

1. Communication

A single, recognisable, warm and consistent VU communication flow with prospective students



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Unit and role: C&M, Communications Adviser, SOZ

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Project objective

Recognisable VU

Prospective students recognise every point of contact as communication from VU, regardless of which unit is communicating.

Impactful communication

Timely, consistent and warm communication helps prospective students navigate the enrolment process more quickly and easily.

Improved conversion

Through consistent, clear and warm contact with VU, we increase the conversion rate from application to enrolment for Dutch bachelor's programmes.

What are we going to do?

Optimise training page templates

Develop and optimise VU-wide content – from application to enrolment

Clear 'pre-student' VU email workflow

Optimised VU 'pre-student' email workflow

Scope and dependencies:

From the moment they apply, prospective students are in contact with various VU departments. Consistent communication requires joint decisions, a single line of communication and commitment from all parties involved. Are we prepared to prioritise the common good?

To achieve this joint communication, in addition to existing VU projects and processes, there are dependencies on other projects within the programme. Any delays in these projects **SEO-GEO audit** and **Seamless process** will have a direct impact on the start and delivery.

A question for you!

- How can you contribute to this project?
- What is currently working well, and what do you think should absolutely not be missing in an ideal world?
- What do you think we can learn from our sister organisations?

Colleagues involved:

Stan Hes | Aart Jan Aantjes | Max Oppenheim | Marcia Kho

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2. Seamless process – Study Choice activities

Prospective students can register for study choice activities easily, quickly and in a logical way.



Name: Erik Pasman, Marketer
Communication & Marketing
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Project objective

More prospective students – within a single session – moving from the landing page to a completed registration for an information session (KPI: conversion rate increasing from 21.8% to 25%).

Period	(Partial) result
Phase 1 – until 1 October	Optimisation of existing process
Phase 2 – until 1 December	Revised registration steps

What are we going to do?

Phase 1: Optimising existing steps to eliminate the biggest pain points (including requesting less personal data, an improved registration form and session schedule, and a new calendar widget)

Phase 2: Revamping the registration process by reducing the number of steps and arranging them in a more logical order.

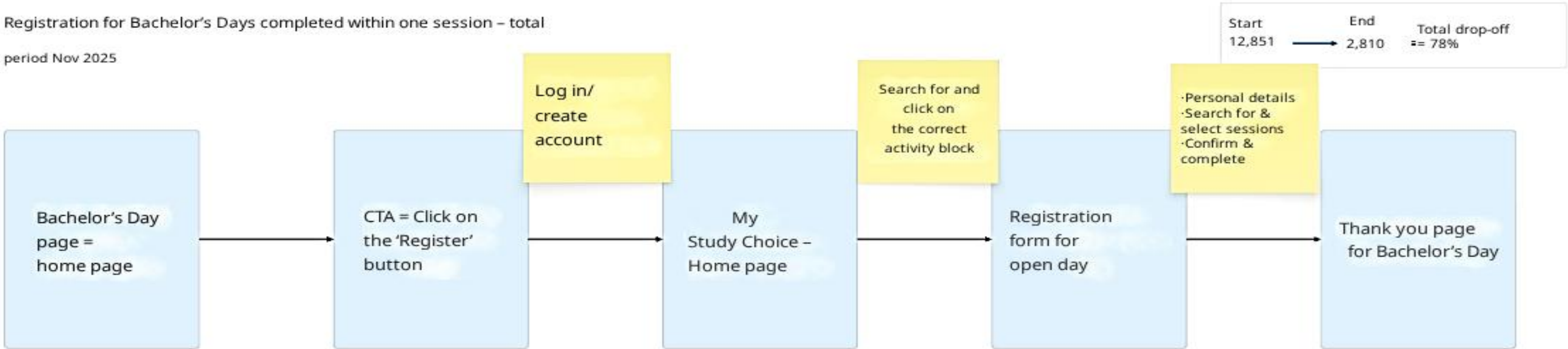


Figure 1: Existing process and drop-out rates

Revised registration process – new order

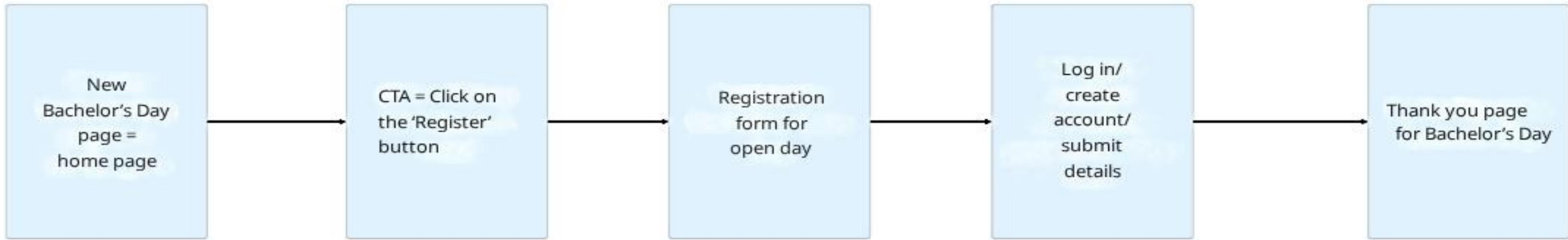


Figure 2: Revised order of registration steps

What effort does this require?

Joint effort by several teams from **C&M** and **IT**. In this regard, prioritisation and capacity are essential to achieving the desired improvements. What do we do if multiple projects are demanding capacity from the same teams?

The **faculties** are asking for flexibility so that we can make rapid adjustments (room changes, extra sessions, etc.) based on the number of registrations, in order to attract as many registrations as possible for the open day and to be able to accommodate them.

A question for you!

Where do you think the biggest drop-off occurs in the current registration process?

1. From the homepage to the 'Sign up' button
2. Logging in/creating an account
3. Selecting the correct activity after logging in (My Study Choice environment)
4. Filling in and completing the registration form

How can you help ensure a swift response for an open day (e.g. in the event of extra registrations) and what do you need to do so?

