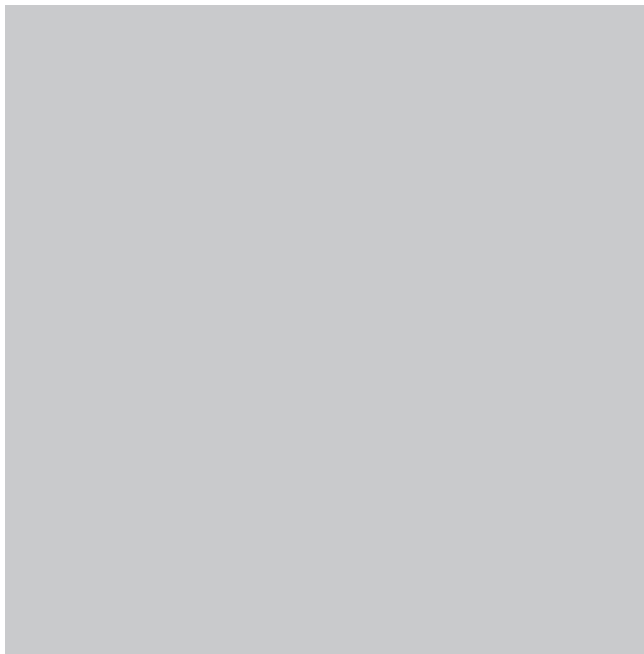


# Programme Evaluation

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN ECONOMICS AND  
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



NHH



Report from the  
Programme Manager  
(2017-2021)  
March 2022



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 About the report

The report presents the programme evaluation of the Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration (MScEBA) programme, in accordance with NHH's guidelines for periodic programme evaluations. Chapter 1 describes the strategic background and the formal requirements for the evaluation, as well as the results from previous evaluations. Chapter 2 presents the current content and structure of the programme, and chapters 3-5 discuss the performance of the programme with respect to NHH's strategic goals (see the next section). Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the viewpoints of the evaluation panel with respect to the discussion questions raised in chapters 2-5.

## 1.2 Strategic goals

The current strategy<sup>1</sup> specifies that “NHH shall educate excellent economists and managers with sound analytical skills, a good understanding of technology and a strong commitment to society”. The main objectives for the education activity are:

1. Admission quality: NHH shall attract students with strong academic results and a high motivation for learning. NHH's study programmes shall be a clear first choice in the fields of economics and business administration among Norwegian students and attract highly qualified international students.
2. Quality of studies: NHH shall have a culture for quality in its education, where the administration, academic staff and students continuously strive to improve the quality of studies. Our teaching, study programmes and learning environment shall be on par with the best international business schools.
3. Graduate quality: NHH graduates shall be preferred in the national market for economists and managers, attractive in the international labour market and qualified for the best international master's degree and PhD programmes.

An important implication of the admission quality objective is that our MScEBA programme should continue to be an attractive alternative in an educational market that is becoming increasingly international and competitive. To produce graduates of high quality, we also need to focus on academic coherence and progression in the programme. Benchmarking of our MScEBA programme against other institutions<sup>2</sup> shows that NHH has a relatively high degree of flexibility and a relatively low share of common/mandatory content. The MScEBA-courses are loosely organised into flexible majors with few, if any, mandatory course requirements. This flexibility of the majors makes it possible for the students to choose only “basic” level courses, avoiding any academic progression. This flexibility is to some extent appreciated by students and staff, but the broad selection of majors and courses also makes it harder to separate some of the profiles from each other. It also presents some challenges regarding how to ensure specific learning outcomes within majors, as well as sufficient academic progression. The benchmarking in the programme evaluation from 2015 suggests that it is possible to maintain its differentiation on flexibility and still introduce a modest increase in mandatory content if it is found desirable to address issues like ensuring academic progression or certain common

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nhh.no/en/about-nhh/strategy/>

<sup>2</sup> Programme evaluation of the Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration, 2015

skills. Since 2015, some changes have been made to tighten the structure, following the work of the MØA committee in 2018-2019. These changes will be described in Chapter 2.

The strategy also specifies strategic priority areas, and the following areas will be particularly relevant for the MScEBA programme:

- **Renewal and relevance**
  - NHH shall systematically review its programmes and courses to ensure that they are relevant.
  - NHH shall develop new technology-related courses.
  - NHH shall offer students more experiences that are practical as part of their education.
- **Outstanding learning environment and educational method**
  - All students shall feel safe and included at NHH.
  - All of NHH's study programmes shall have at least 40% students of each gender.
  - NHH shall offer educational methods that create engagement and facilitate learning, such as by increasing the number of courses that use student-centred teaching methods. As a result, NHH shall achieve a higher score on the Student Survey (Studiebarometeret) on questions concerning students' own engagement and expectations to come prepared to lectures.
  - NHH shall systematically review the use of assessment forms in its courses to maximise learning.

### 1.3 Programme evaluation guidelines

The NHH Quality Assurance System<sup>3</sup> states that all programmes should be evaluated at least every sixth year. The evaluations should assess the quality of the following areas in an integral manner:

- Admission
- Quality of courses/modules
- Course portfolio/programme content
- Work and learning environment
- Production/achieved results
- The educational programme's relevance

The previous evaluation of the Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration (MScEBA) was conducted in 2014/2015.

## 1.4 Previous evaluations

### 1.4.1 Programme evaluation in 2015

The Programme evaluation of the Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration was conducted during autumn 2014 and spring 2015. A tentative report was subject to a formal hearing process in February and March of 2015. The main issues raised in the report were:

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nhh.no/om-nhh/organisasjon/nhhs-kvalitetssystem/>

- *How to attract a greater number of high-quality international degree students, e.g., by opening for combining existing courses into new, focused (high mandatory content) international majors, such as "Finance and strategy" or "Finance and accounting" by admitting non-business bachelors?*
- *How to ensure that all non-"siviløkonom"/international degree students (across majors) share a minimum set of business administrative knowledge upon graduation, e.g., through admission requirements or through mandatory courses in the master programme?*
- *Whether non-"siviløkonom"/international degree students should continue within MScEBA, or receive a separate degree (e.g. a Master in Management)*
- *How should we best achieve academic progression within each major for all students, for instance through mandatory courses that build on each other, or through electives that build on introductory courses, i.e., require students to take at least one advanced course?*
- *How to improve teaching methods used to further the skills development of students, considering resource demanding challenges, higher student numbers and plans for transfer of resources to the bachelor?*

Issues related to internationalization of the programme were prominent in the report and the hearing. As a result of the evaluation, the criteria deciding which admission cycle (national or international) a student is included in was changed, from 2016, from the student's nationality to his or her academic background and merits. Also, the timing of the international and national admission processes to MScEBA was harmonized from 2016, with a common application deadline in February. A follow-up report in 2016 investigated the possibility of a new degree for non-"siviløkonom" and international degree students, but this suggestion was not implemented. Since then, the concept of "international majors" has become less relevant, given that all majors now have been opened for international degree students.

#### 1.4.2 The MØA committee 2018-2019

The mandate of the so-called "MØA committee" was to evaluate the structure of the master programme and suggest improvements, with special focus on academic progression. The mandate was based on a decision by the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs in March 2018. The committee was led by the programme manager and had members from all the academic departments at NHH, as well as students and representatives from the Office of Academic Affairs.

The basis of the work was the NHH strategy for 2018-2021, the restrictions imposed by the Universities Act and its regulations,<sup>4</sup> as well as the requirements for the Siviløkonom title.<sup>5</sup> The committee delivered its final report in February, 2019.<sup>6</sup> The report was discussed in the Academic Committee, and the programme manager produced a follow-up report<sup>7</sup> with a more in-depth evaluation and recommendations about the various proposals. The programme manager's recommendations were then subjected to a hearing process,<sup>8</sup> followed by another debate in the Academic Committee and final decisions made by the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2005-12-01-1392>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.uhr.no/f/p1/i4e6fc9ed-0645-4edb-8a65-e7d7bca68723/vilkar-for-bruk-av-tilleggsbetegnelsen-siviløkonom-vedtatt-nroa-060616-oppdater-t-november-2018-endelig-versjon-1.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> *The MScEBA (MØA) programme at NHH – suggestions for structural improvements*. Report from the MØA committee (2019).

<sup>7</sup> *Structural improvements in the MScEBA (MØA) programme at NHH – evaluation and recommendations*. Report from the MScEBA programme manager (2019).

<sup>8</sup> *Høringsuttalelser – Forslag til endringer i Masterstudiet i Økonomi og Administrasjon*. Rapport fra Kjetil Sudmann Larssen (Seksjon for Utdanningskvalitet) til prorektor Linda Nøstbakken (28.10.2019).

The overall recommendations of the MØA committee were the following:

1. Majors must be sustainable in terms of student numbers. Some of the current majors have very few students and should be discontinued.
2. The future majors should be more distinct and focused than the current majors.
3. The amount of mandatory content should be increased, to enable more courses with progression.
4. The number of courses in the programme should be reduced.
5. The quality assurance mechanisms should be strengthened to maintain the quality and relevance of the majors at a reasonable cost.

More specific recommendations were made with respect to the following issues:

- a) Which majors should be offered?
- b) Formal structure and requirements of the majors
- c) Elective courses
- d) International students
- e) Quality assurance mechanisms

The process started by the work of the MØA committee has led to several changes. Since the work of the committee, and the following hearing process and decisions, have taken place during the evaluation period, the process and the outcomes will be described in detail in the later chapters in this report. The structural changes a-d will be covered in Chapter 2, and the changes with respect to quality assurance mechanisms in Section 4.4. A brief summary of the changes are:

- Discontinuation of small majors (INB and NBD).
- The structure of all the remaining majors, except ENE and MBM, have been reformed, to make them more focused and to facilitate better progression for the students.
- All majors are now open for students with international bachelor's degrees, including students not fluent in a Nordic language.
- The quality assurance mechanisms in the majors have been strengthened by giving the reference groups a formal role in the planning of the curriculum of the majors. To assure the quality and relevance of the majors, the reference groups have also been extended with student representatives, as well as external representatives.

## 1.5 About this evaluation

The programme evaluation work was started in the spring of 2021. It has been led by programme manager Endre Bjørndal,<sup>9</sup> with administrative assistance from the Section for Educational Quality.

The work of the MØA committee<sup>6</sup> in 2018-2019, the evaluation by the programme manager<sup>7</sup> and the opinions collected in the subsequent hearing process<sup>8</sup> are also considered elements of the programme evaluation and will be discussed in Chapter 2 and Section 4.4.

In addition to data that are reported as part of the quality assurance system on a semester- or yearly basis, this report builds on extensive analysis of data from the student system FS ("Felles Studentssystem").

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<sup>9</sup> Endre Bjørndal was programme manager until July 2021, when Jan Haaland took over this role.

The evaluation has been discussed in several meetings by the MScEBA reference group, consisting of the Profile Coordinators, the Academic Director of CEMS MIM, as well as a student representative.

As part of the evaluation, an evaluation panel was appointed. In their meeting in February 2022, they discussed the report, and specifically, the discussion questions at the end of each chapter. The panel consisted of the following members:

- Rolf Andreas Arnestad Gjevne (student representative)
- Janne Flovik Sande (BSc-NHH, MSc-CBS, presently working for Pierre Robert)
- Kari Due-Andresen (BSc-NHH, MSc-NHH, presently working for Akershus Eiendom)
- Patrick Narbel (BSc-Lausanne, MSc-NHH, PhD-NHH, presently working for Go Solr Ltd)
- Steef van de Velde (Rotterdam School of Management, absent due to illness on the day of the meeting)
- Endre Bjørndal (Programme Manager 2017-2021)
- Jan I. Haaland (Programme Manager 2021-)
- Kjetil Sudmann Larsen (Head of Section for Educational Quality)
- Kurt-Rune Bergset (Section for Educational Quality)

The report is written by Endre Bjørndal, with contributions from Kurt-Rune Bergset, Hilde Rusten, Astrid Foldal, Jan Haaland and Kjetil Sudmann Larssen.

## 2. PROGRAMME CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

### 2.1 Learning outcomes and overall structure

The intended learning outcomes of the programme, in accordance with the Norwegian qualification framework<sup>10</sup> are listed in Figure 1. The different majors in the programme have their own learning outcomes, which specifies in more detail what the general learning outcomes means in each major.

**Figure 1 Learning outcomes of the MScEBA programme.**

<p><b>Knowledge</b></p> <p>The candidates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have an in-depth and up-to-date knowledge of relevant theories and empirics within economics and business administration</li> <li>• have solid competence in empirical methods</li> <li>• have broad insight in relevant national and international challenges</li> <li>• have knowledge of sustainability and ethical issues</li> </ul> <p><b>Skills</b></p> <p>The candidates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have strong analytical skills</li> <li>• can work independently with advanced problems</li> <li>• can update themselves and apply new knowledge throughout their career</li> <li>• can apply achieved knowledge to new areas</li> </ul> <p><b>General Competence</b></p> <p>The candidates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• can communicate with both specialists and non-specialists about their academic field</li> <li>• have solid basis for operating professionally in an international setting</li> <li>• can contribute to innovation and entrepreneurship</li> <li>• can reflect upon, and take into consideration, sustainability, and ethical issues.</li> <li>• understand implications of information technology in business and society</li> </ul>
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The smallest building block of MScEBA is a course or seminar. NHH has a standard course size of 7.5 ECTS credits. However, there are also seminars of 2.5 ECTS. The course portfolio of the master consists of approximately 140 unique courses including five courses<sup>11</sup> offered only in the Master's in Accounting and Auditing (MScAA). For a complete list of courses, see [nhh.no](https://www.nhh.no). The course portfolio is quite broad, spanning the area of economics and business administration, and the available courses may be arranged in a multitude of ways to provide interesting and challenging programmes that tailored to the candidates' interests and what they see as beneficial for their career opportunities.

