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Master of Research
in Social Sciences and Global Challenges
in Bruges

A feasibility study



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1 Introduction

This report is a deliverable of a study undertaken by UNU-CRIS aimed at assessing the feasibility of developing new Higher Education initiatives in Bruges. There are two dimensions to this feasibility. On the one hand there is the desirability of such initiatives. On the other hand there are the possibilities and constraints. The present report maps and assesses both dimensions with regard to the feasibility of starting a Master of Research (MRes) in Social Sciences and Global Challenges in Bruges.

The results of this study are intended to serve as suggestions to those who are interested in establishing new higher educational initiatives in Bruges, and as an information resource for all stakeholders concerned.

This report has been made possible thanks to the support of the Euregion Scheldemond - which is a transnational partnership between the provinces of West Flanders, East Flanders and Zeeland -, the city of Bruges, the Province of West Flanders, University College Roosevelt and UNU-CRIS. Its results are intended to serve as suggestions for establishing new higher educational initiatives in Flanders, and as an information resource for all stakeholders concerned.

The research has been conducted by Ewout Ramon and Julie Mariën under the supervision and guidance of Luk Van Langenhove. It has been edited by Andrea Hak.

2 Executive summary

This is the second part of a feasibility study on new higher education initiatives in Bruges conducted by the United Nations University – Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS). It maps and evaluates both the desirability and the possibilities and constraints for starting a Master of Research in Social Sciences and Global Challenges in Bruges.

A Master of Research (MRes) has a specific emphasis on conducting research, is taught in English and is intended for a select group of students. This type of master prepares students for a career as scientific researcher or PhD student.

An analysis of current academic trends and developments in higher education, together with an assessment of the organisation of higher education in Flanders, the position of West Flanders and the ambitions for Bruges, leads to the following conclusions:

1. When compared to the rest of Europe, Flanders is lagging behind in the provision of Masters of Research.
2. But there seems to be a growing awareness of the need for more research-oriented education and a further internationalisation of higher education.
3. The European high level group on the modernisation of higher education is meanwhile calling for more international programmes as a tool to mobilise more brainpower in Europe.
4. Social Science scholars are expressing the need to make the social sciences more relevant and to tackle the bottlenecks in their field.
5. Globalisation and its consequences are likely to be at the core of future research, so education should play a key role in raising awareness of global challenges.
6. There is also growing local support in Bruges to develop higher education initiatives in the city.
7. Any initiative to start a Master of Research in Bruges needs to be taken by one or several of the Flemish universities, preferably with local higher educational partners.
8. Except for KULeuven that has one MRes in Law and 14 applications for new Research Masters pending, no Flemish university has shown interest in offering Masters of Research (yet).
9. It is therefore very unlikely to see a Master of Research in Social Sciences and Global Challenges come about in Bruges any time soon. New developments in higher education however will pressure institutions in Flanders further to develop and diversify their curricula in the future. To meet this challenge Flanders should invest in greater research opportunities for its students.

3 Samenvatting

Dit is het tweede deel van een haalbaarheidsstudie over nieuwe initiatieven op vlak van hoger onderwijs in Brugge uitgevoerd door de Universiteit van de Verenigde Naties te Brugge (UNU-CRIS). Hierin worden zowel de wenselijkheid als de mogelijkheden en beperkingen onderzocht en geëvalueerd voor het opstarten van Onderzoeksmaster in Sociale Wetenschappen en Globale Uitdagingen in Brugge.

Een onderzoeksmaster (MRes) legt de nadruk op het voeren van onderzoek, wordt gegeven in het Engels en is bedoeld voor een selecte groep studenten. Dit type master bereidt studenten voor op een carrière als wetenschappelijk onderzoeker of doctoraatsstudent.

Een analyse van de huidige academische trends en ontwikkelingen in het hoger onderwijs, samen met een beoordeling van de organisatie van het hoger onderwijs in Vlaanderen, de positie van West-Vlaanderen en de ambities voor Brugge, leidt tot de volgende conclusies:

1. In vergelijking met de rest van Europa hinkt Vlaanderen achterop wat het aanbod aan onderzoeksmasters betreft.
2. Maar het besef over de nood aan onderzoeks-gericht onderwijs en meer internationalisering in het hoger onderwijs lijkt te groeien.
3. De Europese 'high level' groep over de modernisering van het hoger onderwijs roept inmiddels op tot meer internationale programma's om meer 'brainpower' in Europa te mobiliseren.
4. Academics binnen de Sociale Wetenschappen uiten de nood om sociale wetenschappen relevanter te maken en de problemen binnen de discipline aan te pakken.
5. Globalisering en zijn gevolgen zullen hoogst waarschijnlijk tot de kern van toekomstig onderzoek behoren. Het is daarom belangrijk om in het onderwijs al voldoende aandacht te besteden aan globale uitdagingen.
6. Er is ook een groeiend lokaal draagvlak in Brugge voor het ontwikkelen van nieuwe initiatieven voor het hoger onderwijs in de stad.
7. Elk initiatief om een onderzoeksmaster in Brugge te realiseren moet worden genomen door een of meer van de Vlaamse universiteiten, bij voorkeur samen met de lokale instellingen voor hoger onderwijs.
8. Behalve de KULeuven die een onderzoeksmaster in de rechten aanbiedt en 14 aanvragen voor nieuwe onderzoeksmasters heeft ingediend, heeft geen enkele Vlaamse universiteit interesse getoond in het aanbieden van onderzoeksmasters.
9. Het is daarom hoogst onwaarschijnlijk dat binnenkort een onderzoeksmaster in de sociale wetenschappen en globale uitdagingen aangeboden zal worden in Brugge. Nieuwe ontwikkelingen in het hoger onderwijs zullen echter druk blijven zetten op de Vlaamse instellingen om hun curricula in de toekomst te diversifiëren. Om deze uitdaging te beantwoorden moet Vlaanderen investeren in meer onderzoeksgerichte opleidingsmogelijkheden voor zijn studenten.

4 The changing landscape of higher education

As so many other aspects of society, higher education is undergoing many changes.¹ These changes form the background to which the feasibility of any new initiative needs to be situated. For this report, three major developments have been singled out: the growing need for research oriented education, the increased calls for interdisciplinary education and the growing internationalisation of the higher education system. Together these three trends have major implications for the higher education system of any country.

4.1 The growing need for research oriented education

Conducting research is an essential part of the 21st century knowledge economy. Decent research skills are required for many jobs. Think for example of psychologists, pharmacists, scientists, investigators, journalists or economists. At the personal level, research skills allow you to pursue your interests, to learn something new and to ameliorate your problem solving skills. Conducting research allows a student to immerse him or herself in a certain field of interest or subject of study. It helps students in their ability to ask questions, think critically, gather data, make logical arguments supported by data, plan a research project and complete it.

