.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The panel found the theses it read to be of high quality and the career paths or master's programmes of alumni to be in line with the general profile of the programme. This convinced the panel that students of the BA Digital Society achieve the intended learning outcomes. Alumni find relevant master's or jobs, and appear confident. The panel encourages the programme to continue to strengthen its ties to alumni, seeing them as ambassadors for the programme.

Score table

The panel assesses the programme as follows:

Bachelor Digital Society

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard
General conclusion	positive

Lieven De Marez, chair

Peter Hildering, secretary

Date: 4 October 2024

Introduction

Procedure

Assessment

On 25 June 2024, the bachelor's programme Digital Society of Maastricht University was assessed by an independent peer review panel. The assessment followed the procedure and standards of the NVAO Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (September 2018).

Quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment upon request of Maastricht University. Peter Hildering acted as coordinator and as secretary in the assessment. He has been certified and registered by the NVAO. Sarah Boer BEd of Academion attended the site visit as observer.

Preparation

Academion composed the peer review panel in cooperation with the institutions and taking into account the expertise and independence of the members. On 22 March 2024, the NVAO approved the composition of the panel. The coordinator instructed the panel chair on his role in the site visit according to the Panel chair profile (NVAO 2016). Shortly before the site visit took place, it became clear that panel member Prof. Patricia Murrieta-Flores could not attend the site visit due to health reasons. After consultation with the programme, secretary and other panel members, it was agreed to add Prof. Julianne Nyhan to the panel for the site visit, and retain Prof. Patricia Murietta-Flores on the panel at a distance, as she already contributed to the preparation. The NVAO agreed on 24 June 2024 with the new panel composition.

The programme composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the secretary (see appendix 4). The programme selected representative partners for the various interviews. It also determined that the development dialogue would be made part of the site visit. A separate development report was made based on this dialogue.

The programme provided the secretary with a list of theses of graduates over the period 2021 – 2023. In consultation with the secretary, the panel chair selected 15 theses. He took the diversity of final grades and examiners into account. Prior to the site visit, the programme provided the panel with the theses and the accompanying assessment forms. It also provided the panel with the self-evaluation report and additional materials (see appendix 5).

The panel members studied the information and sent their findings to the secretary. The secretary collected the panel's questions and remarks in a document and shared this with the panel members. In a preliminary meeting, the panel discussed the initial findings on the self-evaluation report and the theses, as well as the division of tasks during the site visit. The panel was also informed on the assessment framework, the working method and the planning of the site visits and reports.

Site visit

During the site visit, the panel interviewed various programme representatives (see appendix 4). The panel also offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour, no consultation was requested. The panel used the final part of the site visit to discuss its findings in an internal meeting. Afterwards, the panel chair publicly presented the preliminary findings.

Report

The secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to an Academion colleague for peer assessment. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel for feedback. After processing this feedback, the secretary sent the draft report to the programme in order to have it checked for factual irregularities. The secretary discussed the ensuing comments with the panel chair and changes were implemented accordingly. The panel then finalized the report, and the secretary sent it to the faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

Panel

The panel assessing the programme consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. Lieven De Marez, Professor Media, Technology & Innovation and User-centric innovation research at Gent University – *chair*
- Prof. dr. Payal Arora, Professor Inclusive AI Cultures at Utrecht University
- Prof. dr. Julianne Nyhan, Professor Humanities Data Science and Methodology at the Technical University, Darmstadt and Professor Digital Humanities the University College London
- Prof. dr. Patricia Murrieta-Flores, Professor Digital Humanities at Lancaster University
- Paige Christianne Andres, Master student Culture Studies: Art and Media Studies at Tilburg University – *student member*

Information on the programme

Name of the institution:	Maastricht University
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive

Programme name:	Digital Society
CROHO number:	59337
Level:	Bachelor
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	180 EC
Specializations or tracks:	not applicable
Location:	Maastricht
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Language of instruction:	English
Submission date NVAO:	01-11-2024

Description of the assessment

Organization

The BA Digital Society (BA DS) is part of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS) of Maastricht University (UM). A key feature of FASoS is that learning, teaching, and research take place in an interdisciplinary environment. Interaction across disciplinary boundaries is at the heart of FASoS's identity, and one of its core strengths. The faculty has five departments: History, Literature & Art, Philosophy, Political Science, and Society Studies – whose staff collaborate to develop interdisciplinary courses and programmes. It offers four bachelor's programmes and eight master's programmes, which are taught jointly by members of different departments. Programme directors are responsible for the coherence and quality of the educational programmes, and are supervised by the faculty's Associate Dean for Education. FASoS is an international community: with students and staff representing over sixty different nationalities, FASoS is the most international faculty at Maastricht University.

Recommendations previous accreditation panel

The previous accreditation of the Digital Society bachelor's programme was the limited initial accreditation of March 2019. The report of that initial accreditation was shared with the panel, and the documentation provided by the programme reflected on the 2019 recommendations. The panel got the impression that all the comments made in the initial report have been addressed by the programme. For example, the report mentions that the Board of Examiners would expect the programme to involve them in reviewing new assessment methods against the required assessment criteria. The self-evaluation report mentions that this has indeed happened and that colleagues are now also involving the Assessment Support Team (AST), a supporting advisory body that seeks to help teaching staff to further strengthen the quality of assessment. The programme has also asked a mid-term panel to evaluate it in 2022, which the panel sees as evidence of the programme's efforts to improve and develop.