The courses are delivered by the departments, but they are in a sense owned by the majors ("hovedprofiler"), as indicated by a three-letter abbreviation in the course code (e.g., FIEXXX for finance courses). The majors are governed primarily by the profile coordinators, who report to the

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nokut.no/en/norwegian-education/the-norwegian-qualifications-framework-for-lifelong-learning/>

<sup>11</sup> MRR416 Foretaksrett, MRR418 Skatte- og avgiftsrett, MRR451 Revisjon II, MRR452 Finansregnskap II, MRR443 Verdsettelse i regnskapet, MRR453 Digital revisjon



programme manager, and each profile coordinator has a reference group that he/she can consult about decisions regarding development of the profile course portfolio and profile-specific mandatory requirements.

Nearly all the MScEBA courses are assigned to one of eight majors, presented in Table 1. All the MScEBA majors are now open for international students, after BUS and ECO were opened from the autumn semester of 2020. The latest change follows from the school's revised language guidelines from 2019.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1. Programme portfolio, history of majors in MScEBA**

Abbr.	Name	Established	International	Closed
BAN	Business Analytics	2018	2018	
ECN	Economics	2014	2015	
MBM	Marketing and Brand Management	2010	2010	
ENE	Energy, Natural Resources and the Environment	2008	2008	
BUS	Business Analysis and Performance Management	2004	2020	
ECO	Economic Analysis	2004	2020	
FIE	Financial Economics	2004	2015	
STR	Strategy and Management	2004	2015	
NBD	New Business Development	2018	2018	2021
INB	International Business	2004	2004	2020

Figure 2 shows the development in the majors' share of students over time. Financial Economics (FIE) and Business Analysis and Performance Measurement (BUS) together attract approximately 60 per cent of the students. BUS is broad, perhaps the broadest of all the majors, and contains courses in accounting (management and financial), auditing, logistics and supply chain management, and management control, whereas FIE is more homogeneous. Business Analytics (BAN) started as a track in BUS in 2017 (BUS-BA) and was launched as a separate major in 2018. The four largest majors, FIE, BUS, BAN and STR, had 85 % of the students in the programme in 2020. Economics (ECN) and Energy, Natural Resources, and the Environment (ENE) both attract around 5 % of the students, while Economic Analysis (ECO) and Marketing and Brand Management (MBM) are smaller.

For INB, the MØA committee recommended that INB should be discontinued in its present form, and to consider giving CEMS MIM status as a major. The discontinuation of INB was supported by the programme manager's evaluation as well as in the following hearing, and INB was therefore discontinued from 2020. The closing of INB coincided with the decision, in accordance with the revised language guidelines at NHH,<sup>12</sup> that it should be possible to take all MScEBA majors in English. Giving CEMS MIM status as a major was not recommended by the programme manager, since the current integration of CEMS MIM as a minor seems to work well, and since the recent report from the CEMS Peer Review Team specifically highlighted the ability to combine CEMS MIM with any of the existing majors as one of the key strong points. The recommendation of the programme manager regarding CEMS MIM was also supported by the hearing responses, including the CEMS academic director, and the final decision by the Vice Rector was therefore to keep CEMS MIM as it is, e.g., as a minor.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nhh.no/en/about-nhh/language-guidelines/>

New Business Development (NBD) was launched as a major in 2018, but it has not attracted many students since then, although the courses in the major have been popular. Also, Marketing and Brand Management (MBM) has struggled with low and falling student numbers in the recent years, and the MØA committee suggested that these two majors should be merged. The evaluation by the programme manager pointed out that the topics in NBD are also related to the Strategy and Management (STR) major, and many of the NBD courses could also fit in an STR. The recommendation by the programme manager was to give NBD more time to prove that it was sustainable. If student numbers did not increase, the NBD courses could either be offered in a sub-track in MBM or STR. Student numbers did not pick up, neither in 2019 nor 2020, and the Vice Rector finally decided to discontinue the NBD major from 2021. By then, an entrepreneurship sub-track had already been added to the STR major, and most of the NBD courses are offered there. NBD is still offered as a minor.

The MØA committee recommended that Economic Analysis (ECO) should be discontinued, due to the small number of students in the major, and to replace it with an advanced track in the Economics (ECN) major. Further analysis showed, however, that the admission quality of ECO was very good and that it contributes significantly to the recruitment of PhD students from the MScEBA programme, and the programme manager therefore recommended to keep this major. Moreover, there is considerable overlap between ECO and the Research Distinction Track (RDT).<sup>13</sup> There has been some problems in implementing the latter scheme, and RDT candidates were not followed up by the departments in a satisfactory manner. Therefore, the programme manager recommended to drop RDT and focus the resources on ECO. The hearing responses were mixed with respect to ECO, but there were not major objections to dropping RDT. The final decision by the Vice Rector was to keep ECO and to discontinue RDT.

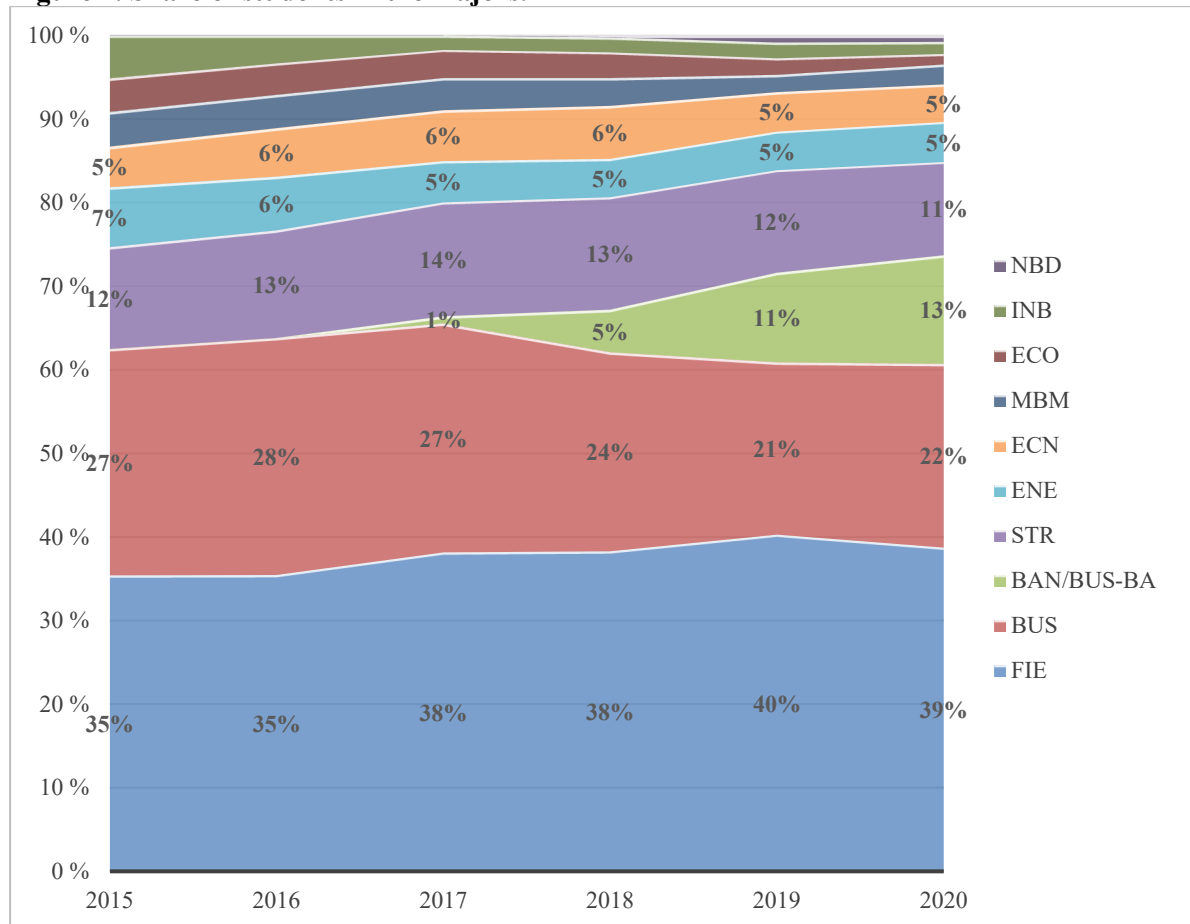
The future structure of the major in Business Analysis and Performance Management (BUS) was also discussed by the MØA committee. Some committee members argued for a more focused BUS major covering the typical competence of a CFO, and they also proposed the establishment of a new major in operations management, at present covered by BUS. Other members argued for a broad BUS major, as today, covering management control, accounting, and operations management. The evaluation by the programme manager suggested that separate and more focused majors would facilitate more progression and make it easier for students to plan their studies, but that removing some combinations that exist in a broad BUS major could make it more difficult for students to tailor their own major, based on their interests. Also, integration of operations management with other subjects contributes to increased understanding of economic implications of technological choices, and this could be more difficult if the subject is taught in a separate major. A new OM/SCM major could potentially attract students that would otherwise not have chosen NHH. Given Norway's long traditions as a shipping nation, a new major with focus on Shipping and Logistics could be attractive to international students, as was the case for the major in Energy, Natural resources, and the Environment (ENE). However, a new major must be sustainable, i.e., the demand for it should be sufficient to justify the additional costs for NHH and the involved departments. The following hearing process did not reveal any new arguments. The Department of Business and Management Science, which would most likely have a central role in the establishment of a new major in operations management, stated that they at present did not have enough faculty for the development of the new major, although they supported the idea of exploring the potential for a new major in Shipping and Logistics.

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<sup>13</sup> Introduced in 2014. The stated goal was to recruit more NHH master students to the PhD programme and to prepare the master students for a PhD education.

The Department of Accounting, Auditing and Law has submitted a proposal<sup>14</sup> for a new MScEBA major in Accounting. The new major would replace the Financial Accounting track in the BUS major, although some of the financial accounting courses would still be available as part of the BUS major. According to the proposal, the curriculum of the new major would also include courses shared with the MSc programme in Accounting and Auditing (MScAA). The new major would offer a more advanced accounting specialization than is currently possible within BUS.

**Figure 2. Share of students in the majors.**



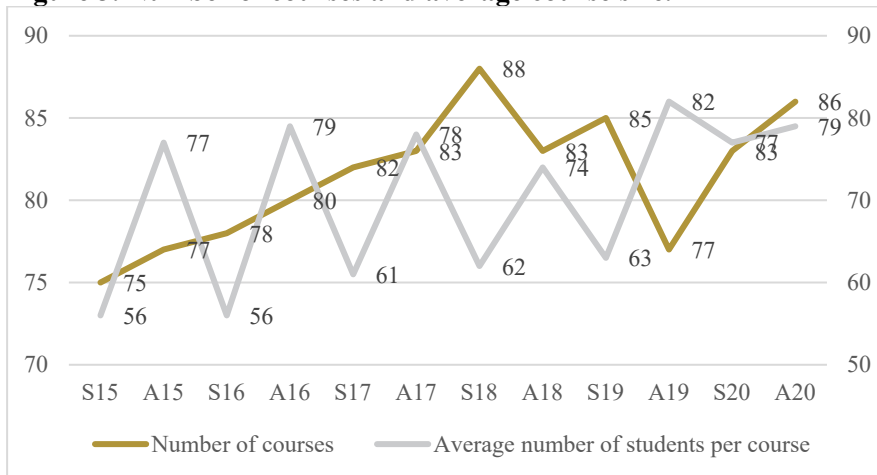
## 2.2 The course portfolio

Figure 3 shows the development in the number of courses in the programme and the average size of the courses. We see a steady increase in the number of courses from 2015 until the spring semester of 2018, but no clear trend after that. However, the total number of students in the programme has also increased, so we see from the figure that the average course size also shows a positive trend. We also see from Figure 3 that the autumn courses have, on average, more students than the spring courses. This is probably because the students mostly take their obligatory core courses in the autumn semester, either because they are only given in the autumn semester or because the students prefer, when they have a choice, to take these courses early. We see the same tendency in Figure 4, where the share of

<sup>14</sup>The proposal was submitted to the programme manager on October 15, 2021, and has since been subject to a hearing in the NHH organization. A final decision regarding the details of the new major is due January 2022.

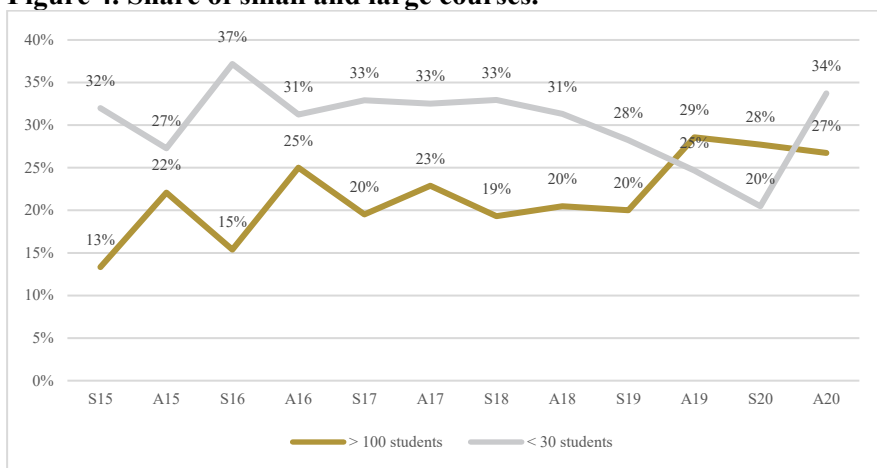
very large courses (>100 students) tends to be higher in the autumn semester than in the spring semester.

