



School of Human Rights Research
Drift 15, 3512 BR Utrecht
tel.: 030-253 8034, fax: 030-253 7168
e-mail: rvdm@uu.nl
<http://www.schoolofhumanrights.org>

REPORT PEER REVIEW 2009 School of Human Rights Research

1. Introduction

On 5 and 6 October 2009 a Panel, consisting of Professor Kevin Boyle (Chair) University of Essex, Professor Marie-Bénédicte Dembour, University of Sussex and Professor Martin Kuijer, Free University of Amsterdam and Ministry of Justice of the Netherlands, conducted a Peer Review of the Netherlands School of Human Rights Research (hereafter: the School). The Peer Review is the third in the history of the School. The Panel was convened at the initiative of the Board of the School and invited to offer an appraisal of the work of the School in particular to give its assessment of the extent to which the School is achieving its goals. This Report of the Panel will hopefully be of assistance to the Board of the School should it seek re-accreditation from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2011.

The School was first recognised in 1995 and has been re-recognised twice since that date. It is one of some 75 such Schools initiated from 1991 as a result of Government policy. The objectives given to Research Schools were:

- To bring together researchers across institutional lines
- To provide a high quality education programme for junior researchers who would benefit from a resultant critical mass
- To raise the international profile of research conducted within the School and
- To strengthen the multidisciplinary character of the research

The School has now virtually achieved its goal of bringing together all institutions engaged in human rights research in the different universities of the Netherlands. This inter- university co operation comprises doctoral students and established academics and the objective, in line with the above policy objectives for Research Schools, is to enhance through co- operation the quality of education and research conducted in the partner institutions. The School has aimed since its inception to encourage both disciplinary and multidisciplinary research and publication. It pioneered training programmes for PHD candidates from participating institutions which continue to run successfully. It has also organised a publications series (School of Human Rights Research Series) whose titles consist in the main of published doctoral theses. The Series is highly regarded in the Netherlands and internationally and is actively promoted by the School. In addition the School with its university members and international partners has run a successful Summer Course for over a decade. The School has long published a quarterly newsletter as well as an annual report. A new website was launched in October 2009 (www.schoolofhumanrights.org), which will strengthen both the international profile of the School and the visibility of its participating university programmes. It will also facilitate communication between the graduate students across the different universities.

The Panel was provided in advance with comprehensive documentation on all aspects of the work and organisation of the School. Over the two days that it met in Utrecht it had meetings with all relevant stakeholders. The Panel met with:

- the director of the School Professor Thomas Zwart and the management team of the School;
- the director of the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights, (SIM) Professor Jenny Goldschmidt;
- members of the Board of the School;
- both senior and junior researchers who are members of the School;
- outside observers with an interest in the School, and
- the Dean of Utrecht School of Law, the host institution of the Research School.

The Panel was assisted very ably by Ms Marcella Kiel, the School's Registrar, who served as its Secretary.

Prior to the formal meetings of the Panel the Chair had the opportunity to attend the annual research day of the School, the 'Toogdag', organized by Tilburg University. The Toogdag is organised each year in turn by the partner universities of the School. In Tilburg the theme for the Toogdag was 'Realizing Human Rights: a Multidisciplinary Endeavour'. It proved an excellent opportunity to have informal discussions with both students and faculty members of the School from across the country.

The Panel notes with approval that by the time of its visit, much self-reflection had already been undertaken within the School, especially since the appointment of its new Director in 2007, Professor Tom Zwart.

In the light of the documentation provided and the opportunities which it had to meet with the staff and membership of the Research School the Panel was able to obtain a reliable picture of the position of the School and how it functions. It had available to it the documentation related to the re- accreditation process, 2005-2011 including the Peer Review report conducted in 2003 under the chairmanship of Professor Schermers. It was also provided with a Self Assessment paper prepared for the Board of the School by the director. "Reinvigorating The Bottom-Up Approach", a Strategic Plan for the School of Human Rights Research 2008 - 2010, was adopted by the Board of the School in 2008. The Panel had opportunity to discuss the strategic plan and its implementation in full with the Board and with the director. The Panel considers that the Plan represents a sound vision and programme of action for the School for the immediate future.

