

Reactions by FASoS to the research assessment report 2011 and to remarks and questions by the CvB (Memo CWI 11.0559)

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The faculty has received the report titled *Research Review of Arts and Social Sciences, Maastricht University, 2005 - 2010* and the memo CWI 11.0559 by the CvB. The faculty Board of FASoS would like to react to these two documents by means of this note.

General remarks

- As the CvB, the faculty is content with the overall very good to excellent results. On average, FASoS achieves a final score of 4,31 (excluding SHCL) and 4,35 (with SHCL).
- We are also pleased that our desire to work in an interdisciplinary manner and to create unity of purpose and outlook over the different research programmes has been recognized and appreciated. The same goes for our commitment to maintain key elements of our research palette, to which the faculty is strongly committed. This does not exclude a careful further development of our existing focal points in the light of developments at the national level (topsectoren etc.) and the UM thematic profile areas (in particular Europe and a Globalizing World; Learning and Innovation).
- The faculty is strongly committed to remain a faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, as we have experienced precisely this mix of different disciplinary approaches as an inspiring element in our research policies.

Recommendations at the level of the research institute:

- "The Faculty and its Graduate School should continue efforts to acquire promising PhD projects and candidates and to bring them to the completion of their degrees" (p. 8 report). We agree with the CvB that it is self-evident for the faculty to continue with this policy and have duly noted the committee's remark that the objective of acquiring PhD places may be increasingly difficult to realize in the research landscape which currently is beginning to take shape. We believe that the interdisciplinary qualities of our GS and the excellent research programmes housed by FASoS will continue to attract interest of promising PhD candidates. Given the

budgetary constraints it will be more difficult to maintain the level of previous years in terms of financing first money stream PhD places. However, the faculty will vigorously continue with its efforts to bring in more research funding and PhD places linked with them.

- Regarding the average time it takes to bring PhD candidates to completion the faculty has installed a number of measures, as explained in the self-evaluation study (section III.5). We are confident that these policies will be successful on the basis of a) the growing number of PhD defenses in 2011 (9) and those to be expected in 2012 (9); b) feedback from within the graduate school itself. We would like to point out that the committee agrees with our assessment that the problems in this respect are a problem of the past and are unlikely to continue in the future. The GS under its new Board is vigorously committed to increase the completion rate and to bring down the average duration of PhD trajectories. We would also like to point out that the average duration of PhD completion already now is far better than national averages (see p. 127-8 self-assessment)
- Improving the marketing and visibility of our research, for example by making “use of the Maastricht biotope” (p. 9). We agree that the visibility of our research can be supported in some respects through using the name of Maastricht as a “brand”, but this needs careful calibration and analysis of associations linked with Maastricht abroad in order not to create empty shells. We interpret the remark of the commission to market ourselves with a “Maastricht approach” as being double-sided: On the one hand regarding the physical location of the faculty, on the other hand a specific methodological approach rather than a focus on specific themes or regions (p. 12).
- We agree that valorization and outreach activities (p. 9) cannot just happen through publications, as important as they may be. The faculty has a good track record in various forms of valorization activities, as explained in various places in the self-evaluation study. The ongoing discussion at the national level on quality indicators in the humanities and the greater focus of funding institutions on valorization elements will be key considerations in the further development of these activities. The faculty is willing to actively contribute to the ongoing debates on defining valorization at the UM level and at the national level.
- “Spontaneous individual or disciplinary research ambitions and collaborative trends across matrix compartments should be given room to develop” (p. 9). We fully agree and see it as one of the strengths of the faculty’s matrix organization to give room to both kinds of activities. The faculty has encouraged collaborative

activities between the programmes and works actively against a compartmentalization of our research efforts. Regarding the structural organization of the faculty's research (as opposed to 'spontaneous' initiatives), the faculty has been served well by interdisciplinary nature of research programmes and focal points and continues to encourage such initiatives. Historical approaches play a key role in all of the faculty's research programmes. We do not think that the creation of a disciplinary (historical) research programme would be helpful.

