

Education Committee Research Masters Erasmus MC
Annual Report 2023-2024



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Erasmus MC, Erasmus University Rotterdam
Rotterdam, December 2024

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Foreword

This is the annual report of the Education Committee Research Masters (ECRM) of the Erasmus University Medical Center Rotterdam (Erasmus MC) for the 2023-2024 academic year. This annual report describes, and provides details, of the membership, working methods and activities of the ECRM in the 2023-2024 academic year.

By publishing this annual report, the ECRM provides information to the reader about the ECRM's role and activities, while promoting accountability for its role as an advisory body to the five Erasmus MC Research Master courses.

December 2024

Dr. E. (Elizabeth) Loehrer, Chair

K. (Kamel) Mohamed Kamel, Student Chair¹

I. (Ira) Blommers, Secretary

This annual report is published in order to formally account for the ECRM's activities in the academic year 2023-2024, thereby complying with Article 9.18, paragraph 1 of the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act (WHW).

Membership and Procedures

Student members

Infection and Immunity

S. (Sophie) Shyfrin

Neuroscience

L. (Lorena) Haehner

Health Sciences

D. (Daniel) Bos

Clinical Research

R. (Rahman) Fakhry

Teacher members

B. (Bernadette) van den Hoogen

M. (Mario) Negrello

D. (Daniel) Bos

Molecular Medicine

A. (Amber) Schotting

J. (Jeremy) Labreque

H. (Hegias) Mira Bontenbal

Genomics in Society

K. (Kamel) Mohamed Kamel (Student Chair) E. (Elizabeth) Loehrer (Chair)

Secretary

I. (Ira) Blommers

Duties of the committee

The duties of the ECRM are registered in Dutch law under the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act (WHW). The most important task of the committee is to provide solicited and unsolicited advice to the Dean, the Director of Education and the Course Directors on matters concerning the quality of education of the Research Master courses (ReMa) taught at Erasmus MC.

As of 1 September 2017, the ECRM was given the right of approval for part of the Teaching and Examination Regulations (TER). In the academic year 2018-2019, the ECRM took on a new role in the assessment of projects financed by the Higher Education Quality Agreements (HoKa). HoKa will discontinue as of 2024, and the program is replaced with the Bestuursakkoord 2022 program from 2025 onwards. The ECRM continued to assess ReMa-related HoKa projects during the academic year 2023-2024.

Selection of ECRM members

All Erasmus MC ReMa recruit students from a mixture of backgrounds. Recruitment of students from the Erasmus MC ReMa is based on personal motivation and recommendations from current ECRM student members. With respect to the composition of the ECRM in 2023-2024, five 2nd year student members were recruited from the respective ReMa. These five student members appointed Kamel Mohamed Kamel (Genomics in Society) as Student Chair.

In parallel to ECRM student members, one experienced teacher is chosen to represent each ReMa during the academic year, though the academic term of teacher members of the ECRM may be longer than that of the single academic term offered to ReMa student ECRM members. The maximum term of teacher members is described in the ECRM Internal Rules and Regulations document. In this respect, new teacher members Bernadette van den Hoogen (Infection and Immunity) and Hegias Mira Botenbal (Molecular Medicine) joined the ECRM. The academic year 2023-2024 was also the first year of service as the ECRM chair for Elizabeth Loehrer (Genomics in Society), who took over from the previous chair John Hays. Also in 2024, Ira Blommers was hired and appointed as the Secretary of the ECRM.

Organizational issues

The professionalization of the ECRM continued during the 2023-2024 academic year. The 2023-2024 status is summarized below.

Secretary

The first half of the academic year 2023-2024, the ECRM received secretarial support from James van der Linde, Advisor on Educational Quality Assurance.

In 2024, Ira Blommers was appointed as the Secretary ('ambtelijk secretaris') of the ECRM.

Emails

A dedicated email address (educationcommitteeRM@erasmusmc.nl) has been used for all correspondence of the ECRM. Emails are archived annually.

Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams was established as the official archive of ECRM documents and business, replacing Sharepoint.

Financial compensation

Financial compensation for the ECRM activities of the Secretary 'ambtelijk secretaris', participating ECRM teachers (according to the business case 'opleidingscommissies voor de docentleden' developed by Dr. L. Blok) and student members (via the EUR 'profileringfonds') has been successfully implemented.

Internal Rules and Regulations

The Internal Rules and Regulations (IRR, Huishoudelijk Reglement) were written by Bernice van Aken, the 2018-2019 Student Chair, and critically evaluated by the other ECRM members. The IRR was reviewed and updated in the academic year 2023-2024.

Meetings of the ECRM

During the academic year 2023-2024, the ECRM held ten physical (preferred) monthly meetings, although some members did occasionally join the meetings via Teams. The main activities of the ECRM are summarized below. Organizational changes are reported separately under the heading 'Organizational issues'.