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

Findings

Profile and aims

The BA Digital Society is an interdisciplinary programme that aims to equip students with the knowledge and skills to understand the relationship between digitalization and social changes. It is organized by the Faculty for Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS) of Maastricht University. Combining insights from philosophy, history, media studies, sociology, science and technology studies (STS), with elements of data science, the programme invites students to investigate the causes and consequences of digitalization. As such, the programme aims to train students to become versatile and inquisitive digital society professionals and critical thinkers about digitalization. Digitalization has transformed society – from politics and industry to culture and social life – in ways that were previously unimaginable. The BA Digital Society programme aims to ensure that individuals and social groups are equipped to navigate the rapidly evolving digital landscape with confidence and foresight. The programme aims to do this by equipping students with specialist knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be able to address these challenges and opportunities. The programme aims to train students to become 'translators', or 'bridges' within interdisciplinary teams working within or

adjacent to digitalization. The programme aims to prepare students for a variety of MA programmes both at Maastricht University and elsewhere, and for careers in both the public and private sectors, ranging from policymaking to working for technology companies such as Microsoft and Siemens. The main objective of the BA programme Digital Society is to train students to be inquisitive and critical thinkers with foundational transactional expertise, who can *analyse, understand,* and *co-shape* digital transformations todays and tomorrow's societies.

The programme uses the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) approach in its education, which is characteristic of Maastricht University. PBL is an active form of learning in which students focus on a specific problem to which they find a solution by applying the knowledge and skills taught in the courses. PBL is based on four key principles: first, learning is a *constructive* process in which knowledge is continuously constructed and restructured. Second, learning is based on interaction between students, and is therefore a *collaborative* process. Third, *context* is provided through meaningful situations or real-life problems. Fourth, learning is *self-directed* as students shape their own learning process. The programme applies these key features of "CCCS" not only in PBL sessions but in different ways throughout the curriculum. To get students to an undergraduate level, the programme uses the 'scaffolding' method: over the three years, the learning activities become more complex while the amount of support gradually decreases. This is in line with the PBL method, aiming to educate students into confident, autonomous professionals who are able to work in many different contexts.

The panel is enthusiastic about the way in which the programme provides academically embedded basis for shaping the professional liaison or translator between different types of stakeholders. It commends the programme for how it addresses the need for such professionals, who are equipped to navigate the rapidly evolving digital landscape. Firstly, through its *small-scale PBL appr*oach. Through PBL (see also standard 2), students become familiar with approaching challenges from different perspectives in discussions, and are encouraged to actively participate in these discussions, as the PBL courses are no larger than 15 students. Secondly, the panel commends the programme's broad scope through *interdisciplinarity.* It focuses mainly on social sciences and humanities, with data science as a strong supporting discipline. The interdisciplinary approach is applied to all courses, with a slight emphasis on the aspect of *critical reflection*. Students are encouraged to consider digital society from an ethical perspective, e.g. not only to understand how an algorithm works, but also to reflect on its ethical implications for society. This aspect of critical reflection is pervasive throughout the programme, producing 'T-shaped' professionals with generalist knowledge- and skills that are deepened through critical reflection. Thirdly, the panel found the *international character* of the programme to be a distinguishing feature, bringing not only multiple disciplines but also multiple cultural perspectives into the classroom which are integrated in PBL. Both the professional and academic fields related to digitalization are often international environments, where understanding and navigating cultural differences are important skills. Having different cultural perspectives in the classroom is an asset when studying the way in which digitalization shapes societies and vice versa. The panel commends the programme for these three characteristics and how they give substance to the unique profile of the programme.

From the interview with the students and alumni, the panel concludes that overall, students are clear about the profile of the programme and was pleased to learn that the programme meets the general expectations of students once they have started to programme. Some students would welcome more direction in possible jobs after the programme; this topic is discussed further under Standard 2.

The programme strives to align the programme goals and content aligned with the expectations of the professional field. External stakeholders are often involved at course level, for example when course

coordinators invite professionals for guest lectures. The panel commends the programme for these efforts to involve external stakeholders in the programme and finds that the programme is well-aligned with the professional field in this way. During the interviews with the programme, it became clear to the panel that that the programme has an ambition to increase the involvement of external stakeholders and alumni in shaping the programme and connecting students to the professional field. The programme has an external advisory board with professional field representatives and alumni, aimed at supplying the programme with an external perspective, however it has not been active in recent years. The panel recommends reactivating the external advisory board in order to further attune the programme's objectives with the expectations of the professional field. This is also in line with the challenge-based approach of the programme, which is inspired by challenges from practice and encourages students to learn by doing (see also the discussion under Standard 2).

Intended learning outcomes

The aim and profile of the programme is translated into 15 intended learning outcomes (PILOs), each of which is explicitly linked to one of the five Dublin descriptors. The PILO's are designed to ensure the interdisciplinary approach of the programme and the integration of critical reflection, as well as the skills and knowledge necessary to function in an environment with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The panel studied the PILO's, and concludes that they are appropriately formulated and well developed. They are at the level of a bachelor's programme and have an academic orientation. The panel appreciates the translation of the interdisciplinary profile of the programme into the PILOs, and recognizes that many of them emphasize the deepening aspect of ethical reflection.

Considerations

The BA Digital Society aims to educate students who can act as translators, bridge-builders and liaisons within interdisciplinary teams and who have the skills, knowledge and attitudes to meet the challenges of digitalization. The panel greatly appreciates this particular ambition, as it recognises the need for such professionals in the field of digitalization. The panel is enthusiastic about the programme's profile of interdisciplinarity with a focus on social sciences and humanities. The programme has a distinctive character, with an emphasis on critical reflection and ethics, the international environment, and the Problem Based Learning-approach. The panel finds that the aims and profile are clearly reflected in the PILOs, which are formulated in accordance with the interdisciplinary nature of the programme and the Dublin descriptors. The PILOs correspond to the level of a bachelor's programme, and are sufficiently aligned with the expectations of the professional field. The panel recommends to further strengthen the alignment of the programme's goals to the professional field by reactivating the external advisory board.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 1.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Findings

Curriculum

The programme has translated the 15 PILO's to course level (CILO's), which are revised regularly by course coordinators to ensure their alignment to recent developments within the particular area, such as the

widespread use of generative AI. The BA Digital Society's curriculum is built on six learning lines: history, culture, politics, technology, ethics and methods. In the courses, the students develop a perspective on technology and digitalization founded on the different learning lines. The mentor trajectory runs throughout the three years and is mandatory in the first two. It offers workshops on student well-being and employability among other topics (see appendix 3).