- "Future self-evaluations should include reports on the faculty's library policy" (p. 9). Such a chapter was not included in the self-assessment as the faculty's library policy is part of the larger UM policy in this respect. We agree that it is helpful for future assessment commissions to be better informed about this issue. The faculty ...
- A careful balance between different types of publications (e.g. monographs / edited volumes vs. international peer-reviewed journal articles; p. 9). We fully agree with this remark. The faculty employs an 'output measurement system' since a couple of years which puts a high incentive on producing international peer reviewed publications (as a reflection of our mediocre track record in this respect in former times). The system however does not only focus on this type of publications, but also gives high appreciation to the production of monographs and does not distinguish between peer reviewed journal articles and other forms of peer reviewed publications (also see comment below on the output of the AMC programme).
- The committee judges that for junior research staff "teaching loads are high, expectations for research productivity are unclear, and prospects for tenure (or other long-term appointments) are equally ambiguous". With this assessment we can only partially agree:
  - It is true that junior *research* staff with a completed PhD (which does not include the 'docent 4' positions) often work on an 80/20 contract. While we agree that being an effective researcher on such a contract is more difficult, it is not impossible. The recently approved personnel note also allows for differentiation in this respect
  - The expectations for research productivity are laid down in the work contracts of junior staff and are discussed and explained by the capgroep heads in the yearly assessment interviews.
  - The faculty operates a clear tenure track policy. Each year the required tenure track positions are decided upon in the FB. Staff are invited to apply for these

positions once they are opened, and the decision on which candidate will be appointed to a tenure track position follows clear criteria laid down in the faculty's tenure track note. The same applies for the decision of whether those on a tenure track position will eventually receive tenure. It is entirely clear to the young colleagues what is expected of them to be considered for tenure.

- Concerning the committee's comment that prospects for tenure (or other long-term appointments) are "ambiguous", we would like to point out that decisions on long-term appointments depend on the qualities of the researcher, as well as on the financial leeway of the faculty, on research and teaching needs of the faculty, and on Dutch higher education policy in general. Because these factors themselves undergo dynamic development, an element of ambiguity about long-term career prospects is unavoidable.
- The faculty board will organize a special meeting with junior staff early in 2012 in which the existing rules and procedures will be discussed and potential misunderstandings be resolved. We are looking into ways to make the provision of information more sustainable in the long run (welcome packs for new colleagues, better use of intranet, open hours of department heads and the personnel officer, etc.).
- The committee notes the challenges linked with the retirement of key professors in various places (p. 8, 12, 13). FASoS shares this concern and is committed to fill these positions with academics of similar stature (or potential) in due course. One complication in this respect could be the budget cuts which at this moment have already resulted in a delay in the appointment of a successor to the chair in Dutch literature (under a new profile). The continued excellence of the various research (and teaching) programmes of the faculty crucially depend on the ability to timely and adequately replace professors after their retirement. On this point, see also the remarks in the section below.

#### Remarks on the individual research programmes

In comparison to chapter 3, the programme chapters make recommendations more implicitly. We focus on a few notable points in the programme chapters and answer to recommendations to the extent that they are discernible in the programme chapters.

## PCE programme

- We are pleased about the positive remarks regarding PCE's research agenda, funding and publication successes, and internal cohesion. We have also noted with approval the remark that the PCE programme's "political and social relevance ... is beyond doubt" and the "confidence in the vision and future of PCE" which the committee expresses.
- The PCE programme is advised to "rethink its focal point and its overall direction both in quantitative and qualitative terms". It may be pointed out, first of all, that it was on the request/recommendation of the 2005 Research Accreditation Committee that the focal point European Administrative Governance - indeed in these terms - was elaborated. According to that Committee 'focus and mass' was needed to get a productive and (inter)nationally recognisable research program off the ground. As, among others, the steep rise in (peer reviewed) output since 2005 demonstrates, this recommendation has been of great value for PCE.
- We have made it clear in the self-evaluation that focal points are a relatively volatile intellectual category and have in fact already indicated the direction in which the focal point intends to develop in the future. While EU studies will remain at the core of the programme for the next years (not least to build on the reputation that our researchers have acquired in this field and to capitalize on the focal point policy), we want to expand the empirical scope of the PCE programme beyond the European Union and to cover also other organisations of regional integration, like ASEAN and MERCOSUR and global organizations of a political and/or regulatory kind, like the UN, WTO, IMF and NATO. We believe that the concepts and approaches that have been developed within the framework of the European Administrative Governance research project can be fruitfully applied to other international organizations and this broader scope will also allow for a wider range of research interests. It will moreover lend a robust basis for cooperation with the Globalisation and Development Initiative, without necessarily merging with that initiative. Last but not least, we think that this new research strategy fits well with the university-wide profile area 'Europe and a Globalising World'.
- We disagree with the remark that the programme has set itself "overly ambitious quantitative targets" and that this may inhibit programmatic innovation. On the one hand, the faculty and the PCE programme have seen a profound shift of publication strategies and cultures in the past years, as can be seen from the growth pattern of the past years. The larger numbers of e.g. international peer reviewed journal publications are not just an artefact of the growing size of the programme. In