In 2008 in preparing the Self Assessment report Professor Zwart and the management team of the School toured all participating institutions. He estimates that he met with some three quarters of the members of the School, both senior and junior researchers. Almost without exception those whom he met considered that the School and its activities enhanced advanced human rights education and research within the partner institutions and that its objectives remain relevant and important to those institutions. The Panel received the same message from all those whom it met.

2. The School of Human Rights Research and its environment

The Panel was made aware of the debate underway in the Netherlands on the future of Research Schools. Alongside the Research Schools new institutions have been formed, known

as Graduate Schools, which also focus on educating PhD candidates. In contrast to Research Schools, which by definition are inter-university, the Graduate Schools are organised locally within universities. A concern expressed was that in some cases university authorities are investing resources in their Graduate School to the detriment of the Research Schools, because the former are under local control.

Since its remit is limited to the Netherlands School of Human Rights Research, and does not extend to other similar Research Schools, the Panel will refrain from commenting on these developments insofar as they do not touch upon this School directly. The Panel has noted that the Director of the School serves as the Chair of the Association of Dutch Research Schools, (SODOLA). The School will undoubtedly benefit from the access to relevant information and policymakers which this position entails. The members of the School are aware of the policy challenges that may lie ahead, but they are clearly resolved to address them positively.

During the discussions with the Panel the School presented itself in a favourable, vital and positive way. The effects of the re-invigoration of the School under its new director were widely appreciated by those members interviewed. They expressed support for the objectives of the School and strongly supported its continuation. Commitment and support was expressed for the School's research and graduate programs and the research cooperation it promotes.

The Panel thus concludes that the School is both relevant and important to its stakeholders, both senior and junior researchers. The Panel is convinced that the School has added value and that there are strong arguments for it to continue.

3. Organization

Since 2007 considerable changes have taken place in the organisational structure of the Directorate of the School. Prior to that date the positions of Director of the School and Director of SIM were joined. In 2007 these roles were divided into a Director of the School (Tom Zwart) and SIM (Jenny Goldschmidt). It is clear to the Panel that the separation has proved positive for both the identity and the running of the School. The separation allows the School to be more responsive to all its members.

In addition a management-team for the School was created. It consists of the Director (Tom Zwart), an Education Officer (Antoine Buyse), a Research Officer (Gentian Zyberi) and Registrar (Marcella Kiel). The Education Officer's role consists mainly of maintaining contacts with junior researchers, especially in relation to the School's graduate program, and in co-editing the website. The tasks of the Research Officer are maintaining contacts with senior researchers, liaising with the Working Groups and managing the Summer Course. The Registrar's duties are managing the overall administration of the School, including the membership's database, organising events, editing the Newsletter and co-editing the website. The executive manager of SIM (Ilse van Vugt) remains responsible for financial administration.

All PhD candidates registered within the School are members of the PhD Council. The Chair and the Deputy-Chair of the Council are members of the Board of the School to allow them to represent the interests of PhD candidates. However until 2008 the Council mainly existed on paper. The Panel was informed that the new Director and the present Chair of the PhD Council have worked to revive it. As a result, the PhD candidates play a much more active

role in the way the School is being run, and the Council itself is much more visible. The Panel welcomes these developments.

The subsidiarity principle has been an important characteristic of the School from the outset. The School does not impose standards or structures on the participating institutions, but instead sees its role as that of stimulating and facilitating common activities. As part of the new strategic plan the Board of the School has nevertheless identified a need to be more proactive in co-ordinating activities especially as regards training programmes for junior researchers. The Panel endorses the subsidiarity principle as regards the participating institutions and the School Board and directorate. But it equally supports the need for the School's directorate to offer leadership in enhancing the junior researchers' experience. One example of such leadership is the proposed mentoring scheme linking each PHD student with a senior researcher other than the supervisor as a mentor. A more active leadership from the Centre is also vital for the international profile of the School's research and publication activities and the Panel was impressed with how much has already been achieved in that regard.