**Figure 3. Number of courses and average course size.**

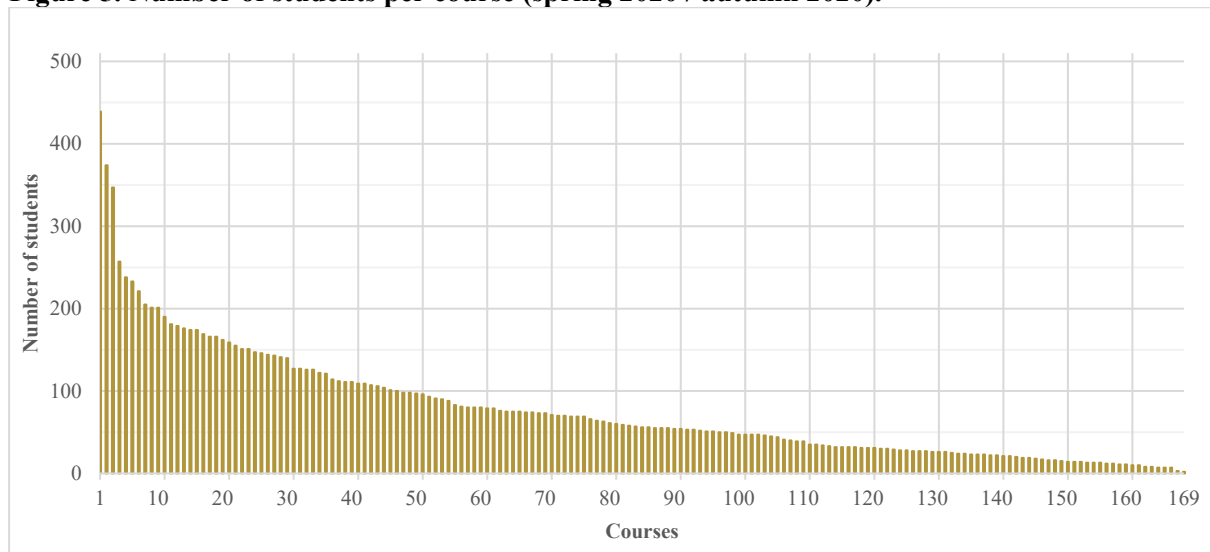


From Figure 4 we see that the share of very large courses, i.e., with more than 100 students, follows the same positive trend as the average course size. The share of very small courses, i.e., courses with less than 30 students, followed a clear downward trend until the autumn semester of 2020. Note that this was the first semester with entirely digital teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is therefore difficult to compare it to a normal semester. The MScEBA course portfolio is large and varied, as illustrated in Figure 5, which shows the courses that were given in 2020. The size of the courses this year ranged from 2 to 439 students.

**Figure 4. Share of small and large courses.**



**Figure 5. Number of students per course (spring 2020 / autumn 2020).**



## 2.3 Management of student choice and progression in the programme

### 2.3.1 Structure of the majors

All students in the MScEBA (Master i Økonomi og Administrasjon (MØA) in Norwegian) programme must complete a major, consisting of at least 45 ECTS of course work and a master's thesis of 30 ECTS. There are currently 8 majors:

- FIE Financial Economics
- BUS Business Analysis and Performance Management
- MBM Marketing and Brand Management
- ENE Energy, Natural Resources, and the Environment
- ECO Economic Analysis
- ECN Economics
- BAN Business Analytics
- STR Strategy and Management

The majors have specific requirements, as shown in Table 2. The table shows the amount of mandatory content in the majors. “Obligatory” means that the requirements can only be fulfilled by taking a specific course. “Semi-obligatory” means that the students can choose from a small set of courses, e.g., they must take 2 out of 4 courses. All students in the MScEBA programme must complete one course (7.5 ECTS) about empirical methods,<sup>15</sup> and each major has a list of approved courses in empirical methods that the students can choose from. In addition, the students must take 2.5 ECTS from a list of approved ethics courses, but this list is not major-specific.

We see that the amount of mandatory content varies considerably, from 7.5 for ENE to 30 for BAN. The degree of flexibility allowed within the mandatory content also varies considerably. Some of the majors have all the mandatory content in semi-obligatory courses, meaning that the students have

<sup>15</sup> The obligatory/semi-obligatory courses in BAN cover this requirement.

several ways of fulfilling the mandatory requirements. Other majors have most of the mandatory content in obligatory courses.

**Table 2. Mandatory content in the MScEBA majors. Numbers in parentheses indicate changes in the programme structure from 2018 to 2021.**

	BAN	FIE	BUS	ECO	ECN	STR	MBM	ENE
Obligatory courses	22.5 (+7.5)	15 (+15)	15 (+15)	7.5	15	7.5 <sup>16</sup>	0	0
Semi-obligatory	7.5 (-7.5)	0 (-15)	0 (-15)	22.5 (+22.5) <sup>17</sup>	0	0	7.5	0
Empirical methodology	0 <sup>18</sup>	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5
<b>Total ECTS</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>37.5 (+22.5)</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7.5</b>

The MØA committee made the following recommendations regarding the formal structure and requirements in the majors:

- a) Each major will still consist of at least 45 ECTS of course work. It was decided to keep the current major requirements to maintain possibilities for specialization and progression within the majors.
- b) The amount of mandatory content should be increased to at least 22.5 ECTS for all majors; i.e. at least 3 mandatory courses (these may be semi-obligatory, see Table 2, i.e., students could be allowed to choose from a set of more than 3 courses).
- c) Every major should have at least some mandatory content consisting of obligatory courses, i.e., courses that must be taken by all students in the major. This requirement will ensure progression, because all other courses in the major can build on the obligatory courses.
- d) If a mandatory course does not build on another mandatory course in the major, it should be possible for all students to take it in the autumn semester.
- e) To ensure progression and specialization, a major can have sub-tracks.
- f) Students should, as a minimum, have completed the mandatory requirements in their major before they write their thesis.

Following an evaluation by the programme manager and a subsequent hearing process, it was decided that most of these recommendations could be implemented. Most majors went through a reform process (led by the profile coordinators) from 2019, with the exception of BAN, which is relatively new, and ENE and MBM, where the reform processes are still taking place. The numbers in Table 2 show that the amount of obligatory content has been increased or is planned to increase in several majors, and that there has been a shift from semi-obligatory to obligatory content, in line with recommendation b) and c) above.

Recommendation d) states that basic core courses should be possible to take in the autumn semester, to facilitate as much progression as possible. The students are encouraged to go on exchange for one semester, and many of them will therefore have only one year to complete the course part of their major. If progression is supposed to build on basic core courses, it is vital that the basic courses can be taken in the first semester. Since the revised language guidelines for the school<sup>12</sup> stated that all majors

<sup>16</sup> A new (obligatory) course “Strategy in Practice” is under development. If introduced, it would bring the obligatory quota for STR up to 15 ECTS.

<sup>17</sup> The requirement is stated as “minimum 3 from a list of courses”, where the list includes 10 courses (as of autumn 2021).

<sup>18</sup> The obligatory courses in the BAN major consist courses in descriptive/predictive/prescriptive analytics. Since these courses focus on methodology, they also cover the general methodology requirement.

should be possible to take in English, the implementation of this requirement was made more difficult by the fact that some core courses are given in both Norwegian and English. Specifically, this applies to the Financial Economics (FIE) and Business Analysis and Performance Management (BUS) majors, where the core courses are given in both Norwegian and English. The FIE core courses are given in English every semester, while BUS, with fewer students, typically has offered the Norwegian versions of the core courses in the autumn semester and the English versions in the spring semester. Hence, the problem mainly applied to BUS, where international students, with the current setup, would have a non-optimal progression. The MØA committee did not agree on how to solve this problem. Some members wanted to require that all core courses should be given in English only, whereas others argued that the quality of some of the courses, at least with the present faculty, would decline if one were to require that they should be given in English. Hence, they found it sufficient that the English version, as a minimum requirement, should be offered in the autumn semester. The programme manager stated<sup>7</sup> that the study quality must be acceptable for all students, including non-Nordic students, and recommended that the relevant profile coordinator and the department work out a plan for acceptable study quality at reasonable cost. The responses in the hearing process were mixed.<sup>19</sup>

Sub-tracks (e) could be used to communicate specializations or topics within the majors. Several majors already had sub-tracks. The purpose of the existing tracks was to give advice to students on how they should choose their courses, and there were no track-specific formal requirements. The tracks were not listed on the students' diplomas. Both the programme manager and several of the hearing responses pointed to the added complexity that would result from formal track requirements, and such requirements have not been implemented. In the reforms of majors that have followed, however, several majors have either introduced new or reformulated existing sub-tracks to make the majors more relevant. Table 3 show that all but two of the current majors use sub-tracks.

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<sup>19</sup> In the following reform of BUS, it was decided, after discussions in the extended BUS reference group, that both versions of the courses should be given in the autumn semester from the implementation of the revised BUS structure in 2020. Since most of the students in the BUS major are Norwegian, the distribution of students between the courses was highly skewed, with very few students taking the English versions. The situation was not satisfactory for the involved departments, which questioned the non-optimal use of faculty resources, and the students demanded more flexibility. After discussions in the reference group in the autumn of 2020, it was decided to test a setup, from the autumn semester of 2021, where one of the two core courses is given in Norwegian in the autumn and English in the spring, while the other course follows the opposite pattern.

**Table 3. Sub-tracks in the MScEBA majors.**

Major	Sub-tracks
Business Analytics	None
Economics	Global Challenges and Economic Behaviour / Competition and Business Strategy / Macroeconomics, Risks and Sustainability
Marketing and Brand Management	Brand Management / Marketing, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation / Marketing Research for B2B and B2C Markets
Energy, Natural Resources and the Environment	Energy and Electricity Markets / Energy and Natural Resources / Environment, Climate and Sustainability / Shipping
Business Analysis and Performance Management	Financial Accounting / Management Control / Sustainability Management / Technology and Operations Management
Economic Analysis	None
Financial Economics	Corporate Finance / Capital Markets / Quantitative Finance and FinTech
Strategy and Management	Leadership and Change / Digitalization and Growth / Strategic Analysis and Analytics / Entrepreneurship

The last recommendation from the MØA committee regarding formal requirement in the majors concerned the master thesis. It is recommended that students write the thesis in the fourth semester, but this is not a requirement. Indeed, many students that go on exchange choose to do this in the fourth semester, and typically they will then write the thesis in the third semester. Since the thesis must be about a topic related to the student's major, it could be an advantage to have completed most of the courses in the major before doing the thesis work. The MØA committee recommended to implement a formal requirement stating that all the mandatory courses must be completed to apply for the master thesis supervisor. The programme manager<sup>7</sup> stated that, although the measure would probably have a positive effect on quality, it could be hard to implement in practice. The hearing responses were mostly sceptical and questioned the need for such a requirement, and it was not implemented.

### 2.3.2 Minors and electives

The elective courses account for 45 ECTS, which may include courses taken on during exchange semesters abroad. Before 2021, students with a bachelor's degree from a Norwegian institution were also required to take a minor of 22.5 ECTS, which entitled them to receive the siviløkonom title. Most students that enter the programme with a non-Norwegian bachelor's degree do not fulfil the bachelor requirements for the siviløkonom title, hence the minor requirement did not apply to them.

The minors were to some extent not very meaningful, since they contained the same set of courses as the majors, and with no requirements for core courses to obtain a minor. The combination of obligatory minors and lack of structure caused the students to form minors that in many cases consisted only of peripheral courses. This happened because students primarily chose courses based on their preferences and then fitted major/minor to their chosen course combination. Hence, the chosen minors were in many cases not very meaningful.

The MØA committee also recommended some changes regarding the electives in the MScEBA programme. While the flexibility within the majors was somehow reduced, the flexibility with respect to the electives was increased with the following proposals:

- a) It was proposed to replace the minor requirement with the requirement that at least 22.5 ECTS of course work is taken outside of the major. This increases the flexibility for the students, since they can combine courses from several majors other than their own, while still satisfying the siviløkonom requirements.



- b) Students could still be given the option of labelling some of their electives with the title of a “minor” on their diploma, given that at least three electives are chosen within a particular specialization.
- c) International options, e.g., exchange and Innovation School, will count as electives.
- d) Majors should, as a main rule, be taken at NHH and cannot be supplemented with courses taken as part of an exchange. Exceptions could be made by maintaining a list of accepted courses at popular partner schools. The programme manager and the profile coordinators will approve the courses initially. Once a course is on the list, applications can be handled by the Office of Academic Affairs.