The curriculum (see appendix 2) consists of 180 EC, with the first two years focused on building foundational skills and knowledge, and the final year on the thesis (21 EC) and the elective space (30 EC) that students can use do a minor or an internship. The academic year is divided into five periods. Periods 1,2, 4, and 5 are each eight weeks, with two parallel courses: one substantive (knowledge) and one focused on skills. Period 3 (four weeks) offers a skills course only. The first week of periods 2, 4, and 5 is a 'preparation week', during which students develop their self-study skills working on tasks defined by the course.

In the first two years, the two types of courses running parallel to each other (one substantive and one skills course) make up the largest part of the EC's. In the first year, the skills courses amount to 21 EC and the substantive courses to 32 EC. Alongside these parallel courses run the mentor scheme (1 EC) and the year-long course *Surveillance Society* (6 EC). This course consists of various lectures and workshops, and analyses surveillance in the different domains touched upon in other first year courses: society, politics, ethics and culture. In the second year, the substantive courses take up 28 EC and the skill courses 31 EC. This leaves 1 EC for the mentor scheme which is still compulsory in the second year.

Skill courses provide academic and professional and technical/digital skills. Academic skills include academic reading and writing, mixed methods research, interdisciplinary research design, critical and analytical thinking, and critical analysis of sources. Professional skills include presentation skills, collaborative working, creative problem solving, and time management. Digital and technical skills include principles of computer programming (in R), creating blogs and vlogs, digital literacy, and designing a basic algorithm. To ensure that students can effectively navigate interdisciplinary discourse and understand technical jargon, the programme has incorporated elements of data science into skills courses, such as the R programming language. Substantive courses focus on fostering knowledge about specific subjects. In these courses, students develop their knowledge of theory building and are introduced to fundamental concepts and principles within the field of digitalization. For example, in *What Is (a) Digital Society,* they are introduced to concepts and theories related to digital activism, e-waste, digital economy, and more.

The integration of knowledge and skills is mainly achieved through the alignment of the parallel courses, as the substantive course provides the students with theory that can be applied in the parallel skills course. For example, in the *Making Knowledge* course students learn about knowledge production and how data visualizations can be misleading, while in the parallel *Quantitative Data Analysis* course they learn how to appropriately describe statistical data with tables and visualisations. In addition to the alignment of parallel courses, theory is also integrated into the skills courses. For example, *Interdisciplinary Research Design* is grounded in philosophy of science.

The first semester of the final year consists of two parts, the 30 EC elective space and 4 EC thesis preparation. Students have the opportunity to do a minor in their faculty or in another faculty of Maastricht University, to do an internship or to study abroad. Interdisciplinarity is reflected in the breadth of internships and minor courses, ranging from internships in using data science and AI for classifying video contents to minors in neuropsychology and law. The year-long mentor scheme is no longer compulsory in the final year, but still available to the students who need it, which is in line with the idea of scaffolding described under standard 1. In the second semester of the final year, students write their thesis (17 EC), follow the course *Controversies in*

Digital Society (9 EC) and can follow an elective FASoS course. Within the thesis, as of 23/24 students have the opportunity to add a digital element such as a video or podcast, but they are no longer required to do so (see standard 3)

The panel studied the programme's curriculum and the manuals and content of some of the courses. It concludes that the programme has a strong and well-balanced interdisciplinary curriculum, which goes beyond the traditional STS social science approach. The panel commends the programme for the way in which it integrates contemporary and real-life issues into the courses and for the combination of theory and practice through the parallel course system. The panel found that the programme strikes a balance between teaching an attitude of critical reflection on technologies and finding solutions for the responsible use of these technologies, emphasizing the ethical perspective on digitalization while teaching students how to work with digital technologies. The different learning lines are clearly visible within the curriculum and are thematically represented in different courses. The panel appreciates the way in which the programme has integrated them horizontally, combining different learning lines in one course rather than pillarizing the disciplines in different courses. The panel concludes with satisfaction that the curriculum is aligned with the aim of delivering T-shaped generalists, and that it is coherent and consistent in the implementation of the profile across the courses.

The panel has a number of suggestions for further development of the programme. First, the panel notes that the international nature of the curriculum could be further emphasized by broadening the view of the global development of technologies, for example by including developments in the Global South, where many countries are becoming leaders in the digitization of society. Legal aspects and polices in, for example, American and Asian countries are also relevant to global development of digital societies. The panel suggests engaging with the Global Studies bachelor's programme to explore options in this direction. An additional benefit is that this could underline the international nature of the programme (see Standard 1), and give the programme a more distinctive competitive position among comparative international oriented programmes. In addition, the panel appreciates that the programme regularly invites guest lecturers from the professional field to the courses, and suggests that this could be developed by involving them in course development. This could be approached from the input side, where stakeholders function as sponsors or owners of challenges in the PBL approach, offering real assignments from potential future employers, as well as from the output side, where alumni could illustrate the relevance of courses in real life in the form of testimonials. Finally, in line with the programme's ambition to further integrate theory and practice beyond the parallel courses, the panel suggests defining a select number of core methods and skills that are essential for all students (e.g. communication and technological skills) and ensuring that these are built upon throughout the different curriculum components , challenging students to increase their level in these skills. Students can broaden or strengthen these core skills with additional skills that fit their personal ambitions, such as additional research skills or programming skills, in the elective part of the programme in the fifth semester.

