

Executive Board
MBB4-6

Faculty Board

your reference

our reference
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Maastricht
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Subject: Report of the research assessment 2016-2021 of the Faculty of Law

Dear Executive Board,

In December 2022, the Research Assessment Committee chaired by Prof. Elaine Mak has presented its Report of the research assessment 2016-2021 of the Faculty of Law to the Faculty Board. The Report is attached. As agreed between all law faculties in The Netherlands, the research assessment was self-standing, and each of the faculties has been assessed by separate evaluation committees, in light of their own strategic aims. The evaluation thus is not intended to compare performance between faculties.

We are pleased to inform you that the Committee has evaluated the research of our Faculty as "very good". This relates to all three components that were assessed in accordance with SEP 2021-2027: the Faculty's research quality, societal relevance and viability. In particular, it commended:

- the Faculty's strategic aims to conduct excellent and socially relevant research,
- our approach to promoting societal relevance in a non-coercive way, in particular the content-driven approach to external funding that is characterized by soft steering,
- the quality of the research that nationally and internationally meets high academic standards,
- our academic culture that is characterized by an autonomous, independent, open and collegial nature,
- our PhD policy and training,
- the content-driven approach to societal relevance of our research,
- the implementation of open science in our Faculty,
- the viability of our research, and
- our human resources policy.

The Faculty Board, therefore, does not see a reason to drastically change our research policy.

At the same time, the Committee has provided a number of recommendations that the Faculty Board highly appreciates and will use for the further development of our research policy and strengthening of our academic culture. In this letter, we would like to inform you about these recommendations and how the Faculty Board intends to address them in the next years. It has also consulted the Faculty Science Committee on this.

Quality indicators for research

The Committee notes that the key publications and key achievements of our research institutes and groups meet high academic standards. Nevertheless, the Committee recommended to further develop the criteria to assess the quality of research, to achieve greater clarity for researchers and managers, and to ensure consistency in the application of the criteria.

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Finding suitable categories of what encompasses good research in terms of its originality, methodology, relevance in the field, quality of reasoning, etc. has been the subject of reflections and discussions within the Faculty for several years. The Faculty Board remains highly committed to continuing these discussions in adequate fora within the Faculty and with other Law Faculties in the Netherlands. In particular, the Faculty Board will work in close cooperation with the Science Committee on how to shape this process further. In the context of the implementation of Recognition and Rewards, we will pay attention to the clarity of assessment standards in the domain research. In addition, the Faculty Board will continue its efforts to calibrate and to invest in our communication about such important matters.

Academic Culture

While one of the Faculty's strengths is its organisation based on personal relationship, according to the Committee, the growth of the Faculty requires more steering and more clarity in communication. The Committee found that the communication from leadership towards researchers could be even more clear about aspects of their work, such as promotion criteria, Open Science and whom to contact with questions on workload etc.

The Faculty Board is very much aware of the need for clear communication and has made this a spearhead of its policy in recent years. Most recently, Maastricht University has introduced a new intranet Umployee to provide a clear structure for all information and foster more active engagement by all employees. The Faculty Board wishes to use this channel to its full extent. In addition, the Faculty Board will continue its efforts that were introduced previously to enhance communication, more specifically the organisation of research days, research festivals and Zoom townhall meetings.

PhD Policy and Training

The Committee describes our PhD policy and training as well-developed and contributing to the Faculty's strategic goals of investing in future generations and creating an environment of attracting and keeping talent. In view of the rather high drop-out rate among external PhD candidates as compared to internal candidates, the Faculty Board has set up a new policy in 2021 that requires a mandatory screening procedure by the Science Committee before external candidates are admitted. The Committee recommends monitoring closely how newly admitted external PhD candidates do after admission and whether this contributes to bringing down the drop-out rates.

The Faculty Board fully subscribes to the wish of monitoring the effects of our newly introduced policy. At this point, we can already see a decrease in the number of external PhD candidates being admitted to our Faculty. We will continue monitoring whether this possible effect is correct.

In relation to scholarship PhD candidates, the Committee suggest to clearly communicate what scholarship PhD candidates can expect from the research environment, in particular regarding office space. The Faculty Board will evaluate whether the conditions of doing research at our Faculty that are set out in the scholarship agreement and our website for scholarship candidates are unequivocal and easily findable and make adjustments if so required.

Research structure

The Committee finds that the Faculty's research programme in terms of research streams fits our Faculty's character. They connect the research institutes and groups to a broader umbrella of the Faculty's research. There is also praise for the continuous reflection on the Faculty's overarching research themes. The advice of the Committee focusses on maintaining this culture of interconnectedness and is two-fold. First, it suggests to monitor the viability of the number of research institutes and groups regularly in order to prevent that researchers are spread thin over

several institutes and groups. Second, the Committee advises to strengthen the interdisciplinary approach even further, between institutes and with other Faculties.

Both recommendations align with the Faculty's Board ambition to facilitate research that researchers are genuinely interested in, regardless of institute or group lines or disciplines. Collaborative projects, which among others have led to interdisciplinary research, have been stimulated and facilitated by the Faculty for several years now, and we will continue doing so. In terms of viability, the Faculty Board will intensify the regular exchange with the research institutes and groups as to whether the creation of new institutes or the merger of existing ones is necessary and appropriate. The Science Committee is also regularly consulted on the viability of our research structure.

Role of the Science Committee

Another recommendation connected to our research structure regards the mission of the Science Committee, as well as its composition. First, the Assessment Committee advises to clarify and review its mission in order to operate with more focus and effect and more proactively. The Science Committee has already initiated discussions on the clarification of its mission in dialogue with the Vice-Dean for Research. The Faculty Board will continue this dialogue with the Science Committee.

Second, the Assessment Committee furthermore suggests to review the composition of the Science Committee in light of the bottom-up approach, openness and diversity that is reflected in the Faculty's strategy. It recommends including several younger researchers in order to enhance its legitimacy. This point was already taken up last year by the Faculty Board that decided to have also more junior colleagues as member of the Committee. It will continue to reflect, together with the Science Committee and the larger community of researchers in the Faculty, on an appropriate balance between maintaining the authority of the Committee and improving its legitimacy and inclusivity.

Human Resources Policy

The Committee appreciates our human resources policy that takes the well-being of our employees seriously and stimulates researchers to work on what they are best in. Among others, it appreciates that our Faculty values and promotes societal relevance, but not in a coercive way, allowing staff to engage with research that they enjoy. One point of concern the Committee points to is the workload of (younger) staff and the effectiveness of measures that were taken to address that workload.

This concern has the full attention of the Faculty Board, as most of the measures taken during the last years have aimed at reducing the workload of our employees, in particular younger researchers. It is therefore one of our primary concerns that we continue to monitor and evaluate.

Another recommendation made by the Committee regards the monitoring of the aim that all assistant professors who want to supervise PhD candidates are provided with opportunities to act as co-supervisors. The Faculty Board is aware of this challenge and continues to monitor it. Part of the problem has already been addressed by regularly motivating full professors and associate professors to invite assistant professors to act as co-supervisors for their PhD candidates. During the annual selection of faculty-funded PhD candidates, the composition of the supervisory committee, and the inclusion of an assistant professor, is taken into account by the selection committee.

The Faculty Board is available for any questions and comments you may have on the Report and the way forward as outlined above.

With kind regards on behalf of the Faculty Board,



Prof. dr. Jan Smits
Dean