Proposal a) from the MØA committee was to replace the minor requirement with a simpler requirement that students must choose at least three courses outside of their major. By keeping the minor as an option (proposal b)) for the students, it would still be possible for them to use the title of the minor to signal specialization within a particular field. Proposal c) was related to the relaxation of the minor requirement, since Innovation School and courses taken on exchange were previously listed as minors on the student diplomas. In the hearing process, two of the academic departments expressed support for relaxing the minor requirement, whereas the other departments did not mention this proposal. Apart from an objection from the administration regarding increased complexity with optional labels, there were no objections to proposals a)-c), and they were therefore implemented.

The set of courses available in the minors have, for most of the profiles, been the same as in the corresponding majors,<sup>20</sup> including courses that are borrowed from other majors. The only restriction on the choice of courses in a minor has been that the minor cannot include courses from the student’s major.<sup>21</sup> A typical student would choose the courses that he/she were interested in from among the courses available in the minor, and the result could easily be minors consisting entirely of courses that were not central in the subject field of the given minor. With optional minors it has been possible to strengthen their requirements so that they become meaningful without restricting the flexibility of the students too much. Table 4 shows the requirements that were in place when the “new” minors were launched in the autumn semester of 2021. The changes were proposed by the profile coordinators and approved by the programme manager, following discussions in the overall reference group for the programme as well as the respective reference groups for the profiles.<sup>22</sup> As shown in the table, the minors have been restricted by only including a subset of the courses in the respective majors and/or imposing a requirement to take a core course.

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<sup>20</sup> The only exception has been Business Analytics, where the set of courses in the minor has been a strict subset of the courses in the major.

<sup>21</sup> This requirement was introduced in 2017. Since many courses belong to multiple majors, the requirement has been linked to the course codes, where the code of a course indicates its “primary” major.

<sup>22</sup> Reforms of the ENE and MBM majors/minors have not been done yet.

**Table 4. Comparison of content/structure of minors and majors.**

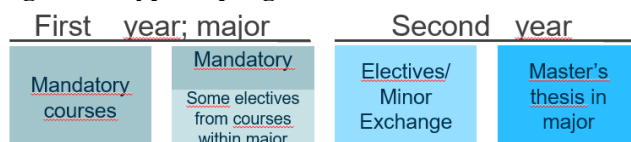
Name	Set of courses in minor	Core requirements
BAN	Subset of major	Minimum one core course
ECN	Same as in major	Minimum one core course
MBM	Same as in major	No requirements
ENE	Same as in major	No requirements
BUS	Subset of major	Minimum one core course
ECO	Subset of major	Minimum one core course
FIE	Same as in major	Minimum one core course
STR	Same as in major	Minimum one core course
NBD	No major exists	No requirements
Taxation	No major exists	No requirements

Proposal d) from the MØA committee opened up for the possibility that some courses in a student’s major could be taken at other schools at NHH, based on a list of pre-approved courses. However, the subsequent evaluation by the programme manager pointed out that maintaining updated lists of approved courses at partner schools would require considerable resources in the administration and therefore recommended that all courses in the majors should be taken at NHH. This was supported in the hearing process, although the students argued for the possibility to take part of the major abroad.

## 2.4 Comparison with similar programmes<sup>23</sup>

We will focus on our key Nordic competitors: BI, CBS, Stockholm School of Economics, Aalto School of Business. Figure 6 illustrates the typical programme structure of our competitors, and Table 5 gives a summary of the mandatory content in the programmes.

**Figure 6. Typical programme structure.**



### Norwegian Business School (BI)

BI has a very structured MSc in Business programme<sup>24</sup>, which also qualifies for the siviløkonom degree. They have a total of 7 different specializations: Economics, Finance, Strategy, Logistics/Operations/Supply chain, Marketing, Leadership and change, and Accounting and Business Control. All 7 specializations have the same 5 core mandatory courses the first year. They also have 5 mandatory (but mostly different) programme courses the first year. In the second year one semester is the master’s thesis, and one semester is elective courses (where most students are on exchange abroad). In addition, BI offers nine more specialized MSc programmes.

<sup>23</sup> This section is based on work done for the MØA committee in 2018-2019.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.bi.edu/programmes-and-individual-courses/master-programmes/business/>

### Copenhagen Business School (CBS)

CBS is a large business school with approx. 3300 students<sup>25</sup> at the master level per year at their MScEBA programme<sup>26</sup>. This programme has 14 different specializations, but several of these are similar, e.g. Finance and Investments, Finance and Applied Economics, Finance and Strategic Management. CBS has a structure of each specialization very similar to BI; with mandatory courses (no electives) the first year, and master's thesis and electives the second year.

### Stockholm School of Economics (SSE)

SSE has 5 specialized master programmes<sup>27</sup>: Economics, Accounting, Finance, Business and Management, and International Business. Within each master programme ('specialization profiles'), there are between 2-4 mandatory courses, and 6 to 11 elective courses where 4 to 6 courses must be elected (8 courses in total the first year in a major). The second year consist of master's thesis and electives (normally taken abroad).

### Aalto School of Business

Aalto has 11 electives in their MScEBA programme<sup>28</sup>. They have a structure more like NHH, where there are 2 to 4 mandatory courses in each field of specialization profiles, and 5 to 7 courses as part of the major to be selected from a list of approx. 10-15 different courses. Elective courses and master's thesis are normally taken the second year.

The structure of the programmes at BI, CBS and SSE, with little or no flexibility in the first study year, can be illustrated as in Table 5 below. The table shows that these programmes all have 60 ECTS of mandatory content, across or within majors. The MScEBA programmes at NHH and Aalto are much more flexible, with much less mandatory content. However, no major at Aalto has as little mandatory content as the minimum at NHH (7.5 ECTS).

**Table 5. Mandatory content (ECTS) in some master programmes.**

Institution	NHH	Aalto	BI	CBS	SSE
Programme	MScEBA	MScEBA	MSc in Business	MScEBA	Various
Mandatory across majors	2.5 <sup>29</sup>	6	30	7.5	0
Mandatory within majors	7.5-37.5	18-42	30	52.5	60
Sum mandatory content	10-40	24-48	60	60	60

Benchmarking of our MScEBA programme against other institutions shows that NHH has a relatively high degree of flexibility and a relatively low share of common/mandatory content.

The flexible structure has several advantages:

- Students can choose unique combinations of course tailored to their interests and what they see as beneficial for their career opportunities.
- Since resource allocation at NHH is to a large extent linked to teaching output, the academic departments have clear incentives to innovate and offer courses that are relevant for today's businesses. An example is the increased focus on technology and digitalization in the last few

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.cbs.dk/files/cbs.dk/call\\_to\\_action/cbs\\_ff\\_2018\\_ny\\_web.pdf](https://www.cbs.dk/files/cbs.dk/call_to_action/cbs_ff_2018_ny_web.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.cbs.dk/files/cbs.dk/call\\_to\\_action/cbs-kandidatuddannelser-2018\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://www.cbs.dk/files/cbs.dk/call_to_action/cbs-kandidatuddannelser-2018_0_0.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.hhs.se/en/education/msc/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.aalto.fi/school-of-business/masters-programmes>

<sup>29</sup> The students have to take an ethics course of at least 2,5 ECTS. The course can be chosen for a list of pre-approved courses. In the autumn of 2021, the list has 9 courses, most of which (7) have a size of 7,5 ECTS.

years, which has resulted in the introduction of a considerable number of technology-related courses in the master programme.

However, the flexibility comes at a cost:

- The flexibility makes it harder to guarantee that the students achieve the stated learning outcomes of the master programme.
- Flexibility hinders academic progression (ref. the Siviløkonom degree's clear progression requirements). In principle, progression could be secured by specifying prerequisites in the more advanced courses. However, a course responsible will be reluctant to do this if he/she fears that it will result in fewer students taking the course. More mandatory content in the majors could facilitate a higher degree of academic progression. Since a considerable number of the students go abroad on exchange in one of the four semesters, they will in practice only have one year to finish their major, and the academic progression must in practice be in the spring semester of the first year.
- The growth in the number of courses in the majors have made them less focused, and it is harder for students to distinguish between them. A major with a distinct specialization suitable for a specific position in a corporation or profession could be advantageous both for the students and the employers.
- A large course portfolio, many of them quite small, is costly to produce.
- To maintain the flexibility for the students, the scheduling section needs to avoid collisions in teaching and exams between popular courses, and this is very hard to achieve. In practice, therefore, it is often not possible for the students to achieve the desired course combinations.

## 2.5 Discussion questions

Q1) Does the programme have the right majors? If not, which majors should NHH consider adding? Should we discontinue some of the small majors?

Q2) The MScEBA programme at NHH has a rather flexible structure compared to most of our competitors. Moderate adjustments have been made to improve progression in the majors and make them more focused. Is this enough, or should the structure be tightened further?

Q3) The students must take 2.5 ECTS from a list of approved ethics courses, but this list is not major-specific. Should this requirement be strengthened, e.g., to 7.5 ECTS and by changing the name to "Ethics, responsibility, and sustainability"? Should it be linked more clearly to the respective majors, e.g., by requiring each major to offer at least one such course?

Q4) The size of the courses varies a lot, e.g., in 2020 it year ranged from 2 to 439 students. What is an acceptable range for course size, and what can the school do to avoid extremely small or large courses?

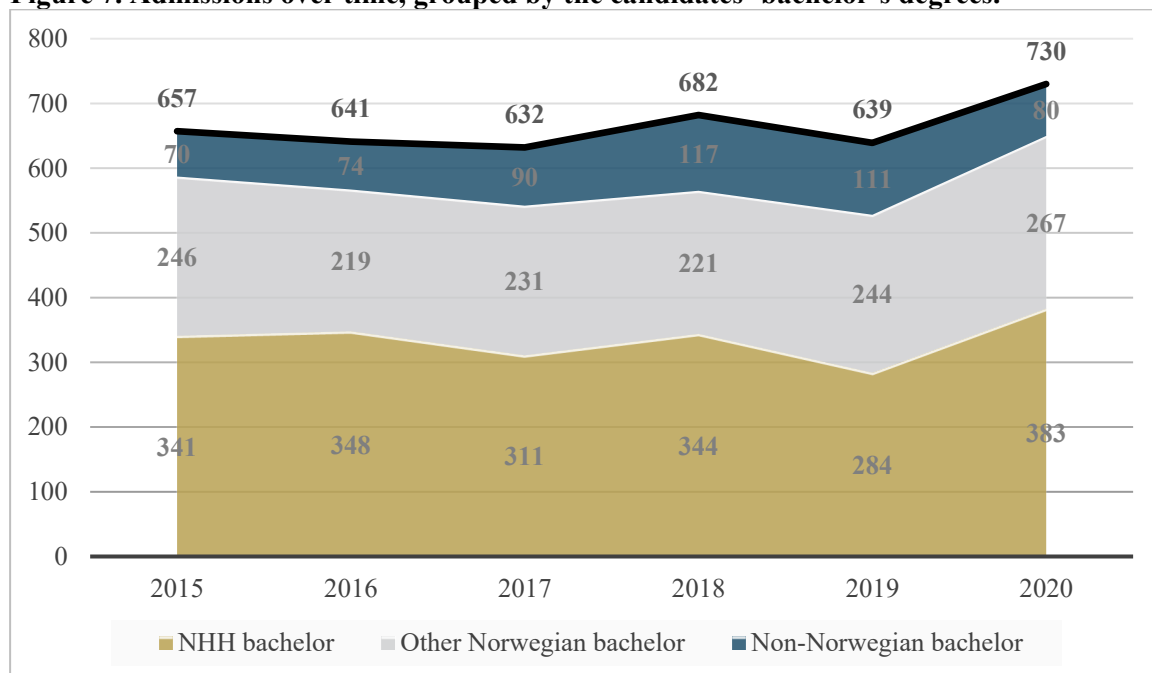
### 3. ADMISSION QUALITY

NHH's strategic objective<sup>1</sup> with respect to admission quality is to attract students with strong academic results and a high motivation for learning. Furthermore, our study programmes shall be a clear first choice in the fields of economics and business administration among Norwegian students and attract highly qualified international students.

#### 3.1 Admission in numbers

The admission to the MScEBA programme has increased over time, as shown in Figure 7, and it reached a new all-time high in 2020,<sup>30</sup> with 730 students admitted. Approximately 50% of the new MScEBA students are admitted directly from the NHH bachelor programme. Of the external candidates, most have completed other Norwegian bachelor programmes, but an increasing number of students are also admitted based on non-Norwegian bachelor programmes.

**Figure 7. Admissions over time, grouped by the candidates' bachelor's degrees.**

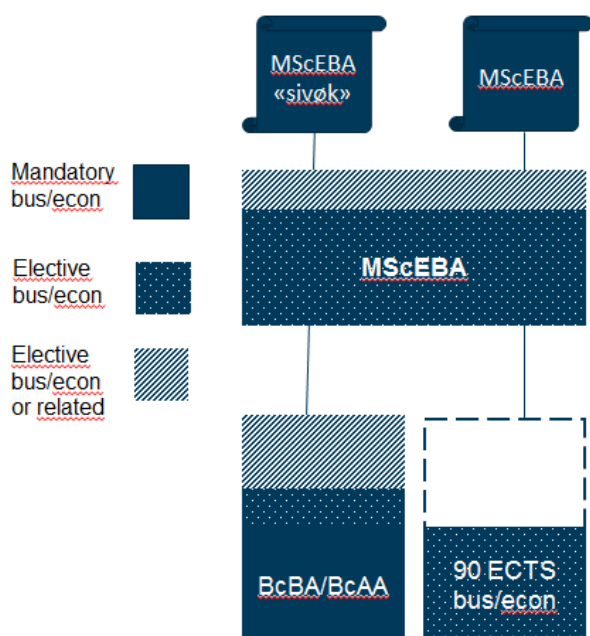


#### 3.2 Academic admission requirements

There are two academic admission requirements to MScEBA; a Norwegian "siviløkonom" admission, and an international, non-"siviløkonom" admission, the latter referring to non-Norwegian bachelor degrees, and the two requirements lead to different diplomas, as illustrated in Figure 8.

