

Two years or not two years that was the question

Marloes van Lierop

*Eindhoven University of
Technology*

Since the post graduate designer programmes stem from the university programme reductions in 1982, the question has arisen what should happen with their two-year duration after the latest university programme extensions. The results of a small opinion poll among OOTI's and ex-OOTI's about this subject are presented.

Introduction

Last year, most engineering programmes of the Dutch Universities of Technology were extended from 4 into 5 years. The objective of this governmental decision was, however, to reduce the time students actually spent in these programmes (at that time 5 and a half year on the average), in order to have the students funding reduced from 5 and a half year to 5 years. When converting their 4-year programmes into 5-year ones, the universities were instructed to strive for feasibility, hence no extra courses should be inserted. However, many departments embraced this opportunity and reorganised and slightly enhanced their programmes.

Since the post graduate designers programmes stem from a reverse action in 1982, namely the reduction of university programmes from 5 into 4 years, the question might pop up whether the duration of these two-years programmes should be adapted to the new situation.

In order to find out the OOTI's and ex-OOTI's opinion about this subject, the Daily Board of OOTI distributed a small questionnaire by electronic mail.

The Questionnaire

In an introductory text, the context and objectives of the questionnaire were explained. The following five possible alternatives were presented.

- (a) Students from the EUT who are admitted to the OOTI-programme do not need to do a final project in their engineering (masters) programme; instead, they receive both the Masters degree and the OOTI-certificate upon completion of the OOTI-programme.
- (b) The duration of the OOTI-programme is reduced to one and a half year, either by
 - 1 reducing the final OOTI-project from 9 into 3 months, or by
 - 2 reducing the coursework part by 6 months.
- (c) The duration of the OOTI-programme will vary from 1 to 2 years, depending on ones previous education.
- (d) The OOTI-programme remains two years for everyone who is admitted.

The form that had to be returned consisted of three input fields (academic background, both discipline and university, and entrance date

of the OOTI-programme), and two multiple choice questions (where explanatory notes were welcomed):

1. (only to be answered by those who previously concluded an academic engineering degree)
 Suppose you would have followed a 5-year academic programme, would you still have applied for the 2-year OOTI-programme?

- yes, because:
- no, because:
- uncertain

2. From the following alternatives I prefer:

- (a) EUT-students skip the masters project;
- (b.1) A half year reduction of the OOTI-programme at the cost of the final project;
- (b.2) A half year reduction of the OOTI-programme at the cost of the coursework part;
- (c) Flexible duration of OOTI-programme, depending on individual background;
- (d) Fixed 2-years duration for everyone.

Explanation/remarks:

Results

The email message was sent to 135 OOTI's and ex-OOTI's of the XOOTIC mailing list, about of which 52 responded, a response rate of 39 percent. 45 respondents received their academic education at a technical university, the other 7 at a general university.

Yes	Uncertain	No
32 (71 %)	13 (29 %)	- (0 %)

Table 1: Responses of first question

As shown in Table 1, of those 45 respondents with an engineering degree, 32 (71 %) stated that they would also have chosen for the OOTI-programme in the case their academic programme would have been 5 years instead of 4, where 13 (29 %) expressed uncertainty. For clarity, no one stated that OOTI would not have been an option in that case.

From the first category of people, those that would choose for OOTI again despite a previous 5-years engineering programme, the most frequently mentioned arguments were:

- The extension from 4 to 5 years is only a cosmetic operation; most of us did spend 5 or more years already in the 4-years programmes!
- The extra year in the engineering programmes can never meet the added value of an OOTI-programme, especially the practical component,

the personal development aspects, and the high level of the group assignments.

The people who were uncertain about their choice in this new situation almost unanimously expressed that much would depend on the actual implementation of the extra year and of the OOTI-programme. Shortly, if OOTI would still offer sufficient added value, most of them would again choose for OOTI.

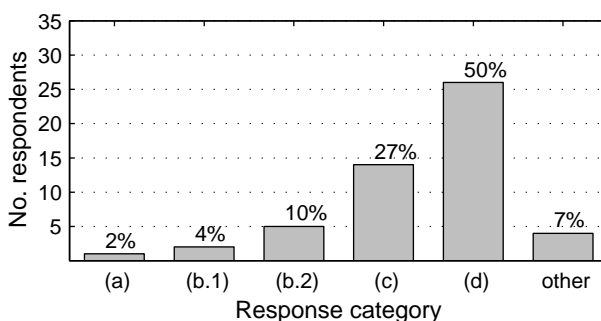


Figure 1 Responses of second question

The outcome of the second question is presented below and in Figure 1. For each alternative the number of respondents that chose that option is given, as well as the percentage (between parentheses). All 52 respondents answered this question.

- (a) EUT-students skip the masters project: 1 (2%)
- (b.1) Reduction programme at the cost of the final project: 2 (4%)
- (b.2) Reduction at the cost of the coursework part: 5 (10%)
- (c) Flexible duration of OOTI-programme: 14 (27%)
- (d) 2 years fixed : 26 (50%)
- other: 4 (7%)

Most respondents commented not only on their own choice, but also on the other options. In the sequel for each option the most frequently uttered comments will be presented.