Names of colleagues involved:

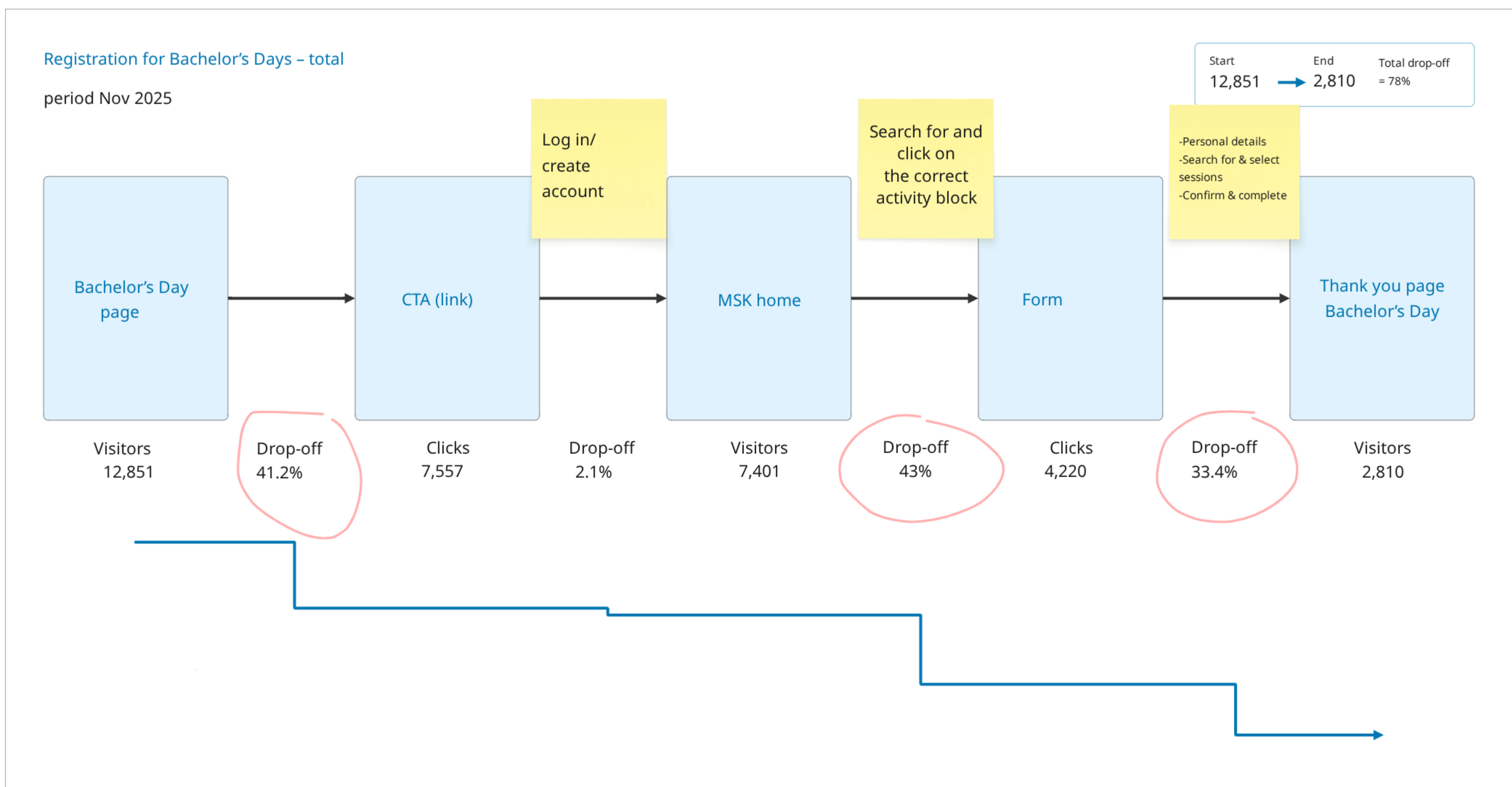
Jens Brokaar | Lucas Gonçalves Felício | Claudia van den Corput | Bahar Bayram | Mieke Sillekens

