Research Assessment 2013

Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies

Radboud University Nijmegen
6  Response of the institute

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Netherlands System of Quality Assessment of Research
This quality assessment of research is part of the assessment system for all public Dutch university research, as organized by the universities in the Netherlands.

The aims of the assessment system are:
• Improvement of research quality based on an external peer review, including scientific and societal relevance of research, research policy and research management.
• Accountability to the board of the research organisation, and towards funding agencies, government and society at large.

The evaluation takes place at the level of research institutes and research programmes. The research institutes submit a description of the results that have been achieved in all contributing research programmes during the previous six years (including quantitative data about staff input, PhD’s, publications, financial resources), a short outline of the mission of the institute, the objective of each individual programme, and developments anticipated in the context of the research profile of the faculty or institute. Important elements of the assessments are the interviews, which the Evaluation Committee conducts with the management and the programme directors, and the visit to the facilities.

The Executive Board of Radboud University Nijmegen commissioned this evaluation of the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies.

1.2 The Evaluation Committee
The Evaluation Committee was appointed in February 2013 and consisted of:
• Professor M.J.B. (Martin) Stokhof (Chair), Philosophy, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
• Professor M.E. (Martien) Brinkman, Theology, VU University Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
• Professor D. J. (Douglas) Davies, Religious Studies, Durham University, Durham, United Kingdom
• Dr S. (Simon) Glendinning, Philosophy, London School of Economics, London, United Kingdom
• Professor S. (Simo) Knuuttila, Theology/Philosophy, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

Mr M. (Maarten) H. Evenblij, journalist, Amsterdam, The Netherlands was appointed secretary to the Evaluation Committee.
A short curriculum vitae of each of the members is included in Appendix 2.
Independence
All members of the Committee signed a statement of independence to ensure that:
• they would judge without bias, personal preference or personal interest, and
• their judgment is made without undue influence from the institute, the programme
  or other stakeholders.

1.3 Scope of the Assessment
This assessment covers the research of the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology
and Religious Studies. The period of assessment is 2007-2012, and the recent
developments in the institute have been taken into account as much as possible.

The Committee would like to make the following preliminary remarks.

The most important of the recent developments was that changes in research policies
as well as the need for closer collaboration have resulted in the creation of the Research
Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies. This fact has shaped both the
scope of the assessment, and, accordingly, the way in which the Committee has carried
it out. The Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies was
established only recently, in 2012. The process leading up to its foundation took some
years, during which the different parts of the future research institute were rearranged
twice. The first time was due to a merger in 2011 of the Faculty of Philosophy, the Faculty
of Religious Studies and the Faculty of Theology of Radboud University Nijmegen into one
faculty, the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies.

During the period 2007-2011 the research groups that merged later into the Research
Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, consisted of ten independent
chairs, each chaired by one professor. After the merger in 2011, those ten chairs were still
relatively independent entities within the research institute. The second rearrangement
took place in 2012 when three research programmes were set up within the institute.
Therefore, the ten chairs became more related to each other and started to work on
common research themes. There can only be mentioning of one institute from 2012 on.

This complex history has made the task of the Committee somewhat ambiguous.
A retrospective evaluation of an institute and of research programmes that have existed
only for one year would be neither fruitful nor fair. Conversely, an assessment of the
prospects of the programmes run by the ten chairs that no longer exist as such would
be pointless.
Therefore, the Committee has decided to assess the research programmes associated
with the ten chairs only retrospectively. Ratings have been given for quality, productivity
and relevance of the research, but not for vitality & feasibility. For the three current
research programmes, which have been operational only for one year, the opposite is true. Here, ratings were only given for vitality & feasibility, and not for the other three aspects. The research institute as a whole has been given only one rating for all aspects together. This rating indicates the future prospects of the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, according to the assessment of the Committee.

Quite similar remarks apply to the PhD programme. The current programme has been put in place only recently, within the context of the Graduate School for the Humanities, and no assessment of its functioning could be made at the time of the evaluation. Here, too, the Committee has decided to assess primarily the future prospects for PhD students in the institute, based on the information given by the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, interviews with PhD students and post docs, and an assessment of the past performance figures provided in the self-evaluation of the institute. In doing so, the Committee took into account its observations regarding the past performance of PhD research and supervision, and its evaluation of how these are addressed in the new structure.

The Committee was asked to operate according to the Standard Evaluation Protocol 2009-2015. This Protocol specifies the criteria for the assessment and the information that must be provided to the Committee.

1.4 Data provided to the Committee

The Evaluation Committee has received a detailed self-evaluation report provided by the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies. The documentation included all the information required by the Protocol.

For each of the ten programmes conducted by the chairs, five key publications were specified in the report and copies of these publications were provided to the Committee. Furthermore, the Committee was provided with a comprehensive list of scientific and other relevant publications, and a detailed overview of other output parameters of the research programmes of the ten chairs over the 2007-2012 period. The Committee also received a list of PhD students and PhD exams in the same period.

For the three newly established research programmes of the new institute, the documentation provided a description of the research area and of the main research themes of each programme, as well as an assessment of its viability and a short SWOT-analysis.

1.5 Procedures followed by the Committee

The assessments are based on the documentation provided by the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, the key publications of each programme and
on extensive interviews with the relevant stakeholders. These interviews took place during the site visit on June 18th and June 19th 2013. Time was allowed for discussions with the Rector Magnificus of the University, the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, the executive board of the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, senior researchers, including the ten chair holders and other senior staff involved in the three new programmes, PhD students, and post docs of the institute. The programme of the site visit is included in Appendix 3.

Before the site visit, the Committee members all read the Self Evaluation Report. Since the research area covered by the institute is complex and involves a great number of disciplines, two Committee members with the relevant disciplinary expertise assessed the key publications of each programme. They drew up a preliminary assessment, using the form provided in the Protocol. These assessments were compiled and discussed with the other members on June 17th 2013, during the preliminary deliberations of the Committee. The result of those deliberations, in the form of a set of questions and discussion points, formed the input for the various interviews. The Committee also agreed upon procedural matters and aspects of the assessment as described in the following section.

At the Welcome meeting in Nijmegen, the Committee had the opportunity to meet with the Rector Magnificus of Radboud University Nijmegen and representatives of the Faculty Board and the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies Management.

The interviews with the management team, the chairs, and the programme leaders took place during the site visits on June 18th and 19th 2013. All interviews and discussions were conducted with the plenary Committee. Instead of the planned tour of the facilities, the Committee decided to have an extra interview with junior and senior scientists of the institute.

After each interview, the members of the Committee briefly discussed the findings from that interview. At the end of the second day of the visit – June 18th 2013 – the members of the Committee discussed the findings of that day more comprehensively and made a preliminary rating of the programmes of the different chairs. On the last day of the visit, the Committee took some more time for first assessments after the interviews with the researchers representing the three programmes. During and after lunch on June 19th 2013, after profound deliberations, the members of the Committee agreed on the final assessments, general conclusions and ratings for each chair, for the three programmes, and for the institute as whole. In addition, the performance and future prospects of the PhD programme was discussed.
After the final meeting of the Committee in the afternoon on June 19th, the Chairman and Secretary of the Committee prepared a short presentation to the management, staff, scientists, (PhD) students and other members of the institute and to the Dean of the Faculty and the Rector Magnificus of the Radboud University Nijmegen, which was given at the end of June 19th 2013.

A draft version of this report was made after the site visit of the Assessment Committee and was sent to the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies and the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies in October 2013, for factual corrections and comments. Later that month the comments were discussed with the Committee Chairman. This led to minor corrections and clarifications. The report was subsequently submitted to the Executive Board of the Radboud University.

1.6 Aspects and Assessment Scale

The Protocol requires the Evaluation Committee to assess research on the four main criteria of the Standard Evaluation Protocol:

- Quality (the level of the research conducted)
- Productivity (relationship between input and output)
- Societal relevance (social, economic and cultural relevance of the research)
- Vitality and feasibility (flexibility, management and leadership)

The ratings used are: Excellent (5); Very good (4); Good (3); Satisfactory (2); Unsatisfactory (1). This five-point scale is described in the Standard Evaluation Protocol as follows:

Excellent (5)  Research is world leading. Researchers are working at the forefront of their field internationally and their research has an important and substantial impact in the field.

Very Good (4)  Research is internationally competitive and makes a significant contribution to the field. Research is considered nationally leading.

Good (3)  Work is competitive at the national level and will probably make a valuable contribution in the international field. Research is considered internationally visible.

Satisfactory (2)  Work adds to our understanding and is solid, but not exciting. Research is nationally visible.