(a) *EUT-students skip the masters project*

The main objections against option (a) were:

- An engineering degree at a true academic level requires a research oriented final project;
- Discrimination of graduates of other universities;
- Earning a masters degree should not depend on your success within the OOTI-programme;
- The experience gained in a masters project is important for a successful start in the OOTI-programme;

- Difficult to explain to the outside world.

(b.1) *A half year reduction of the OOTI-programma at the cost of the final project*

The main objections mentioned:

- Project organisation and start-up cost a lot of time but are very useful;
- Impossible to cover a complete development cycle

(b.2) *A half year reduction of the OOTI-programma at the cost of the coursework part*

Some of the people who were in favour of this option mentioned that the OOTI-programme should concentrate both on broadening aspects and on design education, hence the specific computing science blocks could be skipped, at least for students who have a computing science background.

On the other hand several opponents commented that this option would exclude non-computing science people! The most frequently mentioned objection was that the coursework part contributes substantially to the added value of OOTI and to the specific profile of its graduates, and hence it should not be reduced.

(c) *Flexible duration of OOTI-programme, depending on individual background*

Some of the arguments in favour of this option:

- In this way optimal linking up can be offered between the individual OOTI-programme and previous education;
- A shorter duration might attract more technical computing science students.

Main objections against this option:

- More difficult to attain the famous OOTI team spirit;
- More variation in the graduate's profile.

(d) *Fixed 2-years duration for everyone.*

Both some supporters and opponents of this option argued that the OOTI-programme should have no overlap with the regular engineering programmes and should have a very well-defined added value.

Main comments of the supporters:

- Questionable whether the extra year in the engineering programmes will cause substantial changes in the contents;
- Even in the case that new elements are inserted in the extra year, then still a wide range of other subjects can be considered to be newly inserted in the OOTI-programme;
- Questionable whether reduction of the OOTI-programme would attract more students.

other

Some respondents commented that a combination of (b.1) and (b.2) would be a reasonable compromise: both the coursework part and the final project reduced by three months.

Concluding remarks

The Daily Board of OOTI has discussed the results in its meeting in Januari. They concluded that the option of skipping the masters project for EUT students who enter the OOTI-programme is a very bad idea. Furthermore, most (ex-)OOTI's prefer a two-year duration of the course, regardless of the recent extension of the engineering programmes. However, a necessary condition is that the OOTI-programme has a clear added value. This requires both a substantial coursework part, contributing to the specific profile of the OOTI-graduates, but also some flexibility in order to prevent overlap with ones previous education.

Hence, the current organisation of the programme seems to be satisfactory to most respondents:

- The coursework part is separated into two parts: a substantial part that is obligatory for every OOTI, contributing highly to the programme's added value and the graduate's profile, and an individual programme that either consists of application blocks (computing science students) or of a condensed preparatory phase for those students needing augmentation of their computing science knowledge and experience;
- Everyone spends at least two years in the programme;
- The final project takes 9 months;
- Flexibility is offered towards students who have to do a preparatory phase, in order to have an optimal linking with one's background. In case the scope of the preparatory individual programme of a student exceeds the available time, part of the work has to be fulfilled in advance, extra to the two years that stand for the current programme.

Finally, the Daily Board of OOTI would like to express its gratitude for the large response. The response rate was very high (especially considering the short deadline that was provided) as was the willingness to elucidate on the arguments pro and contra certain options. This again demonstrates the ongoing involvement of the graduates in OOTI. □

Overview latest OOTI reports

The post-masters programme OOTI is concluded with a design project. The final reports of these projects are in general publicly available. The following reports have been published lately.

1. Algra, E. en M. Boosten
Besturings- en Analyse software voor een Akoestische Viscositeitsmeter
keywords: Akoestische viscositeitsmeter
ISBN: 90-5282-707-9, 135 p., November 1996
2. Lamerikx, F. en H. Visser
A DICOM Protocol Analyser
keywords: protocol analyser/digital imaging
ISBN: 90-5282-708-7, 44 p., December 1996
3. Jacobs, H.S.
Design of a Collaborative Virtual Environment Application
keywords: Virtual reality / Collaborative Virtual Environments / Teleworking
ISBN: 90-5282-710-9, 69 p., December 1996
4. Beek, J. van, en H. van Woerkom
Distribution of Multimedia Applications
keywords: Multimedia / CD-I / Remote control
ISBN: 90-5282-709-5, 39 p., October 1996
5. Sliva, J. en H. Hollenberg
SCOPE. Simulation of Cluster Aggregation in Object-Oriented Parallel Environment
keywords: SCOPE / Colloids
ISBN: 90-5282-715-X, 121 p., December 1996
6. Foliant, P.A.J.
Design and Implementation of a Telecommunications Service Architecture at KPN Research
keywords: Telecommunications Service Architecture/CORBA concepts
ISBN: 90-5282-712-5, 48p., December 1996

Copies of these reports are available through the secretariat of the post-masters programme Software Technology (OOTI), tel +31 40 2474334.



Pasfoto
Lierop

Dr.ir. Marloes van Lierop is a staff member at the Department of Mathematics and Computing Science of the Eindhoven University of Technology. She is the Programme Manager of OOTI and supervisor of all OOTI's. Recently, she is appointed as adjunct director of the Stan Ackermans Institute.