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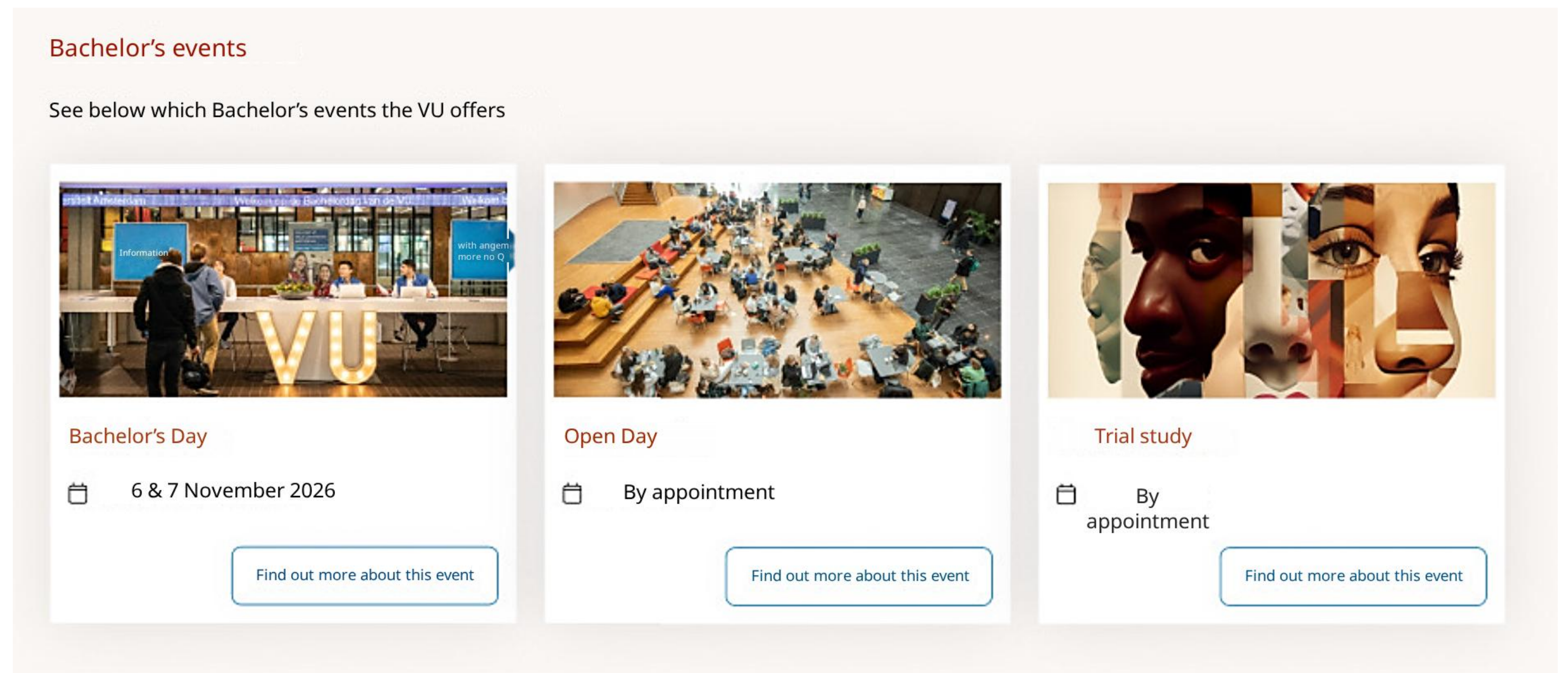
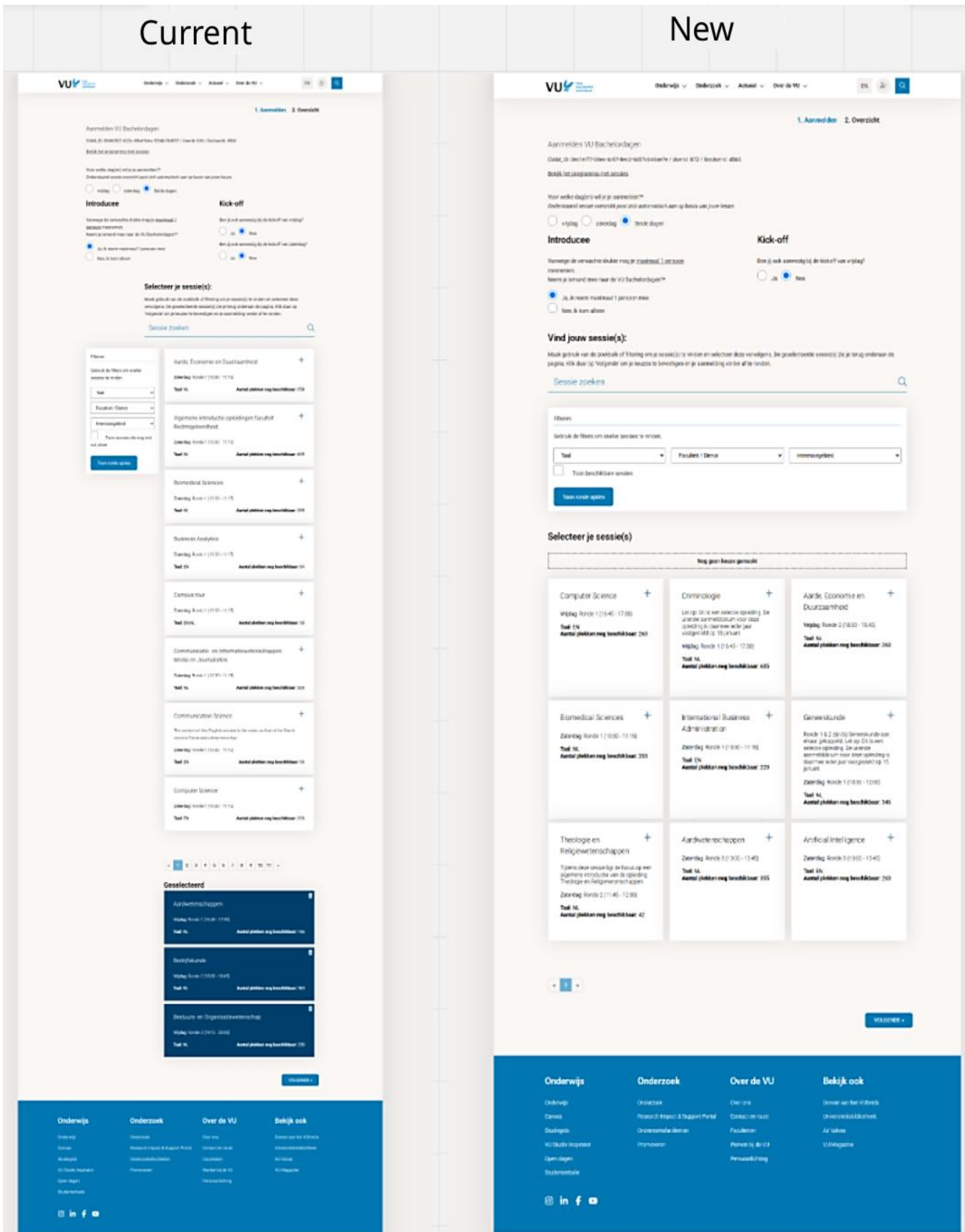
Seamless process – Study choice activities

