The contribution of a pre-entry *Matching Week* to prospective students' understanding of a degree programme and study choice

Paper presented in track 3 at the

EAIR 37th Annual Forum in Krems, Austria

30 August till 2 September 2015

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Key words

Higher education policy/development, Student experience, Student recruitment and selection, Undergraduate study

Abstract

The contribution of a pre-entry *Matching Week* to prospective students' understanding of a degree programme and study choice

The University of Amsterdam developed a pre-entry study check (*Matching Week*) in order to improve the transition from secondary education into university education. Before enrolment, prospective students attended a one-week programme aimed at checking their study choice. Based on their achievement during the *Matching Week* they received a non-binding study advice. A survey (N=2772) indicated that the week helped students to get a better understanding of a degree programme and complemented other study choice activities. Moreover, participants tended to follow the study advice and the advice seems to be an indicator for student attrition during the year.

Presentation

The contribution of a pre-entry *Matching Week* to prospective students' understanding of a degree programme and study choice

Introduction

For many years, researchers have examined which factors contribute to student attrition in the first year of university education (e.g. Harvey, Drew & Smith, 2006; Tinto, 1994; Tinto, 2006). Despite these insights, student retention rates are still a matter of concern. In the Netherlands, approximately 35-40% of the first-year students in university education leave their programmes during their first year (Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2014). In 2013, the Dutch Ministry of Education signed an act aimed at decreasing attrition rates and improving student success in higher education (Act Quality within Diversity, 2013). This act resulted in the introduction of an obligatory 'pre-entry study check' designed to raise awareness among prospective students regarding the motives of their study choice and to enable them to verify whether their expectations of a certain university degree programme are realistic.

In the Netherlands, in general all prospective students fulfilling requirements regarding levels of prior education and subject combinations are admitted to university education without further selection. Only a small number of degree programmes, e.g. medicine and art education, have a selection procedure based on for example marks, motivation and skills. Therefore, the pre-entry study check is an extensive intervention in the Dutch higher education system.

Correct expectations about academic life are a key factor contributing to student success and student retention in university education (e.g. Jackson, Pancer, Patt, & Hunsberger, 2000; Haggis, 2006; Hultberg et al., 2008). Nevertheless, research shows clear gaps between students' expectations and their experiences, for example regarding teaching methods, teacher-student interaction and self-study hours (Lowe & Cooke, 2003; Long & Tricker, 2004; Thomas, 2011; Thomas, 2013). This could be problematic, because a mismatch between students' expectations and their experiences is a commonly given reason for withdrawal (Rowley, Hartley, & Larkin, 2008). In addition, this mismatch refrains students from adjusting to and integrating in the university, which are also risk factors for early leaving (Lowe & Cook, 2003; Harvey et al., 2006; Jones, 2008).

There are several ideas about the origin of students' misconceptions. For example, students feel poorly informed about studying in university education (McInnis, James, & Hartley, 2000; Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005) and they frequently criticize universities for misleading information about degree programmes (e.g. Harvey et al., 2006; Yorke, 2000). Moreover, students find it difficult to identify differences between secondary school and university education before the transition (Crisp et al., 2009; Rowley et al., 2008). Thus, it seems to be important to help prospective students to get a realistic understanding of university education before they enter university in order to support a successful transition (Crisp et al., 2009; Rowley et al., 2008).

Pre- entry intervention: *Matching Week*

The Dutch Ministry of Education enforced the pre-entry study check for all prospective first-year students and universities in the Netherlands, but each university could use its own format that fitted the purpose of this pre-entry check best within that particular university. This paper focuses on a fulltime pre-entry study week, called *Matching Week*, developed and implemented by the University of Amsterdam. Before enrolment, all prospective students were required to attend a one-week programme in their degree programme of interest (44 different *Matching Weeks*, one for each degree programme), consisting of lectures, seminars, self-study and assessments. Each *Matching Week* was comparable to a regular study week in the first year of the particular degree programme and therefore provided prospective students the opportunity to align their expectations with their experiences during the week. After this week, the university advised students whether they fit in the programme, based on their performance on an assessment. This advice was not binding.