<sup>30</sup> The admission in 2020 may have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The negative effect on the labour market contributed by making education a relatively more attractive option for many, and the travel restrictions made NHH a more attractive option for students from Norway. The pandemic also led to a significant reduction in the number of international students, many of whom could not come to Bergen due to travel restrictions. These students were offered to 1) follow the teaching digitally or 2) postpone the start of their studies until 2021. Of the 80 students that were admitted, 25 chose to follow the teaching digitally. There were also 62 students, in addition to the 80, that chose to postpone the start of their studies.

**Figure 8. Two admissions into MScEBA, and their corresponding diplomas.**



The Norwegian admission requirement<sup>31</sup> is a Bachelor's degree in Economics and Business Administration (BScEBA) according to the national plan,<sup>32</sup> or equivalent. The national plan was revised in 2018,<sup>33</sup> and the new plan will be implemented as admission requirements for the MScEBA programme at NHH from 2022. The national bachelor requirement is 120 ECTS of business/economics content, of which 90 ECTS is specified in more detail. All students admitted based on the national bachelor plan are awarded the siviløkonom title.

The requirements for applicants with non-Norwegian bachelor's degrees<sup>34</sup> are softer, both in total business content (90 ECTS business/economics/methodology), but particularly since it does not require coverage of specific subjects in the bachelor's degree. The requirement in terms of grade point average is on par with that of "siviløkonom", however, and with an additional GMAT requirement of 600 for some international groups. At least 30 of the 90 ECTS must be within business administration (i.e., not economics or methodology), and no more than 45 ECTS may be within methodological subjects.

After the decision, following the recommendations of the MØA committee, to make the minor optional, and to replace the minor requirement with a requirement that at least 22.5 ECTS of course work must be outside of the chosen major, the study requirements for students with Norwegian and non-Norwegian bachelor's degrees are, in practice, identical.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.nhh.no/studier/soknad-og-opptak/opptak-master-i-okonomi-og-administrasjon/>

<sup>32</sup> "Plan for bachelor i økonomi og administrasjon", adopted on 17 October 2011 by the National Council of Higher Education in Business Administration (NRØA), the predecessor to Universitet Norge – Economics and administration (UHR-ØA): <https://www.nhh.no/contentassets/bbbee551fb9c461593eea8fb507dc012/plan-for-bachelor-i-okonomi-og-administrasjon.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> "Minimumskrav for Bachelor i økonomi og administrasjon", adopted in November 2018 by Universities Norway – Economics and administration (UHR-ØA):

<https://www.uhr.no/f/p1/i48e11d18-8b76-4089-acb1-511fa13135e4/boa-planvedtatt-av-uhr-oa-november-2018-endelig.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.nhh.no/en/study-programmes/application-and-admission/admission-msc-in-economics-and-business-administration/>

The softer requirements for applicants with foreign bachelor's degrees is an attempt to attract more international students to the programme, in accordance with NHH's strategy.<sup>35</sup> The differentiation has a problematic side effect, though, since it imposes stricter requirements on students with Norwegian bachelor's degrees, who are not allowed to apply for admission as "international" students.

Another difference between the two admission groups is that students with non-Norwegian bachelor's degrees apply directly to majors, while students in the Norwegian intake choose their major after they have entered the programme. Previously, only some majors were open to non-Nordic students, but following the decision, in accordance with NHH's revised language guidelines<sup>12</sup> and the recommendations from the MØA committee, that all majors should be possible to follow in English, the choice of majors is no longer restricted for this group.

### 3.3 Bachelor grades for admitted students

It is well-known that grading practices differ significantly between schools.<sup>36,37</sup> Specifically, the grading in the bachelor programme at NHH is stricter than in most other Norwegian bachelor programmes within Economics and Business Administration. Hence, subjecting bachelor students from NHH to a competition with external bachelor students based on grades would give the external bachelor students an unfair advantage, and NHH has therefore been allowed to guarantee our own bachelor students access to our master programmes. Hence, in effect NHH students enter a five-year programme when they are admitted to the bachelor programme, with an option to continue in one of our master programmes after they complete their bachelor's degree. This also means that comparisons of admission quality between the three admission groups shown in Figure 7 cannot be made based on their bachelor grades.

To study, at least in a partial way, the development of admission quality over time, we show a time series of bachelor grade point averages for external students with Norwegian bachelor's degrees in Table 6. The GPA requirement is quite stable over time. We see some decline of the grade requirement in 2019 and 2020, and this coincides with an increase in the number of admitted students in this admission group.

**Table 6. Grades for external Norwegian admissions.**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Required GPA</b>	3.9	4.1	3.9	4.0	3.9	3.8
<b>Average GPA</b>	4.2	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.2

For the internal bachelor students, we have detailed data about their choices and performance both in the bachelor and the master programme. This allows us to collect bachelor GPA averages not only at the programme level, but also for majors, as shown in Table 7. The data set covers 2168 students that entered the programme between 2015 and 2021 (spring). First, we note that the total average (3,7) is lower than the required GPAs for external students, shown in Table 6, and this means that some of the internal students would have been outcompeted by external students if they had to apply for admission

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.nhh.no/en/about-nhh/strategy/>

<sup>36</sup> Moen, J., & Tjelta, M. (2010). Grading standards, student ability and errors in college admission. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 54(3), 221-237.  
<https://openaccess.nhh.no/nhh-xmlui/handle/11250/164137>

<sup>37</sup> Strøm, B., Falch, T., Gunnes, T., & Haraldsvik, M. (2013). Karakterbruk og kvalitet i høyere utdanning. *SØF-rapport*, 3, 13.  
[https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kd/vedlegg/rapporter/karakterbruk\\_og\\_kvalitet\\_i\\_hoyere\\_utdanning.pdf](https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kd/vedlegg/rapporter/karakterbruk_og_kvalitet_i_hoyere_utdanning.pdf)

on the same terms. As stated above, NHH admits students to a five-year (3+2) siviløkonom programme, and internal bachelor candidates do not have to reapply to enter the master's programme.

A comparison of the average bachelor grades for students in different majors in Table 7 show considerable differences. The majors with the best students, as measured by the average bachelor GPAs, are Financial Economics (FIE) and Economic Analysis (ECO). The contribution of ECO to the overall admission quality of the programme was one of the reasons why it was decided, in the restructuring of the programme initiated by the work of the MØA committee, to keep this major, despite low student numbers. At the bottom end of the grade scale we find some majors with average bachelor GPAs below 3.5. The averages for Strategy and Management (STR) and Marketing and Brand Management (MBM) indicates significantly lower admission quality than the programme average.

There are no admission restrictions in the majors, so the observed grade differences result from student selection rather than competition between students. Students will choose the majors that fit their interests and abilities. We see that majors with a strong focus on quantitative analysis (FIE, ECO, BAN, ECN) attract students with higher grades than majors with a more qualitative focus (STR, MBM).<sup>38</sup> In between we find majors with a more mixed focus (BUS, ENE). One may of course question whether good bachelor grades is good measure of admission quality, but it is a stated goal<sup>1</sup> for NHH to attract students with strong academic results. Hence, the large differences between the majors in terms of this measure deserves some attention by the programme management. One may, e.g., consider reforms of majors with low admission quality, e.g., by introducing curriculum that would attract better students.

**Table 7. Relative admission quality for majors. Average bachelor GPA for NHH students admitted to the various majors (2015- spring 2021).<sup>39</sup>**

Major	GPA	N
FIE	3.9	817
ECO	3.8	56
BAN	3.7	133
ECN	3.7	128
BUS	3.6	544
ENE	3.5	70
STR	3.2	283
MBM	3.1	51
Other <sup>40</sup>	3.8	86
<i>Total</i>	<i>3.7</i>	<i>2 168</i>

<sup>38</sup> A possible objection could be that the overall bachelor GPA is not a good measure of admission quality, since the overall averages could hide differences between academic disciplines in the bachelor programme. Could it be, e.g., that students in “qualitative” majors in the master programme performed relatively better in qualitative bachelor courses? In a previous report, however, the same tendencies were found across sub-disciplines in the bachelor programme (BED, MET, SAM, SOL). See Table 3 in *Structural improvements in the MScEBA (MØA) programme at NHH – evaluation and recommendations. Report from the MScEBA programme manager (2019)*.

<sup>39</sup> A=5, B=4, C=3, D=2, E=1

<sup>40</sup> Includes INB and NBD (due to low numbers) and students who were admitted but never registered for a major before leaving for various reasons.



### 3.4 Discussion questions

Q5) NHH will continue to make internationalization a strategic priority, and this is one of the development objectives that the school has committed to after the EQUIS reaccreditation. What can be done to increase the share of international students in the programme even further?

Q6) Is the seemingly low admission quality of some majors (STR and MBM) a problem? If yes, what can we do make these majors more attractive for good students?

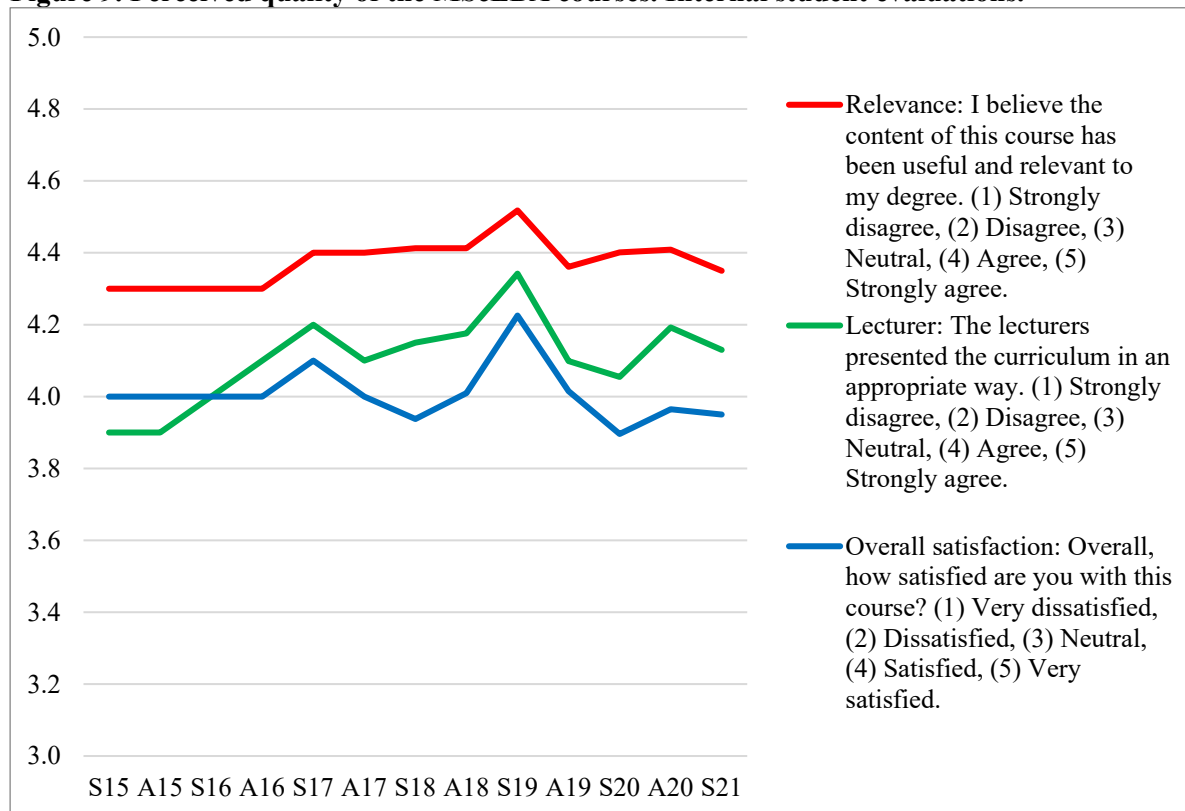
## 4. QUALITY OF STUDIES

NHH's strategic objective<sup>1</sup> with respect to study quality is to have a culture for quality in its education, where the administration, academic staff and students continuously strive to improve the quality of studies. Our teaching, study programmes and learning environment shall be on par with the best international business schools.

### 4.1 Perceived quality of courses and the programme

Figure 9 shows average results from evaluations of the MScEBA courses. Courses are evaluated along three quality dimensions: overall satisfaction, relevance, and the lecturers' ability to communicate the curriculum. We see some variation in the scores over time. In most semesters, the overall score was at least 4, i.e., the students were either satisfied or very satisfied. In the three semesters of 2020 and 2021, the overall score fell below 4, and this could be related to the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated a shift to mostly digital teaching and assessment. The average lecturer score is somewhat higher than the overall score, indicating that the students are satisfied with the lecturer's ability to present. The score on relevance is even higher, indicating that the courses are generally perceived as useful and relevant by the students.