Unsatisfactory (1)  Work that is neither solid nor exciting, flawed in the scientific and or technical approach, repetitions of other work, etc.
2 Assessment of the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies

Name of the institute: Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies
Director of the institute: Professor Marc Slors
Academic staff in 2012: 35.34 fte

Overall assessment of the institute: 4

As explained in section 1.3, the members of the Evaluation Committee have decided to rate the institute as a whole and not on the different aspects (quality, productivity, societal relevance and vitality & feasibility) separately. This is because the structures of the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies have been in place for less than half a year. In this single rating, the Committee expresses its assessment of the potential of the new institute, which is based both on its evaluations of the different programmes that constitute the institute as well as on the Committee's assessment of the set-up of the institute as a whole.

2.1 Mission, goals and research activities

The Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies (PTR) is dedicated to the systematic study of philosophy and religion, both as historical phenomena and as contemporary practices. Its aim is to carry out first rate research in systematic philosophy, theology and religious studies as well as in history of philosophy, theology and religion. It produces critical and high-profile contributions to current debates in the scholarly and academic literature. It offers expert reflection on current developments in science with high societal impact, both as contributions to society and as feedback to science. And it contributes to the many societal debates to which philosophy, theology and religious studies can and do make a crucial difference.

Together, the disciplines of philosophy, theology and religious studies span a coherent range of interconnected fundamental scholarly questions relating to society, human beings and their place in the natural world. These disciplines cover the systematic study of some of the most vexing questions of human self-interpretation of the cultural, cognitive and linguistic means that enable such self-understanding and of the worldviews and social structures it has produced. Each of the three disciplines is marked out by its distinctive methodologies, debates and traditions. Apart from methodological and focal differences, however, there is also significant thematic interconnection between the three disciplines.
This is why the ten discipline-specific research programmes connected with the ten chairs that contribute to the PTR research institute have been reorganized, in the course of 2011 and 2012, into three thematically structured, multidisciplinary research programmes. This larger clustering of research is in line with a general trend in humanities research and with the recommendations of the 2009 'Sustainable Humanities' report. Rooted in different strands of disciplinary research, the programmes are devoted to studying coherent clusters of questions relating to (i) the rival worldviews produced in religion, philosophy and science (programme 1: Competing Worldviews), (ii) the interdependence of language, culture (including religion) and human cognition (programme 2: Cognitive Humanities), and (iii) the, often religion-induced, critique of modernity (programme 3: Modernity Contested).

2.2 Assessment of the institute

The mission of the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies (PTR) is characterised by a broad perspective and ambitious objectives. The members of the Committee value the comprehensiveness of the perspective and welcome the ambition to form one research institute with one well-defined focus out of ten relatively unrelated research chairs each with their own research priorities. This process was initiated several years ago and has resulted in the formulation of three multi-disciplinary research programmes, each with a clear set of interrelated research themes. The Committee acknowledges the thoroughness and the persistence with which the former and current leadership has undertaken this important task.

The Committee is impressed with the progress made in just a couple of years, and with the general enthusiasm, sense of expectation, and energy that has created an excellent atmosphere within the institute. Together with the careful, step-by-step approach and the clear vision with which the process of change has been effected, this contributes very much to a cooperative attitude of all involved.

The Committee welcomes the fact that the institute has not only succeeded in establishing an administrative unity for the institute, but that it has also created a unity with respect to the content of the research. This has given the institute a clear and coherent profile that makes it visible both nationally and internationally. To have realised such a level of integration with so many different disciplines involved, is exceptional. Nevertheless, the Committee needs to draw attention to the possibility that compartmentalization may lie in wait. In some programmes, the disciplinary diversity is small and the coherence large. In other programmes, however, the Committee observes much more diversity, and relative imbalance between the component groups. The Committee therefore would like to draw attention to the danger that smaller research groups might deteriorate undesirably while others flourish.
The extremely good leadership of the research institute made a great impression on the Committee. It has been successful in creating an enthusiastic atmosphere in which staff are willing to cooperate on a limited number of research themes, and in which fluctuations in staffing are absorbed in a cooperative manner. The vision of the future of the research institute that the leadership expresses is promising. Although the chairs in many ways still play a central role in the institute, it has been made clear that the three integrative research programmes and their themes will be the core of the research done within the institute. The institute’s director is ambitious in pursuing further integration for the next five years or so, but he is clearly aware of the possibility that this ambition may turn out to be too high and that, after evaluation of the situation, it may be necessary to tweak the process. However, during the interviews with the leadership of the institute, the members of the Committee did not get a clear impression of what the success and failure conditions are that the leadership, and the community of researchers in general, apply to this process of integration and building of the institute, and it considers a clear and generally agreed upon formulation of such conditions to be a necessary element of a successful execution of the process of integration in the next phase.

The Committee recognizes and welcomes the clear and substantial support of the board and the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies for the director of the institute and their commitment to the process of reorganisation and the formation of the research institute. The Committee has slight concerns about the fact that the director of the institute has only limited means to encourage the researchers of the different parts of the institute to follow new directions on the research roadmap. The director is able to allocate one or two PhD students per year to research programmes, and has a budget for organisation of conferences, incidental short-term sabbaticals for preparation of grant proposals, and international activities. The faculty board on recommendation of the director makes decisions concerning the budget. The director’s recommendations are always followed. The Committee feels that this budget is not sufficient to strengthen the cooperation within the institute further, let alone to encourage staff members to open up new research directions actively.

Similar concerns apply to the structure and the line of management within the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies. Although the director of the research institute de facto appears to be involved in major decision taking of the Faculty, formally he has no position in the executive board of the Faculty, as a vice-dean of research would have. The Committee feels that it is an omission to bypass the director of the research institute in the line of management that runs from the executive board via the chairs to faculty of the institute.
The Committee recognizes the vast amount of energy that has been invested in the internal consistency, coherence and cooperation of the programmes of the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies and the future efforts that still will be necessary. This brings along the danger of getting too focussed on internal affairs, and the Committee would like to emphasise that despite the needed internally oriented efforts there should remain enough awareness of the outside world: for developments and opportunities within other programmes of the institute and for those events in other, national and international research groups and research institutes as well.

With regard to the PhD training and supervision, the Committee is aware that this is a programme in transition. With regard to past performance, the Committee unfortunately has to conclude that training and supervision has at times been insufficient. An adequate system for monitoring PhD students and their progress was missing in the past, which has resulted in severe delays, and in too many cases failure of PhD students to complete their thesis. The system that has recently been put into place, organized by the Graduate School of Humanities, appears to be able to overcome these shortcomings, but an extensive and long-term effort is needed to reach and maintain adequate levels of success. A complicating factor, and one that as such is not directly remedied by the new systems, is the high number of external PhD students of some chairs. The Committee was pleased to hear that there is growing awareness within the institute of the need to address this issue as well. See chapter 5 for more details on the assessment of the PhD programme.

Based on the retrospective assessments of the three quality dimensions of the research carried out by the ten separate chair groups and the more prospective assessment of the three research programmes – which on average are very good – the Committee assesses the potential of the research institute as a whole as very good. The quality, productivity and relevance of the research are very good on average, in some cases even outstanding. However, vitality and feasibility deserve extra attention. The Committee noticed that in some cases the succession of retiring faculty created continuity problems. With respect to vitality and feasibility, the Committee evaluates the potential of the institute as a whole a little higher than that of its component parts. The Committee sees good potential for the institute with respect to the acquisition of external funding, and it considers a number of programme themes as potentially competitive in larger (European) funding schemes, in particular if the leadership of some of the research programmes succeeds in establishing stronger associations with the natural, social and political sciences in selected domains of research.
2.3 Recommendations for the institute

The Committee’s major recommendations are as follows:

(A) Further enhance the coherence of the institute, in particular through a stronger emphasis on common methodologies and shared research themes. Efforts to enhance coherence within the institute should be supported by providing the director of the institute with more management resources and an explicit role in the decision processes of the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies.

(B) Further strengthen the research ties and cooperation with related scientific disciplines (natural sciences, social sciences, political sciences) where applicable.

The Committee more specifically recommends the following:

1. The leadership of the institute should stay alert to the potential danger of compartmentalization of research within the institute, notably within the larger programmes. Multi- and interdisciplinarity is one of the greatest assets of the institute, after all.

2. One needs to remain aware of the possible risk that qualitatively and/or quantitatively stronger research groups or themes within a programme will dominate the less strong ones. That might diminish the desired variety of approaches and viewpoints within the institute.