One of the key building blocks of the *Matching Week* was shaping students' expectations about programme characteristics such as content, level of difficulty, learning environment and time investment. The *Matching Week* aimed to help students to get insight in these aspects and to (re)consider their study choice. It was expected that the experiences gained and advice of the *Matching Week* either confirmed prospective students' study choice or in contrast stimulated them to switch degree programmes or universities. This paper reports whether the *Matching Week* helped prospective students to get a better understanding of a degree programme and whether it complemented other study choice activities. Moreover, it was examined whether the experiences gained were helpful to their final study choice and to what extent prospective students tended to follow the study advice. Lastly, this paper describes the preliminary results of a longitudinal study aimed at exploring the *Matching Week's* effect on dropout rates and study progress.

The following research questions are addressed in this paper:

1. To what extent does a *Matching Week* provide prospective students with insights regarding the degree programme's level of difficulty, content, teaching methods, and expected time investment?
2. To what extent does a *Matching Week* complement other study choice activities?
3. To what extent does a *Matching Week* contribute to prospective students' study choice?
4. Do prospective students follow the non-binding study advice?

Method

Participants

3948 prospective students attended the *Matching Weeks* of 44 degree programmes in June 2014. 2554 of them (65%) filled out at least one question on a questionnaire about their experiences during the week. For reasons of reliability, only prospective students who filled out at least half of the questions per relevant topic were included in this study, therefore the final data set comprised 2272 students. Answers were matched to institutional data concerning background characteristics.

The majority of the participants were male (53%). The average age of the participants was 19.04 (*SD* = 3.13), varying from 16 years old to 72 years old. Most prospective students had a background in pre-university education (88%) and a Dutch nationality. Table 1 gives an overview of all background characteristics.

Table 1
Background Information Participants (N = 2272)

Background Variable	*Percentages*
Gender	
Male	53%
Female	47%
Prior education	
Pre-university education	88%
Higher general secondary education	3%
Higher vocational education	5%
University education	1%
Colloquium doctum (entrance exam)	1%
Other (e.g. non Dutch diplomas) or unknown	1%
Nationality	
Dutch	98%
European	1%
Other or unknown	1%

Measures

A subset of questions of the *Matching Week* evaluation form was used. The items of interest for the current study considered undertaken study choice activities, study behaviour during the *Matching Week*, and the effect of the week on students' understanding of a degree programme and their study choice. Unless otherwise specified, questions were completed on a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)).

First, prospective students filled out which study choice activities they had undertaken inside and outside the University of Amsterdam before they attended the *Matching Week*, for example reading information on a website or visiting an open day (Table 2). Four questions asked about the number of hours spent on the *Matching Week* (scale: 0-5 hours, 6-10 hours, 11-15 hours, etc.), difficulties with self-studying, satisfaction with study effort, and work ethic (i.e. whether they worked hard during the trajectory) (Table 3).

Four other questions aimed to investigate whether the *Matching Week* helped students to get a better understanding of programme aspects. Prospective students were asked about the *Matching Week's* contribution to a better understanding of a) the level of difficulty, b) content, c) teaching methods and d) expected time investment of the particular degree programme (Table 4). Together these questions formed a scale measuring better understanding of the degree programme (α = .80).

Two questions focused on the effect of the *Matching Week* on students' study choice. One question asked whether students experienced the *Matching Week* as complementary to other study choice activities. The second question focused on whether prospective students' participation in a *Matching Week* had influenced their final study choice.

Background characteristics in this study were gender, age, level of prior education, and nationality, all retrieved from the Dutch registration and enrolment application for higher education (*Studielink*). Moreover, institutional data regarding enrolment (confirmation or cancelation), dropout rates and study progression (number of attained credits) were used to explore the longitudinal effect of the *Matching Week*.

Data analyses

Data of the 44 degree programmes were screened on plausible values and outliers. Missing data analysis indicated that the data were not missing at random, therefore, data could not be imputed with the expectation maximization method. Since deletion of data would mean a loss of 21% of the data and a distortion of the sample, group means were imputed for missing values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). All variables were standardized, so that coefficients of interval variables could be interpreted as effect sizes Pearson's *r* and the coefficients of the dummy variables as effect size Cohen's *d* (Cohen, 1992).

It was expected that responses of prospective students within one degree programme would be more similar to each other than to responses of prospective students of another degree programme. Therefore a multilevel approach was applied. First a random-intercepts-only model was built in order to calculate the intraclass correlation, subsequently the model was elaborated stepwise and the model fit was determined using the -2 log likelihood evaluation method.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Most prospective students visited websites of degree programmes to gain information and/or visited one or more information sessions of degree programmes of interest (Table 2).

