

**Development Report**  
**Bachelor International Business Administration**  
**University of Twente**

On 3 & 4 December 2024, the BSc International 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 3 & 4 December 2024. During this conversation, the programme management, 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: Integration of qualitative research methods**

The goal of this development session is to discuss the plans of the programme to integrate more teaching elements on [Qualitative Research Methods](#) (QRMs). Giving more emphasis to QRMs in the IBA Curriculum is expected to better prepare students for their bachelor thesis. The IBA team has observed that students currently feel ill-prepared to conduct qualitative research during their bachelor's thesis. This impression is shared by thesis supervisors, who realise that students are not sufficiently prepared to conduct qualitative research autonomously during their bachelor thesis.

The IBA team presented how qualitative research methods are currently integrated in the curriculum and their short-term and the long-term plans to integrate more qualitative research methods in the programme. Currently, Module 1 (1<sup>st</sup> year) and Module 6 (2<sup>nd</sup> year) address qualitative research methods. In Module 1, students receive an introduction to qualitative and quantitative research methods including an interview training and the opportunity to conduct an interview in a press conference setting. In Module 6, students are introduced to design sciences when designing a product as part of the module. Here, each student conducts five interviews and analyses these interviews by clustering customer needs, providing them with a cluster title, understanding the hierarchy of needs, and prioritizing customer needs for their product design. However, students do not seem to recognise design sciences as qualitative research methods, leading to a situation where they find it difficult to apply this knowledge and the learned methods to their bachelor's thesis research.

To address this issue, programme teachers have developed new intended learning objectives for qualitative research methods and integrated additional teaching on qualitative research methods in the curriculum. Some of these are short-term measures and will be implemented in the current academic year 2024/2025. These **short-term measures** include:

- (1) In Module 1, the content on QRM will be widened. Besides the interview training, students will be introduced to the different ways of qualitative data collection. In addition, conceptualising, operationalising and measuring variables, formulating interview questions, and addressing trustworthiness, reliability and validity of the interview data will be part of the module. To address these additional efforts properly, the number of ECs

for the qualitative research part will be increased by 0,5 ECs, so that these now amount to 3,5 ECs in total.

- (2) Integrating QRMs in the Business and Career Skills in the second and third year, in which students independently follow and complete an online course on QMR.
- (3) Performing a document analysis that helps students to develop business scenarios in Module 11 (3<sup>rd</sup> year) to conduct content analysis, coding and reporting of qualitative data.

In addition, some **long-term measures** will be implemented, starting in the academic year 2025/2026). These include:

- (1) In Module 6, students will apply a classical qualitative research approach in analysing the interviews. This means that students will transcribe, code and analyse their interviews for the product design and report on the customer needs based on these methods.
- (2) Next to the document analysis in Module 11, students will interview stakeholders again to develop a sustainable business model innovation. Here, students will apply inductive coding, while also reflecting on the reliability of the collected data through peer-feedback, thus performing inter-coder reliability.

The IBA team expects that these measures will better prepare students to perform QRM during their bachelor thesis.

### Discussion takeaways

The panel responded positively to the proposed changes, appreciating valuable elements, such as collecting data and interviewing stakeholders. However, the panel raised concerns about the lack of emphasis on the theoretical underpinnings of qualitative research, which could hinder students' understanding of the "how" and "why" of these methods. The panel noted that the proposed design seems to focus more on a practical application of QMR, while the theoretical understanding is not addressed extensively.

The panel advised the programme to focus on research design and go beyond practical tasks, such as interviewing experts. This would allow students to gain insight into the development of theoretical knowledge from their research, while understanding the purpose of qualitative research.

The panel also suggested to conduct further analysis of the underlying problem to determine whether the issue is limited to thesis preparation or stems from a broader lack of theoretical understanding. This seems to be dependent on the programme's level of ambition for the bachelor thesis. The proposed analysis could help to develop the programme further as it would shed light on the roots of the problem: Do students miss the practical steps of conducting QMR or do they lack a theoretical understanding of qualitative research? During the discussion, the IBA team confirmed their intention to include a theoretical understanding of QRMs, such as finding and formulating sound research questions and linking results back to those questions. The panel agreed, stressing that coding qualitative data with a theoretical perspective may result in a deeper analysis, and that understanding the limitations of the data was important.

The IBA team raised the issue of integrating mixed methods in the bachelor's programme and asked for feedback. While the panel acknowledged the value of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, they advised against teaching both simultaneously. Instead, the focus should be on ensuring students thoroughly understand each method independently before attempting to integrate them. It would be better to make sure that students understood each

method in detail instead of learning them at the same time. The IBA team reflected that students perceive research methods as difficult and thus would only go back to their notes and practice what they learned when they write their thesis.

The panel suggested linking qualitative research methods to career preparation. Asking questions and asking the right questions is an important skill set that students need to learn to prepare for their career. Concerning career preparation, the panel questioned whether students really needed to write five transcripts and spend a lot of time on coding the data. Instead, the panel suggested broadening the topics addressed in qualitative research methods and introduce the students to more novel techniques and databases. This could include, for example, the use of a knowledge repository with expert interviews. Also, participatory and observatory methods could be addressed, alongside the upcoming possibilities linked to data sciences and generative AI. As qualitative research methods is a big umbrella term and encompasses various research designs, QRMs goes beyond the analysis of interviews. Students could undertake different tasks that are linked to QRM, e.g. observations or analysing text data with LLMs or other approaches.

With regard to the topic Artificial Intelligence (AI) the teachers highlighted their struggles with the students' use of related platforms. Some students use AI to write the thesis, and supervisors perceive challenges with recognising and assessing original work. The panel advised that education should highlight the limitations of AI in qualitative research, for example, when e.g. coding with AI. The IBA team suggested using a combination of synthetic data and 'real' interviews to help students understand the advantages and limitations of AI. Falsification of the data could also be addressed to stress the importance of reliability of the data.

The panel also suggested incorporating student reflection as part of the thesis. Students could write a two-page reflection or maintain a learning logbook to summarize key insights from their thesis work. These reflections could also be collected and shared with future cohorts to provide a realistic understanding of the thesis process and its challenges, such as delays or difficulties in conducting interviews. A reflection report may especially be important for students writing their thesis in a company, as it allows them to address practical problems.

In conclusion, the panel was positive about the proposed changes and appreciated the integration of research methods in the modules throughout the curriculum. However, they also cautioned that the IBA team has already done a lot and there may be more value by doing less. The IBA team would need to ask themselves what is expected of a bachelor thesis. Should students really go through the entire qualitative research cycle? At other universities, students may only use secondary resources to perform analysis or write a systematic literature review. The panel advised discussing the thesis with the double degree partner, the University of Münster, to reflect on the requirements for the bachelor's thesis.