Teaching methods and language of instruction

As mentioned under standard 1, educational vision of the programme is based on the 4 key principles of learning: it is a *constructive, collaborative, contextual* and *self-directed* process (CCCS). This vision is implemented in several ways, one of which is the use of the PBL method. During the PBL tutorials, especially during the pre-discussion, students read and discuss the assignment text in the syllabus (manual) and come up with learning objectives. Next, they prepare their answer to the learning objectives by reading academic texts and engaging with other material, and sometimes also by completing additional assignments – all of which is self-study. During the subsequent post-discussion in the next tutorial, students share their answers to the learning objectives and discuss the material that they have used to answer the learning objectives. Students have PBL tutorials twice a week, and these sessions are connected to the lectures. One of the aims

of the lectures is to place the course material (including key concepts) in a wider theoretical, academic, and societal context. During the interview with the students, the panel was pleased to learn that students were positive about the way PBL is integrated into the curriculum. Students said that it motivates them to take ownership of their learning process and, as there is always a student chair at the PBL sessions, has them practice leadership as well.

Other ways in which the programme integrates the key didactic principles of CCCS, are found throughout the courses. Examples include the production of a podcast for lay audiences on an academic and technical topic, a Live Action Role Play (LARP) session, or the organization of debates on relevant topics. At the information fair during the site visit, students had the opportunity to show the panel some of the ways in which they had integrated their knowledge into various group projects, such as the podcast mentioned above or an app that they had designed and partly built. The panel was pleased to note that the educational vision of the programme is translated into this didactic method, as evidenced by these examples. From studying the information provided by the programme, the panel also concluded that the key principles are well integrated throughout the curriculum.

The programme has chosen English as the language of instruction, because it recognizes the global nature and impact of digital technologies. It aims to teach students to express themselves well in English language as preparation for the work field., which also one of the programme's PILOs. By choosing English as the language of instruction, the programme hopes to enhance the employability of their students and their options for postgraduate studies either in the Netherlands or elsewhere. Many of the organizations that students end up working for, or the MA programmes that students continue with after completing the programme are international environments where English is the lingua franca. In line with UM policy, the bachelor DS has adopted the principle of the international classroom, with students from a wide variety of backgrounds and different countries. The programme assesses the students' entry English level with a mandatory diagnostic test in BA1; the results indicate levels of proficiency levels and advice, such as the recommendation of additional training English language training. A lower overall score is discussed with the student's mentor to determine the most effective way to address the identified language deficiencies. To ensure the quality of the education, all teaching staff is required to be proficient in English, at least at C1 level. The panel concludes that the programme has sufficient justification to use English as the language of instruction, and sees the international aspect of the programme as an asset (see standard 1).

Student support and feasibility

Student support is organized by the programme in three ways. Firstly, as students are often in contact with the tutors in small-scale PBL tutorial classes, the tutors are often the first member of staff to whom students turn with course-related issues. Secondly, students are supported by the mentor scheme, which is compulsory in the first two years. The mentor guides and coaches the student on any issues that may arise that are not course specific but also do not require the more specialized advice of the student advisor. Finally, the student advisor is the person with whom students can make an appointment for any problems that do require more attention or specialized advice. The student advisor can help students with any study-related problems, such as planning and time management, by being a listening ear, or by advising on how to deal with study stress. In addition, the student advisor is the person who can refer students to other professionals within the university, such as a UM psychologist, or people who can help them with other problems such as the general practitioner. From the panel's interview with the students, it was clear that they appreciated the small-scale approach and the flexibility of the fifth semester, as well as the way in which they were supported throughout the programme. This is also reflected in the success rates of the programme: with almost 60% of students graduating in 3 years, and around 80% in 4 years.

The panel is positive about the feasibility and the student guidance of the programme. The panel appreciates the various ways in which students can find support when they encounter problems. It commends the way in which students are guided and notes in particular that the small scale PBL classes with trained tutors are a good way of making student support easily accessible.

From the student interviews and the NSE results, it is clear that most students are satisfied with the feasibility and student support of the programme. They are positive about the balanced curriculum, small scale classes and the PBL approach as well as the other ways of finding support. Some students expressed that they would appreciate more guidance on career orientation during their BA. The interdisciplinary nature of the programme provides students with many optional future career paths and postgraduate options. This is beneficial for students who want to explore during their bachelor's programme before specializing into a particular direction. However, more structural guidance could be provided to help them make a choice. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the programme, the panel recommends paying extra attention to providing structural guidance to students in their orientation towards a career or master's choice. Further attention to this aspect through the involvement of external stakeholders and alumni in courses could contribute to this (see discussion under Curriculum).

Teaching staff

The teaching staff of the BA Digital Society reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the programme. Staff members come from a variety of backgrounds, including philosophy, history, media and cultural studies, communication science, STS or political science. FASoS has recruited staff specializing in digital research and techniques, whose knowledge has been integrated in the curriculum. Most of the teaching staff of the programme either have hold a PhD or are PhD candidates, combining research and teaching. The majority of teachers are full, associate and assistant professors, who coordinate and teach courses. All teaching staff members are required to complete the University Teaching Qualification (UTQ) training, which is mandatory for all faculty staff members with a teaching component of 10% or more. UTQ training focuses on the development of the following competencies: educational design, teaching delivery, assessment design, collaboration, and self-reflection. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) at UM is intended for staff who have completed the PBL & Tutor Training and who have already been awarded their UTQ. CPD provides a personal choice of what, when and how UM staff continue their development. Activities can focus on topics like GenAI, formulating feedback and dealing with the international classroom.

