

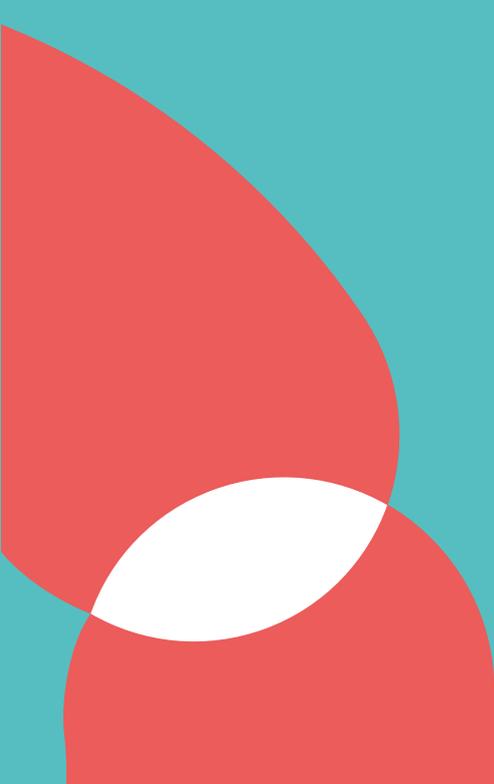


NVAO • THE NETHERLANDS

INITIAL ACCREDITATION

MASTER IN SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS
ROTTERDAM UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED
SCIENCES

SUMMARY REPORT
3 JULY 2025



1 Peer Review

The quality of a new programme is assessed by means of peer review. A panel of independent peers including a student reviews the plans during a site visit to the institution. A discussion amongst peer experts forms the basis for the panel's final judgement and advisory report. The focus is on the curriculum, the teaching and learning environment, and student assessment.

The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) makes a formal decision on the programme's quality based on the outcome of the peer review. This decision can be positive, conditionally positive or negative. If the decision is positive, with or without conditions, the institution may proceed to offer the new programme. Graduates of the programme will then be entitled to receive a legally accredited degree.

This summary report highlights the key outcomes of the peer review. A full report with more details including the panel's findings and analysis is also available. NVAO bases its accreditation decision on this more detailed report.

Both the full and summary reports of peer reviews are published on NVAO's website www.nvao.net. You may also find more information about NVAO and peer reviews of new programmes on the website.

2 Panel

Peer experts

- Dr. Elles Bulder (chair), Professor Environment in Transition at Hanze University of Applied Sciences;
- Dr. Frank van Rijnsoever, Associate Professor in the field of innovation, entrepreneurship and sustainability at Utrecht University;
- Mr. drs. Henriëtte Graveland, strategic consultant at Waterschap De Dommel;
- Anina Jonker, student MSc Climate Studies at Wageningen University & Research.

Assisting staff

- Anne Martens, secretary;
- Reina Louw, NVAO policy advisor and process coordinator.

Site visit

Rotterdam, 28 May 2025

3 Outcome

The NVAO-approved panel reached a positive conclusion regarding the quality of the professional master's programme in Sustainability Transitions (STR) that is proposed and developed by Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences (RUAS). The institution intends to offer the programme of 60 EC as a full-time programme in Rotterdam.

The ambitious programme intends to educate change-makers and system-shifters who connect disciplines and stakeholders, thus catalysing sustainable transitions. Students develop their abilities in strategic sustainability foundations, strategic business tools, finance, applied research and leadership for sustainability transitions. The programme meets national and international requirements and aims to deliver graduates who can solve complex sustainability challenges and facilitate both organisational transformation and long-term system-level change. It has been developed in cooperation with other universities of applied sciences. Together, they have formulated six intended programme learning outcomes that meet the level of a professional master's programme. The STR programme in Rotterdam is focused on themes that are especially relevant to RUAS and its location close to the port of Rotterdam: energy transitions, circular economy and business models.

The curriculum of the programme is well structured, ambitious and ensures a good balance between theory and skills development. Overall, the programme uses a variety of teaching and assessment methods. Throughout the programme, students work on real-world sustainability challenges and prepare a Sustainability Transition Action Plan (STAP). These projects enable students to make their own choices for a specific project topic, according to their personal interests.

The programme strives for a heterogeneous student population, with students from a wide range of different backgrounds – in terms of academic discipline, professional experience and nationality. The programme intends to create a strong learning community and foster a sense of belonging right from the start of the programme. This will likely support students in dealing with a substantial study load. The programme has developed a well thought-out and structured assessment plan which supports students' learning trajectories. It deploys a diverse and balanced set of assessment methods throughout the curriculum.

The programme has been developed by a team of qualified, dedicated and enthusiastic staff members with relevant interdisciplinary expertise and international experience. An experienced Examination Board safeguards the quality of assessment.

The panel concludes that the professional master's programme in Sustainability Transitions is a relevant, ambitious and well-structured programme. The panel supports the programme's argumentation regarding its choice for English as the language of instruction.