Points of drop-out in the existing process

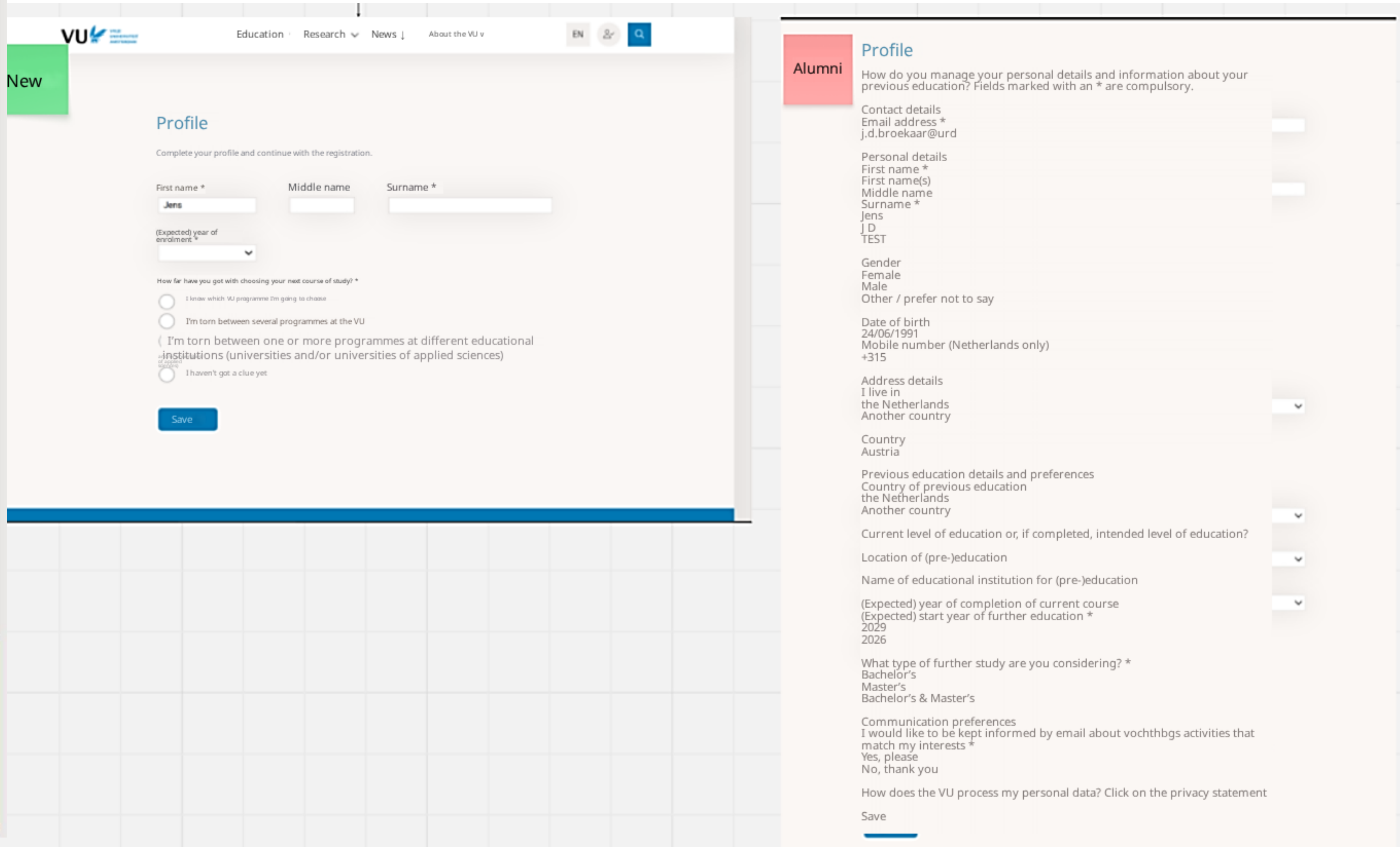


Calendar widget BSc/MSc Home

Registration page



Profile enquiry



2. A seamless process – from application to enrolment

Making it easier to apply for and enrol on a degree programme.

Project leaders: Sybren Vermeulen and Ileen Smits
SOZ (Business project lead) and IT (IT project lead)
s.vermeulen@vu.nl and i.s.smits@vu.nl

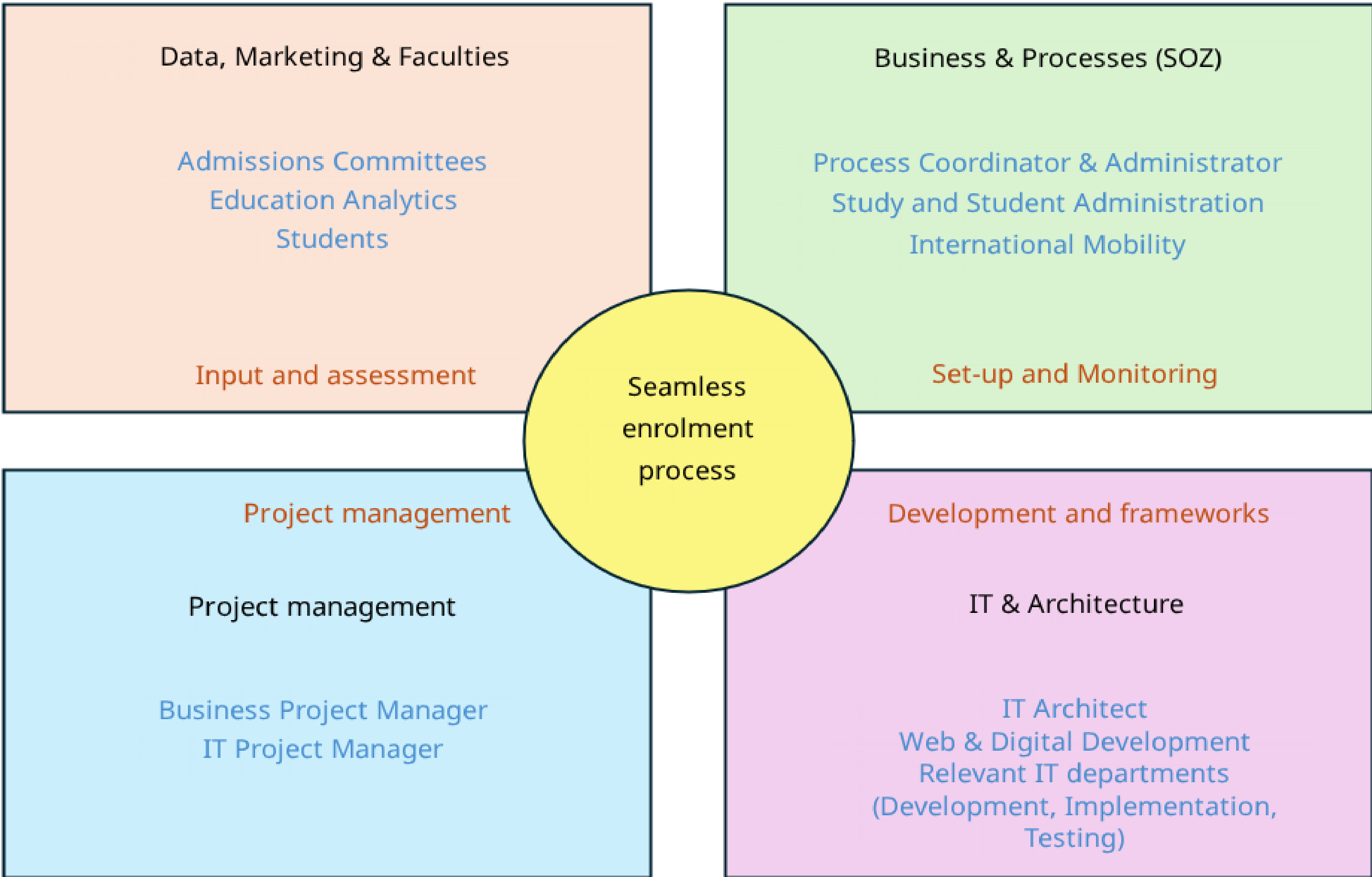


Project objective

The main objective is to ensure that as many applicants as possible are successfully admitted by **optimally streamlining the application and admissions process**. This ensures that prospective students progress smoothly from the pre-enrolment stage to final enrolment, whilst retaining as many as possible.

