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FIRST ANNUAL REPORT – A VERY GOOD MASTER'S PROGRAMME CAN BE EXCELLENT

Programme evaluated: Master's Programme in Biomedical Sciences, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Bergen

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INTRODUCTION

This is the first year of evaluation for signed programme sensor. The evaluation is build upon one physical visit at the Department of Biomedicine, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, where prof. Marit Bakke was the host. She gave an overall presentation of the Master's programme and three additional teachers, responsible for different parts of the programme attended, gave completed information. After the initial programme presentation a lunch together with four student representatives took place where informal discussions about the programme took place. Finally, a meeting with the department head prof. Rolf K. Reed was organised. In addition, the physical teaching locals were shown. Information about the programme at the university web sites has been used in addition to the information received at the physical visit for this first report.

The Master's Programme in Biomedical Sciences is one of several international 2-year Master's Programmes at the University of Bergen. The programme consists of one semester of mandatory courses, one semester of electives and a final year (two semesters) of a project work, which seems to be a general master's programme outline at the University of Bergen for programmes in the fields of natural sciences and technical subjects and medicine and dentistry.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The programme has a strong focus on biomedical research, which is expected according to the research at the hosting department. Here it should be stressed that this is the strength of the programme. This means, on the other hand, that the students are very much trained for further PhD-studies, where they must be very attractive candidates within this field.

The students can choose to specialize within three different biomedical fields: Human Physiology, Medical Cell Biology and Biomedical Image Sciences. From a recruitment point of view these fields could be better defined. A general challenge for the programme seems to be to attract and recruit students. It can be discussed if there is sustainable to specialize in three different biomedical fields. Here it should be added that the programme should gain to develop a clearer biomedical profile. This is more a question about packing and marketing of the programme than reorganize the content. Of course, the content should be continuously updated to implement the latest finding from the different biomedical research fields. In parallel, the programme must show a strong profile where biomedical science is defined and that the students attending the programme will find a challenging future after they receive their Master's exam. From the sensor's point of view this is one part of the difference between a very good and an excellent programme.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

The second semester of the programme consists of a set of courses that the students can choose from. The elected courses will form the specialized field. Some of the courses attract a very small number of students, where others attract students from other programmes as well. In the long run it is questionable if it is sustainable with just five students at a course. At the same time it can be discussed if there has to be any other new courses added to the programme. The development within the field of biomedical science is fast where it is more or less expected that the students can handle large sets of data in a statistical correct way and often with the use of bioinformatics tools. Probably, these matters can be handled during the second year of the programme during the degree project. It is stressed in several documents that student exchange with any of the international partners of the programme is encouraged. Student exchange will in most cases develop a programme and increase the quality. At the same time an optimal window for exchange should be presented for the students, especially when the number of students is low and most course directors would like to see the students at their course.

The discussion with students during the visit at the Department of Biomedicine gave a clear view of satisfied students who expressed that the courses gave them a sound knowledge within the field and a solid base for future research activities. The more critical voices concerned more soft matters around the programme. The students were aware of the challenge to attract enough students to the programme, and some mentioned the competition between the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences and the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry to attract students to their master's programmes. The students asked for more collaboration and that the Master's programme in Biomedical Science was better know, especially within the university. The students also asked for an examination ceremony at the end of the programme to increase the "status" of the Master's degree.

A general challenge for the Master's Programme in Biomedical Sciences is to distinguish from other master's programmes, e.g. the Master's programme in Molecular Biology. With the strong development in Life Science this should be a fairly easy task. At the same time a continuous analysis of the development of other biomedical programmes is crucial, where



the Nordic network (NordBioMedNet) collaboration is a strong tool.

FINAL REMARKS

The content of the programme with electives at the second semester forms a stable and a very good base for students planning to continue with research in the biomedical field, either within academia or at pharmaceutical companies. The programme lead is suggested to further work with the definition of biomedical science and implement a clear cut profile for the programme in a way that will attract today's students (today's students differ widely from yesterday's students). Bridging to medicine could be improved, especially in the announcement and representation of the programme and courses. This to attract more students which is one of the largest challenges for the programme in the near future. The start of a bachelor programme in biomedicine at the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry is advisable (cf Bachelor and Master's programmes in Molecular Biology at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences). The quality of the Master's programmes as such is not a problem for the near future, but improvements have to be introduced continuously to keep and develop the quality. This Master's programme should be a central programme for future developments in the life science and medical sector, and with the Department of Biomedicine as a programme host this should not be an insuperable task.

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