4. Finances

For income the School relies mainly on an annual grant awarded by Utrecht University and annual contributions paid by the partner universities ('first tier' funding). The Panel commends the Directorate of the School for its success in making ends meet over a number of years. The present funding arrangements appear to work well from the perspective of the School and there is no call for change. However, the Panel observes that the Utrecht University executive board has recently decided to transfer the grant to the Dean of the Law School while no longer earmarking it for the School. It was reassured however, by the pledge made by the Dean that the money will be reserved for the School.

In order to prevent the School from becoming too dependent on one single source of income, the School should seek to diversify its sources of funding. The Panel notes with satisfaction that the School has been able to secure some 'third tier' income, for example for the Global Constitutional Justice Project, and that other grant proposals are being pursued. The School is encouraged to continue to increase its share of such research income. The Panel recognises that in order to be able to do so, the School should be able to rely on the services of a professional grant writer. The finances of the School permitting, such a position should be created dedicated to assisting the School in making grant applications.

The Panel supports the attempts made by the Directorate to clarify the School's bookkeeping and to disentangle it from that of SIM.

5. Fostering of research

An important objective of the School is to invite and encourage academics with an interest in human rights research to come together across institutional boundaries. By serving as a platform for research and discussion the School has continued to stimulate human rights academics in the Netherlands to work together including across disciplinary lines. At present some 120 senior and 70 junior researchers based in Utrecht University, Law Faculty and Faculty of Humanities; Maastricht University, Law Faculty; Tilburg University Law Faculty; Erasmus University Rotterdam, Law Faculty; Leiden University Law Faculty and T.M.C.

Asser Institute are members of the School. Complete coverage of all university institutions with involvement in human rights research is expected to be achieved in the near future, with negotiations currently proceeding positively with both the University of Amsterdam and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The Panel recognises that the expansion of the number of participating institutions is a considerable achievement and it underscores that the School is seen as adding value for its member institutions. Negotiations are underway with other candidate institutions including three in Belgium (Leuven, Gent and VUBrussels). While the Panel understands the particular circumstances which explain the latter including a history of co operation, it cautions against further membership expansion outside the Netherlands. Co – operation with human rights institutes in other countries is best pursued through established research networks rather than through membership of the School.

The Panel welcomes the creation by the School of research based Working Groups. These are an innovative and promising basis for developing cooperation between both senior and junior researchers. It supports the ‘three generations policy’ relating to their composition, *i.e.* the aspiration to mix junior researchers, who offer their time and drive to the group, junior senior researchers who add experience and guidance, and senior researchers who share their expertise and insight. The Panel suggests that the School enters into contact with the Dutch Section of the International Commission of Jurists, NJCM, to determine whether there can be synergy with their Working Groups. If there is not enough critical mass within the School to set up a particular Working Group, it may be that such a group can be established within or in cooperation with NJCM, or vice versa.

