

Research review department of Sociology 2013-2018

- Reaction to the assessment report -

Introduction

Our research review (self-evaluation) covers the period 2013-2018. In February 2020, we discussed our research with the committee reviewing the research of six Dutch sociology programs. The committee discussed our research program with the management and representatives of staff and PhD students of the department of Sociology, University of Groningen. The committee has written a report, following the criteria and categories of the SEP protocol, and assessed research quality (1), relevance to society (2), and viability (3). In addition the committee has addressed the topics PhD training (4), research integrity (5), and diversity (6). The report consists of an overall assessment of the research programs of Sociology in the Netherlands and the specific assessment of six research departments, including the department of Sociology in Groningen.

Overall assessment of the department of Sociology

The review committee assessed the quality of the our research program (1) as 'excellent, the relevance to society (2) of the program as 'very good' and the viability (3) as 'very good'. The management of the Institute is very satisfied with these results and highly appreciates the work of the review committee.

Reactions to the recommendations and suggestions of the committee

The review committee made several suggestions to further improve the quality of the our research program. In answer to these, the director of research, supported by the management team, of the department of Sociology has developed a plan. The key components of this plan are presented below.

1) Research Quality

In order to play a more visible role in sociology on the international forum outside the specialized domains, the committee recommends *to cultivate (international) visibility in the sociology discipline, focus more on the core discipline: sociology with more attention to general sociology journals.*

We use a problem-based approach with focus on social problems in networks, solidarity and inequality, executed by 5 research clusters within our department. In different subfields of sociology we already have an international top position which is a good base to publish in disciplinary high ranked journals. In the future our 5 research clusters will collaborate more in order to achieve this.

The committee recommends *considering greater use of different publication formats such as books, special issues, or review papers.*

Our self-study already shows several publication of this art among our top ten papers. Our future focus remains on high quality publications. Books, special issues, or review papers are great examples of such high quality publications.

2) Relevance to society

The committee recommends *to spread the valorization of research more widely across all clusters in the department and across all levels of the staff.*

Our department managed to translate fundamental research into applied research including several interventions as a result (e.g., KiVa anti-bullying program and Grip & Gleam self-management training). Collaboration between the different research clusters within the department made this possible. Also co-creation with organizations outside the university (e.g., NWA and Netwerk Zon) is an important part of our societal impact strategy. It is also a criterion of our tenure track. Both senior and junior staff members show the relevance of our research projects through diverse media platforms (e.g., radio, TV, workshops and interventions). We will continue to pay attention to this in the future.

3) Viability

The committee observed some possible lack of clarity about future teaching of the junior staff *and recommends to write reliable plans in consultation with all staff members about their teaching load and the specific courses to be continued, discontinued or planned for a 2- 3 year period. At least a substantial core of the teaching assignment should be stable over this period.*

For the future our policy is to plan teaching for a longer period. A variety of contracts in the last years has caused agitation among junior staff members. Some of these contracts were financed by the faculty in order to improve teaching and included a higher teaching load. In the future we will focus on contracts meeting the same conditions for all teachers.

Although the PhD training is much appreciated in general, the committee recommends *to establish structures for more systematic exchange between the clusters. These structures could also stimulate new innovative research among the sociologists from different clusters within the department.*

Our department consists of five research clusters. Our self-evaluation might have been unclear about the fact that 1) all researchers are part of one research program, 2) they all contribute to the teaching program, 3) researchers of different clusters share rooms and 4) PhD students share rooms per year group and are therefore mixed. Also, staff members of all clusters meet monthly and many meetings, including our internal colloquia, are organized for the department as a whole. Furthermore, several PhD students are supervised by researchers from different clusters. In the future we will explain this more clearly.

With regard to the experiment of bursary students the committee observed serious issues in labour conditions, outside of the responsibility of the departmental management, are inherent for bursary PhD students (e.g. the lack of social security). The committee recommends *to look systematically into the advantages and disadvantages of the “bursary system” and to document the necessary changes this system needs in order to better balance out the academic freedom with the working conditions of these PhDs. At the same time, we recommend the department to continue their current approach towards these bursary PhDs as this shows a great respect to the people in this position.* Policy on bursary students is developed by our faculty board and therefore it is not possible for us to change the conditions. We are glad that the committee appreciates our effort to treat bursary students and regular PhD students as equal employees.

4) PhD training

The graduate schools are all doing great work in training PhD candidates, creating a group feeling, stimulating mutual help and raising the overall level of the PhDs. First-year PhD candidates asked for more clarity on what lies ahead of them. *The committee recommends (1) to develop a clear insightful document on different career paths and its implications at the start of the PhD and (2) offer a wider range of courses to develop other skills outside academia.*

The ICS courses strongly focus on continuing a career in science as two-thirds of our alumni also stay within academia. We will include a clear document with career paths in the our Information Guide. Furthermore, this topic is part of the annual R&D interviews. Also, internships outside academia are possible. Within the ICS, the annual James Coleman symposium focuses on working outside academia. We would like to point out that the ICS/SCOOP PhD training is a substantive training, and the BSS Graduate School (RUG) provides courses to train skills and competences.

5) Research integrity

The committee experiences considerable sensitivity among the departments concerning ethical behaviour of staff members in hierarchical relationships. Research integrity is high on the agenda. Nevertheless, the committee finds little formal rules on co-authorship. The committee recommends *not to develop formal rules on co-authorship that must apply in all cases, but the committee recommends departments to write down and distribute the common practice in their faculty, define red lines and explicitly point parties involved to procedures they can rely on in case of problems. This document should be widely available among all staff members.*

The criteria for co-authorship are discussed at the beginning of a PhD trajectory. The Introduction Guide (a guide containing all procedures and working methods, especially intended for PhD students and new staff members) contains these criteria. Future PhD theses will mention for each chapter the contribution of each author.

6) Gender & Diversity

Regarding gender balance, all universities still have a considerable way to go. *The committee recommends that all programs continue to address the gender imbalance and develop a clear action plan to speed up the hiring of female full professors.*

We acknowledge that the gender balance is skewed. We will continue to support the flow of our female talents as much as possible. In future TT-vacancies the preference will go out to women. Additionally, our faculty board has developed Aletta Jacobs chairs to encourage women to become professor.

The committee urges the universities to no longer see ethnic diversity in terms of nationality only. Programs to stimulate students with an ethnic background to start a bachelor are developed on university level than on the departmental level. *The committee recommends to start initiatives in the bachelor programs to increase the number of participants from first generation students and Dutch students with a migrant background to choose the research master.*

In our opinion, this recommendation and the action to be taken on it should be part of a broader inclusion policy at the faculty level, particularly also the Research Master.