3. The leadership of the institute should identify the conditions it considers indicative of success or failure of the integration process within the institute. It should set targets for each different phase in that process in terms of those conditions. Also, it is advisable to consider possible strategies for coping with a (partial) failure of integration of various components.

4. The existing, clear support of the Dean and the executive board of the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies for the director of the institute and their commitment to the evolutionary process of forming a strong and coherent research institute should be continued.

5. The financial and other means that are at the disposal of the institute’s director to guide the direction of the institute should be enlarged and strengthened.

6. The director of the institute should be given more formal influence within the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, for example by appointing him as vice-dean of research in the executive board.

7. A change in the hierarchal relations within the institute or faculty towards a more flexible, lean and horizontal organization, where professors, staff, Dean and director share responsibilities, might be explored.

8. An open eye should be kept for developments outside the institute, even where the process of building a coherent institute will demand a lot of attention and energy of the leadership and the faculty of the institute.
9. An external advisory board, consisting of international experts in the areas covered by the institute, should be set up; this advisory board should provide feedback at regular intervals.

10. Firm and practical connections with disciplines in the natural, social and political sciences should be maintained, in order to strengthen both the scientific quality of the research and its potential societal relevance, and thus enlarge the chances for the acquisition of external funding of research – notably in the large scale funding schemes, such as NWO’s Topsectoren and the EU’s Horizon2020 programmes.

11. Extra attention should be paid to training and supervision of PhD students. Although the regulations now in place are promising, it is important that they are put into practice for the PhD programme to become excellent in reality. This needs a dedicated and sustained effort on part of the institute’s leadership as well as of senior faculty.

12. Establish a realistic policy with regard to external PhD students, and ensure that the number of external PhD students associated with individual chairs is realistic.
3 Assessment per programme

The Committee has carried out an assessment at the level of the programmes, as defined by the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies.

Comments that are applicable to all programmes have been made in Chapter 2 (Assessment of the institute) and are not repeated below. However, the Committee would like to repeat a preliminary remark concerning the application of the different aspects of the Standard Evaluation Protocol in its assessment of the programmes (see also paragraph 1.3):

The Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies was founded only recently – in 2012 – and the three current research programmes have only been in place since that time. A retrospective evaluation of research programmes that exist only one year would be neither fruitful nor fair. Therefore, the Evaluation Committee has decided to assess the programmes only prospectively, i.e., ratings have been given only for vitality & feasibility of the research programme, and not for the other three aspects mentioned in the Standard Evaluation Protocol.
3.1 Programme: Competing Worldviews

Programme director: Professor Christoph Lüthy
Academic staff in 2012: 14.99 fte
Assessment: Quality : –
Productivity : –
Societal Relevance : –
Vitality and feasibility : 3

3.1.1 Objectives and research activities

We live in a ‘knowledge society’. But what kind of knowledge is it that we are asked to reveal, develop and apply? For centuries, philosophers and theologians were the ultimate models of those who had scientific knowledge. Their scientia, however, was taken as personal, purely intellectual possession of secure knowledge. The modern science in our ‘knowledge society’, by contrast, describes itself as only hypothetically true, but as victorious in its proven usefulness. Philosophical and theological views of the world and of what constitutes knowledge, however, have not disappeared. This results in a situation in which philosophical, theological and scientific worldviews and epistemologies co-exist, sometimes complementing each other, but more often remaining in state of tension.

The ‘Competing Worldviews’ research programme takes its cue from this situation. Its overall goal is to understand the historical background and the actual condition of the three large fields of philosophy, theology and the natural sciences as competing and/or complementary modes of interpreting and explaining the world in general and nature and society in particular. The aim is to contribute to a better understanding of the way in which the current types of interpretation and explanation have come about; how they work; the extent to which they compete and connect with one another; and the ways in which they are imposed and transmitted. Such understanding is imperative. It puts the current political and societal dominance of scientific knowledge in perspective and at the same time addresses public questions raised by this dominance about the status and function of philosophy and theology.

3.1.2 Assessment of the programme

Judging by the past performance of the groups participating in this programme, the Committee assesses the general quality and productivity of the programme Competing Worldviews as solid. In addition, there is a good potential for relevance. However, the Committee observes an imbalance within the programme. Notably, the group History of Philosophy is more visible than the other three groups, and in view of that, the Committee has some concerns about the coherence of the programme and the balance between the various contributions to the programme in the long run. To make the intended interaction
of the different groups work, there should be more balance between their respective contributions. Furthermore, the Committee has some concerns regarding the scope of the ambitions of the programme. The Committee considers the lack of actual connections with researchers working in the natural sciences and science studies as a potential obstacle for realisation of the potential societal relevance, something that might negatively influence the programme’s vitality & feasibility. How research on competing worldviews can be done without the input of scientific worldviews as held by natural scientists remains unclear. In addition, the Committee feels that the concept of ‘worldviews’ needs strong input from the social sciences. Substantial research on worldviews in different scientific disciplines requires more than just incidental meetings with researchers from those disciplines, it needs a lasting and strong connection to provide the relevant input and to critically engage with preliminary results. Finally, a firmer connection with other scientific disciplines, like natural and social sciences, will increase the likelihood of this programme attracting external funds. This is particularly true for the larger funding schemes like the Dutch ‘Topsectoren’ or the European ‘Horizon 2020’ that require interconnection with themes that have strong potential of social relevance. Research quality alone is no guarantee for attracting funding in such schemes.

Although the quality of research carried out by the members of this programme is a good mix of excellent and good, the overall assessment of its vitality & feasibility is lower than expected. As indicated above, this is because clarity of objectives and overall coherence of the subject matter of the programme still leave something to be desired, as do substantial connections with other sciences, which negatively affects external funding potential.

3.1.3 Recommendations for the programme

The Committee’s major recommendations are:

1. To establish more substantial, explicit and long-term interactions between the contributing groups within the programme and to create and maintain a balance within the various contributions, such as historical research and research done from a systematic perspective.

2. To secure sustained input from researchers working in the natural sciences. In order to study competing worldviews one needs the worldview of working physicists and biologists, in addition to those of philosophers and theologians.

3. To create sustained input from the social sciences. This is needed not only to enhance the quality of the studied concept of worldviews, in the longer term it is also required for attracting funding for which societal relevance of the research is a prerequisite.
3.2 Programme: Cognitive Humanities

Programme director: Professor Eric Venbrux
Academic staff in 2013: 14.28 fte

3.2.1 Objectives and research activities

The Cognitive Humanities (CH) research programme is grounded on explicit acknowledgement of the fact that culture, including language and religion, and the human cognitive system – the human mind – are inextricably intertwined. On the one hand, language, religion and other forms of culture are products of the human mind. On the other hand, the human mind functions most prominently in the context of a culture, a language and often a religion. Thus, the study of human cognition has become one of the cornerstones of present-day linguistics, anthropology, and religious studies. Conversely, in cognitive science and philosophy the ‘socio-linguistic scaffolding of the mind’ is one of the main foci of contemporary research. The aim of the CH programme is to study the interdependence of language, religion and other forms of culture on the one hand and cognition on the other. Thus, we study language and religion by taking into account insights into (embodied and embedded) cognition from cognitive sciences and philosophy. Conversely, we study human cognition from the point of view of its dependency on a cultural, linguistic and sometimes religious context. Researchers in the programme aim to develop novel lines of research on the intersections of its three main themes – language, religion and cognition – in which the results and/or methods of research from different areas reinforce each other.

3.2.2 Assessment of the programme

The Committee is pleased with the level of coherence in the programme Cognitive Humanities, taking into account the differences between the disciplines represented in it. The programme presents a core set of issues that combines the research of the different groups within it. Furthermore, the groups in this programme share a collective research attitude, such as a shared publication strategy, emphasis on linking philosophical and empirical skills, and close cooperation with the empirical sciences, especially the humanities and cognitive and neurosciences.
The contributions that the members of this programme make, display openness, creativity, eagerness, and a belief that an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach combined with empirical methods will be most successful in their field of research. High quality research, high levels of production, and a substantial level of relevance characterize the programme. This programme is one that is vital to the image of the Faculty. The members of the programme seem to have found an excellent niche in external funding, notably by intensive cooperation with other disciplines, like the neurosciences. The Committee assesses the programme as well considered and balanced. It does notice the possibility that smaller and independently operating groups of researchers might be formed within a programme that is as big as this one. Overall, the prospects of the programme realising its objectives are very good, and it clearly has the potential to become excellent.

3.2.3 Recommendations for the programme
The Committee’s major recommendations is to be alert at the possibility that small research groups or niches will develop within this programme.