Table 2
Study Choice Activities Undertaken Inside and Outside the University of Amsterdam (N = 2272)

Study choice activity	Inside UvA (%)	Outside UvA (%)
Study interest test	5.9%	35.9%
Study coach consultation	6.5%	16.5%
Visited websites of degree programmes	64.9%	79.8%
Visited an information session of one degree programme	32.3%	23.0%
Visited information sessions of more than one degree programme	42.0%	56.9%
Visited information session at secondary school		34.1%
No study choice activities undertaken	7.7%	7.3%
Other type of study choice activity	9.2%	7.6%

The majority of participants spent less than five hours on self-studying during the *Matching Week*. Mean scores for difficulties with self-studying, satisfaction with study effort, and work ethic are reported in Table 3.

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations Study Behaviour Variables (N = 2272)

Variable			
The number of hours I spent on self-studying is			
	%		
0-5 hours	60.7		
6-10 hours	26.4		
11-15 hours	8.5		
16-20 hours	2.7		
21-25 hours	1.4		
>25 hours	.3		
		M	*SD*
I had difficulties with self-studying.		2.57	.97
I am satisfied with my effort during this trajectory.		3.11	1.02
I worked hard during this trajectory.		2.82	1.01

Factors related to better understanding of degree programme

Research question 1 asked to what extent a *Matching Week* provided prospective students with a better understanding of a degree programme. Prospective students agreed that they had a somewhat better understanding of level of difficulty (*M* = 3.75, *SD* = .92), content (*M* = 3.76, *SD* = .91), teaching methods (*M* = 3.61, *SD* = .93) and expected time investment (*M* = 3.52, *SD* = .94) (Table 4).

Table 4
Means and Standard Deviations Better Understanding and Study Choice Variables (N = 2272)

Variable	*M*	*SD*
As a result of the *Matching Week* I have a better understanding of		
the educational level of the degree programme than before;	3.75	.92
the subject-content of the degree programme than before;	3.76	.91
the teaching methods of the degree programme (lectures, self-study) than before.	3.61	.93
As a result of *Matching* I know better how much effort I should put in studying.	3.52	.94
To me, the *Matching Week* complements other study choice activities well (inside and outside the UvA).	3.46	1.08
The *Matching Week* has contributed to my study choice (whether I register for this degree programme or not).	2.94	1.28

Via multilevel analyses was examined how background characteristics and study behaviour during the week were related to a better understanding of a degree programme. The results of Model 3 indicated that age, gender, prior education, and prior undertaken study choice activities were not related to students' understanding of a degree programme (Table 5). The number of hours spent on self-studying (*B* = .059, *p* = .02), difficulties with self-studying (*B* = .066, *p* < .01), and students' opinion about their work ethic (*B* = .139, *p* < .01) were significant positive predictors of a better understanding of the degree programme.

Factors related to *Matching Week* as complementing study choice activity

Research question 2 examined to what extent the *Matching Weeks* complemented other study choice activities. Descriptive statistics indicated that prospective students found *Matching* complementary to other study choice activities (*M* = 3.46, *SD* = 1.08; Table 4). Multilevel analyses were conducted to investigate which variables predicted whether students experienced a *Matching Week* as complementary (Table 6). Model 4 seemed to be a better model than previous ones. The background characteristics age, gender and prior education did not affect students' opinion about the complementary character of the *Matching Week*.

Table 5

Fixed Effects Estimates (Top) and Variance-Covariance Estimates (Bottom) for Models of the Predictors of Better Understanding Study Programme