The School plays a facilitating role by offering a structure for encouraging research outputs. The Panel was presented with a well developed list of publications covering the four research clusters, which are attached to the present report (Annexes I-IV). It notes with approval that a number among them are multidisciplinary (*e.g.* B. de Gaay Fortman, Protection or Proscription? Cultural Practices Against the Background of Religious Pluralism, in: M.L.P. Loenen & J.E. Goldschmidt (eds), *Religious Pluralism and Human Rights in Europe: Where to Draw the Line?*, Antwerp: Intersentia 2007, pp. 239-250, W.J.M. van Genugten, The universal declaration of human rights: Catalyst for development of human rights standards (with T. Lambooy), in: W.J.M. van Genugten, R. Lubbers and T. Lambooy (eds), *Inspiration for global governance*, Deventer: Kluwer 2008, pp. 33-61 and J.H. Nieuwenhuis, Multicultureel recht: hoe is het mogelijk?, in: W. van der Burg, C.J.M. Schuyt and J.H. Nieuwenhuis (eds), *Multiculturaliteit en recht* (Handelingen Nederlandse Juristen-Vereniging, 138), Deventer: Kluwer 2008, pp. 125-164), or the result of cooperation between researchers based at different participating institutions (*e.g.* J. Goldschmidt and I. Boerefijn (eds), *Changing perceptions of sovereignty and human rights: Essays in honour of Cees Flinterman*, Antwerp - Oxford - Portland: Intersentia 2008). The Panel has also taken notice of the numerous conferences organised by the School, which exemplify the spirit of cooperation, for example the seminar conducted by professor Asbjørn Eide on “The Right to Adequate Food” at Tilburg University on 7-9 October 2008, the research seminar conducted by Justice Michael Kirby on “The Use of Foreign Sources by Courts” at Utrecht on 27 October 2008, and the seminar conducted by professor Kent Roach on “Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights” at Utrecht on 8 January 2009. The Panel welcomes the decision to use the School’s infrastructure to support the reporting procedure for the expert legal group that will service the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRALEX). It would encourage the School to consider whether other, similar initiatives may be undertaken which by building on the network function of the School demonstrate its value to its members.

A further objective of the School is to detect, explore and tap into new developments in the human rights field and make them ripe for research. The Panel was informed that the Directorate has succeeded in developing a number of new research areas and themes including universalism and cultural relativism, human rights in China, human rights in Central- and Eastern Europe and human rights in Africa. All such are welcome developments.

It is important that the School maintains a proactive attitude towards research opportunities. Discussion of new areas for potential research should feature regularly on the agenda of the Board.

6. Interdisciplinary goals

As the School has indicated in the ‘Introduction to the Self-Assessment’, the legitimacy of mono-disciplinary research is not contested. However an objective of the School is to encourage academics with an interest in human rights research to cross the boundaries of their disciplines by conducting multi-disciplinary research. Turning the School, in which law plays a dominant role, into an interdisciplinary enterprise, is not an easy goal in the Netherlands no more than it has proved easy elsewhere. It notes that the 2003 Peer Review Panel had the impression that multi disciplinary and interdisciplinary research was still to happen.

The Panel believes that progress has been achieved by the School in this area since the last Peer Review. Efforts have been deployed to realize interdisciplinary research on the shop floor. Whereas non-lawyers within the School were once gathered in a separate research cluster they are now rightly integrated within several Working Groups. The Panel notices that several interesting interdisciplinary publications have seen the light of day, such as Fons Coomans, Fred Grünfeld and Menno Kamminga (eds), *Methods of Human Rights Research*, Maastricht Series in Human Rights, Intersentia 2009, x + 262 pp. Several interdisciplinary seminars and conferences have taken place, such as the ‘Supporting the Rule of Law in Central and Eastern Europe’ conference in June 2009, the ‘Russia and the Rule of Law’ seminar with professor Alexander Knoops and professor Orlando Figes, the workshop on the methodology of social sciences organised by professor John Morison and Chiseche Mibenge and the conference on ‘Methods of Human Rights Research’ organised by professor Menno Kamminga and professor Fons Coomans. The Panel welcomes the plan adopted by the School to organise an international conference on universalism and cultural relativism to mark and amplify the interdisciplinary research commitment of the School. It welcomes the constructive role played by the Working Groups, most of which have been composed of members with different disciplinary backgrounds and who engage in cross-disciplinary projects.

The Panel welcomes the boost that the interdisciplinary dimension of School’s activities has received from the very successful cooperation with CERES, the Research School for Development Studies, which has for example made methodological courses (e.g. on how to conduct fieldwork) available to School students. The Panel encourages the School to look for opportunities to strengthen and deepen the cooperation with CERES, and recommends that the School explores the possibilities of cooperation with other interdisciplinary partners on the CERES model.