**Figure 9. Perceived quality of the MScEBA courses. Internal student evaluations.**



The results from the annual survey Studiebarometeret,<sup>41</sup> conducted by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), are shown in Table 8. This survey evaluates the programme along a number of dimensions. The score on overall satisfaction is well above 4 in all

<sup>41</sup> <https://studiebarometeret.no/no/>

years, and higher than for most of the Norwegian competitors. This is impressive, especially considering that the NHH programme is the largest MScEBA programme in terms of student numbers. We see, however, a dip in the overall score in 2020, possibly related to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The effect on the overall score was larger for the NHH programme than for comparable Norwegian programmes. A possible explanation is that student exchange with partner schools abroad is more important at NHH than at other Norwegian business schools. Since travel restrictions during the pandemic, at least in the first few semesters, made student exchange almost impossible, the effect for NHH was more dramatic than for the other schools.

The relevance score in Studiebarometeret is lower than the relevance score for courses. It is an aggregate of several specific questions, e.g., whether the students have received training in how to convey their skills and knowledge to potential employers, and whether companies/organizations contribute to teaching in the programme. The rating of the NHH master programme is, however, better than the average for other Norwegian business programmes.

**Table 8. Perceived quality of the MScEBA programme. Studiebarometeret.**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Overall satisfaction</b>	4.4	4.4	4.5	4.3	4.5	4.2
<b>Relevance for working life</b>	-	-	-	3.7	3.9	3.6
<b>Work load (hours per week)</b>	41.7	43.1	43.7	42.4	39.5	41.2

## 4.2 Grades and completion on time

To evaluate the relative study quality for different student groups, we compare their performance, with respect to completion on time and grades, in Table 9 and Table 10. Table 9 shows that the performance with respect to completion on time, i.e., within 4 semesters, have improved over time, and if we consider the classes that have started since 2015, between 84 % and 88 % of the students have completed on time. There are not large differences among students with NHH bachelor's degrees and other Norwegian bachelor's degrees. However, students with non-Norwegian bachelor's degrees have significantly lower probability of completing on time, between 66 % and 69 % for 2015-2018. There could be several reasons for this difference, but we do not have enough information to conclude anything. Diku did a survey<sup>42</sup> in 2019 among international students<sup>43</sup> in Norway. A majority of the respondents indicated that they found the academic workload to be acceptable. The international students devote slightly more time to their studies than Norwegian students, and they spend more time on independent study relative to organized learning activities. International students also devote slightly more time to paid work than Norwegian students. According to the Eurostudent survey<sup>44</sup> conducted by Statistics Norway, the median income from paid work per semester, for a student that is employed for the entire semester, is 12000 NOK for international students, compared to 10000 NOK for Norwegian students.

We do not see large differences in grades in Table 10, although grades for students with an NHH bachelor's degree tend to be slightly better than for students with a non-Norwegian bachelor's degree, which again have slightly better grades than students with other Norwegian bachelor's degrees.

<sup>42</sup> <https://diku.no/rapporter/international-students-in-norway-contributors-to-quality-in-higher-education>

<sup>43</sup> Students with a non-Norwegian citizenship, including both degree and exchange students.

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.ssb.no/utdanning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/student-er-risikerer-a-miste-arbeidsinntekter>

The grade averages in Table 10 hide considerable differences in grading practice between courses. We illustrate the differences with Table 11, which shows the grade distribution for 150 MScEBA courses in 2019.<sup>45</sup> We see that some courses use only the grades A and B, while some use all the grades A-E.

**Table 9. Completion on time (within 4 semesters).**

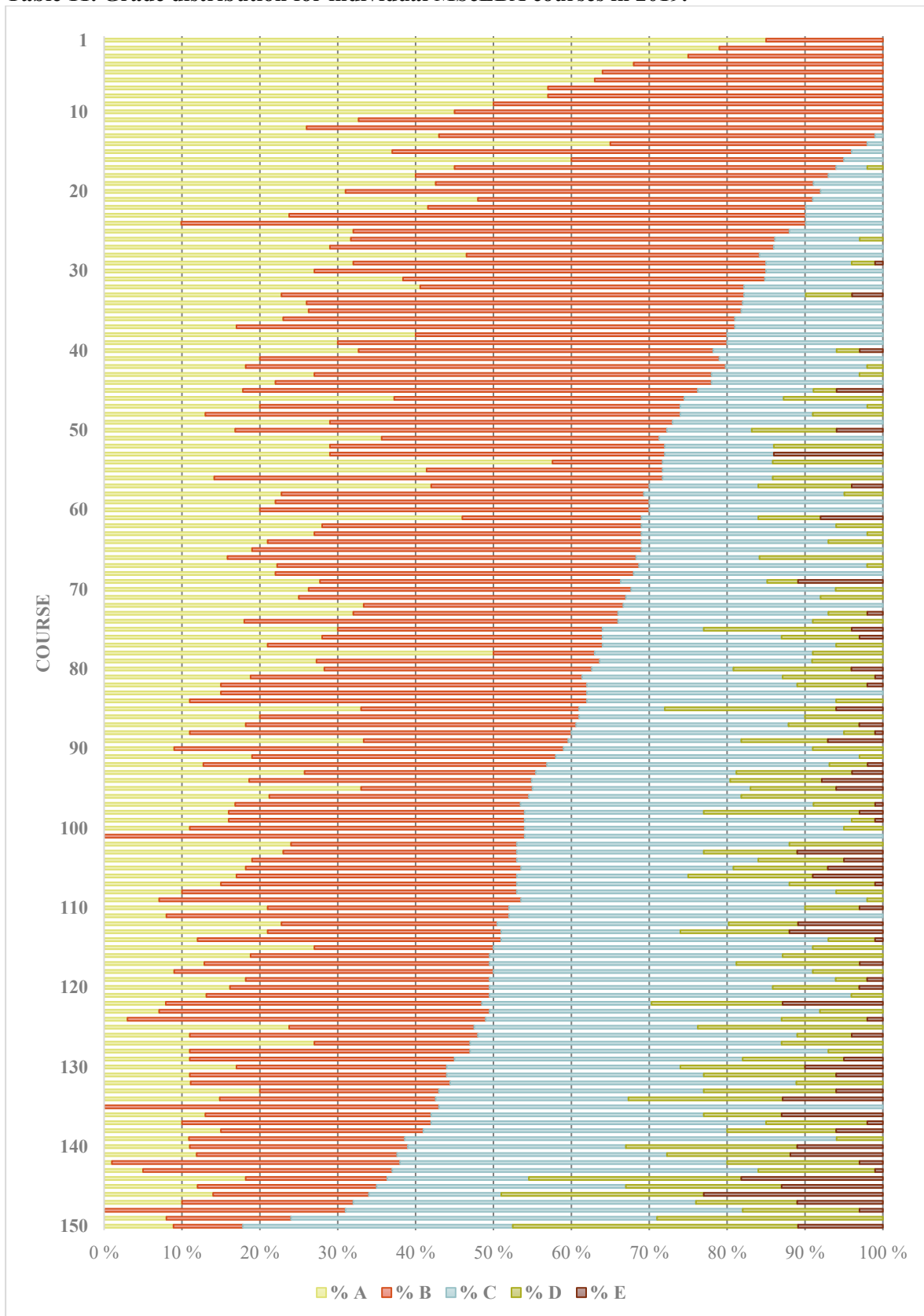
Year of admission to MScEBA	NHH bachelor		Other Norwegian bachelor		Non-Norwegian bachelor		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
2010	75	291	76	179	44	57	72	527
2011	76	312	80	162	58	71	75	545
2012	72	283	71	215	40	75	68	573
2013	81	325	77	224	57	63	77	612
2014	83	356	85	243	60	40	83	639
2015	86	322	86	237	64	66	84	625
2016	83	322	88	197	82	68	84	587
2017	89	289	84	216	68	68	85	573
2018	89	305	94	192	70	69	88	566
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>2 805</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>1 865</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>577</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>5 247</b>

**Table 10. Grades for different student groups in the MScEBA programme.**

Year of admission to MScEBA	NHH bachelor		Other Norwegian bachelor		Non-Norwegian bachelor		Total	
	GPA	N	GPA	N	GPA	N	GPA	N
2010	4.1	291	3.9	179	4.0	57	4.0	527
2011	4.1	312	4.0	162	4.0	71	4.1	545
2012	4.1	283	3.9	215	3.9	75	4.0	573
2013	4.0	325	3.9	224	3.9	63	4.0	612
2014	4.1	356	3.9	243	4.0	40	4.0	639
2015	4.0	322	3.9	237	3.9	66	3.9	625
2016	4.1	322	4.0	197	4.0	68	4.1	587
2017	4.2	289	3.9	216	4.1	68	4.1	573
2018	4.2	305	4.0	192	4.1	69	4.2	566
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>2 805</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>1 865</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>577</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>5 247</b>

<sup>45</sup> We have excluded the master's thesis, courses with less than 5 students, as well as courses that use pass/fail.

**Table 11. Grade distribution for individual MScEBA courses in 2019.**



### 4.3 International mobility

NHH has more than 195 institutional partners around the world. In later years, more than 60 per cent of NHH students have had international experience during their degree. This is above the government's stated ambition of 50% and makes NHH number 1 in Norway when it comes to international mobility. Although we would like all students to have experience with internationalization, quantity is now less important than quality as our primary strategic goal.

Although NHH performs well relative to other Norwegian higher education institutions with respect to international mobility, internationalization is still one of the major challenges for the school. This was pointed out in the EQUIS peer review report when the school was reaccredited in 2021. The report specifically pointed out that the school is too local, not all programmes are taught in English, and the percentage of incoming international students is low. Following the decision of reaccreditation, the school decided to make internationalization one of its main development objectives for the next accreditation period. The school aims to intensify the efforts to internationalize its study programmes, while ensuring that students learn the national and regional context. An important premise for the steps ahead will be active participation in networks and alliances with outstanding business schools around the world to reinforce its network of international partner schools. Key priorities will include recruitment of strong international students, further development of the school's student exchange and Internship Abroad programs, and an overall strengthening of the course portfolio available to international students. The student and learning environment should be internationally diverse to strengthen the learning experience both for national and international students.

One of NHH's strategic goals regarding developing quality in our study programs is to win competitions for external project funding in Erasmus + and national partnership programs. Since 2015 NHH has received funding for several projects on internationalization, such as Internship Abroad, Engage/European Universities, the Partnership Program for North America (Double Degree) and Innovation School. The award of large, strategically important projects such as Engage<sup>46</sup> and Innovation School<sup>47</sup> shows that the organization has given priority to working purposefully and long-term with development and innovation in internationalization. This will position NHH well for the future despite of the current restrictions on certain physical mobility caused by the corona pandemic.

Integration of incoming students is a particular challenge, and the experiences of international students and homecoming exchange students must be better utilized to enrich the study programmes at NHH and to motivate other students to travel abroad. Integration of international students has been a particular focus for NHH in 2021 as part of measures directed towards the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on students. NHH has been in close dialogue with the International Committee and MEBA Council, representing exchange students and international degree master students, respectively, about how to integrate international students with Norwegian students, and has funded activities such as Cultural Exchange Matching. In October 2021 NHH hosted its first International Week in cooperation with the International Committee and MEBA. The activities were promoted by students from NHH and partner schools alike, who shared their experiences from exchange programmes, CEMS, Double degree and internship programmes.

The following options for international mobility are currently offered:

- Semester exchange
- Double degrees
- CEMS MIM

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.nhh.no/en/for-students/international-opportunities/engage-online-exchange/>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.nhh.no/en/for-students/international-opportunities/innovation-school/>

- Internship Abroad
- Innovation School
- Erasmus+ traineeships for recent graduates
- European Universities - ENGAGE
- Summer course at the Nordic Centre at Fudan University

In the following we will comment in more detail on the various options.

**Table 12. International mobility statistics.**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Semester exchange:</b>						
- Incoming students	-	238	252	295	305	101
- Outgoing students	-	317	290	290	280	209
- Incoming relative to outgoing (%)	-	75 %	87 %	102 %	109 %	48 %
- Diplomas with exchange (%)	-	54 %	39 %	44 %	43 %	38 %
Double degree students (in and out)	20	28	26	32	40	31
Outgoing students on Erasmus+	-	137	155	140	134	108
International internships, CEMS, Norwegian School of Entrepreneurship and Innovation School	-	64	100	104	89	45 <sup>48</sup>

### *Semester Exchange*

The share of MScEBA diplomas with exchange is around 40 %, as seen from Table 12, but the share has varied considerable over time. The introduction of Innovation School<sup>49</sup> has provided an alternative to semester exchange, and may have contributed to a reduction in the volume of semester exchange. Most of the MScEBA students spend five years at NHH, and it should also be mentioned that a large share of the bachelor students also goes on exchange for one semester, facilitated by changes in the bachelor study plan from 2015. More than 50 % of the NHH students take one semester or more of their courses on exchange at a partner institution abroad during their five years at NHH. Since some students choose to go on exchange twice, i.e., both as bachelor and master students, it is not clear how the introduction of semester exchange in the bachelor programme has affected the volume of exchange in the master programme.

2020 was an exceptional year for international mobility programmes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, almost all the 209 master students abroad had to cancel their exchange and return to Norway, and most of the 101 incoming students to NHH went home. No inbound or outbound exchanges took place in the autumn semester of 2020. The effect of COVID-19 is reflected by the numbers in Table 12, where we see a decrease in all the international programmes for this year. However, most of the inbound and outbound exchange students in the spring semester 2020 completed their semesters digitally, which was a positive achievement.