this sense, we believe that the quantitative targets are realistic and can be reached even if the programme should decrease in size (note that the publication targets are set in relation to research fte). On the other hand, we believe that staying in touch with intellectual exchange at the global level through e.g. participating in international publication projects and shepherding publications and project proposals through critical peer review processes is the best way of preventing a splendid isolation of the programme. In that sense, we are convinced that the quantitative targets also serve a qualitative objective of continuing to be on the cutting edge of academic debate.

- This latter remark also applies to the other research programmes and the research institute as a whole.

#### STS programme

- We are very pleased with the excellent grades and the qualitative praise that the STS programme received again this time. It is the faculty's ambition to at least maintain the current level of scholarly excellence in the programme.
- Regarding the future of the STS programme, the "inevitable retirements of its founders" indeed are a concern for the faculty. While we share the committee's positive assessment of the existing intellectual capacity and vision among the middle generation of the programme, the timely and appropriate replacement of STS colleagues reaching retirement age is key objective of FASoS in the medium to long-term run.

#### AMC programme

- The committee has many positive things to say about the internal cohesion of the group, the visibility of its publications and research nationally and increasingly also internationally, and the excellent outreach of the AMC focal point. We also concur with the committee's remarks that a thriving programme of Arts, Media and Culture "occupies a crucial position" within the faculty, and that the intellectual contribution of AMC is indispensable for the vitality and intellectual outlook of FASoS.

- As recognised by the committee, the AMC programme has successfully managed the reorganization of the group, the integration of the CGD, and the achievement of a greater degree of coherence over the assessment period. In comparison to the PCE and the STS groups, the AMC programme is of a more variegated nature, and spans more diverse research interests. While agreeing with the recommendation of the committee that the focal point 'cultural memory and diversity' could be "more emphatically presented as the common factor in the various research projects" and that the focal point should aim to "provide a sufficiently unifying programmatic basis for the formulation of joint projects", this ambition is more difficult to realize than in the other programmes.
- The relatively low score (3) of the AMC programme's quality should be seen in that context. Other aspects of the 'quality' criterion as defined by the SEP are the scientific relevance of research, the leadership and management of the group, and the academic reputation of researchers. Especially concerning the first two criteria the committee's assessment seems to be more positive than is reflected in the score of 3 (consider the remarks about the programme's "excellent relevance", its "unified and collegial team of researchers", and the "excellently handled" institutional reorganization). We also want to highlight that the AMC programme has been very successful in securing substantial external funding for its research projects over the assessment period, and that its earning capacity is on a par with the faculty's other research programmes. Regarding the focus of the programme, we do agree with the committee's observation that the development of a shared "Maastricht" approach "may need to rely more on a methodological or operational focus than on a thematic or substantive one" (p. 12).
- We noted that the comparatively low (but still good) grade of "3" for the productivity of the AMC programme seems to be motivated by two factors: On the one hand, the higher number of junior researchers, on the other hand the fewer international peer reviewed publications in this programme. Regarding the latter aspect, we acknowledge that the productivity of AMC concerning this specific type of publications is lower than in the other programmes, while also noting that the respective figures have steadily increased over the past years, and that the programme's leadership agrees with general faculty policy in this respect. At the same time, specific publication cultures in specific fields have to be kept in mind. We concur with the committee's own remark that "monographs and edited collections may for many specialisms in the Humanities continue to be among the most substantial and impact-rich forms of publication" (p. 9). We share the impression of the CvB that there is an element of contradiction in the committee's own reasoning. We also agree with the

positive assessment of the committee concerning AMC's "excellent ... outreach that informs cultural reflection in society at large" (p. 12).