4 Commendations

The programme is commended for the following features of good practice:

1. External stakeholders – The programme has strong links with external stakeholders from the professional field, RUAS's Research Centres and other universities of applied sciences.
2. Curriculum – The programme has a structured curriculum, that prepares students for the creation of a Sustainability Transition Action Plan (STAP).
3. Learning community – The programme focuses on creating a strong learning community and fostering a sense of belonging right from the start of the programme.
4. Assessors – RBS organises mandatory assessor trainings for external assessors, who are also required to attend calibration sessions both before and after assessments.
5. Examination Board – A strong and experienced Examination Board safeguards the programme's assessment quality.

5 Recommendations

The panel recommends several follow-up actions to improve the programme further. These recommendations do not detract from the positive assessment of the programme's quality.

1. Advisory Board – Involve more representatives from the public sector (e.g., national and regional governmental organisations) in the Advisory Board.
2. Case studies – Discuss the case studies regularly with industry representatives to keep the curriculum materials up-to-date with current developments – for example regarding policies and (global) politics that put the programme under pressure.
3. Research methodologies – Increase the lecture time for theory about research methodologies in the curriculum, to ensure that all students acquire the necessary knowledge and expertise in a range of research methods and techniques.
4. Assessment rubrics – Further develop the programme's assessment rubrics with more concrete criteria to improve the transparency of assessment. Continue the development trajectory that has already been started and ensure it is clearly reflected in the implementation phase.

6 What Comes Next?

NVAO grants initial accreditation to a new programme based on the panel's full report, with the accreditation being valid for up to six years. Once accredited, the new programme will adhere to NVAO's review procedures for existing programmes. NVAO publishes the accreditation decision along with the full report and this summary report.¹

Each institution has a quality assurance system, ensuring continuous follow-up actions and periodic peer-review activities. Peer reviews help the institution to improve the quality of its programmes. Progress made since the last

¹ <https://www.nvao.net/nl/besluiten>

review is considered when preparing for the next one, and the follow-up actions are included in the subsequent peer-review report. For more information, please visit the institution's website.²

7 Samenvatting

Het panel oordeelt positief over de kwaliteit van de hbo-masteropleiding in Sustainability Transitions (STR) van Hogeschool Rotterdam. Dit is de uitkomst van de kwaliteitstoets uitgevoerd door een panel van *peers* op verzoek van de Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie (NVAO). Voor deze beoordeling heeft het panel gesprekken gevoerd met de opleiding op 28 mei 2025.

De ambitieuze opleiding wil systeemveranderaars opleiden die disciplines en belanghebbenden met elkaar verbinden en zo duurzame transitie aanjagen. Studenten ontwikkelen hun vaardigheden in duurzaamheid, strategische bedrijfskunde, financiën, toegepast onderzoek en leiderschap. Afgestudeerden kunnen complexe duurzaamheidsuitdagingen oplossen en zowel organisatorische transformatie als systeemverandering op lange termijn faciliteren. De opleiding is ontwikkeld in samenwerking met andere hogescholen, die gezamenlijk zes beoogde programma leeruitkomsten hebben geformuleerd die voldoen aan het niveau van een hbo-masteropleiding. De opleiding STR in Rotterdam richt zich op thema's die vooral relevant zijn voor Hogeschool Rotterdam en haar ligging nabij de Rotterdamse haven: energietransities, circulaire economie en businessmodellen.

De opleiding zal in Rotterdam als voltijds programma worden aangeboden. Het curriculum is goed gestructureerd, ambitieus en zorgt voor een goede balans tussen theorie en de ontwikkeling van vaardigheden. De opleiding maakt daarbij gebruik van gevarieerde onderwijs- en beoordelingsmethoden. Gedurende de opleiding werken studenten aan duurzaamheidsuitdagingen uit de praktijk en stellen ze een Sustainability Transition Action Plan (STAP) op. Deze projecten stellen studenten in staat om hun eigen keuzes te maken voor een specifiek projectonderwerp, afhankelijk van hun eigen interesses.

De opleiding streeft naar een heterogene studentenpopulatie, bestaand uit studenten met een breed scala aan verschillende achtergronden wat betreft academische discipline, werkervaring en nationaliteit. De opleiding wil een sterke leergemeenschap creëren. Dit zal studenten waarschijnlijk helpen om te gaan met de studielast. De opleiding heeft een goed doordacht en gestructureerd toetsplan ontwikkeld dat het persoonlijke leertraject van studenten ondersteunt. De opleiding maakt gebruik van gevarieerde toetsvormen.

De opleiding is ontwikkeld door een team van gekwalificeerde, toegewijde en enthousiaste docenten met relevante interdisciplinaire expertise en internationale ervaring. Een ervaren examencommissie bewaakt de toetskwaliteit.

Het panel concludeert dat de hbo-masteropleiding in Sustainability Transitions een relevant, ambitieus en goed gestructureerd programma heeft. Het panel ondersteunt de keuze van de instelling om de opleiding in het Engels aan te bieden.

Meer informatie over de NVAO-werkwijze en de toetsing van nieuwe opleidingen is te vinden op www.nvao.net. Voor informatie over Hogeschool Rotterdam verwijzen we naar de website van de instelling.³

² <https://www.rotterdamuas.com/>

³ <https://www.hogeschoolrotterdam.nl/>