That risk is imaginable because there is a broad scope of disciplines involved in the programme. It is understandable that sometimes researchers will think about working in more manageable, smaller clusters, and hence the overall coherence of the programme should be guarded.
3.3 Programme: Modernity Contested

Programme director: Professor Jean-Pierre Wils
Academic staff in 2013: 6.18 fte
Assessment: Quality : –
Productivity : –
Societal Relevance : –
Vitality and feasibility : 3

3.3.1 Objectives and research activities

The process of modernisation is broadly characterised by three tendencies. First, the sciences have secured a social monopoly on knowledge and have become an essential component of the industrialisation and ‘technologicalisation’ of society. Secondly, the growth and differentiation of social subsystems has added to the complexity of modern societies and has placed considerable demands on their identities. Thirdly, rationalisation of society has brought an end to the era of ‘vertical legitimation’ for society as a whole. Characteristic of the modernisation process, defined in terms of these three elements, are the secularisation of religious worldviews and practices, the gradual disappearance of integrated social communities and the associated trend towards individualisation. Europe is the cradle for this process.

Modernisation has elicited powerful religious, political and moral critiques. Much of this criticism was and is inspired by the notion of ‘community’. Modernisation is thought to lead to the loss of shared norms, to a loss of confidence in the different levels of aggregation within society and to ‘identity politics’. This is thought to undermine the character of stable moral, political and religious groupings. The ideal of ‘community’ involved in such criticism, however, is far from being unequivocal. Communities are often associated with frequent and manageable ‘face-to-face’ communication, with social assistance and behavioural control. Yet, new media based communities have emerged which opt out of the traditional community milieu. The status and social ontology of these communities is contested. In the critique of modernity, the community ideal is often a communio fantasy; a projection that provides a lever for reactionary political, moral and religious initiatives. The MC research programme will address debates on modernisation and the role of communities in related critiques.

3.3.2 Assessment of the programme

This is a small but coherent group of researchers who share a distinct identity around its theme. The researchers are confident of their potential, although they form a relatively small group. The Committee shares their opinion that the central topic of the programme is an exciting and relevant one, which offers great opportunity to work together in an
important, socially relevant field. The programme consists of a nice mix of conceptual and empirical methodologies. Perhaps the logic underlying the common theme could be elaborated slightly, although it seems to work for the cooperating researchers. The societal impact of the theme is beyond question, as is its salience for the general public. Although 'modernity contested' works well as a leading conception for the programme, the Committee has slight concerns about the theme becoming a straightjacket for the programme as a whole, and it would like to stress the importance of maintaining a measure of flexibility in the choice of research topics. There are well-formulated research questions, which have the potential to connect with the social and political sciences – like migration studies. The Committee is convinced that such connections would be fruitful to the programme, and it strongly recommends to set up, extend, and nourish them. Not only will the cooperation with these sciences deepen the concept of 'modernity contested', but it may extend the societal relevance of the programme, and thus may enhance the chances of getting access to external funding as well. A more intensive connection with the research in political philosophy that is done in the programme Competing Worldviews might also be in order. Although the Committee assesses the different aspects of the research within the programme as good to very good, its assessment of the prospects of the programme is slightly lower, mainly due to the lack of a strong connection with social and political sciences, and, partly because of that, currently weak possibilities of attracting external funding.

3.3.3 Recommendations for the programme

The Committee’s major recommendations are:

1. To be aware of the possibility that the theme 'modernity contested' might become a limitation on viable research topics that could meaningfully be explored in the programme. Although it serves as an excellent leading and binding concept, the theme should not become a straightjacket, and due attention should be given to maintaining flexibility in the choice of research topics.

2. To seek practical cooperation with and input from experts in the social and political sciences, such as migration studies, and to further develop cooperation with the research on political philosophy that is carried out in the programme Competing Worldviews. The quality of the research and the societal relevance of the programme will benefit from this cooperation, and it will increase chances of acquiring external funding from large funding schemes in which societal relevance of the research to be funded is a prerequisite.
4 Assessment per chair

The Committee has carried out an assessment at the level of the chairs, as defined by the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies.

Comments that are applicable to all chairs have been made in Chapter 2 (Assessment of the institute) and Chapter 3 (Assessment of the programmes) and are not repeated below. Nevertheless, the Committee would like to make a preliminary remark concerning the application of the different aspects of the Standard Evaluation Protocol in its assessment of the chairs (see also paragraph 1.3):

The Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies was founded only recently – in 2012 – and the ten individual research chairs have merged into the current three research programmes. The Committee judges that an assessment of the prospects of chairs as such would thus be pointless. Therefore, the Committee has decided to assess the chairs only retrospectively. Ratings have been given for quality, productivity and relevance of the research and not for vitality & feasibility.
4.1 **Chair: Philosophy of Mind and Language**

Chair holder: Professor Marc Slors  
Academic staff in 2012: 4.87 fte  
Assessment:  
- Quality : 5  
- Productivity : 4  
- Societal Relevance : 4  
- Vitality and feasibility : –

4.1.1 **Objectives and research activities**

The research of this chair has a number of focal points in the philosophy of mind and language. Attitudes, attitude ascription and folk psychology are what connect the philosophy of language research with research in the philosophy of mind. Apart from this common theme, the context dependency of the interpretation of linguistic utterances is studied in the philosophy of language section. In the philosophy of mind section, the interpretation of neuroscience is a topic of research and so is the role and relevance of emotions for human self-reflection. The topics studied in our group form a coherent ‘cloud’ of overlapping fields of research. Due to the overlap in research topics there has been extensive (organised and spontaneous) exchange and consequently mutual influencing. The research conducted between 2007 and 2012 was mainly fundamental philosophical research, but where appropriate, there has been fruitful collaboration with colleagues from linguistics, cognitive psychology and neuroscience. The aim of the chair was to publish scholarly papers and books of the highest quality. The chair also aimed to reach a broad public outside of academia with reflections on academic developments with high societal impact.

4.1.2 **Assessment of the chair**

**Quality**

The quality of the research conducted by the Philosophy of Mind and Language chair group is excellent. The group consists of an attractive mix of senior and junior researchers, and enjoys both national and international visibility. Several of the researchers are leading scholars in their disciplines and they make significant contributions to the developments on key issues in their fields. Others show great potential for becoming leading scholars in the near future. The cooperation with researchers in cognitive and neuroscience is substantial and productive: joint research that leads to joint publications. The members of the group publish in international, peer-reviewed journals and with leading publishing companies. There are good contacts with similar groups of researchers in the Netherlands as well as in Europe, and, to a lesser extent, outside Europe. The group is actively engaged with the organisation of international scientific events. The earning capacity is
substantial, especially in the last years, which is another indication of the high quality of the research that is being conducted in the group.

**Productivity**
Productivity is very good. The leadership aims for quality rather than quantity of research output, and this has worked out reasonably well: the high quality that the group aims for and realises does result in a smaller number of publications but overall productivity is solid. Publications for the general public are by and large missing, although some of the books that the group has published during the last five years have reached a broader audience.

**Societal Relevance**
Societal relevance overall is very good. The group is very active and successful in exploring the societal relevance of its research where this exists. Part of the research carried out by the chair group has an obvious potential for societal relevance, in that it relates to on-going debates in science and society at large on important issues such as free will, evolution, etc. Other parts of the research are less easy to bring to bear on societal issues.
4.2 **Chair: History of Christianity**

Chair holder: Professor Daniela Müller  
Academic staff in 2012: 1.13 fte  
Assessment:  
- Quality: 3  
- Productivity: 4  
- Societal Relevance: 3  
- Vitality and feasibility: –

### 4.2.1 Objectives and research activities

Our research is focused on processes of reciprocal interaction in the formation of different views and schools within Christianity. Thus, for instance, we concentrate on historical concepts and practices of disciplining in Christianity. How were prescriptions imposed and maintained? Which views and practices were qualified as deviant (heretical) and hence inadmissible? How were perpetrators treated? And how were adherents to deviant forms of Christianity commonly viewed? The focus here is on the interface between theological and church-historical questions in which the interaction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy is being clarified. Disentangling myths, in particular about the Inquisition – as a theological as well as legal institute – take a prominent place in our research. We also study the interactions of Christianity with other religions such as Paganism or Judaism.  

Another branch of our research relates to methodological issues about the grounding of church-historical research. Here we pay attention in particular to the question how church-historical research should be conducted in the aftermath of postmodernism.