Based on the interview with the teaching staff members and the overview of the staff members provided by the programme, the panel concludes that the teaching staff is both well qualified and academically strong. It notes with satisfaction that there is a balance between teachers with technical expertise and with a humanities specialization. The panel appreciates the programme's continued attention to professionalization and the interdisciplinarity of the teaching staff. In discussion with staff, the panel noted with appreciation the passion and commitment of the teaching staff. In addition, the panel commends the programme's attitude toward professionalization, including the separate tutor training. The panel noted from the discussions during the site visit that the programme aims to continue to increase staff numbers in line with student numbers in order to maintain the small group size (max 15 students) of the PBL approach. This means that cohorts will be split into groups where necessary, requiring more teaching staff. The panel supports this and believes that it is an important condition for sustainable future growth.

Programme-specific facilities

The BA DS programme has access to the Playground and Laboratory for New Technologies (the Plant), set up by the FASoS staff. It provides students and staff with digital research and teaching infrastructure to facilitate engagement with digital technologies such as VR, 3D printing, and audio-visual production. In addition to the

equipment that students and staff can engage with, the Plant has designated areas for teaching and meetings, which are called the Greenhouse and the Field. The staff at the plan Plant caters for the specific needs of the humanities and social sciences, explicitly (but not exclusively) for the BA DS, while also encouraging interdisciplinary research and teaching. All of the Plant's founders and coordinators are also members of the BA DS teaching staff, which strengthens the connection between the programme and the laboratory; courses often make use of the facilities for group work, such as the podcast project, and the Plant has been involved in the design of a new course called 'Virtual Worlds'.

The panel has spent time at the Plant during the site visit, and found it to be an asset to the programme. It recognizes the vision behind it, and sees that it is being realised. This was clear to the panel as they saw several examples of how the Plant is being used by the programme's courses, staff and students of the programme. It learnt that the faculty aims to encourage further use by offering incentives such as the allocation of research budget to the lab and the provision of workshops and support in the use of the equipment. The panel sees the potential of this laboratory, and suggests that is should be explored whether external stakeholders could be involved in its use, which could be a stepping stone to additional external connections.

Considerations

The panel concludes that the programme has a well-balanced, interdisciplinary curriculum that is aligned with the aim of producing T-shaped professionals with a generalist knowledge and skills, deepened by critical reflection. It commends the way in which this interdisciplinarity is achieved throughout the courses, which overlap rather than pillarize the disciplines. It considers that the structure of the parallel substantive and skills courses is an appropriate way of integrating the theoretical knowledge with a more practical approach. It is pleased to note that this strikes a balance between equipping students with the skills necessary both to critically reflect on digital technologies and to use them responsibly. The panel also appreciates the emphasis on internationalization within the programme, and considers this to be in line with the expectations from the professional field. It notes that there is potential for further strengthening this international aspect, including, for example, the development of digital societies in the Global South and legal and policy aspects outside of Europe. Furthermore, the panel appreciates the didactic approach of PBL, which it considers to be a manifestation of the programme's profile. The different ways in which the key features of CCCS are integrated into the courses, for example through group projects, show how this educational vision is implemented not only in the PBL sessions but throughout the curriculum. The panel is positive about the connections with external stakeholders, and suggests involving them even more on course level to further strengthen the alignment of the programme with the professional field.

The panel appreciates the student support system that the programme has in place, with three main ways in which students can find guidance, depending on the issue, through the tutor, the mentor or the student advisor. It was pleased to find that students were largely positive about the feasibility of the programme and the way in which they were supported, and concluded that the workload and content of the programme met student's expectations. The panel recommends the establishment of a structural way to guide students in their orientation towards a possible career path or master's degree. The panel is positive about the teaching staff, whom it considers to be well qualified and committed to the programme. It also appreciates the continuing professionalization and the balance between technical and social expertise within the staff. The panel is positive about the teaching- and research facilities at the Plant, which it sees as an asset to the programme and the university. It suggests that this space could be used as a stepping stone to further involve external stakeholders in the programme due to its general appeal.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 2.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

Findings

System of assessment

The BA Digital Society works with an assessment policy and BoE guidelines, which are in line with the UM and FASoS policies, to ensure the quality and independence of the assessment. It aims to achieve six assessment principles: constructive alignment, transparency, reliability, validity, continuous development and monitoring, and fairness. To implement these principles, the programme includes a variety of assessment forms such as multiple-choice exams, closed-book exams, take-home exams, essays, presentations and oral exams, group or individual assignments. It also experiments with new assessment methods such as the podcast or the LARP session. The different assessment methods are adapted to the different skills and learning objectives that they test: exams for knowledge, essays for critical argumentation, group assignments for collaboration etc. In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the assessments, the programme works with the four-eyes principle (at least two members of staff are involved in an exam or assignment) and has regular calibration sessions to harmonize the interpretation of the assessment criteria among the tutors. There are frequent meetings between tutors to ensure alignment of assessment, and sample checks of the tutor's grading by the course coordinators. Finally, the BoE and the Educational Programme Committee monitor the assessment process to ensure its validity and independence.

