

**Assessment of Public Administration Research at Erasmus University
Rotterdam, Tilburg University and Utrecht University, 2001-2007**

May 2008
Committee
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1. Introduction

The committee was asked to evaluate the research of the departments of public administration of the Erasmus University Rotterdam, Tilburg University and Utrecht University. The involved departments are all members of the Netherlands Institute for Governance – the Dutch research school of public administration. The three departments cooperate regularly and offer a joint research master programme. NIG offers an educational programme for PhD candidates and functions as research platforms in which different research colloquia exist. We appreciate such cooperation and would suggest that an even closer collaboration could strengthen the already strong research activities at the departments.

Apart from the NIG two departments participate in other research schools, such as the Research School on Traffic and Logistics TRAIL, (EUR), the Research School of Society and Safety (EUR) and CERES, Research School for Resource Studies for Development, (UU).

1.1. Evaluation protocol

The evaluation committee was asked to assess against international scientific standards. The committee used the Standard Evaluation Protocol (2003-2009) for Public Research Organisation (SEP). This protocol was defined by the three main Dutch organizations responsible for publicly funded research – the universities, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). The protocol is attached to this report in Annex A.

The governing boards of Erasmus University Rotterdam, University Tilburg and Utrecht University are responsible for the present evaluation. They appointed the chair and members of the committee. They determined the protocol for the evaluation. They are responsible for the publication of the reports of the committee and for the conclusions to be drawn from these reports.

This research assessment concerns:

- the research programme of the Department of Public Administration of the Erasmus University Rotterdam in the period 2001-2007. After the last research assessment in 2001 the existing research programme on the internal and external management of public and hybrid organizations was continued. Next to this programme a second programme was formulated: Governance and Policy Dynamics. A mid term evaluation in 2005 led to a new research programme in which the two research programmes have merged. The title of the new programme is according to the self-evaluation report ‘Lost connections, linking capacities; on the effectiveness, legitimacy and self- organization of new public administration practices’. The committee received the text of this programme during the site visit and was not able to assess all the merits of the new programme.
- the research programme of the Tilburg School of Politics and Public Administration (TSPPA) in the period 2001-2007 ‘Legitimacy, Vitality and Multiplicity: State, City and Civic Governance in the Network Society’. The TSPPA is currently (in 2008 and during the period of the site visit of the committee) active with the development of the new research programme.
- the research of the Utrecht University/ School of Governance (USG) 2001-2007. The committee assessed two research programmes for the USG: ‘Management of Meaning’ and ‘Management of Responsibilities. The management of the USG

informed the committee that the process to combine the two research programmes into one integrated programme 'Public Matters' has started recently and it was also briefly introduced in the self-evaluation report.

The research assessment concerns the achievements of the departments in the review period 2001-2007. The committee evaluated above that, according to the assessment protocol, the prospects of the departments. The new or developing research programmes and the processes leading to them were therefore also input for the assessment.

1.2. Evaluation Committee

The University Boards appointed Professor F. DeRynck as the chair of the committee. The committee consisted of:

- Prof. Filip DeRynck, University College Ghent, Belgium;
- Prof. Per Laegreid, University of Bergen, Norway;
- Prof. Renate Meyer, University of Vienna, Austria;
- Prof. Janet Newman, Open University, UK;

More detailed information about the committee members can be found in Appendix A. The University Boards appointed Dr. Barbara van Balen as secretary of the committee.

1.3. The Input for the Assessment Process

The input for the evaluation comprised of

- self-evaluation reports submitted by the involved departments;
- five key publications of the research programmes under review;
- interviews with the Board of the Faculty, management of the departments, representatives of the research staff and a selection of PhD students during the site visits;
- campus visit (facilities, library,...)

The Board of Utrecht University additionally asked the committee to assess the value of the research master degree course. The research master is a joint programme of the involved departments, coordinated by the University Utrecht. The input for the evaluation of the research master comprised of:

- description of the degree courses and the research master programme and five research master theses;
- interviews with the management and teachers of the research master;
- interviews with a selection of research master students;

The committee assessed the value of the research master for the research programmes of the departments. It did not evaluate the value of the teaching programme as such. This assessment is therefore not aimed at accreditation of the research master.

The self-evaluation reports were of major value for the assessment and they proved an invaluable context for the subsequent discussions with representatives from the individual departments about their research programmes and activities. The factual background and outlines of aims and objectives stated in the self-evaluation reports were very helpful; the obvious honesty and openness of the SWOT analyses undertaken by each department

reflected both careful self-evaluation and the seriousness with which the exercise was undertaken. The committee wishes to acknowledge the efforts made by the departments in producing these useful reports.