### 4.2.2 Assessment of the chair

**Quality**  
The quality of the output of the researchers in the chair group is good. Results are published with well-known publishing companies, though not with the highest ranking ones. Many publications are in Dutch and German. Also, there are relatively few publications in international, peer reviewed journals; most are books, books chapters, and contributions to conference proceedings. As a consequence, international visibility of the research carried out in the chair group is not optimal. There is no external funding, and the number of PhD students is low. Some of these observations are explained by the fact that the 2007-2012 period was one of transition due to the retirement of senior faculty.
Productivity
Productivity of the chair group is very good, especially in view of the relatively small size of the group. The number of publications has decreased somewhat during the last years, while the number of staff involved in the group has remained the same. This may also be due to the retirement of productive senior faculty.

Societal Relevance
Societal relevance of the research in the chair group is good. Attempts are made to bring the academic results to bear on current societal issues, mainly by providing information on Christianity in the Middle East. This is mainly done by publications for a larger audience as well as professional publications. The scope of this engagement is somewhat limited, but that is explained by the nature of the discipline.
4.3 **Chair: History of Philosophy**

Chair holder: Professor Christoph Lüthy  
Academic staff in 2012: 4.23 fte  
Assessment:  
  - Quality : 5  
  - Productivity : 5  
  - Societal Relevance : 4  
  - Vitality and feasibility : −

4.3.1 **Objectives and research activities**  
Research in the History of Philosophy chair was formerly organised in the research programme ‘From Natural Philosophy to Science’, which is embedded in the Centre for the History of Philosophy and Science. The guiding idea behind the foundation of this Centre, in 1998, was to assemble historians of both philosophy and science in a single research unit, so as to investigate the evolution of natural philosophy as well as the emergence of the academic disciplines in their modern forms. Within the global academic landscape, the Centre’s research topic is unique as it approaches the history of philosophy and the history of science as historically intertwined phenomena.  
Two important research projects, both funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), were carried out in the period under consideration. The first, called *Form of the Body or Ghost in the Machine? The Study of Soul, Mind and Body (1250–1700)*, studied the history of psychology in the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Bakker, Leijenhorst, De Boer). The second, *Visualizing the Invisible. Representations of Matter and Motion since the Renaissance*, investigated the evolution of scientific iconography from the sixteenth century onward (Thijssen, Lüthy, Palmerino, Smets).

4.3.2 **Assessment of the chair**  
**Quality**  
The quality of the research conducted by the members of the chair group under the umbrella of the Centre for the History of Philosophy and Science is excellent. The work is at the international forefront of the field. Many of the researchers are leading scholars who enjoy excellent national and international visibility and who make significant contributions to the developments in their fields of research. Publications are with leading publishing companies and in high-ranked internal, peer-reviewed journals. There is close cooperation with leading scholars in and outside Europe. The earning capacity of the group is high (though somewhat declining over this five year period), which is another indication of the excellent quality of the research. The editorships of the highly ranked journal *Early Science and Medicine* (Brill) and the book series *Medieval and Early Modern Science* (Brill) provide such indications as well.
**Productivity**

The productivity of the chair group is excellent. This holds for the basic research as well as for the editorial work, which is of great importance in this area and to which the chair group makes very significant contributions. The number of scientific publications is high, but publications intended for the general public are lacking. Book chapters form an increasing part of the publication output. The Committee would emphasise the importance of maintaining a high profile in international journal publications.

**Societal Relevance**

Societal relevance is very good. The Centre for the History of Philosophy and Science is internationally known for its basic research on the historical development from natural philosophy to science. This work is a crucial element in coming to understand the roots of the current ‘knowledge society’, and in that manner it has the potential to contribute to better policies. The group engages with this aspect of its work by means of professional publications, and participation in public debates.
4.4 Chair: Systematic Religious Studies

Chair holder: Professor Christoph Hübenthal
Academic staff in 2012: 5.02 fte
Assessment:
- Quality : 3
- Productivity : 3
- Societal Relevance : 3
- Vitality and feasibility : –

4.4.1 Objectives and research activities

In the period between 2007 and 2012, research in the chair of Systematic Religious Studies focused on the Transformation of Religions in the framework of Modernity. The principal issue in this theme is how the normative authority claimed by religious belief-systems is being influenced by cultural and societal processes of modernisation. Which processes of reinterpretation of religious traditions are involved? To what extent do religious traditions adapt and renew, and to what extent do they resist change and reject modification?

Methodologically, investigation consisted mainly of desktop research. The theoretical and practical stances of bearers of religious traditions in response to the historical dynamics of their contemporary context were analysed. The frame of reference adopted was the tradition of systematic thinking in Christianity and the philosophical, cultural and spiritual traditions associated with this.

A recurrent theme in many sub-projects is the question of what constitutes critical awareness of modernity. Here modernity is characterized by three dimensions. It is not only a historical given that describes a certain period in time. It is also a category marked out by criticism of religion and breaches with tradition. At the same time, it is a claim to autonomy that in turn is subjected to criticism from the side of religion. Another focus in this program’s research is the relationship between divine and human agency. The programme has yielded valuable insights into the stratified nature of modernity and in several of its layers.

4.4.2 Assessment of the chair

Quality

The chair in systematic theology has a reputable past that constitutes a challenge. The quality of the research conducted in the chair group is good overall. It has been hampered somewhat by many changes in staff over the last years, and a relative lack of strong leadership in the past. The group is shifting its focus from more traditional research in systematic theology to themes that engage with problems and phenomena in modern society. Publications are in English, German, and Dutch, and with good journals and
publishing companies, though not with the highest-ranked ones. International visibility of the group and its research output is good, but somewhat limited: connections are mainly with researchers in Europe and South Africa. The earning capacity is low: there is no external funding from the standard funding organisations, and just one grant from the Dutch Ministry of Health, Wellbeing and Sports. The number of regular PhD students is low as well.

**Productivity**

The productivity of the group is good. Relative to the comparatively large number of staff members the quantity of the output is satisfactory. There is a sharp decline in the total number of publications. This is mainly due to a decrease in the number of professional publications, which is explained by a shift from more practical to more theoretical research. In view of the number of staff overall productivity levels could be higher.

**Societal Relevance**

Societal relevance of the research conducted in the group is good, and has potential to increase in importance. The research addresses issues that have wider impact than the scientific discipline as such and for which there is substantial interest with researchers in other disciplines and with the general public. The group regularly produces output that is intended for the general public.
4.5 **Chair: Comparative Religious Studies**

Chair holder: Professor Eric Venbrux  
Academic staff in 2012: 2.42 fte  
Assessment:  
- Quality : 4  
- Productivity : 4  
- Societal Relevance : 4  
- Vitality and feasibility : –  

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4.5.1 **Assessment of the chair**

**Quality**  
The quality of the research conducted by the members of the chair group is very good. The group regularly published in international, peer-reviewed journals and in publications with major publishing companies. Their research is original and enjoys very good national and international visibility. The members of the group are well-placed in national and international networks. This is testified by their involvement with the organisation of international conferences, a number of editorships of book series with international publishing companies and in international journals, and various functions in national and international professional organisations. Earning capacity is substantial, with projects being funded from a variety of sources.

**Productivity**  
The productivity of the chair group is very good. The output is high and consistently so, with a good balance between scientific publications and professional and general audience publications. The number of PhD theses is good.

**Societal Relevance**  
Societal relevance of the research that is done by the group is very good. It is concerned with topics that are not solely of scientific interest but that are also of substantial importance to society at large and that raise much interest from the general public. The group addresses this, among others, by appearances in the media, contributions to exhibitions, and by conducting policy-oriented research for the Dutch Ministry of Justice. The active involvement of stakeholders as external advisors in the strategic planning of research is a remarkable feature that could serve as an example for other research groups.
4.6 Chair: Empirical and Practical Religious Studies

Chair holder: Professor Chris Hermans
Academic staff in 2012: 5.36 fte
Assessment: Quality : 4
Productivity : 4
Societal Relevance : 4
Vitality and feasibility : –

4.6.1 Objectives and research activities

Researchers in our empirical research programme study the transformation of religious identity in a pluralizing and individualizing context. We continued the three lines of research that were evaluated as excellent in 1999-2006:

(1) Research on antecedent relations of religious identity. Our objective was to gain insight into the dynamics of religious identity and its antecedent processes. We used longitudinal data sets in order to understand the role of parenting on religious identity in adulthood. We studied life narratives using categories like ‘ultimate relates to’ and ‘contingency’.

(2) Research on consequent relations of religious identity. Interactions between individuals and groups can take the form of support (eufunction) or the form of conflict or violence (dysfunction). The first form is addressed in the programme ‘Religious Sources of Solidarity’ (EUROSOURCE). The second form is addressed in the programme of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Indonesia and the Philippines.