Parameter	Model 0 Beta (SE)	Model 1 Beta (SE)	Model 2 Beta (SE)	Model 3 Beta (SE)
Intercept	-.017 (.049)	-.023 (.049)	-.020 (.048)	-.024 (.043)
Fixed Effects				
Level 1 (student specific)				
Student Characteristics				
Age		-.000 (.024)	.006 (.024)	-.010 (.024)
Gender		-.005 (.023)	-.007 (.023)	-.021 (.022)
Prior Education				
Pre-university education		-.058 (.064)	-.066 (.064)	-.053 (.063)
Higher general secondary education		-.016 (.039)	-.016 (.039)	-.002 (.039)
Higher vocational education		.035 (.049)	.034 (.049)	.034 (.048)
University education		-.011 (.029)	-.013 (.029)	-.008 (.029)
Colloquium doctum (entrance exam)		.000 (.029)	.001 (.029)	.009 (.029)
Study choice				
Study choice activities inside this university			-.024 (.022)	-.030 (.022)
Study choice activities outside this university			.052* (.023)	.040 (.022)
Study behaviour				
Hours spent on self-studying				.059* (.026)
Self-studying difficult				.066** (.022)
Content about efforts				-.021 (.028)
Work ethic				.139** (.029)
Random Parameters				
Level 1 – variance	.958** (.029)	.952** (.029)	.951** (.029)	.923** (.027)
Level 2 – variance	.064** (.024)	.060** (.022)	.058** (.022)	.043* (.019)
-2*log likelihood	6400.922	6386.291	6380.967	6307.345

Note: Standardized coefficients are reported. Standard errors are in parentheses. Dummy variables: gender: 0 = male, 1 = female; prior education: 0 = no, 1= yes. Explained variance student level: 5%. Explained variance programme level 2: 26%.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 6

Fixed Effects Estimates (Top) and Variance-Covariance Estimates (Bottom) for Models of the Predictors of the extent to which Matching Week Complements Study Choice Activities

Parameter	Model 0 Beta (SE)	Model 1 Beta (SE)	Model 2 Beta (SE)	Model 3 Beta (SE)	Model 4 Beta (SE)
Intercept	.035 (.042)	.030 (.040)	.030 (.039)	.009 (.037)	.011 (.022)
Fixed Effects					
Level 1 (student specific)					
Student Characteristics					
Age		.005 (.024)	.011 (.024)	-.007 (.024)	-.001 (.019)
Gender		.002 (.023)	.000 (.023)	-.013 (.022)	-.001 (.018)
Prior Education					
Pre-university education		-.069 (.064)	-.075 (.064)	-.061 (.063)	-.035 (.052)
Higher general secondary education		-.011 (.039)	-.011 (.040)	.005 (.039)	.005 (.032)
Higher vocational education		.016 (.049)	.016 (.049)	.017 (.048)	-.003 (.039)
University education		-.032 (.029)	-.031 (.029)	-.028 (.029)	-.026 (.023)
Colloquium doctum (entrance exam)		-.042 (.030)	-.042 (.030)	-.032 (.029)	-.038 (.024)
Study choice					
Study choice activities inside this university			.031 (.022)	.021 (.022)	.039* (.018)
Study choice activities outside this university			.044 (.023)	.033 (.022)	.009 (.018)
Study behaviour					
Hours spent on self-studying				.035 (.025)	-.008 (.020)
Self-studying difficult				.020 (.022)	-.022 (.018)
Content about efforts				.015 (.028)	.035 (.023)
Work ethic				.193** (.029)	.116** (.024)
Effect Matching Week					
Better understanding of degree programme					.564** (.017)
Random Parameters					
Level 1 – variance	.971** (.029)	.966** (.029)	.963** (.029)	.919** (.028)	.628** (.019)
Level 2 – variance	.038* (.017)	.033* (.016)	.031* (.015)	.025 (.014)	.004 (.005)
-2*log likelihood	6417.014	6403.721	6395.213	6285.731	5403.524

Note: Standardized coefficients are reported. Standard errors are in parentheses. Dummy variables: gender: 0 = male, 1 = female; prior education: 0 = no, 1= yes. Explained variance student level: 37%. Explained variance programme level 2: 71%.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 7

Fixed Effects Estimates (Top) and Variance-Covariance Estimates (Bottom) for Models of the Predictors of Matching Week's Influence on Study Choice