It is therefore no surprise to see much more research oriented and research based courses and programmes booming in the landscape of higher education, all over the world. The focus in research oriented and research based curricula is on developing students' knowledge of and ability to utilise research methodologies and methods, and on ensuring that the student learns as much as possible in research or inquiry mode.²

The OECD sends a clear message to educators in its report 'Trends Shaping Education 2013': "[they] need to be aware of the growing focus on the advanced skills and qualifications their students will need to flourish within more knowledge-intensive labour markets".³

4.2 The trend towards interdisciplinarity

The twenty-first century is characterised by an increasing (global) connectivity combined with increasingly rapid change. Interconnectedness among diverse elements on different scales lead to changes so rapid and complex, that they are impossible to comprehend from a single disciplinary perspective.⁴ Students are facing and will continue to face challenges dealing with this, as will scholars and policy-makers. The answer seems to be a multi-perspective approach where different disciplines are used to deal with complex problems.

A discipline can conveniently be defined as any comparatively self-contained and isolated domain of human experience which possesses its own community of experts. Interdisciplinarity can best be seen as bringing together distinctive components of two or more disciplines.⁵ In today's higher education system, these disciplines are institutionalised into departments and faculties. They form the backbone

¹ See for example the 'Higher Education in the World' series by the Global University Network for Innovation and the various reports from the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) (such as 'Trends Shaping Education 2013').

² Haeley, Jenkins & Lea, 2014

³ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2013, pp. 62-63

⁴ Newell, 2007

⁵ Nissani, 1997, p. 203

of how university teaching is organised, especially at the Bachelors level: from a mono-disciplinary perspective. Such a disciplinary approach to teaching has become increasingly criticised. Bringing them together in an integrated approach simply holds a greater promise of bringing one closer to attaining a firm grasp of a complex subject than any important but one-sided study.

Also the European Commission (EC) Directorate General for Research recognises, next to the traditional disciplinary approaches, the need for deep forms of interdisciplinarity. This type of research has a strong potential to be able to address the complexity of real world problems and their solutions.⁶

4.3 The trend towards internationalisation

The processes of internationalisation of higher education cannot be ignored. According to the OECD, an estimated 4.5 million students today study in another country and that figure will continue to increase to an expected 7.2 million in 2020. International students still form a very small part of the total student population around the globe, but the growth rate of international students exceeds that of domestic students. One could even say internationalisation has become an indicator for quality in higher education. “International student mobility is one of the very interesting indications of the globalisation of higher education, yet we know little about what drives it.”⁷

The gains from internationalisation manifest themselves on different levels and in different domains. A first value added through internationalisation is economic gains. The academic mobility made possible by the increasingly borderless academic world will, like other kinds of free trade, bring many economic benefits, along with intellectual ferment and tremendous opportunities for individuals.⁸ A clear economic benefit is the direct financial impact of international students on the host country through fee income and associated expenditure during their study. This value has been researched in the UK for example, and was estimated at about £8 billion for 2008/09.⁹

A second benefit from internationalisation is its impact upon civil society in the region. Opening up to the global public attracts creative minds, be it students, professors or artists, and leads to innovative ideas. Together with strategic partnerships between research institutes, universities and the city, it contributes to an increase in prosperity and well-being of the region. Obviously, the institute itself and its personnel and students also profit from regional or international collaboration. Not only because of the rise in employment opportunities, but also because of the multicultural environment in which they can study, work and live.¹⁰

A third beneficiary of internationalisation is the institute itself. It for example allows the institute to expand its research networks and to collaborate with various international partners; to attract international talents; to offer more qualitative curricula; to engage in development cooperation as a part of its social commitment; and to acquire name and fame at the international level.

Lastly, there are the advantages for the students. Internationalisation allows students to develop a global awareness and an intercultural understanding, which they can also integrate into their

⁶ Directorate-General for Research, 2009, pp. 124-125

⁷ Van Damme, 2014a, para 2

⁸ Wildavsky, cited in Flanders Knowledge Area, 2013a

⁹ Conlon et al., 2011 cited in Careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC), 2013

¹⁰ CRAC, 2013

research. A study by Janson, Schomburg and Teichler¹¹ for example shows that more than 80% of students value their personal development as the most important positive effect of an international experience, followed by their increased chances on the labour market at a bit more than 50%.

Today universities all over the world invest in global partnerships and in the internationalisation of their curricula. Global competition is increasing and the study choices of international students are becoming more sophisticated. Students increasingly focus on making educational choices that add value to their career outcomes and are paying attention to the student experience and the level of student support services in higher education institutes.

¹¹ 2009, cited in CRAC, 2013

5 Flemish higher education

Higher education in Flanders is largely shaped by the European framework of the Bologna Process.¹² This process is meant to create 'the European Higher Education Area' and should facilitate student mobility across Europe. The bachelor-master structure is a visible result of the Bologna Process. The higher education degree system consists of three cycles. The first cycle consists of the bachelors programmes, the second cycle are the masters programmes and the third cycle are the Doctorate or PhD programmes.¹³

There are several types of higher educational institutions in Flanders. The types best known are the 'universities' [universiteiten] and the 'colleges of higher education' [hogescholen]¹⁴. A college of higher education offers bachelors programmes with a professional orientation. Academic education comprises bachelor and master courses, which are provided by universities. Only universities can award the degree of Doctor.^{15,16}

Universities and colleges of higher education cooperate intensively through the so-called "associations".¹⁷ These are official entities regulating cooperation. Members of the association – consisting of at least one university and one college of higher education – may transfer their powers regarding education, scientific research and social society services to this association.

The establishment of associations has emphasized the trend towards big higher education institutions in Flanders. Together with the increase of university students through the democratisation process of higher education, we can speak of a 'mass education' culture. Except for some specific educational programmes¹⁸, bachelor's programmes at universities in Flanders are open for everyone with a diploma in secondary education. This gives almost everyone the opportunity to enrol in university programmes.

Universities offer academic bachelor's courses that prepare students for master courses. Academic courses centre on general training and focus on the acquisition of academic or artistic knowledge. They make students acquire competences which they must have in order to function in the field of sciences or the arts. The student workload of a bachelor course is at least 180 ECTS¹⁹ credits which correspond to three years of full-time study.

After obtaining an academic bachelor, most students continue their academic trajectory by enrolling in a masters programme. The two most common types of masters programmes are the Master of Arts (MA) and the Master of Science (MSc). The MA and MSc are typical graduate degrees involving

¹² Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation [Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie] NVAO, 2013

¹³ NVAO, 2013

¹⁴ Sometimes also translated as 'university colleges'. To avoid confusion, 'a college of higher education' is used throughout the document to refer to a 'hogeschool'.

¹⁵ Flemish government, 2008, p. 34

¹⁶ Department of Education and Training (DET), 2013a

¹⁷ The associations are (Flanders Knowledge Area, 2013b):

- Antwerp University Association: <http://www.associatie-antwerpen.be>
- Brussels University Association: <http://www.universitaireassociatiebrussel.be>
- Ghent University Association: <http://www.augent.be>
- K.U.Leuven Association: <http://www.associatie.kuleuven.be>
- Limburg University Association: <http://www.auhl.be>

¹⁸ Some educational programmes, like medicine and dentistry, require an entrance exam.

¹⁹ European Credit Transfer System

lectures, examinations and a dissertation (see supra section 2.2. for a more in depth overview of the different types of master programmes offered at universities).

Lastly, there is the MRes, which will be discussed in the following section. The Flemish government has made it possible to organise masters of research in Flanders since 2013. At the moment of writing, the only Flemish university that offered an MRes programme is the Catholic University of Leuven.