Timeframe	(Partial) result
Phase 1 – up to and including December 2026	Preliminary research and tackling the issues <i>quick wins</i> where possible
Phase 2 – until 1 October 2027	Implementation: register and enrol in a new process
From 1 October 2027	Register and enrol in the revised process

What effort would this require?



What are we going to do?

Phase 1: Preliminary research & Needs assessment

- **Process and data mapping:** visually mapping the entire student journey
- **bottleneck & data audit:** identifying technical bottlenecks and reducing the volume of information requested (must-haves vs. nice-to-haves)
- **Qualitative student research:** interviews with Dutch students choosing a bachelor’s degree and the Student Helpdesk to validate current perceptions.
- **Student research to test solutions:** user tests to evaluate concept solutions.

Phase 2: Concept, Development & Implementation

- **Responsive form:** development of a form widget to replace separate files.
- **Database integration:** implementation of secure, long user sessions with real-time data pre-filled.
- **Central Student Dashboard:** optimisation of the dashboard in a single central location where students can view real-time status updates, outstanding tasks and processing times.

A question for you!

What can be improved in the current enrolment and admissions process, in your view, be done to improve the student experience?

Names of colleagues involved:

Mieke Sillekens | Marcia Kho | Josje Krips | Sibren Meijer | Karin Zondervan

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3. Comprehensive collaboration

Strengthening joint and action-oriented work towards objectives.
Improved collaboration between services, departments within services and faculties



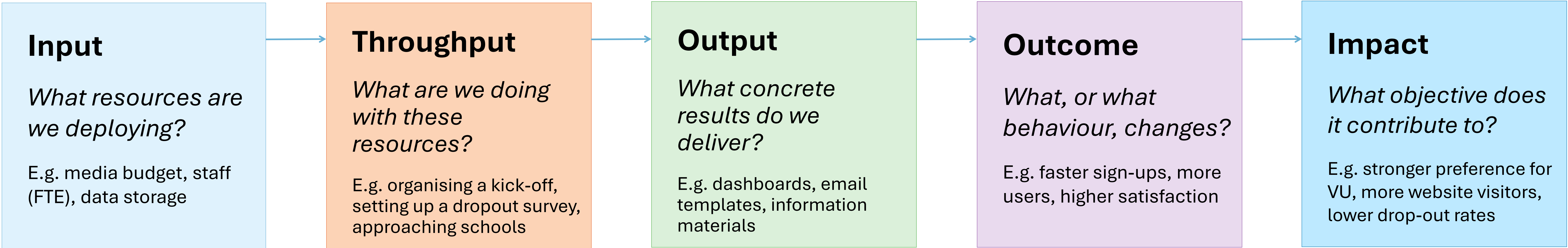
Project leader’s name: Jesús Blanco
Unit and role: SOZ, Data scientist
Email: j.e.blanco@vu.nl

Project objective

Improved collaboration between departments and faculties and within the relevant departments, by:

- **Joint, measurable objectives** and outcomes;
- **Transparency**;
- **Specific agreements** regarding scope and division of roles;
- A great deal of collegial **contact** for **reflection**, guidance and the development of **personal** connections and **trust**.

Programme and project monitoring



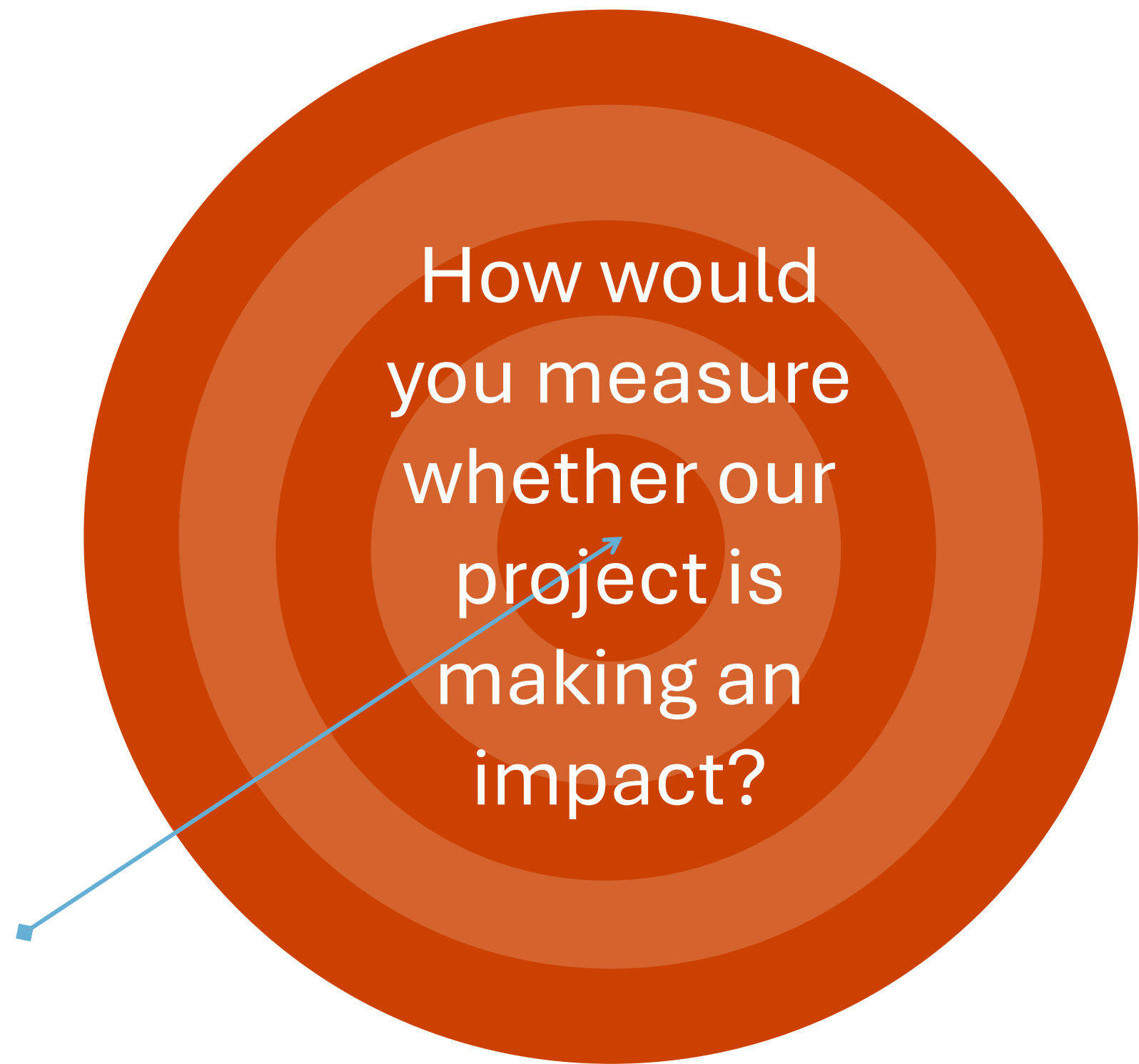
What are we going to do?