The master courses taken while on exchange can be used as a minor and as free electives, and some students also get permission to include some courses taken abroad as part of their major. The exchange semester is typically the third or fourth semester, and Table 13 shows the proportion of autumn and spring semester exchanges by master students during the last 4 academic years. The majority of the

<sup>48</sup> Low number partly due to COVID-19, but also to the fact that the old Innovation School programme was ended in 2019, while the new programme (in Germany) starts in 2021.

<sup>49</sup> Innovation School was offered in partnership with UC Berkeley in 2017-2019, with 35-40 students per year. A revised programme, in partnership with the Technical University in Munich and the Goethe University in Frankfurt, was launched in 2021.

exchange students go abroad in the spring semester, i.e., typically the fourth semester of the programme, which means that they will write their master theses before they go abroad. Since the students' learning outcome from their master thesis work would benefit from the knowledge and skills acquired in the courses, this sequence is not optimal. It also often leads to extra work and complications in connection with the approval process at NHH, e.g., if the courses that the student intended to take at the exchange partner institution were not available. Students that plan their exchange in the spring semester are also much more prone to cancel their plans after the exchange has been approved, as can be seen from Table 14. A cancelled exchange means that the student and the staff at NHH and the partner institution have spent valuable time and resources planning for activities that ended up not taking place. Hence, there are good arguments for limiting exchange to take place in the third semester. The benefits of such a restriction, in terms of better academic progression and reduced costs for NHH and its partner institutions, must of course be weighed against the cost, in terms of reduced flexibility, for the students.

**Table 13. Exchange semester for MScEBA students.**

Academic year	Autumn	Spring
2013-2014	44 %	56 %
2014-2015	35 %	65 %
2015-2016	30 %	70 %
2016-2017	32 %	68 %

**Table 14. Exchange cancellations for MScEBA students.**

Academic year	Autumn	Spring
2013-2014	6 %	12 %
2014-2015	4 %	13 %
2015-2016	6 %	9 %
2016-2017	4 %	20 %

Section for International Relations has started a review of our partner portfolio, to align it with NHH's and the government's goals and strategies. The so-called Panorama countries,<sup>50</sup> and the stated goals and needs of the government and Norwegian business community will be important points of departure to make international student mobility relevant to the needs of future employers.

According to the 2015 Master programme evaluation, feedback from NHH students on exchange suggested that NHH performs well compared to our exchange partners, except for its teaching methods. To be on par with the best international business schools, NHH needs solid knowledge about our partners' study programs and teaching. NHH strives to partner up with some of the world's best business schools. If we reach our goal of having a Triple Crown, this will open more possibilities to attract excellent partners. For instance, AACSB is particularly esteemed among North American universities.

#### *The Double Degree Programme*

NHH's Double degree programme has since 2015 been restructured and developed with the ambition to fit NHH's Strategy and goals. Our portfolio and agreements have been reviewed and updated accordingly, with new partners being added and some partnerships discontinued. In addition to strengthening the academic focus, we aim to develop Double Degrees that are mutual, compatible, and integrated to ensure that the degree is truly double. The proposed study plan(s) must ensure mutual recognition of courses from both institutions, and Double Degrees should preferably build on existing

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/panorama/id2457714/>



cooperation between academic staff. Finally, we aim to create unique degrees which are forward-looking and preferably contain elements of technology, data science, sustainability and other important competencies, in order for our students to stay attractive in the labour market- also internationally. NHH currently has eight Double degree partnerships; Bocconi University, HEC Paris, HEC Montreal (new), Ivey Business School, Louvain School of Management, Mannheim University, Nova School of Business and Economics, University of Queensland.

### *CEMS*

The CEMS Master's in Management (CEMS MIM) programme is integrated in the MScEBA programme as a minor and can be combined with any of the majors. CEMS MIM is a one-year programme offered jointly by 34 CEMS partners around the world.<sup>51</sup> According to CEMS' vision, CEMS MIM "prepares responsible leaders contributing to a more open, sustainable and inclusive world". The CEMS students spend one of their CEMS semesters in their home school and the other one in one of the other CEMS schools. In addition, all CEMS students are required to have an eight-week international internship. At NHH we recruit approximately 50 CEMS students per year, and we welcome a similar number of incoming CEMS students from the other member schools.

CEMS MIM requires 60 ECTS of course work, plus mandatory seminars etc. While it formally counts as a minor at NHH, it includes all the elective courses for the students, in addition to some overlap with courses from their majors. As discussed in section 2.1, it has previously been considered to make CEMS MIM a major, but for various reasons, it was decided to continue with the present solution, thus enabling students to combine CEMS MIM with any of the majors at NHH.

### *Internships/Work experience*

The CEMS MiM degree has always required an international internship, so NHH has been sending students abroad to gain work experience for many years. In 2017 the Working Group for Internships recommended a scheme for internships that applies to all bachelor and master students at NHH. Since the autumn of 2018 NHH has offered students the opportunity to complete an internship abroad. This may be done after completing a degree through Erasmus + (recent graduates) or as part of their degree. After a pilot phase which started with project support from DIKU (Now HK-Dir) in 2018 the credit-bearing course InternAbroad was adopted in 2020 as part of the ordinary course offering. As a result, NHH has seen an increase in the number of master's students who complete an internship abroad as part of the degree.

It should also be mentioned that the CEMS MiM degree has always included an obligatory international internship, so the idea of international internships is not new at NHH

In 2020 NHH was awarded NOK 5 million from DIKU to increase working life relevance in higher education to develop a new Innovation School in Germany. The programme started in 2021, with 30 students the first year. They achieved 30 credit points, for course work done at NHH, an 8 week internship with a German company, and for two weeks of course work in Germany at the Technical University in Munich and the Goethe University in Frankfurt.

As part of another DIKU project NHH will establish a double degree with the ENE profile at NHH and Global Supply Chain Management at HEC Montreal in 2021. Here, a compulsory internship will be integrated into the study plan. These programmes are important contributions to help NHH achieve its important strategic goals of working life relevance in the studies, accreditation, and quality enhancement in studies. The ENEINT course (2.5 ECTS) combines an internship in a

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<sup>51</sup> See CEMS.ORG for details of the network, and <https://www.nhh.no/en/about-nhh/international-networks/cems/> for information about CEMS at NHH.

company/organization operating within the areas relevant for the ENE profile with a report that relates academic theories to practice.

#### *European Universities - ENGAGE*

In July 2020, NHH was awarded status as a European University, as one of three Norwegian educational institutions. European Universities is an initiative from the European Commission to create a common identity and strengthen the competitiveness and quality of European higher education. This status is awarded to networks of outstanding universities from programme countries under the EU's education programme Erasmus+, after an open competition announced by the European Commission. NHH and its 6 partner universities are part of the network ENGAGE.EU; *The European University engaged in societal change.*

NHH believes that this alliance with excellent European business schools will significantly contribute to and improve the quality of NHH's study programmes.

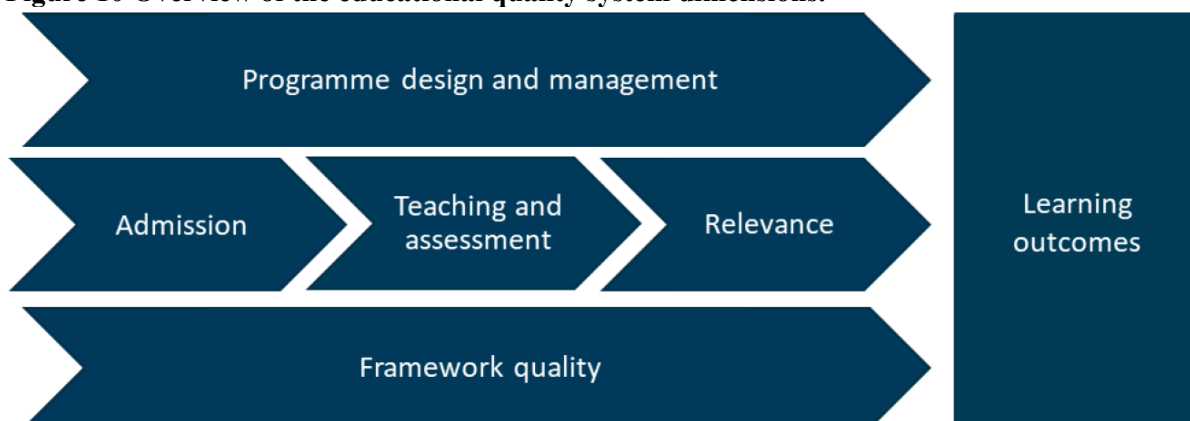
## 4.4 Quality assurance mechanisms

The quality assurance system at NHH is designed to help the school achieve its strategic goals related to education. The objective of the system is to ensure systematic quality enhancement and development in the school's educational activities, through:

- giving course coordinators, departments, programme managers and institutional leadership sufficient data to make good decisions concerning the school's educational activities
- identifying cases of failure to meet quality standards
- ensuring compliance with government regulations and national and international accreditations
- providing the school with a basis for internally generated evaluation and change that ensures continual improvement and development

Under the current quality assurance system quality in education is defined along six dimensions, which are monitored and evaluated in various ways at different intervals, shown in Figure 10.

**Figure 10 Overview of the educational quality system dimensions.**



The school redesigned the quality assurance system in connection with the change in leadership structure in 2017. The new unitary structure moved authority from the previous programme boards to programme managers with advisory reference groups as support. In connection with this, the mandates and authorities for the different roles (both individual and boards/committees) were revised. Under the new structure, the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs were given the responsibility for all the full-time

programmes, and each programme has a programme manager that reports to the Vice Rector. The programme manager has a reference group, and for the MScEBA programme the reference group consists of the academic coordinators for the majors (profile coordinators) plus the CEMS academic director, as well as a student representative and a representative from the Office of Academic Affairs. The MScEBA reference group has regular meeting to discuss issues that concern all majors or the MScEBA programme as such. Each profile coordinators has a reference group. Prior to the reforms suggested by the MØA committee, the profile reference groups consisted of faculty members who were consulted on an ad hoc basis.

The quality assurance system describes the systematic processes through which courses, specialisations and programmes are designed, evaluated, and changed. The basic quality assurance cycle is central to all levels from course to programme level. Evaluation of the courses and programmes contributes to development and further improvement and forms the basis for a constructive dialogue between students and faculty on the nature and content of the courses and programmes. It is therefore fundamentally important that both good and bad aspects of course and programme quality are brought forward, from the perspective of both students and faculty.

The quality assurance work in the majors had previously been the joint responsibility of the respective profile coordinators and the programme manager. In effect, the academic departments had considerable control over “their” majors, and in cases where several departments had conflicting interests, e.g., regarding the introduction of new courses, it was not clear how the conflicts should be resolved. Students and external representatives were only involved in the MScEBA reference group, and only about issues that concerned the entire programme. To maintain the relevance and quality of the majors, and to control the number of courses, the MØA committee suggested to strengthen and formalize the role of the profile reference groups. They proposed the following:

- a) The reference group for each major should (as previously) have faculty members from the academic departments that are involved in the major, in addition to the profile coordinator.
- b) In addition, each reference group should have at least one external member. These external members at the profile level would replace the external member of the MScEBA reference group.
- c) Each reference group should have at least one student representative.
- d) The members of the reference groups should have an active role in the quality assurance work, including review of course evaluations in meetings with the programme manager.
- e) At least annually the portfolio of courses in a major should be reviewed by the reference group, where need for new courses and/or removal of courses and/or need for quality improvements or modifications of existing courses should be discussed and recommended. The reference group would submit its recommendations to the programme manager, who will take the final decision on changes to the course portfolio.

To the extent that the proposals were commented in the hearing process, the reactions were positive, and the changes were implemented from the spring semester in 2020. The reference groups now meet at least once per semester. Some adjustments in other administrative processes had to be made to give the reference groups a meaningful role in the decision processes regarding the curriculum in the majors, e.g., by adjusting the deadlines for departments to propose courses and making sure that relevant information, e.g., course evaluations and course reports, are made available before the meetings.

## **4.5 Discussion questions**

- Q7) International students take considerably longer to complete their studies than Norwegian students. What can be done to improve this?
- Q8) There are currently no restrictions on when the students can go on exchange, and a majority of the students choose to do this in their fourth semester, which means that they write their thesis in the third semester. An optimal academic progression would probably be to write the thesis at the end of the programme. Also, high cancellation rates for spring exchange and complications related to approvals upon the students' return imply that the current practice has significant costs for NHH and its partner institutions. On the other hand, the flexibility to choose the exchange semester freely has some value for the students. Should the current practice of allowing exchange in the fourth semester be continued?

## 5. GRADUATE QUALITY

NHH's strategic objective<sup>1</sup> with respect to the quality of our graduates is that they shall be preferred in the national market for economists and managers, attractive in the international labour market and qualified for the best international master's degree and PhD programmes.

### 5.1 Measures of graduate quality

The measures that we have available are from NHHs own labour market survey (Table 15) and NIFU's graduate survey (Table 16). Both surveys are done six months after graduation, and the NIFU survey is only done once every two years. The results from both surveys show that the MScEBA candidates easily find a job after graduation, and roughly 9 out of 10 graduates have found a job after six months. The NHH survey shows that most graduates choose to stay in Norway, with less than 1 out of 10 stating that they have found a job abroad.

The NHH survey asks the students to evaluate their programme. We see from Table 15 that the graduates are generally very satisfied with the quality of the programme, and they think that it has given them a relevant theoretical basis. They also think that the programme has made them competitive in the international labour market, although the scores here are slightly lower than for the other two criteria.