5.1 Bruges

Although the number of students is rising steadily, Bruges still struggles with problems like brain drain and an ageing population. It has one of the lowest number of students compared to other Flemish student cities. In 2011, 5.1% of the population of Bruges were students.²⁰ After Turnhout, this is the lowest number in Flanders. The City Council of Bruges has however made a remarkable effort to attract more students and to make Bruges more attractive for its current students.

The College of Europe and UNU-CRIS are universities located in Bruges. Although both institutes are centres of excellence, they are quite isolated from the rest of the research institutes and universities in Flanders. Introducing an MRes programme in Bruges, together with these institutes, would already tackle this isolation. Both institutes have shown their interest in cooperating with other universities to introduce this MRes.

The College of Europe is specialised in European Studies, while UNU-CRIS specialises in Regional Integration Studies. Both institutes could offer an added value to a Master of Research. The institutes could for example provide courses on their topic of expertise, on research methods or even provide research projects for students.

Together with the two colleges of higher education, Vives and Howest, the College of Europe offers student services for certain activities and problems such as: studying with a disability, student housing, sports and culture, mobility, and psychosocial problems.²¹ Cooperative structures for these matters could easily be established between all parties. Finally, there is a specific project set up by the College that will be of interest to our future international students; i.e. having lunch on Sundays with a host family in Bruges. It is a way for foreign students to interact with locals, get to know the local culture and traditions, and practice their Dutch.

The City Council of Bruges has made a remarkable effort to attract more students and to make Bruges more attractive for its current students. It tries to profile its city as a student city and collaborates with Howest, Vives and the College of Europe. They organise a lot of activities for students. There is, for example, at least one free sporting activity per month, a photo contest, a students on ice event and a traditional student welcome festival. On their website, the city announces when and where students can study together. Usually this is at the facilities of Vives or Howest. The city of Bruges also offers a discount card for several bars, restaurants, associations and cultural activities. The city also offers the possibility to rent a cheap room in Bruges. They suggest to rent a room via the website 'Kotwest', a website that brings students and landlords together.²² Finally, several student associations are active in Bruges, both from Vives and Howest. They organise all sorts of leisure activities.

²⁰ Youth Council of Bruges [Brugse Stedelijke Jeugdraad], 2011

²¹ City of Bruges, 2014

²² <http://www.kotwest.be/>

The societal value of social science knowledge and research is underestimated. However, social problems are often valued as more important than technological problems. Disciplines from the social sciences often provide an explanation for these social problems and can sometimes lead to a solution. Many academics have argued that social sciences have a major impact on public policy as they help policy makers to make effective policy decisions, contribute to the evolution of new markets and economic prosperity, can have a fundamental role in minimising the negative social effects of technological change, and make the public more informed about policy issues, innovation processes and economic and social changes. Scholars have expressed the need to make the societal value of social sciences more visible and relevant.^{23,24,25,26,27}

Besides the fact that social sciences are undervalued, they also have to deal with other problems.²⁸ Compared to the natural sciences, social sciences have significantly less human and financial resources. They are still conducted within disciplinary boundaries, schools are competitive, researchers have to deal with publication pressure, there is a lack of adequate quality control, etc.²⁹

In order to tackle these problems, the BRIOSS³⁰ scientific committee suggests a shift from a disciplinary research agenda to a problem-driven agenda, from publication-driven research to change-generating research and from reactive research to proactive research.³¹ Also in general, social science teaching should include more research methods, a concern also expressed by the International Social Science Council of UNESCO and the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences (KNAW). Social sciences should also be introduced into other disciplines and should themselves transcend their disciplinary boundaries and use a multi- or interdisciplinary approach.

Lastly, social sciences should transcend their local boundaries. Social science researchers focus mostly on local issues and too often the nation state is subject of research. This is due to budgetary constraints, institutional problems and preferences, fragmentary knowledge creation and the gap between knowledge and practice.³² They should rather broaden their scope to encompass today's globalised world. Social sciences should be in a position to further people's understanding of current societal changes and to contribute to the tackling of major local and global challenges in an integrated approach.³³ It is very likely that globalisation and its consequences will be at the core of future research. Education should therefore play a key role in raising awareness of global challenges.

²³ Bastow, Dunleavy & Tinkler, 2011

²⁴ Van Langenhove, 2007, pp. 137-146

²⁵ Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2012

²⁶ Verlaeck & Vitorino, 2002

²⁷ Van Langenhove, 2012

²⁸ Marar, 2013

²⁹ Van Langenhove, 2007, pp. 137-138

³⁰ Bruges' Research Initiative for Opening the Social Sciences

³¹ Vuijlsteke, 2000, pp. 33-38

³² Vuijlsteke, 2000, pp. 33-38

³³ Van Langenhove, 2012

To sum up, there are a number of challenges in Flemish higher education: a) the need for more research oriented and research based education, b) the need for more programmes with an international profile, c) the need for more interdisciplinary teaching, d) the need to take two centres of excellence in Bruges out of their isolated position, and e) the need to address the bottlenecks in the field of social sciences.

One way to cope with these challenges is by introducing a Master of Research in Social Sciences and Global Challenges in Bruges.

7.1 What is an MRes?

A Master of Research (MRes)³⁴ differs from regular masters in the sense that it has a stronger emphasis on research. Usually about two thirds of the study programme must involve research courses.^{35,36} The MRes belong to the group of research masters, which consists of an MRes and a Master of Philosophy (MPhil). These masters should prepare students for their career as a scientific researcher or a PhD student. The duration of an MRes can vary from one to two years and the courses are usually, but not necessarily, taught in English. The MRes dissertation is very demanding. Some universities even demand that it meets the quality requirements to be published in a scientific journal.

This type of master is also characterised by its small scale. The Social Sciences Council of the Royal Dutch Academy of Science for example aims to obtain a minimum number of 15 students and a maximum of 23. The small scale incentivises students to interact and debate more than the average student. It is common for MRes students to work in seminars where they can conduct research, present results and debate about it. This provides a solid foundation to obtain a critical, scientific way of thinking.³⁷

MRes students must have a genuine interest in research and possess excellent research qualifications. Therefore universities set up entry requirements. These can differ from university to university, but they are usually based on the student's results, his/her motivation, and if applicable, his/her bachelor's thesis.³⁸ Besides the students' level of education, universities also set high requirements regarding their staff. Most of the universities want a minimum of half of the teaching staff to be professors.³⁹

7.2 MRes compared to other postgraduate programmes

Aside from research masters, other types of masters include: initial university masters (such as Master of Laws (LLM), Master of Arts (MA), Master of Science (MSc)), post initial masters (such as Master of

³⁴ In the Netherlands and Belgium they are referred to as research masters, whereas in the UK they are called 'masters by research' or a 'masters of research'. The term 'Master of Research' is used here to avoid confusion.

³⁵ The average programme of a 2-year MRes is composed as follows: taught modules (43 ECTS), research modules (28 ECTS of which 6 on qualitative methods, 16 on quantitative and 6 for other courses), skills (8 ECTS), internship (9 ECTS), master thesis (26 ECTS) and a remaining course of choice (6 ECTS) (Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences [Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen] (KNAW), 2007).