- **Define shared goals** , reflecting on them regularly and adjusting plans where necessary.
- **Regular check-ins** across the programme and per project, with **relevant**, experienced **programme manager**.
- Providing **reliable, accessible management information** (using Power BI)
 - Impact dashboard for comprehensive insight: “OKRs” – current status compared to last year, current status compared to target.
 - Outcome indicators for project-specific insight: current status compared to last year, current status compared to target.
 - Market dashboard for market insight: where do we stand in relation to the market?

Period	(Partial) result
September	- Kick-off sessions for (sub)projects and the programme (scheduled to take place regularly thereafter) - Market dashboard prototype - Setting measurable objectives and outcomes
October	- 2nd ^e Advisory Board meeting (scheduled on a recurring basis) - Data collection on targets (impact) and outcomes - 1 ^e plenary update session for (sub-)project leaders - First production version of the Market Dashboard
November	- Prototype of the Impact dashboard (OKRs) - Prototype of the Outcome dashboard - Further development of the Market Dashboard - 1 ^e Quarterly report and decision point for adjusting plans

What commitment does this require?

- **Together** with all (sub-)project leaders, we will seek clearly formulated indicators that we all **understand**, are measurable, can be substantiated and are time-bound.
- Every month **we reflect** on the indicators and our collaboration, in order to clearly map out progress and, if necessary, **plans** and **agreements** can **adjust**.
- To promote **transparency**, we will need to create an easily accessible environment in which **open insight** into the progress of all indicators.



Brand awareness: Campaigns

From education-focused promotion,
to more brand- and target-group-driven recruitment.

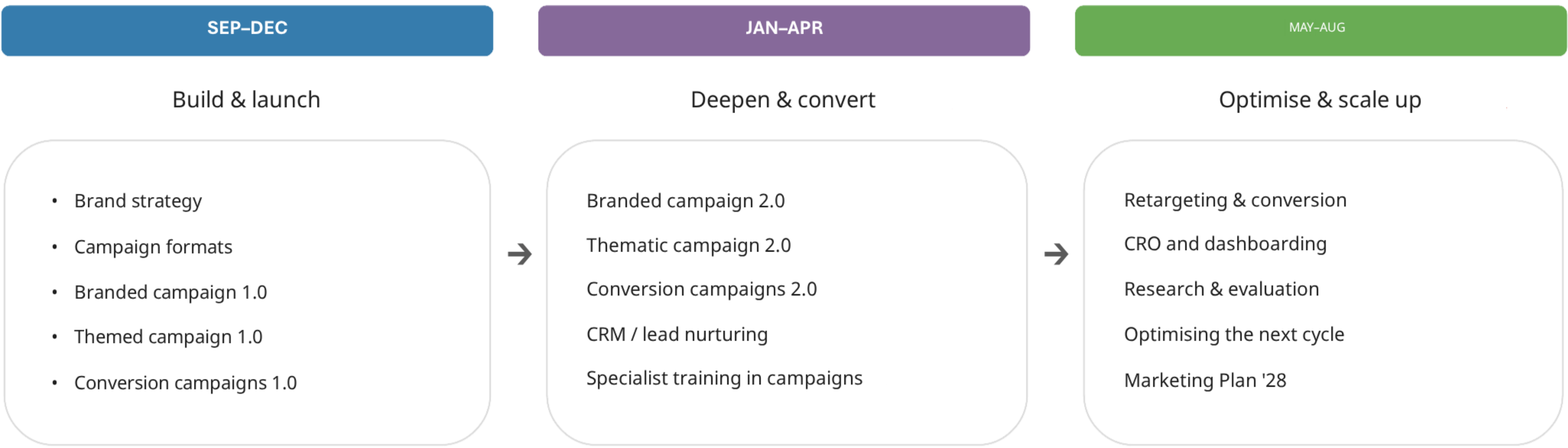


Project manager's name: Rogier Peters
Department and role: C&M, Acting Senior Marketer
Email: r.peters@vu.nl

Reason

Brand awareness is the key to brand preference. That is why we are investing in a campaign platform that ensures recognisable and consistent visibility for the VU. In this way, we are systematically building brand awareness and preference.

What we're going to do



Objective

- +3 pp top-of-mind
- +5 pp spontaneous awareness
- +2 pp helped raise awareness

What commitment does this require?

- Budget
- Consistency
- MFT
- Data
- Flexibility
- Adoption/collaboration



DARE TO BE YOURSELF
Provocative questions with a twist.
Encourages you to look at things differently.

HERO
Why do we look beyond?
Big questions about yourself, others and the world.

→

WHO WOULD YOU BE IF NO ONE LOOK?
Dare to be yourself. Look further.

HUB
What are we looking at?
Delve into topics that really matter. From different perspectives.

→

IF HEALTH IS MORE THAN JUST NOT BEING ILL, WHAT THEN MAKES US TRULY HEALTHY?
Look beyond the surface.

HYGIENE
What can I do?
Concrete, practical and personal. The next step.

→

DO YOU WANT TO FIND OUT WHICH COURSE IS RIGHT FOR YOU?
Come to the VU Bachelor's Open Day.
6 & 7 NOVEMBER 2026

THE STORIES OF
Real stories from students.
Personal, authentic and inspiring.

→

THE VU OF BINTANG
"At the VU, I can choose my own path and stay true to myself."
Read Bintang's story

TERRY'S EXPERIENCE AT THE VU
"I discovered how everything is connected: body, mind and environment."
"That's what makes the VU unique."
Read Terry's story

ROOSJE'S VU EXPERIENCE
"The open day felt right. I could already picture myself settling in here."
Read Roosje's story

UGC
By and for students.
Real moments, real perspectives.