(3) Study of the foundations of empirical research on religious identity. We focus on bridging the gap between religious studies and theology through study of the pragmatism-based concept of weak rationality in science and on developing a discourse methodology for studying religion.

4.6.2 Assessment of the chair

Quality
The quality of the research conducted by the chair group is very good. The research has a clear and distinct profile and makes a specific and highly-valued contribution to the multi-varied field of religious studies as such. The focus on empirical methodologies, in particular, is of substantial interest for the field as a whole, but leads to a relative neglect of theoretical and conceptual aspects. The publications of the group appear in renowned international, peer-reviewed journals and in publications with major publishers. The group enjoys a very good national and international reputation, as is witnessed by a large number of involvements in international conferences, and functions in professional organisations. The earning capacity is very good, with a good spread over various funding organisations, and including four PhD projects funded from private funds.
Productivity
The productivity of the research conducted in the chair group is very good. There is a steady output of scientific publications, combined with a more modest output of professional publications. There are no publications intended for the general public, however.

Societal Relevance
The research done by the group has substantial societal relevance, and the group engages with that mainly through the support of professionals working in health care, schools, the judiciary and other organisations. This is done systematically and methodically. Outreach to the general public would appear another possibility but that is less actively undertaken.
4.7 Chair: Fundamental Philosophy

Chair holder: Professor Philippe van Haute
Academic staff in 2012: 4.61 fte
Assessment:

- Quality : 4
- Productivity : 4
- Societal Relevance : 3
- Vitality and feasibility : –

4.7.1 Assessment of the chair

Quality
The quality of the research conducted in the chair group is very good. It addresses fundamental issues in metaphysics, political philosophy, and engages with major traditions in continental philosophy. The group publishes with well-known, international university presses. The results of the research are nationally and internationally visible, and are recognised as making valuable contributions to current research in these areas. The quality of the research is also testified by international collaborations, functions in professional organisations, and honours acquired. The earning capacity of the group is good, though external funding remains largely limited to small-scale projects. What is remarkable is that the group has managed to attract a number of young, talented scholars who have acquired independent funding for their projects.

Productivity
The productivity of the group is very good. Output is numerically not very high, and decreasing over the years, but comprises a relatively high number of books. The publication strategy is fairly traditional, and the Committee would recommend paying more attention to publication in high-ranked journals in order to increase impact.

Societal Relevance
Societal relevance is good. This type of research, which engages mainly with theoretical issues, has limited direct application on societal issues, but is able to provide context and background to current debates in society at large. The group makes modest attempt to apply its research results in this way by engaging in debates and sometimes produce publications intended for a general audience.
4.8 **Chair: Textual Sources of Judaism and Christianity**

Chair holder: Professor Ellen van Wolde  
Academic staff in 2012: 1.63 fte  
Assessment:  
| Quality   | 5 |
| Productivity | 5 |
| Societal Relevance | 4 |
| Vitality and feasibility | – |

4.8.1 **Objectives and research activities**

The research in this chair focuses on two topics, the Hebrew Bible in the context of the ancient Near East, and the New Testament in the context of the second Temple period in early Christianity. Our aim is to investigate linguistic and literary aspects of Bible texts in order to understand their origin and meaning, while doing justice to the historic, cognitive, semantic and hermeneutic context within which these texts were written. This aim can be further specified as follows. We focused on 1. Cognitive-linguistic research of the Hebrew language and Hebrew Bible texts in their original cognitive and cultural context; 2. Historical-linguistic research on the development of classic Hebrew based on complete Hebrew databases; 3. Integrated cognitive-linguistic, historical-linguistic and literary research of specific Bible texts, viz. Genesis 1, Genesis 9, Genesis 18-19; the books 1 and 2 of Samuel; 4. Semantic and lexicographic word-research of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, and the New Testament; 5. Integrated linguistic, literary and ethical-theological research of the New Testament in general and the Gospel of John in particular. This research distinguishes itself from Bible research at other universities in the Netherlands and abroad by its emphasis on linguistic research techniques. These techniques are derived from general linguistics but were refined for their application to Bible texts with their specific demands. They are specifically attuned to the historical development of the Hebrew language, and to the integrated study of the cognitive, material, literary and cultural context of the Bible in relation to the languages used. The development of a cognitive-linguistic method of research on the Hebrew Bible here in Nijmegen is a considerable scholarly feat.

4.8.2 **Assessment of the chair**

**Quality**  
The quality of the research conducted in the chair group is excellent. It makes substantial and innovative contributions to central issues, and is at the forefront of research in its field. The publications are in international, high-ranked journals and in publications that appear with major international publishers. The group enjoys excellent national and international
visibility, as is testified, e.g., by international collaborations, involvements with international conferences, and various national and international honours. Earning capacity is modest, with only one project funded externally.

**Productivity**
Productivity of the group is excellent. It consistently produces a high number of publications, relative to the small number of research staff that the group consists of. The number of completed PhD theses is very good as well.

**Societal Relevance**
Societal relevance of the research results is very good. The group makes a substantial and concerted effort to get young children in primary school interested in science and scholarly questions, in addition to contributing to public debate on issues that touch on the research done by members of the group.
Chair: Islamic Studies

Chair holder: Professor Karin van Nieuwkerk
Academic staff in 2012: 4.19 fte
Assessment:
- Quality: 4
- Productivity: 4
- Societal Relevance: 4
- Vitality and feasibility: –

Objectives and research activities

The department of Islamic and Arabic Studies of the Faculty of Arts was transferred to the Faculty of Religious Studies in July 2008 and subsequently to the new Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies in January 2011. As a result, the research programme has been adapted. The research programme Dynamics of Islamic Culture (2007-2012) was intended for the study of the integration of Islamic societies in the modern world. It consisted of two parts: philological-historical research on Islamic texts and traditions on the one hand and social-academic research on contemporary trends and movements on the other. In response to the changed research environment a new research programme was conceived: 'Dynamics of Islamic Politics'. In this programme, the contested place of Islam in the public domain through forms of Muslim activism is being researched by investigating religious-political activism, cultural politics, gender politics and identity politics. Between 2007 and 2012, the focus of our research has shifted towards contemporary societal and political issues, while simultaneously taking into account the fact that these issues also require the study of religious sources, texts and traditions.

The research is strongly coherent, due on the one hand to its object of study – contemporary Islam – and on the other hand to cooperation between researchers, postdocs and PhD students in two NWO projects 'Salafism' (2007-2011) and 'Islam and the Performing Arts' (2008-2013).

Assessment of the chair

Quality

The quality of the research conducted in the chair group is very good. The group does internationally competitive research with a timely contribution to the field and that holds great promise for further investigation. Publications are with international publishers, some of them top-ranked. The research of the group has very good national and international visibility and the members of the group are well-placed in national and international networks. This is testified by their engagement in the organisation of international
workshops, by prizes awarded to their output, and by a substantial number of translations of their work. Earning capacity is very good as well, with external funding coming from a variety of sources.

Productivity
The productivity of the group is very good. The output is high, and increasing – certainly in view of the size of the group – and strikes a good balance between scientific, professional and popularising publications.

Societal Relevance
Societal relevance is very good. The research program is of substantial societal relevance and the group has been an active actor in its research field and in society. The group contributes to public debates, and has intensive collaborations with various Dutch governmental departments that are connected with societal issues surrounding Islam, radicalisation, and so on. The group appears very well aware of possible tensions with respect to scientific integrity that are connected with research for such third parties.
4.10 Chair: Practical Philosophy

Chair holder: Professor Jean-Pierre Wils
Academic staff in 2012: 2.85 fte
Assessment: Quality: 3
Productivity: 3
Societal Relevance: 4
Vitality and feasibility: –

4.10.1 Objectives and research activities
In the period between 2007 and 2012, research in practical philosophy consisted of two main branches, an ethical and a political-philosophical branch. Both were initially part of the ‘Centre for Ethics’ (CvE); from 2009 onwards they were part of the research programme of the Faculty of Philosophy, under the heading of Practical Philosophy. The research programme of the CvE was entitled ‘Conflict and Consensus in Civil Society’. One of its main points of focus was the relationship between religion, politics and ethics. Another equally important topic in this programme was virtue ethics and the hermeneutic-methodological research in the Ethics chair.

The research programme distinguished itself from what may count as mainstream positions. The ethical research distinguishes itself from current applied ethics by its hermeneutical and virtue-ethical approach. The social-political research distinguishes itself from liberal-political currents in Anglo-American thought by its continental-European perspective. We focus especially on the tradition of ‘political-theological’ thought, the relationship between political-philosophical thought and the fundamental problems of democracy. Our research has a clear societal, moral and political impact.