The School has already achieved progress in building its multidisciplinary mission. However, there is no reason for complacency. Although the non-legal disciplines have been taken out of isolation, law remains the dominant discipline and any Midas effect on the research conducted within the School that may result from this should be suppressed. The Panel feels that the communication within the School and with its environment should be scrutinised in particular. Often when there is a dominant discipline, invitations and bulletins tend to be biased towards that discipline. The Panel suggests that the School reconsider the final sentences of its mission statement, which are clearly addressed to lawyers only. The School might consider amending them, for example by adding: “exploration of social relations”.

7. International profile

A further objective of the School is to encourage its members to cross international boundaries. There is indeed a need for the School to maintain an independent international profile. The previous Peer Review Panels have expressed the view that more should and could be done to enhance this international profile. The current Panel has noted with approval that both the Board and the Director show a strong commitment to strengthening the international presence of the School, and that considerable progress has already been made.

The School has clearly invested in encouraging international contacts. This is exemplified by the large number of visiting fellows, the recruitment of PhD candidates from abroad, the engagement in projects abroad, in particular in China and Central- and Eastern Europe, the support of the African Human Rights Network, and the Summer Course. The Panel warmly welcomes the establishment of an independent and sophisticated new website of the School of Human Rights Research which is an essential tool for communication within the international community. It encourages the School to continue to explore the possibility of setting up a carousel between it and selected international universities, which would offer PhD students exchange opportunities as occurs in the SOCRATES/ERASMUS program. The Panel believes that the initiatives taken to date have considerably strengthened the international profile of the School, and that the international reputation of the School and its participating institutions as offering a world class research and education programme will continue to develop as a result of them.

The Panel believes that the School has become an important 'brand', and some of the participating institutions are rightly flagging their membership in their external communication, such as brochures and letterheads. The Panel would like to encourage all participating institutions to follow suit. By presenting themselves as part of a consortium rather than stand-alone institutions, they will undoubtedly broaden their appeal.

The Panel was informed that the School has decided to welcome Belgian universities as members. Negotiations have started with Leuven. Although the Panel welcomes this development and the fact that a flexible structure has been put in place to admit partners with different statuses, it would advise the School to limit its expansion to Belgium, in particular to the Dutch-speaking universities there. This will prevent the School from overstretching itself and from overlapping with networks like AHRI and EMA. However this advice in no way diminishes the importance of the relationships the School has been building with institutions across the world as external partners, in particular in the U.S., Central- and Eastern Europe, Russia, Africa and in Asia especially China.

8. Engaging with society

An objective of the School is to encourage its members to share the outcomes of their research with other stakeholders in society through knowledge transfer and *pro bono* activities. The School is very conscious of its role in this regard and of the importance generally of effective communication with society. The Panel noted with approval that the School has started to make occasional use of the services of a public affairs expert to draw attention to its research products and it believes that this is an instrument with great potential. These valuable activities are amplified by the Newsletter, which is a very informative means to assist the School in reaching out not only to its members, but also to the community at

large. The new website, already mentioned, will also assist the School in communicating effectively with its environment.

The Panel welcomes the fact that the School is actively engaged in knowledge transfer. One partner, the T.M.C. Asser Institute has gained considerable expertise and a strong reputation in training lawyers and officials in transitional democracies. The Panel notes that the Summer Course not only serves as a recruitment pool for potential PhD candidates, but also as an important forum for sharing the outcomes of the School's research with the participants. The Panel would like to commend the School for supporting the establishment of the African Human Rights Network by providing its expertise and facilities on a *pro bono* basis.

The National Human Rights Institute (NIRM) a national human rights institution for the Netherlands is expected to be operational soon. The Panel welcomes the fact that the School has been actively engaged in the negotiations resulting in the establishment of NIRM, and that it has offered its services in assisting research which the new body will need. It anticipates that the School and NIRM will build a productive relationship.

9. PhD students

A. Introduction

The training programme offered by the School is prepared by the Graduate Programme Committee and contains three elements: courses offered by participating faculties, courses focussed on the individual wishes of PhD researchers and courses, seminars and other activities initiated and organised by the School itself.

