

Minutes Ontwikkelgesprek – 25 May 2021

Research Master Behavioural and Social Sciences (ReMa BSS) – Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

Present: Prof. Rob Ruiter (Chair Visitation panel), Prof. Detlev Leutner (Member Visitation panel), Annemarie Venemans (Support Visitation panel), Marieke Timmerman (programme director ReMa BSS), Ingrid Veenstra (coordinator ReMa BSS - minutes)

Timmerman: Thank you for the constructive report and the pleasant way of carrying out the visitation. The recommendations in the report are clear, and very useful for us to improve the quality of our program further.

1. Students experience the program as an intensive program – high workload

Timmerman: The students and graduates report that they experience the program as intensive. We believe that working hard is not problematic. However, it sometimes leads to high levels of stress which we do not want. What is your view? Do you see possibilities for us to help decreasing the stress?

Visitation panel: Students complain about the high frequency of graded assignments and summative assessments. Students reported that they were running from one assignment to the other, with too little time to reflect. Students have a high drive to achieve high grades and internal competition among students is a potential threat. Only saying and informing them that they can work a bit less hard does not help and is also not advised. Our recommendation is to critically look at the amount of summative assessments and considering replacing them by formative assessments. Because of their generally strong intrinsic motivation, it is not necessary to have graded assessments on (e.g.) a weekly base for these students.

2. Research assistantship for first-year students

Timmerman: We offer our first-year students, at the beginning of the program, a research assistantship for 4 hours per week. It is not part of the program. Students appreciate the assistantship, they like it, and almost every Research Master student takes it. Students benefit from this experience, and they are imbedded in the research group. But, at the same time, we do want to increase the workload by giving this option to students. Do you have any thoughts about the assistantship in relation to the workload?

Visitation panel: The assistantship is not part of the study program. This must be very clear to students. Having an assistantship is a very nice experience for students and might increase the chance of becoming a PhD student. The solution for the high workload, however, is not in cutting out the assistantship. The high workload should be solved within the program, scheduling, and assessments.

Timmerman: We are thinking about possible postponing the assistantship and start later during the program with the assistantship. That way, students can better judge whether they want to and can do this on the side.

Visitation panel: This is a good idea.

3. Theme “Deficits, Distress, and Disorders” (DDD)

Timmerman: The main specializations in the theme “Deficits, Distress and Disorders” are clinical psychology, clinical neuropsychology, pedagogical and educational sciences. Mainly students with an interest in clinical psychology and clinical neuropsychology are represented in this theme. Students from pedagogical and educational sciences are hardly presented. Also, students fear that post-doctoral programs do not accept students specialized in a program called Deficits, Distress, and Disorders. For post-doctoral programs in Germany, the program title represents an extra hurdle in qualifying for a clinical training program. Therefore, we are thinking about changing the title into ‘clinical psychology and clinical neuropsychology’. In addition, we consider leaving out the pedagogical and educational component from this theme. What are your thoughts about this change? Would you consider this to have a too large detrimental effect on the multidisciplinary component of the program?

Visitation panel: Denoting the theme as ‘clinical psychology and clinical neuropsychology’ would attract more students. It is therefore a good idea to change the name. We concluded that the number of students in this theme is currently too low to be viable in the long term. We expect that changing the name will help; “Deficits, Distress, and Disorders” is a strange name. We expect that this year the number of applications will probably be much higher due to Corona, but we also expect that this does not represent the number of applications for the upcoming years. The low number of pedagogical and educational sciences students can also be affected by the fact that pedagogical sciences is rather Dutch, and internationally unknown, while the Research Master Behavioural and Social Sciences is an international oriented program. On the other hand, the pedagogical and education sciences research group at RUG might not be happy with losing connection with the Research Master. In changing the name some representation of pedagogical aspects might be considered, for example by referring to concepts such as child and developmental psychology, remedial teaching, or the like.