The panel has studied the assessment procedure, several examples of assessment in courses and the assessment policy. It appreciates the variety of assessment methods, and the creative way in which some of them are designed. It considers that the assessment procedures are appropriate, and that the checks and balances that are in place are adequate to ensure the quality of assessment. It notes that the assessment methods are in line with the intended learning goals of the courses. During the site visit, the panel discussed with the programme the assessment of interactional expertise, the level of expertise that students are expected to have in many technical aspects of the digital society. It felt that this was difficult to assess as this implies actual interaction with stakeholders outside the programme. It was pleased to learn that many courses and projects pay attention to interaction with stakeholders. It also notes that the majority of these are projects or internships with external stakeholders that are elective, which leads to differences in the extent to which students are assessed on this based on their curriculum choices. It suggests that interactional expertise could be assessed more thoroughly through compulsory elements. From its study of the SER and discussions with the programme management and the Board of Examiners, the panel concludes that the programme has GenAI on the radar as a challenging new development. It appreciates the attention that the programme is giving to this development by working with GenAI rather than simply restricting its use. It notes that attention should also be paid to whether students have equal access to AI tools, as some of the most advanced tools are not free to use.

Thesis assessment

The BA DS final work consists of a research project resulting in a thesis of approximately 10.000 words, written individually by each student. The supervisor and a second independent reader assess the thesis in pairs. The thesis coordinator proposes the two examiners of the thesis to the Board of Examiners (BoE), who consider diversity, experience, conflicts of interest and attempt to avoid pairing. Both examiners evaluate

the thesis according to the following seven criteria: Structure, Research Question, Link with the research field, Analytical framework; methodology and sources, Analysis, Conclusion, Language and rhetorical skills. To assist the examiners in assessing these criteria, they are provided with a grading rubric for the criteria and the associated sub-criteria. The second reader is the first to officially grade the thesis, after which the first reader who is also the supervisor grades the thesis independently. After they have both completed draft versions of the assessment form, they discuss the work and intended grade. The second reader adjusts the assessment form. The second reader may also adjust the grade too, depending on the results of the feedback process with the first reader. Both must agree on the final grade and the content of the assessment form. If the two examiners disagree on a grade, the programme director or thesis coordinator will appoint a third reader with relevant expertise to assesses the thesis independently from the two first examiners. In this case, the final grade will always be agreed by at least two of the three examiners in this case. In 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, the BA DS theses included a compulsory digital element such as a podcast, video, or infographic. The digital element itself was not assessed, but the students had to write a reflection justifying their choice for the specific digital element that was assessed. Based on concerns from the mid-term panel as to why the element itself was not assessed, and students struggling with the variety of choices for the digital element, the programme decided to make this element optional as of 2023-2024.

The panel has studied the thesis assessment policy and the rubric for grading the thesis, as well as 15 theses written in the recent years. It concludes that the thesis assessment framework is solid, and that the writing standards are well aligned with what is the expected bachelor's level. The panel is positive about the variety of topics in the theses, and the rubrics for assessing the theses. However, it suggests that the element of critical reflection be more firmly embedded into the assessment of the thesis, as this is an important part of the programme profile and curriculum. Currently it is present but somewhat underrepresented in formal assessment such as the rubric. The panel considers the assessment system with the two examiners and the checks and balances of the BoE to be reliable and valid.

Board of Examiners

The FASoS has one Board of Examiners (BoE) for all the programmes within the faculty, including the Digital Society BA. The Board of Examiners safeguards the quality of assessment within the programme through regular evaluation of the assessment plan. It advises the programme management and the teaching staff on assessment procedures and is responsible for enforcing the guidelines on plagiarism. It shares an anti-plagiarism and anti-fraud campaign with staff and students twice per year. The exam administration of FaSOS reports anomalous exam results to the BoE, which carries out sampling on the quality of individual exams. The BoE annually reviews the BA DS curriculum and its assessment plan, and advises on any changes to the curriculum that impact assessment. The Board of Examiners annually provides and oversees the thesis assessment procedure, approves the assessment form, appoints all grading pairs, and requests the scheduling of calibration sessions. It also takes samples of course assessment and conducts an internal audit for theses to ensure the quality of student assessment.

The FASoS BoE consists of a Chair, a Vice-Chair, and five general members, one of whom is an external member. The BoE is administratively supported by a secretary and a service desk. The Faculty Board appoints new members of the BoE. In addition, FASoS has an Assessment Support Team, which can be consulted by teaching staff in the preparation of exams.

Based on the documentation on the Board of Examiners and the discussion with the Board during the site visit, the panel concludes that the Board fulfils its legal obligations assuring the quality of assessment of the programme. It considers that the checks and balances that are in place to safeguard the validity of the

assessment, such as the sampling of individual exams, are appropriate and reliable. The panel commends the BoE's procedure for monitoring the thesis assessment process and ensuring its validity.

Considerations

The panel concludes that the quality of the assessment procedures of the Digital Society bachelor's programme are adequate and reliable. The assessment methods are varied and creative, and are aligned with the intended learning outcomes and the learning goals of the courses. The panel is positive about the attention to assessment that values interactional expertise. However, the programme needs to consider how these assessments are applied across the different curriculum options. It recommends the introduction of more mandatory assessment moments to more structurally embed the assessment of students' level of interactional expertise. The panel studied the thesis assessment procedures, and found the framework to be reliable and solid and safeguarding the validity of the assessment. According to the panel, the writing standards for the thesis are in line with what is expected of a bachelor's level. It finds the thesis rubric helpful and appropriate. The panel concludes that the Board of Examiners fulfils its legal obligations in ensuring the validity and quality of the assessment procedures. Checks and balances are in place to safeguard this quality.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 3.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

The panel studied a selection of 15 recent theses to determine the exit level of students. It was pleased to find that the theses were of a high quality, clearly demonstrating that the students have achieved the BA level. The panel appreciates the way in which the profile of the programme is reflected in the theses, with a wide range of topics demonstrating the interdisciplinary aspect. The theses topics are diverse, topical and in line with the current developments in the field of digitalization. The panel found the digital element of the thesis a refreshing addition to the final work. It understands why the programme has made the use of the digital element to optional rather than compulsory.