**Table 15. NHHs labour market survey (MScEBA) (UA)<sup>52</sup>**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
I was generally satisfied with the quality of the study programme	4.3	4.2	4.2	4.2	4.3	4.2
The programme has given me a relevant theoretical basis	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.3	4.4	4.4
The programme makes me competitive in the international labour market	4.1	4.1	3.8	3.9	4.0	4.0
Proportion in employment within six months <sup>53</sup>	90.0 %	86.7 %	88.1 %	92.1 %	89.7 %	92.6 %
Starting salary, NHH graduates (NOK 1,000) <sup>54</sup>	453	451	463	485	498	503
Proportion of students taking a job abroad <sup>55</sup>	8 %	8 %	5 %	11 %	7 %	6 %

**Table 16. NIFUs graduate survey<sup>56</sup>**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Graduates employed in relevant work six months after graduation (KD)(UA)	89.0 %	-	88.9 %	-	96.6	-

<sup>52</sup> Figures from NHH's labour market survey. Scale of 1–5, where 5 is the highest score.

<sup>53</sup> Relevant and not relevant work.

<sup>54</sup> Average gross basic salary per year.

<sup>55</sup> The figure includes both relevant and non-relevant work.

<sup>56</sup> The survey is conducted by the Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU) every second year.

## 5.2 Relevance of the programme content

The content of the MSc EBA is continuously updated to keep it relevant and in line with the strategic objectives of NHH.

One of the megatrends affecting society is rapid technological change, and NHH has responded by launching new courses that give our candidates knowledge and skills related to technology. More than 80% of the MSc EBA students that graduated in 2019 had at least one course about programming and/or big data on their diploma, and this share had risen to 91% in 2020. A new major in Business Analytics (BAN) was launched in 2018, for students who would like to specialize further within this field. At the same time, a new major in New Business Development (NBD) was started. The Business Analytics major has become a popular choice, whereas New Business Development, although less popular as a major, has popular courses.

Sustainability is another strategic priority for NHH, and the MScEBA programme has a wide selection of courses that addresses various sustainability aspects: BUS446 Sustainable Business Models, FIE459 Sustainable Finance, BUS452 Corruption – Incentives, Disclosure and Liability, BUS465 Corporate Crime: Detection and Prevention, ECN421 Corporate Social Responsibility. All these courses have been launched from 2015 and onwards, and they all have in common that they qualify for the obligatory ethics requirement in the programme.<sup>57</sup>

## 5.3 Discussion questions

Q9) Rapid technological change, globalization, and increased focus on sustainability (environmental, social, and economical) are megatrends that are addressed in the current NHH strategy document.<sup>1</sup> Are these megatrends properly reflected in the curriculum of the MScEBA programme?

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<sup>57</sup> <https://www.nhh.no/en/study-programmes/msc-in-economics-and-business-administration/ethics2/>

## 6. SUMMARY OF PANEL DISCUSSION

### 6.1 Introduction

The members of the evaluation panel were:

- Rolf Andreas Arnestad Gjevre (student representative)
- Janne Flovik Sande (BSc-NHH, MSc-CBS, presently working for Pierre Robert)
- Kari Due-Andresen (BSc-NHH, MSc-NHH, presently working for Akershus Eiendom)
- Patrick Narbel (BSc-Lausanne, MSc-NHH, PhD-NHH, presently working for Go Solr Ltd)
- Steef van de Velde (Rotterdam School of Management, absent due to illness on the day of the meeting)
- Endre Bjørndal (Programme Manager 2017-2021)
- Jan I. Haaland (Programme Manager 2021-)
- Kjetil Sudmann Larsen (Head of Section for Educational Quality)
- Kurt-Rune Bergset (Section for Educational Quality)

The panel met on Friday February 4<sup>th</sup> 2022, between 09:00 and 12:00 CET. The meeting was held digitally.

The panel members had read chapter 1-5 of the report in advance, and the discussion followed the structure in chapter 2-5. For each chapter, Endre Bjørndal (the former programme manager) gave a short introduction, and the panel then addressed the discussion questions for that chapter.

### 6.2 Programme content and structure

*Q1) Does the programme have the right majors? If not, which majors should NHH consider adding? Should we discontinue some of the small majors?*

The panel agreed that majors should be sustainable, in terms of student numbers, over time. It could therefore be necessary to discontinue some small majors and allocate the resources to other areas where they produce more value.

If the school, e.g., for strategic reasons, decides to keep majors that have exhibited low student numbers over some time, actions should be taken to improve those numbers. Such actions could include improved marketing towards the students, but fundamental changes in the curriculum and structure of the majors may also be necessary. The panel noted, specifically, that MBM (Marketing and Brand Management) has had very low student numbers over some time. The panel agreed that MBM needs a stronger focus on analytics and practical skills to become a more attractive choice for students. An interesting observation from the external panel members, and relevant for all the NHH majors, was that businesses typically are looking for candidates that combine strong analytical capabilities / skills with a good business understanding.

The importance of academic progression in the majors was also discussed here. The progression should ensure that students have the knowledge/skills/competences required by potential employers when they graduate. However, the relevant profile coordinator and the programme manager must also make sure that the progression in each major is realistic for the students, given the knowledge/skills/competences that they possess when they enter the programme.

*Q2) The MScEBA programme at NHH has a rather flexible structure compared to most of our competitors. Moderate adjustments have been made to improve progression in the majors and make them more focused. Is this enough, or should the structure be tightened further?*

The panel agreed that there is a trade-off between flexibility and quality. Flexibility allows the students to tailor their curriculum to their own interests and what they see as relevant for their future careers in a changing business environment, and this can contribute positively to the relevance and quality of the candidates.

However, the main takeaway from the discussion was that it is beneficial to restrict this flexibility in the majors even further, through more mandatory content and better progression, to ensure that the NHH candidates have the necessary skills and competences that they will need in their future careers. The external members of the panel mentioned, specifically, skills related to quantitative methods and ethics/sustainability. Although reduced flexibility may be perceived negatively by the students in the short run, more structure and better progression can contribute positively to the quality of the NHH candidates, and thereby, in the long run, to increased popularity of the MScEBA programme. The success of the Business Analytics (BAN) major was mentioned as evidence that students do not necessarily shy away from a major with strict structure if it is seen as necessary to produce candidates of high quality.

If, and how much, the structure of individual majors should be tightened, will vary. Most majors, except ENE and MBM, have already made changes following the report from the MØA committee. However, a continued evaluation of the structure and progression in all majors is necessary to ensure good quality of the NHH candidates.

*Q3) The students must take 2.5 ECTS from a list of approved ethics courses, but this list is not major-specific. Should this requirement be strengthened, e.g., to 7.5 ECTS and by changing the name to “Ethics, responsibility, and sustainability”? Should it be linked more clearly to the respective majors, e.g., by requiring each major to offer at least one such course?*

The panel discussion stressed the importance of sustainability for society and for individual businesses. All businesses will be required to have sustainable business models in the future, and training about sustainability issues must therefore be an obligatory element in the NHH master’s programme. The panel agreed that the NHH requirement should be increased to 7.5 ECTS, and that the scope should be broadened from “ethics” to “ethics, responsibility, and sustainability”. The external panel members pointed out that these courses must have a practical business focus, including how businesses can make money with a sustainable business model. To further strengthen the practical focus, the individual courses should be tailored to the respective majors that they belong to. This is already, to a certain degree, implemented in some of the “ethics” courses, such as Sustainable Business Models and Sustainable Finance.

*Q4) The size of the courses varies a lot, e.g., in 2020 it year ranged from 2 to 439 students. What is an acceptable range for course size, and what can the school do to avoid extremely small or large courses?*

The panel agreed that there are quality issues with very large courses as well as very small courses, and the school should try to avoid both extremes. Courses about very popular topics, such as programming, should be duplicated to increase the availability and quality for the students. The



programme manager and the rectorate are currently working with the departments to facilitate this. Actions should also be taken for courses with very few students, either to make the courses more relevant, improve the marketing, or, if the problem persists, discontinue the courses.

### 6.3 Admission quality

*Q5) NHH will continue to make internationalization a strategic priority, and this is one of the development objectives that the school has committed to after the EQUIS reaccreditation. What can be done to increase the share of international students in the programme even further?*

It was noted here that, to have an informed discussion about this question, we first need more information about *drivers* for choosing NHH among potential applicants abroad. It is also important to be clear about *why* NHH should increase the share of international students.

NHH has a disadvantage in that Norway/Bergen is not well known, and the country is not associated with higher education like some larger countries like the UK, Germany, or the USA. To compensate for this disadvantage, the school could focus on direct recruitment and personally oriented marketing. Once international students are in Bergen, it is also vital to integrate them well with the Norwegian students, and this is an issue that the NHH management and the student association needs to work on together.

Perhaps the most important point in this discussion was that it will be better for a small school like NHH to focus on certain areas where Norway has advantages, rather than spreading its marketing efforts evenly over all areas. The success of the ENE major can be explained by the natural advantage that Norway has within the field of energy and natural resources. The present world-wide focus on oceans and the blue economy, an area where Norway is an important player, could be used to attract more international students to NHH.

One panel member commented that the names of the different NHH majors are not very distinctive. This could make it hard to attract international students that are looking for a master within “standard” business school areas such as finance, accounting, human resource management, operations, information systems, or sustainability.

*Q6) Is the seemingly low admission quality of some majors (STR and MBM) a problem? If yes, what can we do make these majors more attractive for good students?*

The question refers to Table 7 in this report. One might expect students to perform relatively better in bachelor subjects related to the master majors that they choose later. This has been investigated in more detail in a previous report<sup>58</sup>, and the results showed that the STR and MBM students, on average, had lower bachelor grades, compared to students in other master majors, in all subject areas of the bachelor programme.

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<sup>58</sup> Appendix A in *Structural improvements in the MScEBA (MØA) programme at NHH – evaluation and recommendations*. Report from the MScEBA programme manager (2019).

For MBM the low admission quality coincides with low student numbers, and the discussion under Question 1 already suggested measures to increase the popularity of MBM. On the other hand, STR is one of the more popular majors, so it seems like a paradox that the admission quality is low also here.

## 6.4 Quality of studies

*Q7) International students take considerably longer to complete their studies than Norwegian students. What can be done to improve this?*

There can be several reasons behind these numbers. We know anecdotally that some students, especially those from countries outside of Europe, may have reasons to deliberately extend their student rights, e.g., to take internships before they lose their work permit. However, this is not likely to be the only explanation, and to explore this issue further, NHH should try to find out more about these students and the reasons behind their delays.

The master programme at NHH differs considerably from many other master programmes in that the structure is more flexible, with considerable freedom to choose among a large set of master courses. The larger degree of freedom and responsibility, relative to what the foreign students are used to at schools in other countries, may come as a shock and take time to get used to. In Norway it is relatively easy to get help with academic or administrative issues if you ask for it, but foreign students may not be aware of the possibilities that exist.

The panel also discussed differences in admission quality as a possible reason for the differences in completion time. Applicants with international bachelor degrees face approximately the same grade point average requirements as applicants with Norwegian bachelor degrees, but the requirements with respect to the total amount of study points within economics and business administration, as well as within sub-areas, are less stringent. One suggestion was to tighten the admission requirements for this group of students to increase the admission quality and improve the students' ability to successfully complete their studies on time. This could, however, conflict with NHH's strategic goal to increase the share of international full-degree students in the master programme, in particular, since bachelor degrees in other countries normally do not reflect the composition of subjects required in the Norwegian BØA plan.

*Q8) There are currently no restrictions on when the students can go on exchange, and a majority of the students choose to do this in their fourth semester, which means that they write their thesis in the third semester. An optimal academic progression would probably be to write the thesis at the end of the programme. Also, high cancellation rates for spring exchange and complications related to approvals upon the students' return imply that the current practice has significant costs for NHH and its partner institutions. On the other hand, the flexibility to choose the exchange semester freely has some value for the students. Should the current practice of allowing exchange in the fourth semester be continued?*

The panel agreed that limiting exchange to the third semester would imply benefits, in terms of better academic progression and less problems related to cancellations and other complications. All panel members, except for the student representative, also agreed that the benefits would outweigh the costs. The student representative noted that flexibility is one of the things that make the NHH master unique,

and that the flexibility to choose the exchange semester has positive value for the students. According to the panel majority, however, this flexibility is “nice to have” rather than “need to have”. Moreover, a stricter structure, if it increases the quality of the programme due to improved academic progression, will also contribute to increased attractiveness of the programme in the long run.

## 6.5 Graduate quality

*Q9) Rapid technological change, globalization, and increased focus on sustainability (environmental, social, and economical) are megatrends that are addressed in the current NHH strategy document. Are these megatrends properly reflected in the curriculum of the MScEBA programme?*

The discussion reiterated some issues that had been raised previously, especially under Question 2 (structure) and Question 3 (sustainability). A key point in the discussion was that megatrends, like sustainability, should be integrated in the various majors and their courses, to secure a practical and relevant focus.

With respect to technology, the discussion focused on the importance of producing candidates that understand both business and technology, not just one of them. The NHH candidates should primarily have a business focus, but they need to have sufficient technological knowledge and skills to communicate and cooperate with technology experts. To a certain extent NHH candidates will also have to master technological tools, e.g., programming languages. The level of this training is more important than the exact choice of tools, since deeper understanding makes it easier to transfer the knowledge to other technologies later.