1.4. The Site Visit

The site visit was scheduled for the period, April 21-24, 2008.
During the site visits the evaluation committee interviewed:

April 22, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Management / Board

Prof.dr. H.G.Schmidt, dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences
Prof.dr. K.van Paridon, head of the department of Public Administration
Prof.dr.V.Bekkers, director of research Public Administration
Prof.dr.B.Steijn director of education Public Administration
Prof.dr E.H.Klijn,
Prof.dr.M.Thuens

Representatives Research staff

Dr.M.W.van Buuren
Dr.A.R.Edwards
Dr.J.Edelenbosch
Dr. P.L.Hupe
Prof.dr.W.J.M.Kickert
Dr.M.Haverland

PhD students

Drs. L.G.Tummers
Drs.R.T.I.Moody
Drs.L.M.Gerrits
Drs.J.Posseth
Drs.B.Pel

April 23, University Tilburg

Management/ Board:

Prof.dr.Ph.Eijlander, dean of the Faculty of Law, Tilburg University
Prof.dr.J.Verschuuren, vice-dean Faculty of Law, Tilburg University
Prof.dr.F.Hendriks, chair of the TSPPA
Prof.dr.G.van den Brink, member of the executive board of TSPPA

Representatives Research staff

Prof.dr F.Hendriks
Prof.dr P.Frissen
Prof.dr S. Zouridis
Dr.L.Schaap
Dr.M.Boogers

Dr. T. Metze
Dr. M. van Hulst
Dr. M. Oude Vrielink
Dr. L. de Graaf

PhD students

Drs. J. van Ostaaijen
Drs. T. van den Wijdeven
Drs. L. van den Munckhof
Drs. E. Cornelissen
Drs. E. Wisse
Drs. C. Geurts
Drs. N. Karsten
Drs. S. Soeparman

April 24 University Utrecht

Management/ Board:

Prof. dr M. Bovens, director of the school, programme leader 'Management of Responsibilities'
Prof. dr P. Leisink, programme leader 'Management of Meaning'

Representatives Research staff 'Management of Meaning'

Prof. dr P. Leisink
Prof. dr. D. Hosking
Prof. dr. M. van der Velde
Prof. dr. P. Verweel
Dr. R. van Berkel
Dr. E. van Wijk

Representatives Research staff 'Management of Responsibilities'

Prof. dr. M. Bovens
Prof. dr. D. Curtin
Prof. dr. M. Noordegraaf
Dr. A. Meijer
Dr. K. Yesilkagit

PhD students

M. Busuloc (MA)
S. Grimmelikhuijsen (MSc)
Drs. E. Knies
Drs. B. de Wit

Management and staff Research Master

Prof. dr. M. Bovens
Prof. dr. P. Leisink
Prof. dr. M. Trappenburg
Dr. A. Meijer
Drs. S. Jansen

Research Master Students

N.Burger
K.van Boetzelaer
A.Hilderink
S.Steenman
L.Veldman
S.Verduyn
A.Bos (MSc)

1.5. Independence

All members of the committee signed a statement of independence to safeguard that they would assess the quality of the department and research programmes in an unbiased and independent way. Any existing personal or professional relationships between committee members and programmes under review were reported and discussed in the committee meeting. The committee concluded that there were no close relations or dependencies and that there was no risk in terms of bias or undue influence.

1.6 Procedures followed by the committee

The committee proceeded according to the SEP. Prior to the committee meeting, each programme was assigned to a first reviewer, the other members of the committee were assigned as second reviewer. The first reviewer formulated a preliminary assessment of the research programme and formulated additional questions for the interviews during the site visit. The committee prepared each site visit in a committee meeting. The first reviewer took the lead in the interviews with the representatives of the departments. Each site visit ended by an immediate and preliminary assessment and feedback to the staff (Erasmus and Tilburg) and the management (Utrecht).

The final assessments are based on the documentation provided by the departments, the key publications and the interviews with the management and representatives of the programmes. After the interviews the committee discussed the scores and comments and produced draft texts. The texts were finalised through email exchanges. The final draft was presented to the departments on May 30, 2008. The comments of the departments on this draft were discussed in the committee and led to changes in the report on a number of points. The final report was presented to the Boards of the participating universities.

The committee used the rating system of the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP). The meaning of the scores is described in Appendix 2.

The evaluation by this committee is part of a six year cycle of research assessment as is prescribed in the Dutch system. This evaluation was obviously not the only one, next to the research assessment teaching evaluations and mid term reviews take place. The committee had some doubts by the benefits of the frequent assessment practice and wondered if the combined assessment of research and teaching could be more effective. The assessment of three public administration departments by one committee however is seen as very positive.

1.7 Some remarks concerning the ratings

The committee was obliged according to the SEP protocol to mark each research programme using four criteria, each of them based on a set of subcriteria. The committee wants to stress that it was very difficult to express the merit of each of the programmes in these marks. For example the relevance criteria should cover both scientific impact and socio-economic impact. In some cases departments can score high on scientific relevance and low on impact on developments in society at large and vice versa. Each mark combines a variety of reasons and evaluative remarks that can only be read in the argumentation and reflection on the programme as a whole. The marks also do not express the variation in contribution to the quantity and the quality of the output of the researchers in several programmes. The prescribed assessment criteria were, in the opinion of the committee, not in all aspects transparent and applicable. The committee used the subcriteria in the argumentation following the marks, expecting that these items will feed the internal debate in the departments.