³⁶ Curtin University, 2014

³⁷ Maastricht University, 2013

³⁸ University of Amsterdam, 2013

³⁹ KNAW, 2007

Business Administration (MBA), Master of Health Administration (MHA), etc.) and the advanced master (this type of master requires the possession of a master diploma and fulfilment of admission criteria). The table below provides an overview of these types of masters. This list is non-exhaustive.

Table 1. Overview of types of masters

Initial university master		
LLM	Master of Laws	For finalised law studies at a university
MA	Master of Arts	For studies in humanities
MSc	Master of Science	For studies in applied, exact or social sciences
Research master		
MPhil	Master of Philosophy	Post initial research master at a university, specifically preparing for a PhD
MRes	MScRes Master of Arts by Research	Initial Master of Research at a university
	MaRes Master of Sciences by Research	Initial Master of Research at a university
Post initial masters (2 examples)		
MBA	Master of Business Administration	For business administration or management-related training
MBI	Master of Business Informatics	Post initial training in business computing
Advanced masters (2 examples)		
MPA	Master of Public Administration	Public administration training specifically focused on the public sector
MPH	Master of Public Health	Policy and management training in the field of public health

The MRes can be considered as something between a regular master and a PhD or MPhil. It consists of both taught and research modules and offers an opportunity to students who want to work at research institutes. It allows students to specialise in their field of study without having to obtain an MPhil or a PhD. Yet, it is considered as a good preparation programme for a Master of Philosophy (MPhil)⁴⁰ or a PhD.⁴¹ After all, it offers an opportunity to both develop a greater in-depth knowledge about the subject of the Master of Research and it broadens the student's experience and skills in conducting scientific research.⁴² The MRes makes it possible for students to discover whether the particular study and research area suites them for future endeavours.

The MRes diploma is not meant to be a precondition for further postgraduate studies. Universities could nevertheless opt to shorten a PhD programme if the student has obtained an MRes degree, as these students are considered to be more motivated and skilled in conducting research. Some universities allow students who have obtained an MRes degree to shorten their PhD programmes by one year.^{43,44}

⁴⁰ In most cases, an MPhil consists only of a thesis. Sometimes this type of master serves as a provisional enrolment to start a PhD.

⁴¹ Catholic University of Leuven (KULeuven), 2012

⁴² University of Chester, 2014

⁴³ Tilburg University, 2014

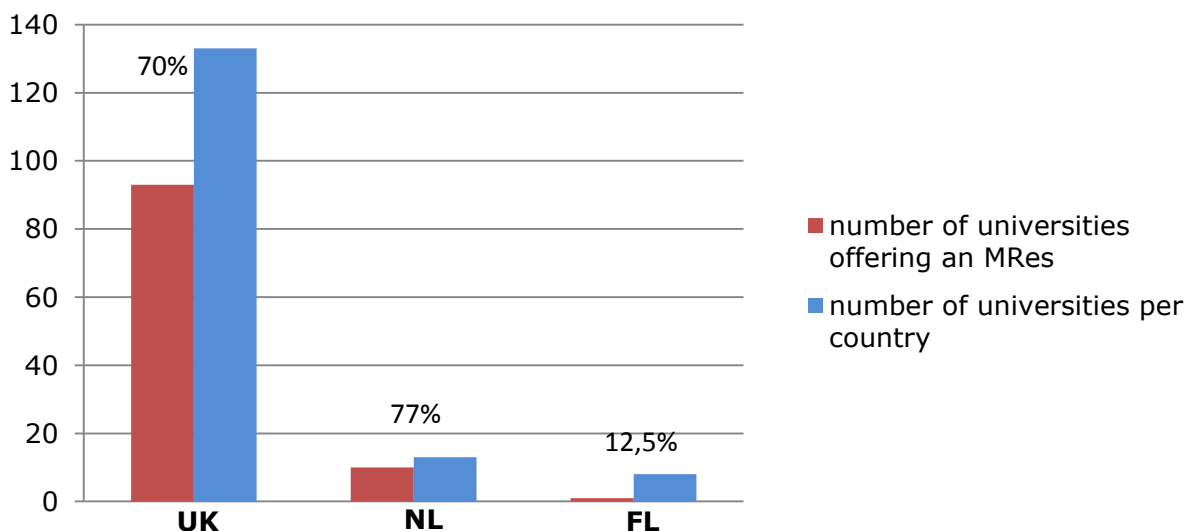
⁴⁴ KNAW, 2007

7.3 Trends of MRes in other countries

Compared to countries such as the Netherlands or the United Kingdom (UK), there is a clear lack of masters of research in Flanders. This is clearly illustrated in the graph below where the availability figures are presented. The reason behind this comparison with the UK and the Netherlands is threefold. First, a limitation in the number of comparable countries was necessary, in order not to lose focus and to save time. The UK was chosen, because its market share of international students is increasing, and the Netherlands, because their academic excellence, as well as their market share of international students is increasing (see *infra*, figure 4, p. 26). Lastly, because both countries are geographically very close to Flanders.

The graph below shows how Flanders is lagging behind. In the UK 93 universities out of 133 (70%) offer about 876 masters of research. Also in the Netherlands, 10 out of 13 (77%) universities offer about 182 masters of research.

Figure 1. Number of universities offering an MRes (UK, NL & FL)



The only university in Flanders that offers an MRes is the Catholic University of Leuven (KULeuven). They provide an MRes in law in cooperation with Tilburg University (NL). Since 2007, law students have two graduation options; the specialisation in law and the specialisation MRes in Law. According to these institutions the students of the MRes have an equal or even better opportunity on the labour market than students of the regular master. Only 24 students are selected for the MRes: 8 foreign students, 8 students from Leuven and 8 students from Tilburg.⁴⁵ KULeuven is gaining even more ground in this area as they have submitted 14 extra applications for new masters of research.⁴⁶ The fact that Flanders has such a low number of masters of research may result in a competitive disadvantage in the field of higher education, not only on an international level, but also on a European one.

The Netherlands started introducing masters of research in 2003. The growth of masters of research was encouraged, because there was a need to fulfil the demand for more researchers. As indicated in

⁴⁵ KULeuven, 2013

⁴⁶ Ysebaert, 2013

the table below, the number of students enrolling in an MRes in the Netherlands has been rising steadily.⁴⁷

Table 2. Number of students enrolled in an MRes (2005-2009)⁴⁸

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
(Bio)medical Sciences	75	115	171	190	217	768
Behavioural Sciences	210	262	309	353	404	1538
Earth Sciences	6	7	26	8	7	54
Humanities	343	371	414	507	522	2157
Social Sciences	202	207	268	304	378	1359
Total	836	962	1188	1362	1528	5876
<i>% of MA population</i>	4%	3%	3%	4%	4%	4%

The MRes in the Netherlands has a high return. The average maximum number of students for an MRes is 23, the minimum 15. Almost all of the students who register, graduate in the normal time period.⁴⁹ Attrition rates (measured in the period 2005-2009) are relatively low.⁵⁰ It ranges from 11% after one year to 17% after four years. As is shown in the figure below, 76% of the students graduate within 24 months.⁵¹ KNAW also estimates that the MRes has a higher return than other masters.