The first objective of the School in this respect is to offer a high quality training program to PhD candidates, which enables them to pursue a career in the human rights field, both within and outside academia. As already noted the School plays an essential role with regard to the training of doctoral students. As was emphasised in particular by the junior researchers whom the Panel met, great strides have been made since the last review in implementing the mission of the School to enhance the graduate experience of PhD students. This positive experience is amplified by the opportunity to enrol in courses offered by CERES.

The PhD candidates regard the introductory course and the additional courses taught at the central level as valuable parts of their training, which complements the education they receive within their institutions. The PhD candidates have welcomed the new format of the introductory course and the new follow-up arrangements. The annual research day or 'Toogdag', the research seminars, the meetings of the Working Groups, and the events organised by the School offer the PhD candidates a significant range of opportunity to meet senior researchers and international scholars.

At the central level more emphasis has been put on acquiring research skills, like networking, publishing, and presenting, and this has been warmly welcomed by the PhD students. These are transferable skills, which will also be very useful for those PhD candidates who will pursue a non-academic career after completing their PhD theses, which is a sizeable majority. The Panel welcomes these steps.

B. Complementarity

Since training courses for doctoral candidates are increasingly being offered both at the local and the central level, coordination is essential to prevent overlap especially where the new Graduate Schools offer their own training programs. The Panel believes that the Graduate Program Committee and the Education Officer can ensure coordination. However, if as a result of an oversight a PhD student is asked to enrol for the second time in a similar course, a waiver should be given.

The Panel supports the proposal to invite lecturers who have offered courses at the local level, which have proven successful, to offer such again at the central level for the benefit of other students.

C. Timely completion of the PhD thesis

The timely completion of PhD theses continues to be a cause for concern. Although the panel recognises that it is primarily the task of the participating institutions to increase the number of PhD's who finish on time, it also engages the responsibility of the School.

Since failure in their first job may haunt PhD candidates during their entire career, the School should play more than a symbolic role. It should ensure that every PhD candidate will be supervised by more than one supervisor, engage in training supervisors and, as suggested by the Director, appoint an independent Ombudsperson who can deal with queries and complaints brought by PhD candidates with regard to their supervision.

In addition, the School should act as a forum for discussing concrete problems, like the *de facto* teaching load of PhD students. The regular informal breakfast meetings between the Director and the PhD's based at Utrecht, during which everything relating to their work can be discussed is an example of a best practice in communication with students that could be emulated elsewhere.

D. Recruitment

One of the objectives the School has set itself is to scout highly talented students and recruit them for a career in the field of human rights. Given the general trend of diminishing inflow of PhD students in the Netherlands, the Panel is impressed by the growing number of PhD students the School still manages to recruit. This means that conducting research at the School is still being perceived as an attractive career opportunity.

The School starts early with recruiting by inviting BA and MA students and students of the research masters to its research events and by providing information on the website. The School is developing initiatives to reach out more actively to BA and MA students in order to familiarise them early on with human rights issues and to draw attention to academia as a career option. The Panel believes that these initiatives will assist the School in securing a steady influx of talented young researchers into the School. The School rightly regards the research masters as a stepping stone for PhD positions.

Furthermore, the intention to increase the quality of the participants of the Summer Course by offering scholarships and by inviting more prestigious speakers could turn the Course into a more extensive pool of potential PhD candidates than was already the case before. The Panel

feels that it would be appropriate to complement the website with a more conventional informative leaflet about the School.

E. Placement

The Panel very much welcomes the idea of encouraging PhD students to spend a three months' period in a position in society by way of an internship or placement. Such placements and internships could be facilitated by the Research Officer.

However, the Panel believes that the effect of such placements on the time needed for the completion of the doctoral thesis should be considered and taken into account. One possibility might be to allow candidates to "intermit" their doctoral student status for the duration of their placement. Whether this proposal is appropriate or not, the Panel encourages the School to foster discussion among the partners in consultation with the PHD Council on how to enable such placements to be accommodated.

