

On 3 & 4 December 2024, the MSc Business Administration programme was assessed by an external panel of experts. The final assessment will be performed by NVAO (Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie). In addition to the formal assessment, a development dialogue took place on 4 December 2024. During this conversation, the programme management, three teachers of the programme, and the panel discussed some aspects of the programme in light of further possible improvement. Present at the conversation were the assessment panel and programme representatives.

This report summarises the topics posed by the programme management and the takeaways from the discussion with the panel members.

Description of the developmental topic: Re-design of master's programme

The programme management suggested to re-design the master of the BA programme after extensive discussions with the track coordinators of the seven specialisations. The ideas that were shared and discussed with the panel are as follows:

- Increased focus on interdisciplinary learning between the BA disciplines in the common courses (those courses that are followed by students of all specialisations) in which students work on (real-life) societal challenges interdisciplinary in the project.
- More space for interdisciplinary learning and a clearer BA learning line in the curriculum by increasing the number of ECs for common courses from 15 to 25 EC.
- Future-proofing the programme by focusing on various, possibly paradoxical, traditional and emerging paradigms in management science by taking stakeholder needs into consideration in a system approach.
- More focus on skill development, concentrating especially on 21st century skills by working on wicked, complex challenges. The idea is to work more on wider societal challenges that require students to become more reflexive. For this, students need to become π -shaped, capable of handling multidisciplinary problems and driving businesses in high-tech environments.
- More structure to facilitate graduation on time, especially focusing on the master thesis.
- Entrepreneurship with technology - how technology can be used to develop new business, but also technological developments through markets and businesses.
- Reduction in tracks from 7 specialisations (Digital Business and Analytics; Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Strategy; Financial Management; Human Resource Management; International Management and Consultancy; Purchasing and Supply Management; and Strategic Marketing and Servitization) to 3 specialisations (Starting a business – becoming an entrepreneur; Managing a business – becoming a manager; and Transforming and sustaining a business – becoming a consultant). In this way, the tracks are based on an organisational life-cycle and align with the entrepreneurship expertise of the programme and university.

Discussion takeaways

The panel was positive about the programme's proposed approach to encouraging and supporting interdisciplinarity in the core courses. They advised that this requires specific types of courses. They were also positive about the future-oriented mindset that the programme wants students to develop and the proactive and developmental attitude of the programme management and teachers. The current focus on entrepreneurship and challenge-based learning in the programme were admired because students get the opportunity to work on complex challenges. However, these challenges could be broadened to not only business entrepreneurship, as is currently the case, but to also include entrepreneurship with and for society.

The panel cautioned against losing focus on the programme's established strengths, which they considered to be highly valued by students. They specifically noted that students simultaneously find it an opportunity and challenge to choose from a wide range of courses. Accordingly, the panel advised understanding the needs of future students and recommended piloting changes (i.e. by redesigning the common courses first) before rolling them out on a larger scale (i.e. track redesign). Furthermore, the panel suggested identifying both the opportunities and risks associated with the proposed changes. To better align with student needs, they encouraged the programme management to undertake focus groups to gain deeper insights into what students want and value in the programme.

The panel recommended reviewing the content of existing courses to determine the extent of required changes. Some courses may only need minor adjustments, while others could require substantial updates and the involvement of relevant staff expertise. Students currently seem to like the wide variety of courses that they can choose from, but simultaneously find it challenging to choose the right course. The panel further advised to consider the names of the labels for the common courses and the tracks and to consider how to legitimise the changes to teaching and for our teaching staff and students (i.e. how to legitimize a novel way of combining disciplines in tracks, provided that current tracks are more mono-disciplinary in nature). The panel was positive about having three suggested specialisations, but advised that the programme needs to be clear about the framing and naming of the specialisations to align them with students' understanding.

The programme representatives also addressed the challenges of capacity issues in the implementation of challenge-based learning (CBL) in a regular programme. The overall idea was considered as positive, also in connection to the development of 21st century skills. On this point the panel advised to carefully think about which skills the programme wants to develop in the bachelor's and the master's programme, since the panel currently perceived some overlaps. However, the panel recommended to consider the costs and resources of CBL and consider the challenges around CBL. The programme was generally advised to clearly identify the underlying issue that the redesign aims to address and to consider collaborating with external stakeholders or using examples from other universities in shaping the change.