Advice and Letters

The main points relating to advice and letters provided by the ECRM are shown below. A more extensive description of this advice is available on the [ECRM website](#).

Teaching and Examination Regulations 2024-2025

The Teaching and Examination Regulations (TER) adopted for the 2024-2025 academic year were largely based on those already in place during the 2023-2024 academic year. In this respect, the ECRM advised positively on the revision of the TER for 2024-2025. As well as suggesting several changes to the English language text, the ECRM provided advice on the dates and timelines for holidays, electives as part of the study program, and the updated Iudicium Abeundi.

Restructuring of the Biomedical Sciences Division

In September 2023, the Raad van Bestuur announced a restructuring of the Biomedical Sciences Division that would lead to the discontinuation of three departments within the Erasmus MC (i.e. Cell Biology, Biochemistry, and Genetic Identification). The discontinuation of these departments placed immediate uncertainty in the contract of faculty members and instructors for numerous ReMas and created uncertainty about the availability and sustainability of thesis internship positions for numerous current and prospective ReMa students. The ECRM, together with the Education Committee Medicine, sent a request for information to the Raad van Bestuur, Dean Stefan Sleijfer and Vice Dean of Education, Maarten Frens, to request their explicit plans to ensure the viability of the ReMa programs impacted by the restructuring and their plans to ensure continuity and support of existing ReMa students embedded in those departments. The ECRM remained in close contact with Vice Dean of Education, Maarten Frens, and the program director for the ReMa Molecular Medicine and chair of the program directors committee, Gert Jansen, throughout the academic year 2023-2024 to monitor the impact of the reorganization on ReMa faculty member's appointments, the development of mitigation strategies for the most-impacted ReMas, and the experience of students conducting research in the impacted departments. In May 2024, the ECRM sent a formal letter of advice about these matters to the Graduate School and program directors. We will remain in close contact with program directors and Vice Dean of Education throughout the 2024-2025 school year to monitor long-term impacts of the restructuring on education in the Graduate School.

A Safe Learning Environment

In July 2023 (part of the academic year 2023-2024 agenda), the ECRM offered advice regarding the establishment and maintenance of a 'safe learning environment'. The ECRM reminded program directors to pay attention to the following topics: 1) Supposition and prejudice 2) Abuse of power: 3) Bullying/harassment: 4) The availability of transparent information (e.g., via FAQs) and 5) Accessible support services, including religious support. In September 2023, the ECRM received a request for additional clarification about advice from the ReMa Program Directors. In the ECRM response in October 2024, we noted that several ReMa programs have received questions about psychological safety from external panel members during the accreditation cycle.

In anticipation that four ReMa programs will undergo midterm reviews in the academic year 2024-2025, the ECRM requested that each ReMa program provided their existing (written) policies that help ensure a safe learning environment (based on the above criteria). In the academic year 2023-2024, the ECRM collected and collected those responses.

Midterm report and development plan Neuroscience

The ECRM received a request for an input development plan for the ReMa Neuroscience based on feedback from their midterm review. The ECRM commended the plan and particularly noted that the elective “Careers outside academia” has been positively received by Neuroscience students and is a topic of interest to many other ReMa students. The ECRM advised the ReMa Neuroscience to create written policies to ensure appropriate workload and expectations between students and master’s thesis supervisors in additions to ongoing efforts to verbally communicate culture and expectation to students, teachers, and supervisors.

Letter of support for SURE to gain official status as a student organization

In February 2024, the ECRM sent a letter of support to the College van Bestuur at Erasmus University Rotterdam to express our support that Student Union of the Research Masters (SURE) gain official recognition as a student organization ('onderwijscomplementaire organisatie') according to article 1.1.3 of the “Erkennings- en faciliteitenregeling studentorganisaties 2020”. SURE’s application was approved, and the organization received the status of an official student organization.

CAO for UMCs 2024 and payments for internships

In April 2024, the ECRM sent a letter of advice to the Vice Dean of Education, Prof. Maarten Frens regarding the ongoing negotiations around payment for internships proposed in the 2024 CAO for university medical centers. The ECRM noted both positive and negative potential impacts on students enrolled in ReMa programs and undergoing research internships as part of their thesis research and program curriculum. Namely, 1) financial hardship is a real concern among the student body that has a negative impact on educational activities (see Annual Plan: Financial hardship and aid). Even small payments can relieve the financial burden for students. 2) Payment for some but not all interns within the institution will increase inequality among students. Student ECRM members expressed a preference that all student interns are paid, or no student interns are paid. 3) Faculty members noted that substantial time and financial investment have already gone into student internships. 4) If the payment is seen as salary, this can change the expectation and management of student internships, shifting them from educational experiences to jobs, which may result in different expectations about quality and quantity of output from students. We specifically urged that the final agreement included an explicit explanation of what the payment represents (i.e. is this a salary, in which case students are then considered employees which comes with other considerations and implications) or is this a form of financial aid while a student completes their studies. We also noted that these payments could have substantial predictable and unpredictable impacts on budgets, and we would wish to be informed about the long-term financial strategy to ensure sustainability and availability of research internship opportunities for ReMa students within the Erasmus MC.