10. Conclusions and Recommendations

On the basis of the views that have been expressed in the preceding sections, the Panel would like to draw the following conclusions and recommendations set out in terms of the School's published objectives.

- 1. To offer a high quality training program to PhD candidates which enables them to pursue a(n academic) career in the human rights field*

The School plays an essential role in the training of doctoral students. Junior researchers whom the Panel met spoke of considerable improvements since the last review in enhancing the graduate experience of PhD students. One example given was the opportunity the relationship with CERES provided to enrol in courses offered by that Research School.

The PhD candidates regard the introductory course and the additional courses taught at the central level as a valuable part of their training, that complemented the education they receive at the local level. The PhD candidates welcomed the new format and content of the introductory course. The annual research day or 'Toogdag', the research seminars, the meetings of the Working Groups, and the events organised by the School offer the PhD candidates significant opportunities to meet senior researchers and international scholars.

In an initiative taken at central level more emphasis is now put in training on acquiring skills such as networking, publishing, and presenting. The Panel found that this focus on skills is warmly welcomed by students. These are transferable skills, and they will prove also to be very useful for those PhD candidates who pursue a non-academic career after completing their theses, which is a sizeable majority.

The Panel was told that the Graduate Program Committee and the Education Officer will assist in preventing duplication between local and central training courses offered to candidates. If such nonetheless occurs, a waiver should be arranged for the PhD candidate concerned. The Panel supports the idea that the School might invite lecturers to offer courses, which have proven successful at the local level, to offer such again at the central level when there is demand.

The timely completion of PhD theses continues to be a cause for concern. Although the panel recognises that it is primarily the task of the participating institutions to increase the number of PhD's who finish on time, it also engages the responsibility of the School. The School should ensure that every PhD candidate will be supervised by more than one supervisor, and engage in training supervisors. As suggested by the Director, the School might appoint an independent Ombudsperson who can deal with queries and complaints brought by PhD candidates with regard to their supervision. In addition, the School should act as a platform for discussing concrete problems, like the *de facto* teaching load of the PhD students, and best practices on the teaching assignments of students.

The Panel welcomes the proposal to facilitate PhD students who wish to spend a three months' period in human rights or other organisations by way of an internship or placement. Such placements and internships could be facilitated by the Research Officer.

However, the Panel believes that such placements should not necessarily be counted within the length of time the PhD candidates are allowed to spend on their thesis. It therefore encourages discussion among the partners to find solutions for the consequences this situation may have on their employment.

2. To invite and encourage academics with an interest in human rights research to come together across institutional boundaries

The Panel is impressed by the expansion of the School's membership. It notes with approval that the number of participating institutions has increased and that negotiations are underway with other candidate institutions. There can be no better demonstration that the School adds value than the continuing interest of institutions in joining it.

The Panel welcomes the Working Groups as a new, and promising system of cooperation for both senior and junior researchers. The Panel suggests that the School enters into contact with the Dutch Section of the International Commission of Jurists, NJCM, to see whether there can be synergy with their Working Groups. The Panel welcomes the decision to start relying on the School's infrastructure to feed the reporting procedure for FRALEX. It would like to encourage the School to see whether other, similar initiatives may be undertaken which build on the network function of the School.

3. To invite and encourage academics with an interest in human rights research to cross the boundaries of their disciplines by conducting multi-disciplinary research

The Panel notes with approval the steps that the School has taken in order to stimulate multidisciplinary research. It welcomes the very constructive role played by the Working Groups, most of which have been composed of members with different disciplinary backgrounds who engage in cross-disciplinary projects.

The Panel is of the view that the interdisciplinary dimension of School's activities has also received a boost from the very successful cooperation with CERES, the Research School for Development Studies. It encourages the School to look for opportunities to strengthen and deepen the cooperation with CERES, and it recommends it to explore the possibilities of cooperation with other interdisciplinary partners like CERES.

Although the non-legal disciplines have been taken out of isolation, law still remains the dominant discipline. This warrants some vigilance, which should also extend to the

communication within the School and with its environment. Often when there is a dominant discipline, invitations and bulletins tend to be biased towards that discipline.