Based on information on graduates provided by the programme, graduates move on to master's programmes in line with the aims of the programme, such as ethics of technology and AI, digital media and communication sciences, entrepreneurship, policy of technology, and more technical fields such as data science. Most graduates continue to do a master's programme, but some enter the labour market straight away. They have found jobs in the digital field, such as technology specialist at Microsoft, junior consultant at Siemens, or project manager IT solutions. Some of the programme's graduates have also been hired by the company where they did their internship, such as Amazon in Prague or an AI company in Düsseldorf. This demonstrates both the interdisciplinary and the international nature of the programme. The programme management aims to improve student-alumni relations by actively collecting alumni data and encouraging meaningful interaction between students and alumni, as it seeks to provide role models for the students considering life after their BA.

Based on information about alumni and their subsequent studies or career paths, the panel concluded that alumni are finding relevant jobs that are linked to the programme's intended outcomes. Through

conversations with alumni, the panel concluded that alumni of the programme appear to be confident and comfortable in their current jobs, whether they are pursuing a master's programme of entering the professional field. The panel commends the programme for its efforts to improve student-alumni relations, and suggests that the programme could consider alumni as ambassadors for the programme in their future job. They could also invite alumni back to the programme as well to connect with new cohorts.

Considerations

The good quality of the theses, as well as the career paths or master's programmes of alumni, convinced the panel that graduates of the BA Digital Society achieve the intended learning outcomes. Alumni are finding relevant master's or jobs, and appear confident. The panel encourages the programme to continue to strengthen ties with alumni, seeing them as ambassadors for the programme.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 4.

General conclusion

The panel's assessment of the bachelor programme Digital Society is positive.

Development points

1. Further strengthen the alignment of the programme's aims to the professional field by reviving the external advisory board.
2. Establish a structured way to guide students in their orientation towards a possible career path or master's degree.
3. Introduce more mandatory assessment moments to more structurally embed the assessment of students' level of interactional expertise.
4. Embed the element of critical reflection more structurally into the thesis assessment procedure.

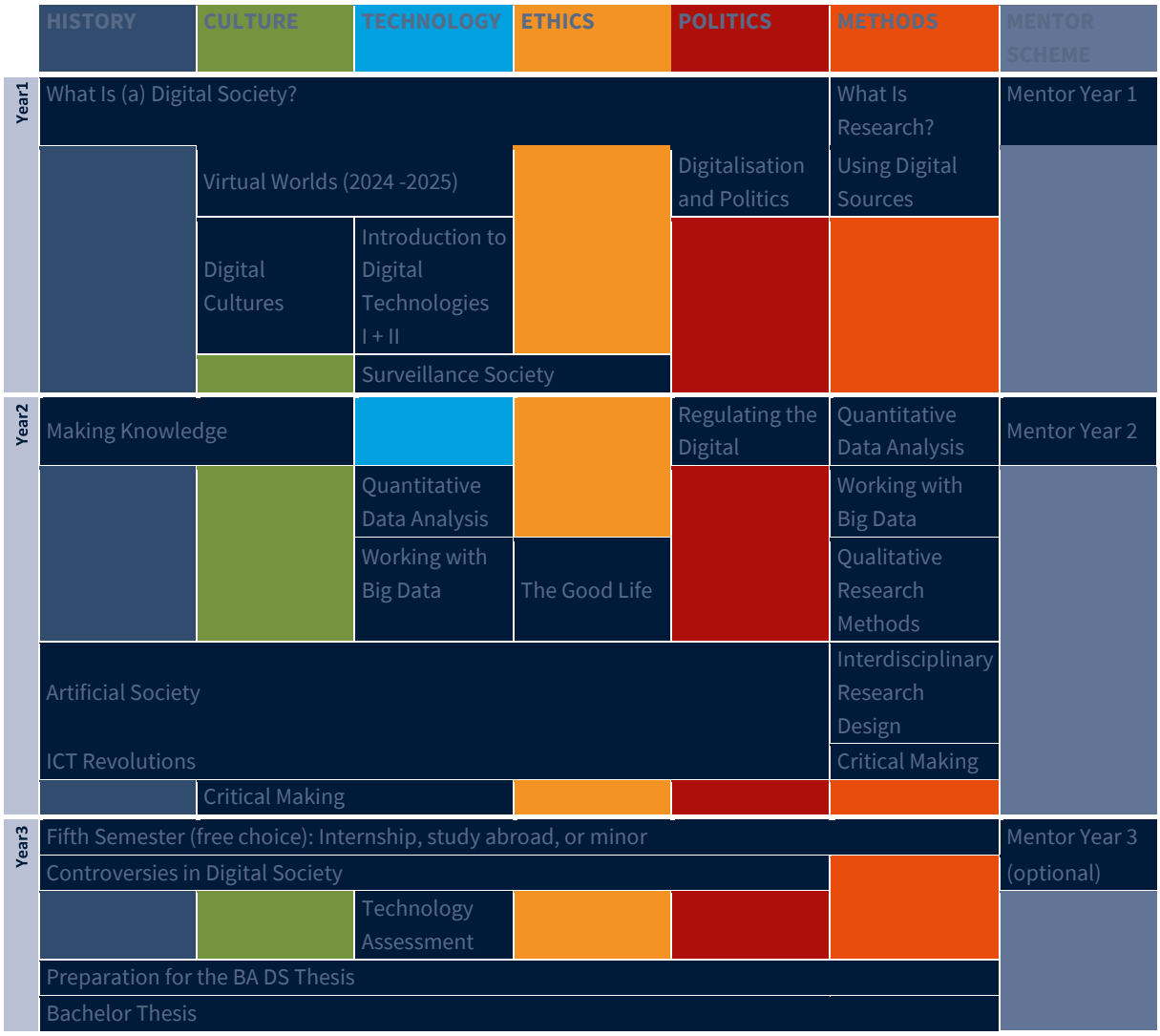
Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes	Programme Intended Learning Outcomes	
Knowledge and insight (Dublin Descriptor I)	*Graduates will be able to…:*	
	1	…understand complex and dynamic changes in the relationships between digital technologies, social changes and user practices, and can situate these changes in their relevant historical, political, cultural and organisational contexts.
	2	…define intellectual, social, ethical, cultural and political issues associated with processes of digitalisation in contemporary society.
	3	…demonstrate knowledge of the main ideas, concepts, theoretical debates and methods from the humanities and the social sciences that are relevant to understanding processes of digitalisation.
Applying knowledge and insight (Dublin Descriptor II)	*Graduates will be able to…:*	
	1	…apply their knowledge of the past and present to new and emerging situations, with different digital applications in different social contexts.
	2	…identify assumptions, imaginaries, promises and fears surrounding digital innovation and implementation.
	3	…formulate research problems about processes of digitalisation, and identify appropriate methods to address the problems.
	4	…use their knowledge and understanding about processes of digitalisation to contribute to the creation of a better society.
Formation of a judgement (Dublin Descriptor III)	*Graduates will be able to…:*	
	1	…analyse ethical, cultural and social consequences of digital developments, and what they mean for different people and groups in society.
	2	…Reflect critically on the validity of claims made by different social actors in relation to the development and consequence of digital solutions.
Communication (Dublin Descriptor IV)	*Graduates will be able to…:*	
	1	…participate in societal and academic debates about the ethical, cultural, political and social issues raised by digitalisation processes in different contexts, by articulating complex, interdisciplinary information and ideas about how these processes are developed and used.
	2	…express themselves adequately and appropriately in academic English, orally and in a variety of written forms, depending on the professional context.
	3	…communicate across disciplinary and professional boundaries, to deepen mutual understanding of the relationships between digital technologies and societal changes.
Learning skills (Dublin Descriptor V)	*Graduates will be able to…:*	
	1	…engage critically with selection and use of (digital) methods and sources to study the past, present and future.
	2	…work both individually and collaboratively with people from different backgrounds and cultures, with different interests and goals to formulate a research problem arising from digitalisation processes, identify appropriate sources and methods, and articulate results.
	3	…continue to learn after graduation about new digitalisation processes and their potential societal implications, drawing on the knowledge, skills and confidence developed during the BA.

Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

	Period 1 Sept-Oct	Period 2 Nov-Dec	Period 3 January	Period 4 Feb-March	Period 5 April-May	June
Year 1	Mentor Scheme (1 ECTS)					
	Surveillance Society (6 ECTS)					
	What is (a) Digital Society? (8 ECTS)	Digitalisation and Politics (8 ECTS)	What Is Research? (5 ECTS)	ICT Revolutions: Continuity and Change (8 ECTS)	Digital Cultures (8 ECTS)	
	Making Your Own Online Presence (4 ECTS)	Introduction to Digital Technologies I (4 ECTS)		Using Digital Sources (4 ECTS)	Introduction to Digital Technologies II (4 ECTS)	
Year 2	Mentor Scheme (1 ECTS)					
	Making Knowledge (7 ECTS)	Artificial Society (7 ECTS)	Critical Making (5 ECTS)	The 'Good Life' (7 ECTS)	Regulating the Digital (7 ECTS)	
	Quantitative Data Analysis (6 ECTS)	Working With Big Data (6 ECTS)		Qualitative Research Methods (7 ECTS)	Interdisciplinary Research Design (7 ECTS)	
Year 3	Mentor Scheme					
	Preparation for Thesis (4 ECTS)			Bachelor Thesis (17 ECTS)		
	Elective units of study (30 ECTS): Internship, Study Abroad, FASoS or UM Minor, literature exam			Controversies in Digital Society (9 ECTS)	Elective from FASoS or UM	

Appendix 3. Learning lines



Appendix 4. Programme of the site visit

24 June 2024

17.00 – 19.00	Preparatory panel meeting (incl. open consultation)

25 June 2025

08.45 – 09.00	Arrival and welcome
09.00 – 09.45	**Interview programme management**
09.45 – 10.15	Internal panel meeting
10.15 – 11.00	**Interview students and alumni**
11.15 – 12.00	**Interview teaching staff**
12.00 – 13.30	**Information fair** (incl. lunch)
13.30 – 14.00	**Interview Board of Examiners**
14.00 – 14.45	Internal panel meeting
14.45 – 15.15	**Final interview programme management**
15.15 – 16.15	Concluding panel session
16.15 – 16.45	**Oral feedback**
16.45 – 17.30	**Development dialogue**

Appendix 5. Materials

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 theses. Information on the theses is available from Academion upon request. The panel also studied other materials, which included:

- Report TNO 2019
- Report Mid-Term Evaluation 2022
- Benchmark Bachelor Digital Society
- Curriculum overview
- Programme Intended Learning Outcomes
- Overview CILOs and assessment related to PILOs
- Outflow to master's programmes and to the professional field
- Programme overview BA Digital Society 2023-2024 1
- Overview study abroad / internship / minor
- Curriculum changes
- Examples of implementation didactic CCCS-principles
- Staff overview
- Assessment principles and guidelines on a university, faculty and programme level
- Recent reports Board of Examiners and Educational Programme Committee
- Recent NSE results
- Thesis syllabus