→

Dare to be yourself. Then space to look
What do you think? #dare to be yourself #look beyond

What does health to you?
Share your thoughts in the comments! #health #vuamsterdam

Open Day 6 & 7 Nov
Will we see you there?
Register at vu.nl/opendag #opendag #vuamsterdam

A question for you!

"How will you help to fulfil and/or exceed the promise?"

Names of colleagues involved:

Hans Geldof / Sijanda de Boer /
Rocio Manzanares / Max Werz /
Renzo Storm / Stan Hes / Adrie
Smits / Maarten Duijn / Aart Jan
Aartjes / Bart Leeuwenburgh

Contact:

 Rogier Peters
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Brand awareness: School Plan

Greater and earlier awareness of VU and VU bachelor's programmes among pupils in VWO years 3–5



Project manager's name: Jolanda Brontsema
Department, role: C&M, Recruitment Adviser
Email: j.e.brontsema@vu.nl

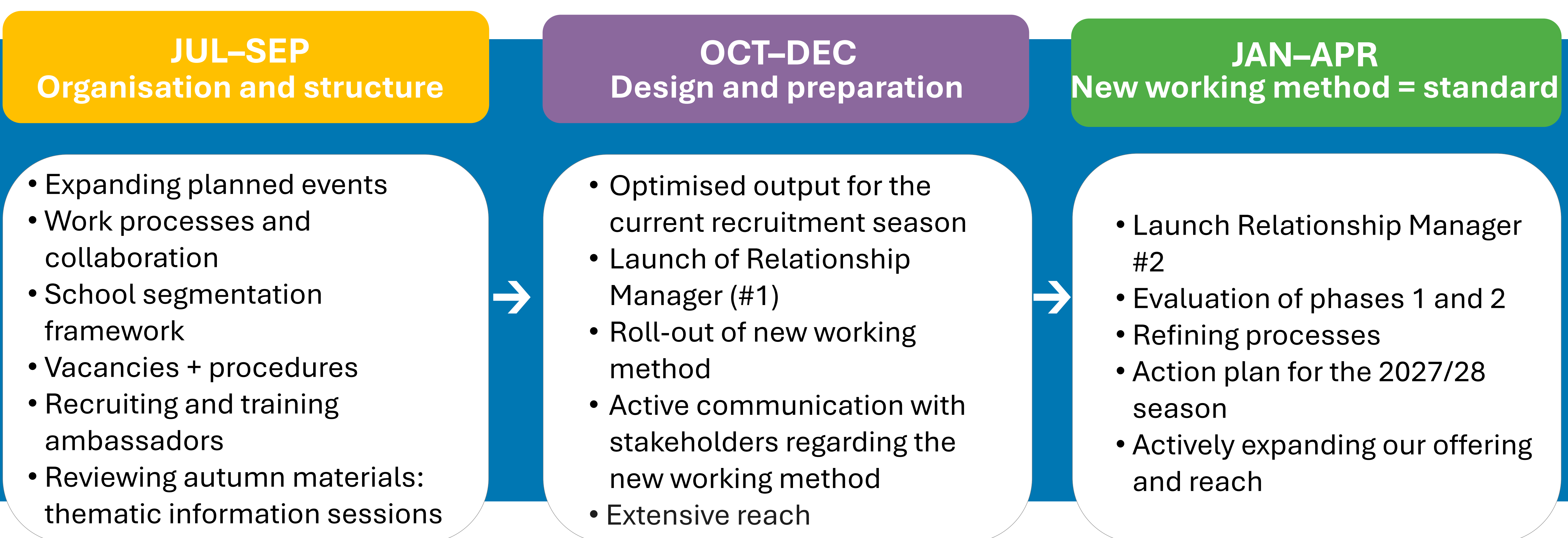
Reason: why schools?

1. Visibility in lower secondary school is a key factor in brand preference
2. Opportunity: introducing pupils to VU right where they are
3. Form tutors and headteachers play a key role in students' choice of degree programme

What we aim to achieve:

1. Personal contact with pupils and guidance counsellors
2. An enthusiastic team of student ambassadors
3. Distinctive offering from VU (PUC | C&M)

Increased visibility leads to brand awareness, which leads to brand preference, which leads to increased participation in activities at VU and: an increase in applications



A question for you!

- What network do you have that could be relevant to achieving these goals?
- What experiences and dos and don'ts have you personally encountered when choosing a school or degree programme?

What commitment does this require from us?

- **Flexibility:** Implementation whilst existing work processes are still active
- **Collaboration** between departments and faculties (whilst retaining everyone's strengths)
- **Comprehensive approach:** School outreach cannot be viewed in isolation from other recruitment and onboarding activities

Colleagues involved from SOZ/PUC and C&M:

Eva Goudsmit | Kati Cousijn | Jasper Rudolphus | Femke Bokma | Esther Moolenaar | Marieke de Bakker

Brand awareness: SEO & GEO

From analysis to action.



Project manager's name: Hans Geldof
Department and role: C&M, project manager
Email: j.l.geldof@vu.nl

Background

Significant drop in organic traffic:

Since the end of 2025, VU has seen a sharp decline in Google traffic, particularly on key pages such as /onderwijs and /education.

Impact on recruitment and leads:

The decline is directly affecting requests for brochures, which are essential for recruiting students and professionals.

A changing AI search landscape:

The rise of AI Overviews and LLMs (such as ChatGPT and Perplexity) is leading to 'zero-click' search results, where information is displayed without users clicking through to the website.

Objective

Aligning our content and technology with the way prospective students use AI search and LLMs

What are we going to do?

SEO audit (technical & content):

An in-depth analysis of the technical condition, content structure and authority of VU.nl.

GEO audit (AI visibility):

Assessing how VU is represented in AI responses and how this compares to the competition.

Competitor analysis & market trends:

Insight into VU's position relative to other universities and commercial providers in the AI sector.

Drawing up a prioritised action plan:

A concrete roadmap with priorities based on impact, effort and required investment for the short and long term.

What commitment does this require?

- Selection process involving relevant (internal) stakeholders.
- Selection of an external party to carry out the audit.
- Conducting the audit in collaboration with internal specialists

The audit determines the next steps:

- Procurement of tools for online (GEO) marketing
- Prioritised action plan for further development.
- Modification of front-end templates.
- Content adjustments based on GEO insights.

A question for you!

- Speaking from the perspective of your unit, what do you think is currently working very well in the communication flow with prospective students? In your view, what should absolutely not be missing in an ideal world?
- What do you think we can learn from our sister organisations?