4. To invite and encourage academics with an interest in human rights research to cross international boundaries

The Panel notes with approval that both the Board and the Director show a strong commitment to strengthening the international presence of the School, and that considerable progress has already been made in this area: the School has clearly invested in encouraging international contacts.

The Panel warmly welcomes the establishment of the new independent website, which offers a 21st century means of communication with the outside world, including the international community. The Panel encourages the School to continue to explore the possibility of setting up a carousel with partner universities outside the Netherlands.

The Panel has noticed that the School has decided to welcome Belgian universities as members and that it has started negotiations with Leuven to this end. Although the Panel welcomes this development and the fact that a flexible structure has been put in place to admit partners with different statuses, it would advise the School to limit its expansion in order not to overstretch its capacities.

However, this in no way diminishes the importance of the working relationships the School has been building with institutions across the world as external partners, in particular in the U.S., Central- and Eastern Europe, especially with Russia, Africa and Asia, especially with China.

The Panel suggests that all participating institutions should be encouraged to flag their membership of the School in their external communications such as websites.

5. To invite and encourage academics with an interest in human rights research to share the outcomes of their research with other stakeholders in society through knowledge transfer and pro bono activities

The Panel finds that the School is fully aware of its own role in ensuring that there is effective communication with society over its research activities and that of its participating institutions. It notes with approval that the School has started to make occasional use of the services of a public affairs expert to draw attention to its research products.

These valuable activities are amplified by the Newsletter, which is an effective means to assist the School in reaching out not only to its members, but also to the community at large. The new website will also assist the School in communicating effectively with its environment.

The Panel welcomes the fact that the School is actively engaged in knowledge transfer through the training activities of the T.M.C. Asser Institute and the Summer Course. The Panel commends the School for supporting the establishment of the African Human Rights Network by providing its expertise and facilities on a *pro bono* basis.

The Panel welcomes the fact that the School has been actively engaged in the negotiations over the imminent establishment of NIRM, the Netherlands national human rights institution, and that it is seeking to serve the research needs of this institution.

6. To scout highly talented students and recruit them for a career in the field of human rights

Given the general trend of diminishing inflow of PhD students in the Netherlands, the Panel is impressed by the growing number of PhD students that the School still manages to recruit.

The School starts early with recruiting by inviting BA and MA students and students of the research masters to its research events and by providing information on the website. The School is developing initiatives to reach out more actively to BA and MA students in order to familiarise them early on with human rights issues and to draw attention to academia as a career option. The Panel believes that these initiatives will assist the School in securing a steady influx of talented young researchers into the School.

The intention to increase the quality of the participants of the Summer Course by offering scholarships and by inviting more prestigious speakers could turn the Course into a more extensive pool of potential PhD candidates than has been the case to date. A conventional information leaflet about the School would be valuable for recruitment to compliment the website.

7. To detect, explore and tap into new developments in the human rights field and make them ripe for research

The Directorate has succeeded in developing a number of new research themes in the area of universalism and cultural relativism, human rights in China, human rights in Central- and Eastern Europe and human rights in Africa. These are welcome developments. The Panel suggests however, given the expected establishment of NIRM, that human rights research focussed on the Netherlands, should also be encouraged. Such research could focus for example, on the challenges which the implementation of new international human rights standards pose for domestic law. Discussion of new research opportunities should be regularly on the agenda of the Board.

8. Final Comments

The Panel is in no doubt that the School is fulfilling the general objectives of research schools as set out initially by Government in 1991. It is also fulfilling highly successfully its own more specific educational and research objectives. On the basis of the information presented to it, the Panel is agreed that the School is both relevant and important to its major stakeholders, senior and junior researchers. The Panel considered that its core task has been to establish whether there is an added value to the School's activities. There can be no doubt that this has been established. The Panel therefore is of the opinion that the School should continue.

Professor Kevin Boyle
Professor Marie-Bénédicte Dembour
Professor Martin Kuijer

3 November 2009