⁴⁷ David & Van der Spek, 2012, p. 21

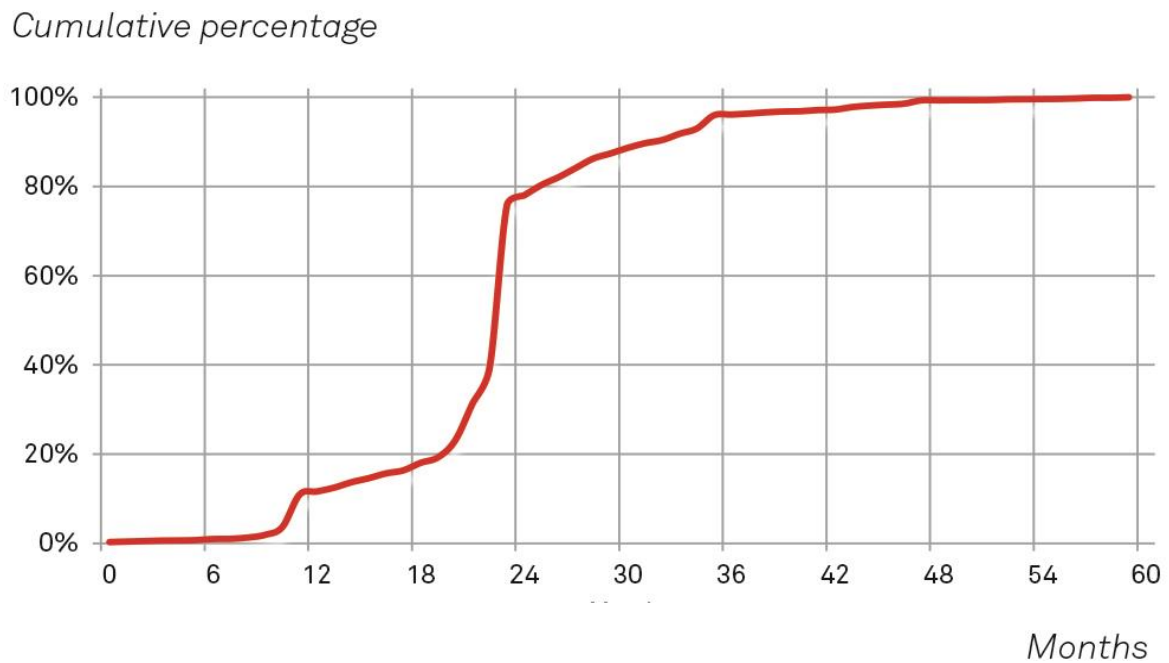
⁴⁸ David & Van der Spek, 2012, p. 21

⁴⁹ KNAW, 2007

⁵⁰ The most common reasons given for students leaving the programme are: “personal problems, following courses or doing an internship at a university outside the Netherlands, a job offer or being admitted to a PhD programme” (David & Van der Spek, 2012, p. 23).

⁵¹ Cumulative percentage of graduates over 1-60 months (n=2788) (David & Van der Spek, 2012, p. 24).

Figure 2. Cumulative percentage of graduates over 1-60 months (n=2788)⁵²



Masters of research usually tend to have a high intake of international students. In the Netherlands this intake was 36% for the MRes in 2009⁵³, whereas figures from 2011 indicate that of all students enrolled in regular master's programmes, 15% are international students. The proportion of international students in the MRes is more than twice as high. This clearly shows that masters of research greatly contribute to a university's international profile.

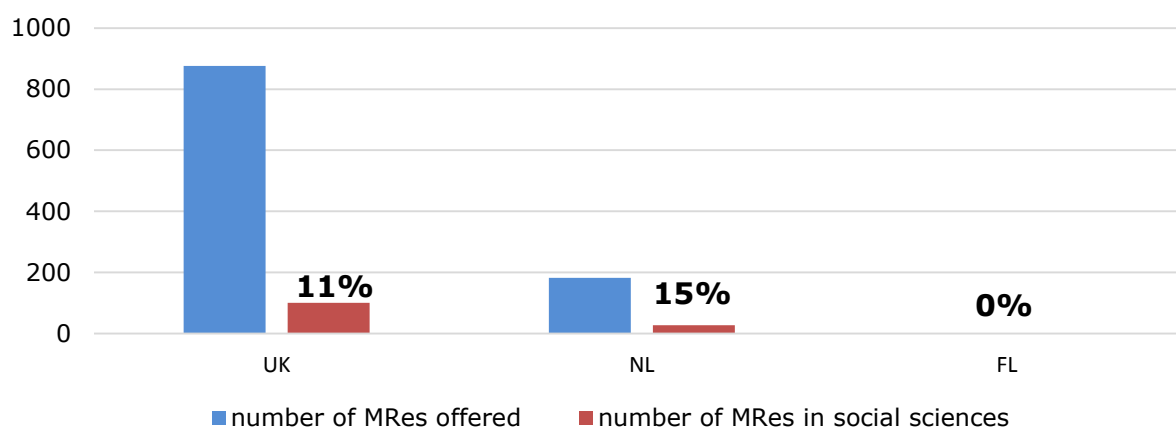
⁵² David & Van der Spek, 2012, p. 24

⁵³ David & Van der Spek, 2012, p. 23

8 Master of Research in Social Sciences and Global Challenges

In Belgium's neighbouring countries the MRes in social sciences and the masters of research in general have a high success rate. In the Netherlands for example, the MRes in Social Sciences is quite popular.⁵⁴ In 2009, the average number of students enrolled in an MRes in Social Sciences was 17.⁵⁵ Also the number of masters of research in social sciences is relatively high, as shown in figure 4: 11% in the UK and 15% in the Netherlands. The success of masters of research in social sciences in the neighbouring countries should stimulate Flanders to introduce more programmes.

Figure 3. Number of MRes in Social Sciences offered (UK, NL, FL)



The introduction of an MRes in Social Sciences and Global Challenges would tackle some specific bottlenecks from the previous sections. It should already be clear that an MRes would comply with the trends towards more research oriented education, more interdisciplinarity and more internationalisation.

Secondly, it would address some of the challenges in the field of social sciences. With a specific focus on global challenges, the scope of the social sciences would be broadened, the research agenda would be more problem driven and could generate (global) change. The MRes would shape attitudes and behaviours that can make a difference in how we deal with global challenges and can result in a global civic responsibility amongst students.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs defines a global challenge as “any major trend, shock, or development that has the potential for serious global impacts”.⁵⁶ Global challenges can thus encompass many things. One could take the millennium development goals (MDG) or the more recent sustainable development goals as an example. The millennium development goals were set in 2000 to accelerate global development and include: the eradication of extreme hunger and poverty; achievement of universal primary education; promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women; reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and a global partnership

⁵⁴ See table on page 22.

⁵⁵ There is however a relatively high standard deviation, which implies that the number of entrants is not centred around the average, but there is a large spread (David & Van der Spek, 2012, p. 22).

