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Advice Education Committee Research Masters Joining forces

An advice on accessibility of following courses between Erasmus MC Research Masters

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Topic

Joining forces

Submitted by ECRM members

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Topic area

- New policy or new educational component
- Revision of policy or educational component
- Topic of annual planning ECRM from PDCA cycle
- Topic of annual planning ECRM put on the agenda by ECRM member
- Other: [Click here to enter text.](#)

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Contents of advice

1. Motivation

The EMC research masters represent a set of small and highly specialized programmes. Although this allows for small class sizes and high individual attention, this limits the variety of courses that one master can offer. Student's projects often require skills spanning various fields. The courses from their own master might thus be insufficient. If courses from the other masters were easily accessible students could fill gaps in their knowledge more easily. Following from this, we investigated whether students would be interested in taking courses from another master and whether there were clear barriers to doing so. Finally, we discussed our findings with the course administrators to identify barriers on their side for doing so. We shared a questionnaire with the students. This questionnaire got 58 responses divided over all of the research masters.

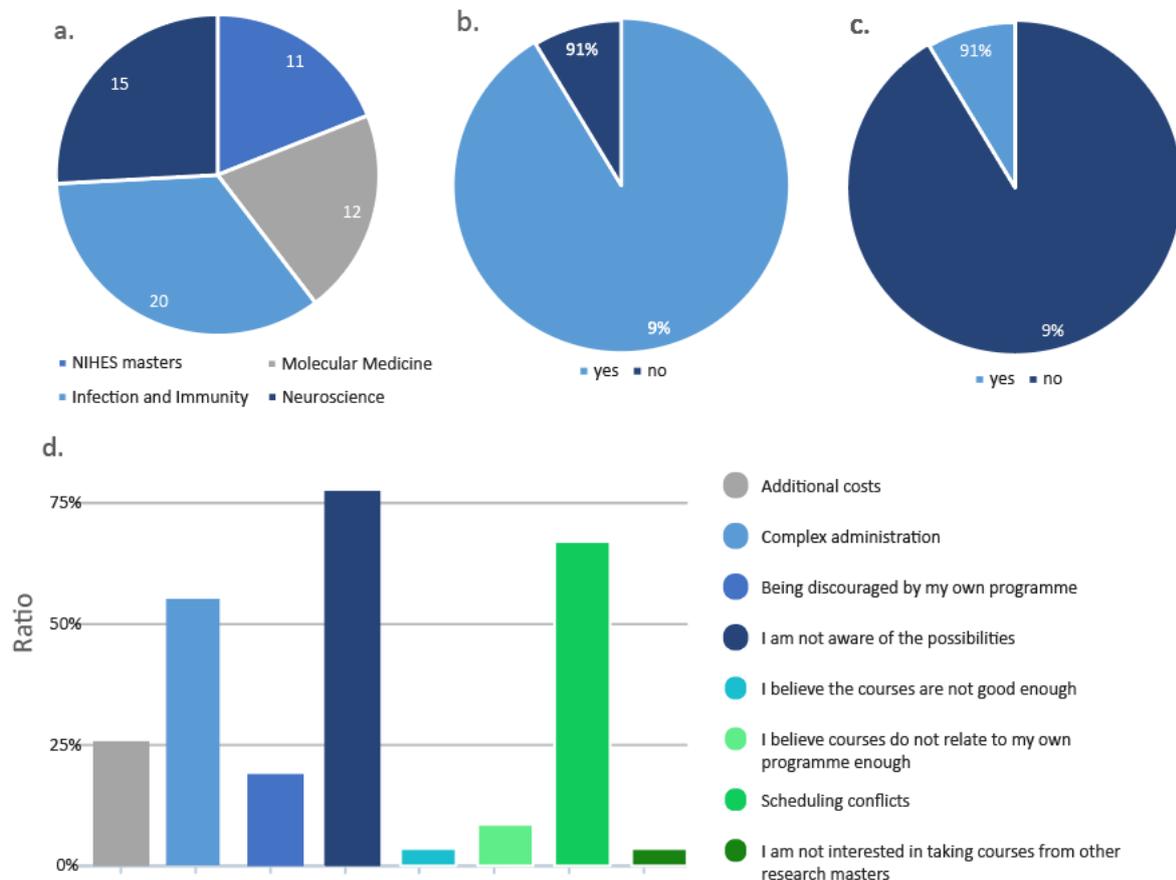


Figure 1. Questionnaire response. The above figure shows the response to a questionnaire from late 2019, distributed among first years and second years within the Erasmus MC research masters. **a.** number of responses per master **b.** Would you

be/have been interested in taking courses from other masters? c. Have you tried taking a course from another research master?
d. What are the biggest barriers for you to take a course at another research master?

Are students interested in following courses from other EMC research masters than their own?

More than 90% (fig. 1b) of the respondents to our questionnaire responded that they would be or would have been interested in taking a course from another research master. However, less than 10% reported having actually tried to do so (fig. 1c).

Are there limitations that have prevented students from doing so?

Limited awareness of possibilities, scheduling conflicts, and complex administration were the biggest barriers reported for doing so, each being reported more than 50% (fig 1d). Additional costs and being discouraged by their own programme was reported substantially less but still in more than 15% of the cases. Quality of the courses, how well the courses relate and interest rarely formed big barriers as they were each reported less than 10%.

Are there limitations that limit the administration from making this possible?

Each of the representatives discussed the results of the questionnaire with their respective administration. The outcome was that the NIHES and Neuroscience masters had no major objectives. The Infection and Immunity and Molecular biology masters had some objectives however. Limited course capacity and limited time in an already packed programme were concerns that were mentioned by these administrators.

2. Conclusion

Most of the students would be interested in taking a course from another research master. However, there are major barriers to doing so. First and foremost, the students should be aware of the courses taught in other research masters. What courses are there, what are their schedules, who are the coordinators and what are the requirements for joining such a course? This information should be available in a clear format for all incoming students. Second, the administrative process should be streamlined. Right now one of the requirements for a student taking a course from another research master requires approval from the examination board. If this approval is pre-arranged, an important administrative step would be removed. Ideally, joining a course from another master should be as simple as emailing your administrator and the course coordinator. Given that, by law, taking courses from other masters when you are doing a full EMC research master should not incur any cost, students should be informed that this is free for them. Finally, scheduling conflicts might remain a major hurdle, however, as long as students can easily assess course schedules they should be able to figure out whether a course fits in their schedule.

On the side of the administration there were some different concerns. They mentioned that limited course capacity would be an issue. This issue could be addressed by placing a cap on the number of participants in each of the courses. A cap could also be placed on the maximum number of credits a student can take outside their own programme.

Overall, we see a large interest from students for taking courses outside their own research master. However, there are major barriers to doing so. In the above advice we have suggested ways to address these barriers. In short this would require creating an overview for all of the courses in the research masters containing their relevant information, streamlining the administrative process, and defining the limitations. We strongly suggest that the masters follow these steps, given the demand and given the positive effect being able to take courses from other masters could have.

Finally, as the education committee, we note that our informal work has led to the research masters including '*facilitating the possibility of following adjacent subjects in each other's programs*' in the 2020-2024 Covenant agreements. We are happy to note that the research masters strive towards more collaboration and believe it will lead to improved education for the students.