4.10.2 Assessment of the chair
Quality
The quality of the research conducted in the chair group is good. It is concerned with a broad range of topics, and on those issues it makes valuable contributions to on-going debates. However, it does lack sufficient focus and coherence. The results of the research are published with national and international publishers, but they appear mainly in Dutch and in German. Also, there are relatively few publications in international, peer reviewed journals; most are books, book chapters, and contributions to conference proceedings. As a consequence, international visibility of the results of the research carried out in the chair group is not optimal. Various members of the group do engage in international collaborations and networks with researchers in various European countries. Earning capacity is good, with one large scale project externally funded, in addition to some smaller external grants that have been acquired.
Productivity
The productivity of the group is good. The number of publications is very high, also in relation to the size of the group, but this is due to a large share of professional publications.

Societal Relevance
Societal relevance of the research is very good. The group is very active in contributing to public debates and providing training to civil servants, on the basis of the research it conducts. In this way the group serves an important function. Some more structure to its activities in this area seems to be needed, however.
5 Assessment of the PhD programme

General assessment: 3
The Committee would like to make the following preliminary remarks:

The PhD programme is a programme in transition. Only since December 2011 has there been a comprehensive programme in place for training, supervision, supporting and monitoring PhD students within the research domain of the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies. This programme is part of the Graduate School for the Humanities (GSH) of the Radboud University Nijmegen. The GSH has standardised the PhD training programmes of the Faculty of Arts and of the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, and provides a unified framework for the graduate programmes of the three research institutes in the Humanities at Radboud University Nijmegen.

Before this programme was put into place, regulations with regard to supervision and a framework for monitoring the progress of PhD students in the ten chairs groups of the Faculty were lacking.

Thus, the total period to be assessed by the Evaluation Committee (2007-2012) concerns the old situation for the greater part.

The Evaluation Committee has chosen to assess the PhD programme retrospectively (the historical situation) and prospectively (the actual situation) separately.

The Committee has chosen a 3 as an overall grade for the PhD programme. This rating is a combination of a 2 for past performance and a 4 for future viability. The latter assessment is conditional on the procedures laid down in the protocols of the GSH being duly executed.

5.1 Assessment of the historical situation

As for past performance, over the 2007-2011 period, the Committee was struck by the absence of a clear training programme, a common framework for supervision, and a system for monitoring of progress. No doubt, the lack of such elementary tools is an important element in the explanation of the substantial delays in the completion of many PhD theses, and the significant drop out rate. The overall picture is somewhat skewed by the extremely high number of external PhD students, who on average take much more time to complete their projects than ordinary PhD students. However, even if one considers this, the results are not good.

The Committee also noted that a relatively large number of regular PhD students are ‘home grown’, i.e., are students who did their master-level training in Nijmegen. This is an indication that selection procedures may be somehow biased and favour students from the own institution, and/or that the research environment is insufficiently attractive for students from other institutions in the Netherlands or abroad.
The quality of the PhD theses is good on average, with some excellent theses, as becomes apparent from the success rate in getting follow-up funding from funding agencies like NWO and ERC.

A crucial factor in diagnosing this unsatisfactory past performance is the lack of a good monitoring system for PhD students. There has been insufficient monitoring of their progress and a good system for applying incentives for students and staffs has been absent. The Committee also have the impression that this lack of governance in some cases is due to a lack of engagement on part of the supervisors.

Another factor that prevents students from finishing their projects in time is a lack of attention to the feasibility of the projects. This is mainly the responsibility of the supervisors, and senior research staff involved in the programme within which the PhD research is conducted.

5.2 Assessment of the present situation
The Committee considers the present situation, where the governance of PhD students of the institute is embedded in the Graduate School for the Humanities (GSH), promising. The protocols of the GSH concern PhD selection procedures, a PhD educational programme, guidelines for supervision of the PhD students, a framework for monitoring the success rates of the PhD students, and attention for the career perspectives of the PhD graduates.

Interviews with PhD students, post docs, staff and the director of the institute and the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies have strengthened the Committee’s impression that these regulations will not be a paper tiger, but will change actual practices.

This requires a change in culture that is actively being encouraged by the institute’s leadership. It is, however, not a short-term affair: putting the regulations into effect is one thing, seeing to it that they change the culture and results in different practices is a long term-process that needs consistent and persistent attention.

5.3 Recommendations for the PhD programme
The Evaluation Committee’s major recommendations are:
1. To continue improving the PhD training programme, along the path sketched by the Graduate School for the Humanities by putting the school’s regulations and protocols into effect.
2. Not to rely too much on written regulations, but to be aware of the necessity to enforce them in practice. This needs continuous and persistent attention of all stakeholders involved in the PhD training programme.
3. to assess the feasibility of projects for PhD students and to make sure that they can reasonably be expected to be carried out in four years.
4. to reduce the number of external PhD students – notably in some particular research groups.
5. to increase the influx of PhD students from other institutions, both nationally and internationally, by actively soliciting their applications and by maintaining fair selection procedures.
6 Response of the institute

The programme coordinators, the previous directors of research and the current director of the PTR Research Institute would like to express their gratitude to the evaluation committee for having accepted the difficult task of assessing a research institute that is still in the process of development, as well as the chairs and institutes that were its predecessors. The committee consisted of five top-researchers from various disciplines with a wide range of expertise and substantial experience in research management. Their report, which highlights the Institute’s features of excellence and constructively identifies areas and opportunities for improvement, contains a wealth of valuable assessments and recommendations.

We are obviously pleased to note that the Institute in its current stage is assessed as being ‘very good’ – as reflected in a solid 4 grade. We are also pleased to note that the committee appreciates the multi-disciplinary way in which the current PTR programmes are conceived. The level of integration of our often very different disciplines achieved so far is deemed to be ‘exceptional’. There is, moreover, in the opinion of the committee, more than sufficient thematic coherence and focus in each of the programmes to make multi-disciplinarity an added value rather than an obstacle for research. At the same time it should be noted that the programmes are in a relatively early stage of development and that the process of maturing into stable interdisciplinary collaborations is all but finished. The committee recognizes this and its sharp observations and clear recommendations pertaining to the improvement and further development of the programmes are well taken. In particular the recommendation to set clear and measurable targets for each programme will be implemented as soon as possible.

The report contains recommendations, at the level of the Institute as a whole, at the programmatic level and at the level of chairs for which we are thankful. Many of these can straightforwardly be implemented in order to strengthen the research in the chairs and programmes. A few will require further thought and dialogue with chairs and programme coordinators. In the upcoming months we will determine the exact ways in which to follow up on this important report and to put it to use in further developing and strengthening our Institute.

With respect to the PhD programme, we are well aware of the noted deficiencies in the past and we are grateful to observe that the committee expresses confidence in the measures taken to overcome them by rating the viability of the programme as ‘very good’. The recommendations and observations of the committee with respect to potential future pitfalls will certainly be taken to heart.
In the upcoming years the multi-disciplinary Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies will strive to consolidate its programmes and strengthen its research. The thoughtful report provided by the committee will be a valuable tool in the further development of the Institute.

Marc Slors
Director of the Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies
Appendix 1  Description of the institute and its research activities

The Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies (PTR) is dedicated to the systematic study of philosophy and religion, both as historical phenomena and as contemporary practices. Its aim is to carry out first rate research in systematic philosophy, theology and religious studies as well as in history of philosophy, theology and religion. It produces critical and high-profile contributions to current debates in the scholarly and academic literature. It offers expert reflection on current developments in science with high societal impact, both as contributions to society and as feedback to science. And it contributes to the many societal debates to which philosophy, theology and religious studies can and do make a crucial difference.

Together, the disciplines of philosophy, theology and religious studies span a coherent range of interconnected fundamental scholarly questions relating to society, human beings and their place in the natural world. These disciplines cover the systematic study of some of the most vexing questions of human self-interpretation of the cultural, cognitive and linguistic means that enable such self-understanding and of the worldviews and social structures it has produced. Each of the three disciplines is marked out by its distinctive methodologies, debates and traditions. Apart from methodological and focal differences, however, there is also significant thematic interconnection between the three disciplines. This is why the ten discipline-specific research programmes connected with the ten chairs that contribute to the PTR research institute have been reorganized, in the course of 2011 and 2012, into three thematically structured, multidisciplinary research programmes. This larger clustering of research is in line with a general trend in humanities research and with the recommendations of the 2009 'Sustainable Humanities' report. Rooted in different strands of disciplinary research, our programmes are devoted to studying coherent clusters of questions relating to (i) the rival worldviews produced in religion, philosophy and science (programme 1: Competing Worldviews), (ii) the interdependence of language, culture (including religion) and human cognition (programme 2: Cognitive Humanities), and (iii) the, often religion-induced, critique of modernity (programme 3: Modernity Contested).
Appendix 2  Curricula vitae of the Evaluation Committee members

**Prof Martin Stokhof** (Chair) (Philosophy, University of Amsterdam) is a member of the KNAW (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences). He is co-founder and former scientific director of the Institute for Logic, Language and Computation in Amsterdam, former chairman of the Humanities Council of NWO, and member/chairman of various committees at NWO, KNAW/NVAO, HERA, ESF, and ERC. His research is in formal semantics and philosophy of language, in particular the philosophy of Wittgenstein. His broad expertise in the humanities and his knowledge of the Dutch (and Nijmegen) situation, qualify him as chairman of the Committee.