⁵⁶ Gelsdorf, 2010, p. 4

for development.⁵⁷ At the Rio+20 summit, the UN decided to set up sustainable development goals (SDG) to build upon the MDG. The process of developing these goals is still ongoing at the moment of writing.⁵⁸ KPMG, a private think tank, also lists some global issues which will have an enormous impact. They focus on climate change, water scarcity, material resource scarcity, population growth, energy and fuel, wealth, urbanisation, ecosystem decline and deforestation.⁵⁹

The millennium project⁶⁰, to give a last example, also focuses on 15 global challenges: sustainable development and climate change, clean water, population and resources, democratisation, long-term perspectives, global governance of IT, rich-poor gap, health issues, capacity to decide, peace and conflict, status of women, transnational organised crime, energy, science and technology and global ethics. Other global challenges that can be added to the list are: financial and economic crises, migration, food crises, cyber criminality, etc. It should be clear that this is a non-exhaustive list and that global challenges can span a wide range of subjects.

These challenges could be transformed into questions such as: “How can sustainable development be achieved for all, while addressing global climate change? How can transnational organized crime networks be stopped from becoming more powerful and sophisticated global enterprises?”.⁶¹ Definite course subjects or possible research questions are to be decided on in a later phase of the preparations by the partners involved.

A thematic focus on global challenges would also allow for the two centres of excellence located in Bruges to deliver a substantial contribution to the programme.

8.1 The College of Europe⁶²

The College of Europe is an international university attracting students from various countries to follow specialised postgraduate European studies. The College selects students to prepare them for leadership functions. Going from European law to administrative courses, the College could be an important partner to organise the MRes in Bruges. The new master students in Bruges could greatly benefit from its enormous network of professors and EU professionals. The College is always able to attract prominent international figures to give lectures to students. In the past they have invited François Mitterand, Margaret Thatcher, Jacques Delors, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, José Manuel Barosso and Xi Jinping. Also the library of the College, which is already available to UNU-CRIS personnel, can become part of a big network of university libraries in Bruges.

Furthermore, a network between the students of the College and the MRes can be established, where knowledge and experiences are exchanged in a multicultural and international environment. The development office of the College, for example, organises different activities alongside the educational programmes, which can be attended by all. The presence of the College in Bruges would certainly contribute to the intellectual development of the MRes students.

⁵⁷ United Nations, 2014a

⁵⁸ United Nations, 2014b

⁵⁹ KPMG, 2012, pp. 2-3

⁶⁰ The Millennium project is an independent non-profit global participatory futures research think tank of futurists, scholars, business planners, and policy makers who work for international organisations, governments, corporations, NGOs, and universities (The Millennium Project, 2011a).

⁶¹ The Millennium Project, 2011b, para. 7

⁶² <https://www.coleurope.eu/>

8.2 United Nations University – Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies⁶³

UNU-CRIS is one of the research institutes of the United Nations (UN), located in Bruges. It is specialised in studying the processes and consequences of regional integration and cooperation, and has a lot of expertise in cross-national academic cooperation.

The network of UNU-CRIS is remarkable; it has close ties with the UN, the other UNU institutes across the world, regional organisations like the European Union, the African Union, etc., the College of Europe and other universities all over the world. The overall mission of the United Nations University is to conduct research on pressing global issues. Policy makers at an international level (e.g. UN) and national level can use the research undertaken to set up policy programmes or formulate recommendations to various stakeholders.

UNU-CRIS cooperates with other universities in different programmes, research projects and summer schools. It offers, for example, a joint Master Programme with the University of Maastricht, and it co-organises a Doctoral Summer School with the University Andina Simon Bolivar in Quito, Ecuador.

The comparative research conducted at UNU-CRIS ranges from regional integration to human security, from international trade to health care policies in the south, and from transnational policy networks to circular migration. Each year, researchers and interns from all over the world come to UNU-CRIS to gather work experience in the field of regionalism studies, while enriching the research institute with different perspectives, experiences and knowledge.

8.3 Why Flanders needs more research oriented education

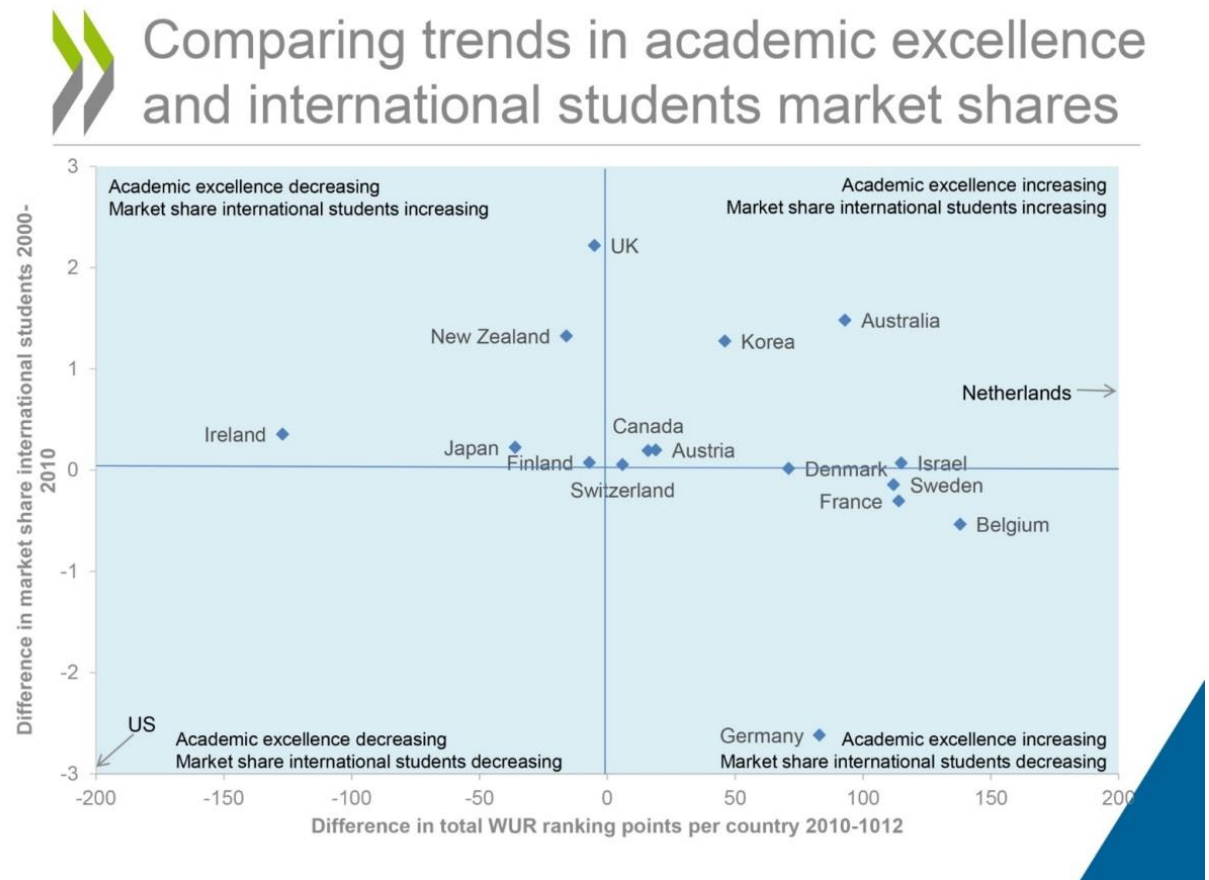
Belgium ranks relatively well on the knowledge economic index (KEI)⁶⁴ of the World Bank, but it shows that Belgium is becoming less knowledge intensive. Belgium also scores below the OECD average of total spending on research and development.⁶⁵ Other OECD figures indicate that the Belgian market share of international students is decreasing (see figure 3). There is room for improvement, and the introduction of Masters of Research can be part of a new strategy for Flemish higher education.