Institutional response to the conflict in the Middle East

In the academic year 2023-2024, the ECRM held many discussions as a committee and with members of the Student Council about the institutional response to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, including the attack in Israel on October 7, 2023, the subsequent and ongoing war and humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and the psychological impact these events were having on students and faculty in the Graduate School. Citing the Erasmian values, mission, and 2024 strategy, in May 2024, the ECRM co-signed a letter from the Student Council to the Raad van Bestuur of Erasmus MC requesting transparency on all on-going collaborations with Israeli universities (knowledge) institutions and companies and a call to sever existing ties and not enter into new collaborations with universities (knowledge) institutions and companies explicitly complicit in and in support of the ongoing offensive in Gaza.

Document Revisions

Working procedure ECRM

A new 'ECRM Working procedure' document and instructions was adapted from that currently used by the Erasmus MC Gezamenlijke Vergadering (GV). The ECRM reviewed and revised the Working Procedure and approved these for implementation in the academic year 2023-2024.

Internal Rules and Regulations

The ECRM reviewed and revised its Internal Rules and Regulations and implemented these in the academic year 2023-2024.

Annual Plan

The ECRM generated a 2023-2024 Annual Plan and discussed the following topics during ECRM meetings in the academic year 2023-2024. If considered necessary, the results of the discussions were formulated into unsolicited advice and distributed to ReMa Program Directors for information and/or comment. In the case of financial hardship and aid for students, two members of the ECRM directly reported our findings and advice to the Program Directors committee.

- Professional skills development
- Processing of student feedback from course evaluations
- Educational integration with TU Delft
- Financial hardship and aid for students
- Internships and jobs in industry

Cooperation and Communication

Cooperation

The ECRM was pleased to start receiving the 6-weekly meeting notes of ReMa Program Directors, which provide up-to-date information relating to potential developments in ReMA courses. The notes also provide potential discussion points for the ECRM. The notes will continue to be received in 2024-2025. Two members of the ECRM (J. Labrecque and A. Schotting) attended the ReMa Program Directors' July meeting to present the results of their survey on financial hardship among ReMa students as part of the ECRM annual plan on financial hardship and financial aid for students. The chair of the ReMa Program Directors (G. Jansen) attended multiple ECRM meetings in the last year to discuss the impact of the restructuring of Biomedical Sciences on the Rema's.

We maintained ongoing communication with Student Council and the student organization SURE throughout the academic year 2023-2024 and invited members of both committees to the December ECRM meeting. Additionally, Oskar Knotschke, Policy Advisor Education and Quality Assurance at Erasmus University, organized three Program Committees (PC) chairs meetings in the academic year 2023-2024, and these meetings invited the chairs of all program committees in all faculties within the Erasmus University Rotterdam to facilitate further collaboration and conversation in the broader university.

The ECRM chair and student chair were present at these PC chair meetings. The initiative is planned to continue in the academic year 2024-2025. The ECRM additionally maintained contact with the Examination Committee.

An introductory workshop was organized for members of the ECRM in October 2023, and an additional training workshop about the Teaching and Exam Regulations (TER) was provided in February 2024 for members of the ECRM, OC and GV. Finally, the ECRM collaborated with the GV on the ReMa TER.

Communication

Efficient communication between the ECRM and its stakeholders is very important if the ECRM is to function effectively in its role as an advisory body. Therefore, information on the activities of the ECRM is provided via this Annual Report and via the ECRM website, including details of the composition of the ECRM, its activities, Annual Reports, and contact details.

Concrete Objectives ECRM 2024-2025

Looking forward to the academic year 2024-2025, the ECRM will include 5 teacher members and 5 student members, in line with the merging of ReMa “Health Sciences” and ReMa “Clinical Research”. The ECRM further professionalized with regards to revision and updates of its Working Procedure, as well as its Internal Rules and Regulations and training opportunities for members. The ECRM will continue with its proactive role in the evaluation of ongoing ReMa-based education funding opportunities, including through the new Faculty Education Agenda, which will replace the HoKa projects. The ECRM will continue to monitor impact to the ReMa’s, particularly the ReMa “Molecular Medicine” following the restructuring of the Biomedical Sciences division in 2023-2024. The ECRM will monitor the effect of Artificial Intelligence (e.g., ChatGPT) on ReMa education, educational convergence, and the assessment of professional behavior within the ReMas. Additionally, the ECRM provides advice on the midterm quality assurance evaluations for four ReMa programs in the Graduate School.

Finally, we acknowledge the financial constraints resulting from the government’s recent budget cuts and will incorporate these into our planning. As a committee, we remain vigilant in ensuring the graduate school continues to provide high-quality education. Our focus is on balancing financial sustainability by maintaining the educational standards and