

Development report Bachelor BMW and Master BMS University Utrecht

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Theme 1: The student journey: student well-being, study feasibility and student inflow and outflow

Both the bachelor's programme BMW and the master's programme Biomedical Sciences offer students a challenging study programme with many options. However, students encounter problems with the feasibility of the programmes and perceive stress. Intensive guidance and support are provided to help students with their personal development and the choices they make. Nevertheless, our SWOT analyses show that the perceived study pressure and stress among students are remarkably high. We see different needs and questions that students encounter. We would like to discuss how the relationship between providing guidance and programme adjustments and assigning responsibility to the students can best be balanced.

The panel notes that

- There is a strong link between the bachelor's and master's programmes; they are perceived as a continuum. This persistent narrative seems to cause considerable stress among bachelor students about their study route towards (the selection for) a master's programme.
- *Framing is crucial to initiate a culture change.* One could see the bachelor as a period of self-discovery and a foundation for personal growth, of being able to discover one's talents while keeping all options open.
- It is important to instill (self)confidence in students and to foster a growth mindset. For example, by sharing stories of the 'average' student; by communicating the broader options; by highlighting 'happy failures' and providing room to grow through mistakes.
- The Navigation Towards Personal Excellence workshops could be framed differently. The panel suggests calling this course 'Discovering Personal Talent'.
- *It starts with leadership:* teachers can create a safe and stimulating environment by acting as a role model.
- Increasing teachers' and counselors' knowledge of young adult development could aid in a better understanding of the emotional roller coaster that students can experience in this stage of life.
- It is about finding a balance between guidance (that may be perceived as limitation) on the one hand and developing ownership of students (freedom of choice) on the other. This is a common challenge that could be tackled in collaboration with other Dutch universities.
- It is important to take some pressure away and incorporate some more breathing space into the programmes, to keep in mind that learning should be a pleasure (joy of learning).
- The programme management could reconsider the selection and admission procedures for the MSc programmes.

Theme 2: Curriculum review

The bachelor's programme BMW would like to discuss the curriculum content in the context of the curriculum review. In essence, the new curriculum aims to prepare students for their role as future scientists and engaged citizens in a rapidly changing world. We aim for a future-oriented curriculum with an emphasis on multidisciplinary education and an optimal balance between theoretic knowledge, practice applications, research skills, personal growth and well-being. The programme strives to instill a broad set of skills and a holistic approach to prepare students for scientific careers and responsible citizenship.

We wish to discuss the following questions with the panel:

- *How can we strengthen our scientific profile and integrate research skills in an optimal way?*
- *How can we better bridge the gap between science and society, without losing sight of our biomedical profile?*
- *How can we ensure the development and well-being of students during their studies?*

- The panel suggests that it is important to reflect on the professional and societal skills that a biomedical scientist will need in 5 or 10 years from now. This question immediately ties in with the discussion about what the (future) biomedical profile will look like. This will involve innovation, with the incorporation of new developments and removing topics that have been rendered obsolete as a result of these new developments. The programme management has a clear vision on this, but it is confronted with an internal tension which relates to a basic fear amongst departments and individual teachers of losing the very existence of one's discipline. This presents challenges in translating the vision into the curriculum.
- The panel recommends keeping an eye on the horizon: a scientifically and socially anchored profile. A change of the process involves change management, which begins by recognizing the internal tension, identifying strengths and emphasising benefits that can take away the fear for change, and a transparent communication.
- The support of the Deans is very relevant in this process of conversion, especially from the Faculty of Medicine, but the student's perspective is equally important.
- Students themselves indicate that it is good to make clear what the added value of the BMW Academy is (self-reflection, giving feedback, etc.) and to initiate this earlier in the curriculum so that it better supports the development as a student and as a biomedical practitioner. Learning to apply theoretical knowledge as soon as possible is important; this way the Academy serves a direct purpose.
- Regarding the question how to bridge the gap between science and society, the panel believes that the profiles discussed are not separate but juxtaposed; scientific depth is (already) achieved via social themes. Thus, synergy is created through an interdisciplinary approach. In this regard, the panel mentions the importance of having clear definitions in advance and working on a common language, both internally and towards stakeholders. The 'why' question is also important. The panel's advice is to include the connection to society in this as well.

Theme 3: The Future-proof Research Master

Where do we want to go as Research Masters in the future? How do we want to educate?

We would like to discuss the following topics with you during the Theme Meeting:

- *The optimization of the curriculum: the balance between structure and freedom of choice. E.g.: What to do with the writing assignment component?*
- *What is our role in relation to the job market? Who do we serve: traditional and academic, or also alternative careers? We have been developing the latter over the last few years. To what capacity should or could we extend this? What would this look like in 10-15 years? Is this future-proof? How does this compare to other audits?*
- *We are proud of our ability to do a 9- and 6-month internship; The second internship of 6 months (33EC) is often abroad and highly valued by both students and supervisors. However, they have limited addition to the end terms and are facing capacity limitations. Moreover, students have the option to extend this internship with credits of the electives (12EC). Is having such a high amount of internship credits (up to 51+33+12 = 96EC) future proof?*
- *How do we promote and maintain a healthy and safe learning environment and community within the School?*
- The current design of the programme – first a long internship to develop basic practical skills in the programmes' specialisation, followed by a shorter internship geared towards a students' profile (often abroad) in the 2nd year – was discussed. From an organisational point of view, the panel suggested to reverse this setup; students could use a 6-month internship first to find out where their specific interests lie and subsequently use a 9-month internship to further specialise in a specific field. It may be a challenge though to find funding for such an extensive period abroad, an aspect that must be taken into consideration.

- The panel suggested to explore the options to increase the internship capacity; a mix could also be implemented e.g. a flexible major internship, or replacing the 2nd internship by an elective. Before looking at the 'how', the 'why' should be clear for all involved. It might be good to start with the shared mission/vision or common goal as an anchor point for these discussions, apart from practical issues. The panel also mentioned to investigate whether there may be other intermediate options to improve the curriculum at shorter notice.
- Also the common core of biomedical sciences was addressed, the overall focus on research, and how practical and societal skills could receive more attention. The panel mentioned the option to diversify and add profiles for different contexts, to give students a variety of options.
- One of the challenges discussed is how to deal with the writing assignment, since it frequently causes study delay. Students indicated that it takes more time than the allocated five full-time weeks to write a proper systematic review. To get to a publishable result takes even more time because this needs additional editing. Students have little time to discuss the results with a supervisor and suggest including the assignment into the internship. In this way, students would be more familiar with a topic, would have the opportunity to discuss the review with experts and would be able to better plan the work.
- The panel inquired about experiences with the didactical concept of 'programmatic assessment' such as was implemented in UU's veterinarian MSc, as some of its principles might be worthwhile to help optimise the curriculum. The programmes indicated that there are specialists at university level, that they are aware that programmatic assessment would require intensive mentorship, but would be an interesting path to explore.