⁶³ <http://www.cris.unu.edu>

⁶⁴ “The Knowledge Economy Index (KEI) takes into account whether the environment is conducive for knowledge to be used effectively for economic development. It is an aggregate index that represents the overall level of development of a country or region towards the Knowledge Economy. The KEI is calculated based on the average of the normalized performance scores of a country or region on all 4 pillars related to the knowledge economy - economic incentive and institutional regime, education and human resources, the innovation system and ICT” (The World Bank Group, 2012).

⁶⁵ OECD, 2013, pp. 62-63

Figure 4. Comparing trends in academic excellence and international students market shares⁶⁶



There is almost no offer of masters of research in Flanders. The KULeuven is the only exception in Flanders with their MRes in law. They have also submitted requests for new Masters of Research, one of which is in the field of social sciences. At the moment of writing, these requests are still pending.⁶⁷ In Flanders, 40 students can be submitted for an MRes each year, spread over all Flemish universities.⁶⁸

Introducing more MRes programmes would greatly benefit Flanders on a European and international level. By not acting, Flanders runs the risk of leaving this field open to other international actors losing out on ambitious national and international students. It would also respond to the three current trends in higher education: the need for more research oriented education, the trend towards interdisciplinarity and the fast process of internationalisation.

The Flemish government already intends to reinforce the international climate/character of Flemish higher education. Not only does it want to focus on the '20-20-20-objective'⁶⁹, it also wants to make internationalisation an integral part of Flemish higher education institutions. The government

⁶⁶ Van Damme, 2014b, p. 46

⁶⁷ KULeuven, 2013

⁶⁸ Vercruyse, 2014

⁶⁹ The focus on achieving European targets of 20% of graduates with experience acquired abroad by 2020 (DET, 2013a).

recognises the importance of improving the international climate in the institutions, and on the international dimension reflected in the learning outcomes of the programmes and courses.⁷⁰

“Internationalisation is an indispensable aspect of the character of our age. In education and higher education, internationalisation plays an important role. That’s why our higher education must respond to the worldwide trend for internationalisation to guarantee the place of Flanders and Brussels within a globalised knowledge society. [...] On the one hand, Flemish higher education must have the opportunities and the necessary competitiveness to attract talent from elsewhere, and on the other we need highly educated Flemish students who make their way into international institutions, industries, research centres, etc. [...] On my initiative regulations have been adapted, allowing our universities and university colleges⁷¹ to offer more courses in other languages”

Pascal Smet, Flemish Minister of Education.⁷²

In this regard, the Flemish government supports initiatives such as international summer schools and intensive programmes. It also promotes student and teacher mobility, increased synergies and international cooperation between academic institutions, increasing the appeal of Flemish higher education, etc.⁷³

Furthermore, the Flemish government aims to support foreign students through grants, in order to boost the attractiveness of Flemish higher education. International students that come to Flanders, mostly to follow a bachelor’s degree, master’s degree or PhD programme in a language other than Dutch, offer an added value to Flemish higher education. Important elements include the interaction between Flemish students and staff, and the transfer of knowledge and expertise. Attracting outstanding international students is especially interesting for institutions of Higher Education in this regard. After they complete their studies, students that return to their home country can act as ‘ambassadors for Flanders’. Their introduction to Flanders can even lead to the development or reinforcement of economic, social and political ties.⁷⁴

In the Netherlands, between 2005 and 2009, 40% of the students of the MRes in social sciences, for example, were international students.⁷⁵ An MRes would clearly meet the demand for more international oriented, English educational programmes; upgrade the international profile of the Flemish higher educational landscape; and would meet the expected trend of a larger demand for students who possess excellent research skills.^{76,77}

⁷⁰ DET, 2013a, pp. 8-13

⁷¹ Here: colleges of higher education

⁷² DET, 2013a, p. 8

⁷³ DET, 2013a, p. 41

⁷⁴ DET, 2013a, p. 41

⁷⁵ David & Van der Spek, 2012, p. 23

⁷⁶ DG Research, 2009; International Social Science Council, 2010

⁷⁷ International Social Science Council, 2010

In Belgium, the Communities are competent in educational policy, including higher education.⁷⁸ In general, the Flemish government strongly encourages student mobility, wants to attract more foreign students and wants to become a knowledge economy. Flanders Knowledge Area^{79,80} for example promotes incoming student mobility through their website ‘Study in Flanders’⁸¹ and it supports the internationalisation of Flemish higher education through various projects.⁸² The action plan of the Flemish government ‘Brains on the Move’ contains initiatives that should contribute to the further development of an international and high-quality Flemish higher education. The following proposals in the action plan connect well to the idea of setting up an MRes⁸³:

- *“courses should be organised in association with international partners*
- *courses should deal with international elements*
- *international projects as an assignment for a course*
- *structurally employing foreign guest teachers*
- *making the curriculum more international*
- *organising international summer schools and other intensive programmes, etc.”*

One of the possible constraints in this objective however might be the protection of the Dutch language in higher education. “The Dutch language is legally defined as both the management language and the teaching language in institutions of higher education in the Flemish Community”. Exceptions for bachelor’s and master’s courses are however possible, for example in programmes aimed especially at foreign students. In that case, an equivalent study programme needs to be provided in Dutch.⁸⁴

To overcome this constraint, an application can be submitted for an exemption from the equivalence condition, provided that the bachelor’s or master’s programme is offered together with a partner outside the Flemish Community.⁸⁵ An educational programme is considered to be in English if 18,33% of all courses are taught in English. To be more competitive on an international scale Flanders should offer more higher educational programmes in English.

The shift towards more international and research-oriented education is also being stimulated at the European level.

⁷⁸ De Wit, 2006, p. 1

⁷⁹ Flanders Knowledge Area is an independent agency for the internationalisation of Flemish higher education. It is supported by the Flemish Department of Education and Training and the Department of Flanders International.

⁸⁰ De Vereniging van Universiteiten (VSNU), 2012

⁸¹ Flanders Knowledge Area, 2014a

⁸² Flanders Knowledge Area, 2014b

⁸³ DET, 2013b, p. 39

⁸⁴ Flemish Parliament, 2013a

⁸⁵ DET, 2014

The European high level group on the modernisation of higher education, for example, published a report for the EC on improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education which includes specific recommendations:⁸⁶

- *Higher education institutions should introduce and **promote cross-, trans- and interdisciplinary approaches** to teaching, learning and assessment, helping students develop their breadth of understanding and entrepreneurial and innovative mind-sets.*
- Higher education institutions should develop and implement holistic **internationalisation strategies as an integral part of their overall mission** and functions. Increased mobility of student and staff, international dimension of curricula, international experience of faculty, with a sufficient command of English and a second foreign language and intercultural competences, transnational delivery of courses and degrees, and international alliances should become indispensable components of higher education in Europe and beyond.