Names of colleagues involved:

Hans Geldof / Sijanda de Boer /
Max Werz / Renzo Storm / Stan
Hes

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5. Research into the study choice process

What makes a prospective student choose – or not choose – VU?

Project manager's name: Nina Geelen and Jesús Blanco
Department and role: Data and Insights Consultant (C&M) and
Data Scientist (SOZ)
Email: n.v.geelen@vu.nl and j.e.blanco@vu.nl



Project objective

Perception survey

The aim is to understand why prospective students choose VU and which moments in their decision-making journey are decisive.

Dropout research

The aim of this project is to gain insight into the reasons and moments that lead to prospective students dropping out.

By drawing on insights from both studies, we can better cater to their needs, expectations and motivations, thereby improving the university selection process and increasing the conversion rate to students who actually enrol.

What are we going to do?

Perception survey

- **Phase 1 – Understanding:** 16 qualitative interviews with students who have chosen VU. We will explore their motivations, needs, doubts and experiences (Sept – Oct).
- **Phase 2 – In-depth analysis:** Using a quantitative driver analysis, we will identify which factors have the greatest influence on perception and conversion (Nov – Dec).
- **Phase 3 – Implementation:** We translate insights into concrete improvements in service provision, communication and recruitment, and test which measures have the greatest impact (from Jan).

Dropout research

- **Qualitative research:** 12 in-depth interviews with dropouts about their decision, decisive factors and opportunities for VU that can be influenced (Sept – Oct).
- **Quantitative research:** Analysis of Studielink data. Here, we identify the most common reasons and patterns behind dropouts (Sept – Nov).

What commitment does this require?

- **Commitment and expertise** from the relevant departments, faculties and research agencies to enrich the customer journey and research findings.
- **Access** to relevant data and existing insights into prospective students and dropouts.
- **Commitment and ownership** on the part of the relevant departments and faculties to translate research insights into concrete improvements in processes, communication and recruitment.

A question for you!

What insights do you have that might be relevant to this research?

What can students who have dropped out teach us about improving student intake?

What (market) research has been carried out or is planned within your faculty?



6. Dropout prevention

Normalising doubt, reinforcing choices, retaining students

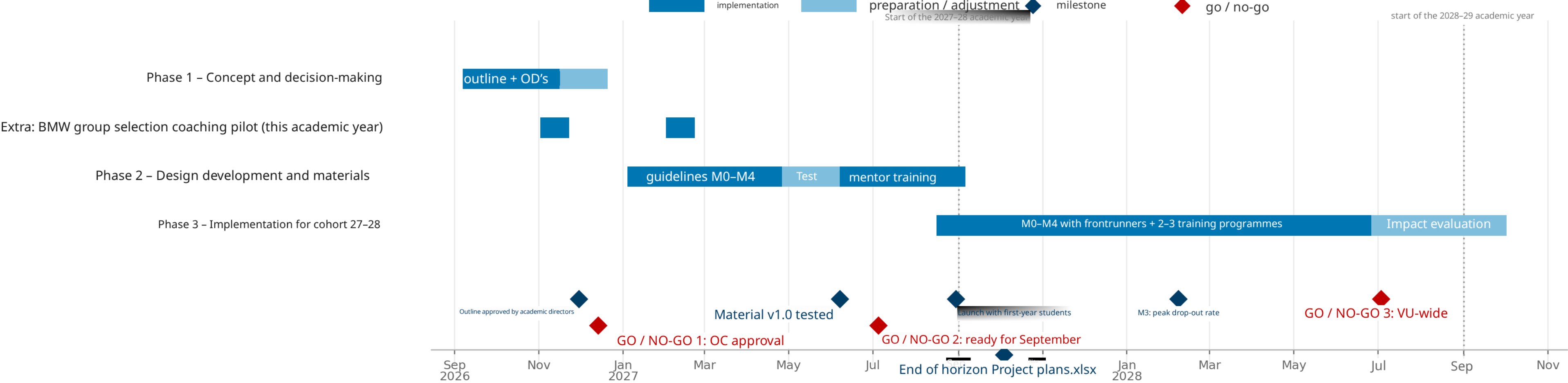
Project manager’s name: Mariëtte Huizinga and Tom Kik
 Department and role: Vice-Dean of Education, FGB / SOZ staff member
 Email: m.Huizinga@vu.nl and t.kik@vu.nl



Project objective
Outcome: Reduced dropout rates and student retention at VU, even when students switch programmes. The first year of study is a new phase in the study choice process. The peak in dropouts around February is precisely when new commitment takes hold.
Impact on intake: BMS and G&L will run the programme from September ’27. The effect on drop-out rates will be visible from February ’28; a full cohort picture will be available in September ’28.

What are we going to do?
Five key moments (M0–M4): from the welcome message to in-depth study in year 2. *Tom Kik*
Mentor development: training and peer supervision for mentors. *CTL in collaboration with Tom Kik*
Group-based choice coaching: scaling up to a group format; already running as a pilot at BMS this academic year. *Tom Kik*
Flagship programmes at BMW and G&L: 1 FTE judo S10 for implementation. *Tom Kik and Loek Kallen*
Monitoring and impact assessment: KPIs, cohort re-assessment, quasi-experimental design. *MH + Tom Kik + Education Analytics*

Stage	Focus of the discussion
M0 – 2 weeks before the start	Welcome message from the mentor; the fixed group is already known. One question: what are you hoping to find here?
M1 – Induction week + first 2 weeks of teaching	Unravelling the subject area like a map; exploring the ‘countries’ and finding your place.
M2 – Weeks 5–7, after the first test	Comparing expectations with reality; normalising setbacks.
M3 – January / February	Consciously saying ‘yes’ again; making it possible to discuss doubts, the path to group coaching.
M4 – May / June	Where do you want to go in Year 2? Explore your VUture, plus a brief reassessment.



From concept (autumn ’26) to VU-wide roll-out (July ’28): planning and milestones

What commitment does this require?
 Access to the revamped induction days in September ’27. That is where the first two anchor moments (M0, M1) will take place.
 Furthermore: a slot on the agenda of the programme committees in Nov/Dec ’26 for the go/no-go decision, two to three additional programmes participating alongside BMS and G&L, and sufficient training capacity at CTL. Stocktake of existing initiatives: there is already a lot going on at VU. Before we roll out the initiative, we will map out what is already in place.

A question for you!

What initiatives are already underway at your faculty or department that we could draw inspiration from for the first 100 days? Think of mentoring or buddy programmes, or activities organised by student societies.