- As for the other programmes, we concur with the committee's remark about the importance of "effective replacements for chairs now approaching pension age".

#### The Globalisation and Development Initiative

- We are pleased about the committee's very positive assessment of this new initiative, especially given the currently still small size of the group and the fact that the GDI is still in its infancy. We concur with the assessment that the "GDI is an excellent response to the University's policy of situating European affairs in a more global context" and note that GDI staff are already now actively involved in this thematic profile area of UM.
- Apart from gaining a critical mass of researchers within the faculty, the further thematic consolidation of the GDI will be the main challenge in the years ahead. The committee's recommendations that the "notion of Transnationalism [should be] explicitly incorporated into the Initiative's self-description" and that migrant experiences could fruitfully be studied "over a slightly longer (pre-1980) historical period, [and] in cities and mining industries along the Cologne-Aachen-Liège-Brussels axis" offers valuable food for thought in this respect. We see these suggestions as an invitation to more generally examine cross-cutting research interests which GDI researchers share with colleagues in other FASoS programmes and centres. An element of collaboration with the SHCL is indeed already under way by incorporating global history in the MA GDS (Ad Knotter has an important role here). We also see fertile ground for future collaboration around the area of 'border studies' in which the GDI can make comparisons of historical trends in border regions in the Euregio and in other areas of the world where the GDI currently focuses on (particularly Africa and SE Asia).
- Given the excellent funding successes of the GDI in the past, we are less concerned that "the method of multi-sited ethnography creates heavy budgetary demands that may be challenging to sustain during fiscal retrenchment". Multi-sited ethnography is a research design employed by transnational studies and therefore fundamental to the focus of the program but that it does not interfere with the viability of the program as the costs of such research are covered by the grants. In fact, multi-sited ethnography often is one of the aspects that gives our research

group a distinctive characteristic which acts in our favour in obtaining funding. The future growth and diversification of the GDI will inevitably also lead to a greater diversity of research interests and methodological approaches housed by the group.

#### Sociaal-Historisch Centrum Limburg

- We are, of course, very happy with the positive evaluation of research at SHCL. Our aim to do comparative historical research that is both regionally and internationally relevant, and positioned in an international network of research is clearly highly valued by the committee. The result is enormously stimulating for developing and extending our research programme in this field even further, and could be supportive when we submit new proposals for research projects at NWO, the EU, and third parties. We consider the positive evaluation also as an encouragement to develop the academic 'research atelier' for comparative regional history in the future 'Historisch Centrum Limburg' (in which SHCL will merge with the Regional Archives, as announced in the self-assessment of SHCL). The idea is that the existing 'lieringsovereenkomst' between SHCL and UM will be replaced by a so called 'academiseringsovereenkomst' to support academic research in the HCL by the university.
- This 'research atelier' will not only be relevant for FaSOS, but also for other faculties at Maastricht University, for instance related to research in the field of medical history, economic history and legal history, that is done already on a small scale in the faculties concerned. In the framework of such an historical research atelier, the fragmented research in these historical fields, until now outside FaSOS and SHCL, can be connected and strengthened. A recent example is the dissertation written by SHCL fellow dr. Hans van Hall on a legal historical subject under supervision of prof. Louis Berkvens at the Law Faculty. Another example is the work done in the field of medical history by prof. Houwaart en em. prof. Hillen. To enable research in the 'historical atelier' set up by SHCL to be broadened and combined with historical research in other faculties, it would be highly desirable for the university to support this kind of research on a larger scale in the context of the projected 'historical research atelier'.
- This could be one way to solve 'the very tenuous staffing of the centre', as the committee remarked in the closing sentence of her report on the SHCL.