Parameter	Model 0 Beta (SE)	Model 1 Beta (SE)	Model 2 Beta (SE)	Model 3 Beta (SE)	Model 4 Beta (SE)	Model 5 Beta (SE)
Intercept	.013 (.045)	-.004 (.043)	-.003 (.042)	-.016 (.040)	-.009 (.032)	-.013 (.026)
Fixed Effects						
Level 1 (student specific)						
Student Characteristics						
Age		.034 (.024)	.042 (.024)	.031 (.024)	.034 (.022)	.034 (.021)
Gender		.039 (.023)	.036 (.023)	.029 (.022)	.038 (.020)	.040* (.019)
Prior Education						
Pre-university education		.001 (.064)	-.007 (.064)	.006 (.063)	.026 (.058)	.037 (.055)
Higher general secondary education		.042 (.039)	.043 (.039)	.055 (.039)	.056 (.036)	.054 (.034)
Higher vocational education		.075 (.049)	.076 (.049)	.078 (.048)	.065 (.044)	.065 (.042)
University education		-.032 (.029)	-.032 (.029)	-.029 (.029)	-.026 (.027)	-.017 (.025)
Colloquium doctum (entrance exam)		-.028 (.02	-.028 (.029)	-.021 (.029)	-.025 (.027)	-.011 (.025)
Study choice						
Study choice activities inside this university			.187 (.022)	.014 (.022)	.026 (.020)	.013 (.019)
Study choice activities outside this university			.061** (.023)	.053* (.022)	.037 (.021)	.034 (.020)
Study behaviour						
Hours spent on self-studying				.022 (.025)	-.003 (.023)	-.003 (.021)
Self-studying difficult				.044* (.022)	.016 (.020)	.022 (.019)
Content about efforts				.026 (.028)	.036 (.026)	.026 (.024)
Work ethic				.102** (.029)	.047 (.027)	.005 (.026)
Effect Matching Week						
Better understanding of degree programme					.395** (.019)	.184** (.022)
Complements other study activities						.376** (.022)
Random Parameters						
Level 1 – variance	.969** (.029)	.958** (.029)	.954** (.029)	.937** (.028)	.796** (.024)	.711** (.021)
Level 2 – variance	.047* (.019)	.042* (.018)	.039* (.018)	.033* (.016)	.017 (.010)	.008 (.007)
-2*log likelihood	6417.400	6390.036	6379.208	6335.374	5956.147	5690.541

Note: Standardized coefficients are reported. Standard errors are in parentheses. Dummy variables: gender: 0 = male, 1 = female; prior education: 0 = no, 1= yes.
Explained variance student level: 29%. Explained variance programme level 2: 66%.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Prospective students that undertook several types of study choice activities within the University of Amsterdam found the *Matching Week* more complementing to other study activities than students that were less involved in study choice activities at the University of Amsterdam (B = .039, p = .032). Also students who worked hard during the week tended to see the *Matching Week* as a more complementing activity (B = .039, p = .03). Moreover, it seemed that the *Matching Week* was of value for students who got a better understanding of the degree programme due to their participation in the week (B = .564, p < .01).

Factors related to the influence of a *Matching Week* on study choice

Lastly, research question 3 focused on the extent to which a *Matching Week* contributed to prospective students' study choice. Students tended to say that the week did not affect their study choice, but there was quite some variation across their answers (M = 2.94, SD = 1.28; Table 4). A multilevel approach was used to examine how background characteristics and study behaviour during the week related to study choice. Based on Model 5 it could be concluded that the *Matching Week*'s influence on study choice was not affected by age, prior education and undertaken study choice activities (Table 7).

Female students' study choice was affected significantly more than male students' study choice (B = .040, p = .04). Results further indicated that students who got a better understanding of a degree programme during the *Matching Week* let affect their study choice significantly more than students who did not get a better understanding of the degree programme (B = .184, p < .01). Prospective students who found the week complementary to other study choice activities, valued the *Matching Week* more in their study choice (B = .376, p < .01).

Enrolment rates, dropout rates and study progress

After the *Matching Week* the university advised students non-binding whether they fit in the programme or not, based on their performance on an assessment at the end of the week. 62% of the participants received a positive advice. The registration figures showed that in total 76% of the prospective students who attended the *Matching Week* decided to hold their decision to enrol at the University of Amsterdam (Table 8). 80% of the students who received a positive advice (i.e. passed the exam) confirmed their enrolment, while students with a negative advice (i.e. failed the exam) confirmed their enrolment less often (66%). Prospective students who attended a pre-entry study check activity at another Dutch university got an exemption for the *Matching Week* and could therefore be admitted.