These recommendations are relevant for the MRes in social sciences and global challenges, as the programme has an interdisciplinary approach, is taught in English and contributes to an increased student and staff mobility.

It also fits the proposed strategy by the European Research Area (ERA) to strengthen the three poles of Europe's knowledge triangle (education, research and innovation). Europe has few researchers employed compared to countries such as Canada, South Korea, the US and Japan. The EU could therefore meet the challenge to provide good (doctoral) researchers by setting up more MRes programmes.

One of the bottlenecks for European universities expressed by the EC is the uniformity in higher education. A second one is that university programmes remain fragmented and insulated, partly because the instruction language is usually in the mother tongue.⁸⁷ Since the new MRes in Bruges would be unique in subject and offered in English, these two bottlenecks would be addressed.

Finally, the European Research Area Board recommends that Europe should take the lead in tackling global challenges.⁸⁸

"We are concerned by the fractured state of the ERA today: (it is) still too much driven by inward national policies (...) In view of the challenges our planet and Europe faces, we must act and act now. Otherwise, Europe will not only become marginalised in a global market, but will fail to contribute to solving our greatest challenges."

A new educational programme in Flanders must be accredited by the NVAO. The accreditation serves as a quality label and is valid for six years.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ High level group on the modernisation of higher education, 2013, pp. 64-67

⁸⁷ European Commission, 2005, pp. 3-4, 11

⁸⁸ Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2012, p. 5

⁸⁹ In case an educational programme does not receive any accreditation the institute offering the programme has the possibility to appeal within two years. During this period students are not able to register for the educational programme. In case the accreditation is not granted, the financing of the educational programme will stop, the right to obtain a recognised diploma expires, the registration of the educational programme in the central register of higher educational programmes will expire, the institute must assure that students that are enrolled can continue their studies in another educational programme, the right of financing for students expires and financial support for public transport expires (Van Oosterhout, 2014).

The decree stipulating the accreditation requirements also provides learning outcomes for both bachelor's and master's degrees.⁹⁰ These involve competences such as: critical reflection, creativity, knowledge of research methods, insight in scientific knowledge, etc. The Flemish Government draws up a list - the central register of higher educational programmes - of bachelor's and master's programmes per institute. It consists of the different places where an institute can set up a certain programme.⁹¹

Goals should also be set regarding the number of students the institutions hope to prepare for a PhD after the MRes, the duration of this preparation and how the institutions will monitor the realisation of these goals and guard the quality. The accreditation of the NVAO thus depends on general qualitative criteria. In case the MRes will be offered as an expansion of an existing master programme, the decision concerning the expansion of the scope of master programmes is applicable.⁹²

As this new educational programme can also be provided in cooperation with a partner across the border, it might be important to know the conditions under which a joint educational programme can be set up in Flanders. These conditions are outlined in the decree of the 4th of April 2003 concerning the restructuring of higher education in Flanders.⁹³ Chapter five on cooperation agreements is of particular importance for this project. The Flemish government recognises the importance of international partnerships within higher education and promotes them through various mechanisms. Incentives to promote these partnerships include public funding for research activities, a tax advantage for companies that cooperate with universities and funding for Erasmus activities and programmes.⁹⁴

The master's programme could connect to many bachelor programmes in the social sciences from all over the world. In Flanders, all universities, except for KULAK and UHasselt, offer bachelor programmes in social sciences. The University of Ghent (UGent), together with the University of Brussels (VUB) have even launched the proposal to start a Bachelor of Science in Social Sciences (BScSS) offered in English. Because this programme also has a specific focus on conducting research within the field of social sciences – with the instruction language in English – it would be an excellent preparation for the MRes in social sciences and global challenges.

Clearly, the MRes in Social Sciences and Global Challenges would be an asset for the educational landscape of Flanders. Nevertheless, there appears to be little interest for Masters of Research by Flemish universities. Only KULeuven has shown interest in this matter, but other Flemish universities don't seem to see the added value of these types of masters. They would rather prefer to prolong the regular Master's programmes from one to two years, so that each Master's student has at least studied for five years.

⁹⁰ Flemish Parliament, 2013b

⁹¹ Flemish Parliament, 2013b

⁹² This decision allows programmes to extend from 60 ECTS to 90 or 120 ECTS. It also creates the possibility to offer a limited number of masters of research. The criteria for the expansion of masters of research are outlined in article 63quater of the decree on the restructuring of Flanders' educational landscape, namely: the expected flow to research careers at institutes of higher education should be indicated; the master should focus on the research priorities of higher education; and the expected end level of graduation should be as high as internationally expected (Flemish Parliament, 2013b).

⁹³ Articles 24bis, 24quater, 86, 94, 95 en 95bis1, en 63novies, 63decies of this decree stipulate these conditions (Flemish Parliament, 2013b).

⁹⁴ De Wit, 2006, p. 18

10 Conclusion

1. When compared to the rest of Europe, Flanders is lagging behind in the provision of Masters of Research.
2. But there seems to be a growing awareness of the need for more research-oriented education and a further internationalisation of higher education.
3. The European high level group on the modernisation of higher education is meanwhile calling for more international programmes as a tool to mobilise more brainpower in Europe.
4. Social Science scholars are expressing the need to make the social sciences more relevant and to tackle the bottlenecks in their field.
5. Globalisation and its consequences are likely to be at the core of future research, so education should play a key role in raising awareness of global challenges.
6. There is also growing local support in Bruges to develop higher education initiatives in the city.
7. Any initiative to start a Master of Research in Bruges needs to be taken by one or several of the Flemish universities, preferably with local higher educational partners.
8. Except for KULeuven that has one MRes in Law and 14 applications for new Research Masters pending, no Flemish university has shown interest in offering Masters of Research (yet).
9. It is therefore very unlikely to see a Master of Research in Social Sciences and Global Challenges come about in Bruges any time soon. New developments in higher education however will pressure institutions in Flanders further to develop and diversify their curricula in the future. To meet this challenge Flanders should invest in greater research opportunities for its students.

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12 List of abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BScSS	Bachelor of Science in Social Science
CRAC	Careers Research & Advisory Centre
DET	Department of Education and Training
DG	Directorate-General
DSA	Data, Studie en Advies [Data, Study and Advice]
EC	European Commission
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EEA	European Economic Area
ERA	European Research Area
EU	European Union
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
Howest	Hogeschool West-Vlaanderen [College of higher education West-Flanders]
KEI	Knowledge Economic Index
KNAW	Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen [Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences]
KULeuven	Katholieke Universiteit Leuven [Catholic University of Leuven]
MA	Master of Arts
MPhil	Master of Philosophy
MRes	Master of Research
MSc	Master of Science
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NL	The Netherlands
NVAO	Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie [Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation]
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
SMI	Skills Mismatch Index
SC	Sciences
UC	University College
UCR	University College Roosevelt
UGent	University of Ghent
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNU-CRIS	United Nations University – Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies
US	United States
VUB	Vrije Universiteit Brussel [Free University Brussels]