**Prof Douglas J. Davies** (Religious Studies, Durham University, UK) is managing director of a department of religious studies that is assessed as the number one in the UK. Prof. Davies has a broad knowledge both of theology as well as of religious studies, he has insight in both qualitative as well as quantitative research methods, and he is a leading and prominent researcher, who will greatly strengthen the international stature of the committee.

**Prof Martien E. Brinkman** (Theology, VU Amsterdam) has a broad experience as a researcher and as a manager. His research is mainly in the field of systematic theology. He was dean of the Faculty of Theology (VU) and managing director of the interdisciplinary research institute VISOR. He is managing director of the International Reformed Theological Institute. Brinkman has supervised a great number of doctoral dissertations and currently has an impressive number of PhD students from all over the world.

**Prof Simo Knuutila** (Theology/Philosophy, University of Helsinki, Finland). Professor Knuutila is Professor Theological Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion at the University of Helsinki, and Chairman of the Centre of Excellence ‘Philosophical Psychology, Morality and Politics: Human Conduct in the History of Philosophy’, Academy of Finland. He is the managing editor of the New Synthese Historical Library (Springer, Dordrecht) and member of several editorial boards of leading journals. He has been a member of various assessment committees (e.g. for the Faculty of Philosophy in Leiden, Netherlands) and he has a broad expertise that both comprises aspects of the theology (ethics) as well as aspects of philosophy (semantics, logic, history of philosophy).

**Dr Simon Glendinning** (European Institute, London School of Economics) is an expert in the field of continental philosophy. With his books, released by publishers like Routledge, Edinburgh University Press and Blackwell, on phenomenology, Heidegger, and Derrida, and with his research interest in political and social philosophy, he brings to the Committee the sort of philosophical expertise that is complementary to the expertise of Knuutila and
Stokhof. Glendinning is Director of the Forum for European Philosophy and was formerly the Chair of the Society for European Philosophy, and furthermore he has a great deal of managing experience.

Mr Maarten Evenblij (journalist, Amsterdam, The Netherlands) is an independent journalist, science writer and book author. He was trained in biochemistry at the universities of Utrecht, Amsterdam and Leiden. Although his major experience lies in the biological and medical fields, he has published on a broad scope of topics. He works and has been working for different kind of media, such as newspapers, radio, television and specialised magazines.
Appendix 3  Programme of the site visit

Research Assessment Research Institute for Philosophy, Theology & Religious Studies
Radboud University Nijmegen

Site Visit Programme
17-19 June 2013

External evaluation committee
• Prof. Martin Stokhof (Chair)
• Prof. Martien E. Brinkman
• Prof. Douglas J. Davies
• Dr. Simon Glendinning
• Prof. Simo Knuuttila
• Committee secretary: Mr. Maarten Evenblij

Day 1: Monday 17 June 2013
Location: Jachtslot Mookerheide, Molenhoek
17.00 Welcome reception and introduction with Committee, Dean of the Faculty, Director of the institute. Location: lounge hotel
18.00 Closed Committee meeting: site visit preparation (Hubertus room)
19.00 Dinner at the hotel (Committee only)
20.30 Further preparation of the site visit (Committee only, Hubertus room)

Day 2: Tuesday 18 June 2013
Location: Radboud University, Erasmusbuilding, room E 15.39 & 15.41
8.05 Taxi from hotel
9.00 Welcome by prof. dr. Sebastian Kortmann, Rector Magnificus of Radboud University Nijmegen Present: dean, director, program leaders
9.10 Short presentation on PTR by the director of the institute, Prof. Marc Slors
9.40 Interview session with key chair holders
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Key chair holders</th>
<th>Key chair</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.40-10.00</td>
<td>Prof. Marc Slors</td>
<td>Philosophy of Mind and Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00-10.05</td>
<td>Closed session committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.05-10.25</td>
<td>Prof. Daniela Müller</td>
<td>History of Church and Christianity</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.25-10.30</td>
<td>Closed session committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.30-10.50</td>
<td>Prof. Christoph Lüthy</td>
<td>History of Philosophy</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.50-10.55</td>
<td>Closed session committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.55-11.15</td>
<td>Dr. Christoph Hübenthal</td>
<td>Systematic Religious Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.15-11.20</td>
<td>Closed session committee</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11.20-11.40</td>
<td>Prof. Eric Venbrux</td>
<td>Comparative Religious Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.40-11.50</td>
<td>Closed session committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.50-12.10</td>
<td>Prof. Chris Hermans</td>
<td>Empirical and Practical Religious Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.10-12.15</td>
<td>Closed session committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.30-13.30</td>
<td>Lunch (committee only, room 15.41)</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.45-15.25</td>
<td>Interview session with key chair holders (continued)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Key chair holders</th>
<th>Key chairs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.45-14.05</td>
<td>Prof. Philippe van Haute</td>
<td>Fundamental Philosophy</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.05-14.10</td>
<td>Closed session committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.10-14.30</td>
<td>Prof. Ellen van Wolde</td>
<td>Textual Sources of Judaism and Christianity</td>
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<td>14.30-14.35</td>
<td>Closed session committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.35-14.55</td>
<td>Prof. Karin van Nieuwkerk</td>
<td>Islamic Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.55-15.00</td>
<td>Closed session committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.00-15.20</td>
<td>Prof. Jean-Pierre Wils</td>
<td>Practical Philosophy</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.20-15.25</td>
<td>Closed session committee</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15.30-16.30</td>
<td>Interview session with PhD students and Post docs 45 minute talks and 15 minute closed session committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.45-17.30</td>
<td>Interview session with junior and senior scientists</td>
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<td>17.30-18.30</td>
<td>Closed session committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>Dinner Committee with dean faculty, director institute and program leaders (Faculty Club)</td>
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<td>≥21.30</td>
<td>Taxi to hotel</td>
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Day 3: Wednesday 19 June 2013
Location: Radboud University, Erasmusbuilding, room E 15.39 & 15.41

8.05 Taxi from hotel
9.00 Interview session with program leaders as from 2013 et seq. 
In these sessions other researchers will also attend.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Program leader &amp; members</th>
<th>Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.00-9.30</td>
<td><strong>Prof. Christoph Lüthy</strong></td>
<td>Competing Worldviews</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dr. Christoph Hübenthal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prof. Daniela Müller</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prof. Philippe van Haute</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dr. Antonio Cimino</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dr. Stephan van Erp</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.30-9.45</td>
<td>Closed session committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.45-10.15</td>
<td><strong>Prof. Eric Venbrux</strong></td>
<td>Cognitive Humanities</td>
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<td>Prof. Chris Hermans</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Prof. Ellen van Wolde</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Prof. Marc Slors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dr. Thomas Quartier</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dr Leon de Bruin</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.15-10.30</td>
<td>Closed session committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.30-11.00</td>
<td><strong>Prof. Jean-Pierre Wils</strong></td>
<td>Modernity Contested</td>
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<td>Prof. Karin van Nieuwkerk</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Prof. Hans Schilderman</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. Roel Meijer</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.00-11.15</td>
<td>Closed session committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.15-12.00</td>
<td>Interview meeting with the director of the institute and the research management assistant, Frans Wolswijk, MA (absent due to illness)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.15-13.00</td>
<td>Interview meeting with the dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, prof. Hans Thijsen</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.15-14.00</td>
<td>Lunch (committee only)</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.00-15.45</td>
<td>Committee meeting to discuss results and preparation of site visit report</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.15</td>
<td>Presentation of preliminary findings (E 15.39 &amp; 15.41)</td>
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<tr>
<td>±16.45</td>
<td>Informal gathering and drinks (coffee corner)</td>
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<tr>
<td>±17.15</td>
<td>End of programme – taxi to hotel/train station</td>
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