Table 8
Matching Week Marks versus Enrolment, Dropout and Study Progress

	Positive advice	Negative advice	No advice	Total
Enrolment September 2014	80%	66%	-	76%
Dropout rates June 2015	13.5%	24.4%	20.7%	17.7%
Attained credits June 2015	43.8 ECTS	35.6 ECTS	36.0 ECTS	40.5 ECTS

During the academic year 2014-2015 the dropout rates and study progress of those with a positive, negative or no advice were monitored. At the time of writing (June 2015), only preliminary descriptive statistics were available. At the end of June 2015, 17.7% of the first-year students had already left university. Students with a positive advice quitted their studies less often (13.5%) than students with a negative advice (24.4%). Moreover, students with a positive advice gained more ECTS credits, namely on average 43.8 ECTS, than students with a negative advice, who earned 35.6 ECTS. Administration offices will register the last marks of the academic year 2014-2015 at the end of Augusts and the registration for year 2 will be closed in October. Thus final statistics for year 1 become available during the fall of 2015.

Discussion

Results indicated that the *Matching Weeks* helped students to get a better understanding of the degree programme of their interest. The number of hours spent on the *Matching Week*, the experienced difficulties with self-studying and their work ethic during the trajectory significantly affected their understanding. An explanation for this finding is the fact that due to their effort and time spending these students were more

exposed to study materials and content. As a result they probably got a better understanding of a degree programme. Moreover, those who encountered more difficulties with self-studying might have adopted an in-depth study attitude and therefore saw more aspects of the degree programme. The results suggest the importance of stimulating student engagement during the week.

Prospective students reckoned the *Matching Week* as a complementing study choice activity. Especially prospective students who worked hard during the week and those who got a better understanding of the degree programme found it complementary to other activities. One of the main differences between open days, information sessions and the *Matching Weeks* was the amount of time and effort students were expected to invest. It was therefore hardly surprising that those students who indeed spent the pre-specified amount of time and effort were more likely to experience a *Matching Week* as a complementing study choice activity.

Most students said that the week did not affect their study choice, although there was quite a large variation. The study choice of female students was more influenced by the *Matching Week* than that of male students. This effect was small, but relevant. This result could be explained by motives underlying study choice that vary across male and female students (Malgwi, Howe, & Burnaby, 2005; Noble Calkins & Welki, 2006): male students attach more importance to career related motives, while female students emphasize aptitude and regard advice from others important to their major choice (Noble Calkins & Welki, 2006).

Looking at the enrolment figures it became clear that students with a positive advice enrolled more often than students with a negative advice indicating that the advice did possibly affect final study choice. In addition, students with a positive advice left university less often and earned more ECTS credits than students with a negative advice. An explanation for this finding could be that students who received a negative advice were also students with lower school achievement (pre-university GPA), which is a strong predictor for achievement in the Dutch higher education system (Jansma & Bruinsma, 2005). This hypothesis will be tested in the fall of 2015.

Recommendations for research and practice

Based on the results of the presented study several recommendations for educational practice could be made. It is important to encourage students to put effort in the *Matching Week*, because the amount of time spent on the *Matching Week* and students' perceived effort are positively related to whether they got a better understanding of a degree programme. This could be achieved by implementing student-activating teaching methods, for example group assignments, discussions or presentations.

A second recommendation concerns the final exam, which is considered to be a reflection of the student-degree programme fit and serves as a basis for the study advice. As long as this advice comes without consequence, it is questionable whether students' really strive to pass the exam. An alternative idea is to focus on the student experience and to use the *Matching Week* as a reflection instrument. A debriefing session during which prospective student and teachers discuss the experiences gained could raise awareness of the function of the *Matching Week* and might help prospective students to reflect on their study choice.

Lastly, the current *Matching Week* tried to shape students' expectations about studying in university education. It could also be argued that university lecturers should better meet students' expectations or should help students more in their transition from secondary education to university. Since previous research has indicated that teaching staff pays little attention to students' prior education (Thomas, 2011), a suggestion for practice and further research would be to focus not only on student expectations but also on university lecturers expectations and how these interact.

Conclusion

The present study showed that the *Matching Weeks* were a helpful intervention in giving prospective students a better understanding of a degree programme. Especially study behaviour during the week seemed to contribute to a better understanding of the academic life. The *Matching Week* particularly affected the study choice of female students and of students that got a better understanding of a degree programme due to their participation. The large number of participants, inclusion of 44 different *Matching Weeks* and advanced data-analyses make the results very robust. Moreover, the results are highly relevant for the higher education field and offer an excellent starting point for reducing student attrition rates in university education.

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