In order to be able to make some differentiation between the research programmes and their respective merits without challenging the system too much the committee chose to use both whole and half point marks.

The productivity of the departments is not merely assessed as an arithmetical question. In rating the productivity the committee also took the following criteria into account:

- the number PhD-students involved. In the Dutch academic system PhD students are counted as academic staff but it can not be expected that PhD students publish as much as tenured staff.
- the impact of the publications. It takes more effort to publish in high impact international refereed journals, than in journals with a lower impact.

In evaluating the programmes the committee took the recommendations of the last assessment into account. However, the committee did not attempt to use the ratings of the former committee as benchmarks against which to measure change, but marked the programmes of the reviewed period independently and according to the indications as given in the appendix. It is important to note in this respect that a lower mark on one of the criteria does not necessarily mean that the programme did not make any progress or is achieving less than six years ago. The marks have to be understood in the actual context, with regard to all the changes the departments experienced in the meantime.

The committee assessed each of the programmes separately on its own merits. It was not the purpose nor possible in the brief of the committee to compare the research programmes. It was however inevitable, partly due to the decision to appoint one committee for three programmes, that the different programmes served as each other's benchmarks and that the assessment of the programmes will be compared to each other.

2. The departments and programmes

2.1. Introduction

In chapters 3-5 each of the departments involved in this assessment is presented in a brief description followed by a short reflection of the committee on leadership, strategy and resources. In chapter 6 the reflection of the committee on the research master is described. Each research programme is assessed on four criteria: quality and productivity, relevance and prospects (vitality and feasibility).

The next paragraph gives a general impression of the committee on the departments involved.

2.2. A positive general impression

In general the committee was impressed by the quality and the quantity of the output of the research programmes it evaluated. The research is in general of a very good to excellent national level and very good international standard. Some of the research and researchers are excellent and belong to the top echelons of European research in public administration, a few of them even on global level.

The productivity of the three departments has increased considerably over the six year period. The average academic output per fte (excl. PhD students) of the EUR grew from 7.7 in 2001 to 12 in 2007, the academic output of TSPPA doubled from 4 to 8 and the average output of the USG from 6.8 to 11.3. One concern is the trade-off between quality and quantity. A general advice would be that the scholars should be encouraged to publish more in the top ranking international journals and leading international publishers. In this respect, the highest category in the evaluation protocol (“English speaking refereed journals”) is too broad. One could also think of supplementing the counting of publication practice with impact or citation indicators.

Generally the research staff at the three departments are highly motivated, competent and committed researchers that are active participants in the internationally research community and they have a high quality and productivity regarding scientific publications. This profile is encouraged by:

- committed management and leadership both at the department and the faculty level that encourages research;
- the existence of a research programme that is able to balance the need for profile, concentration and focus with the need for academic freedom for individual researchers;
- accreditation and performance management systems that stimulate researchers to publish academically and internationally;
- management of the balance between teaching and research responsibilities in order to stimulate research;
- a research strategy that stimulates group work, collaborations and joint publications. Actually in the assessed period 75 to 80% of the A1 publications are joint publications.

It was good to notice that the trade-off between research and teaching in the three departments is seen as positive by the involved staff. The same applies to the trade-off between international publishing and relevance for the public debate. Although it is very clear that the pressure to publish on an international level has increased, all three departments have found ways to cope with the needed balance between research, teaching and societal relevance. The departments are each with their own accents and variants developing strategies to adjust the personnel management and performance management systems to the changing demands. The performance management system in Rotterdam allows individuals to 'buy their teaching time off', the strategy in Tilburg is aimed at a trade-off between contract research and reinforcement of international publishing. The system in Utrecht is developing into a more Anglo-Saxon individual career system, offering the possibility of promoting high achieving scholars. Utrecht also offers a flexible trade-off between teaching and research.

Generally the performance management system seems to stimulate international publications, but there is a concern that they also can enhance individualism at the expense of team work and cooperation which in the long run might be contraproductive. The system seems, however, to allow some flexibility implying that a more soft version can be applied in some cases. We appreciate such flexibility that allows adjustment to local circumstances.

Traditionally the research in public administration in the three departments has a strong orientation on and interaction with the field and on socially or politically relevant issues (relevance, policy advice and presence in the public debate). Consequently a prominent part of the research is contract research, mainly for government organisations. The strong link between the field of public administration and the world of practice is a strength of this research area. But the required orientation on the international research community (public administration as a discipline) and high level international publication channels are challenged by this field orientation. There is, then, a difficult trade-off between relevance, quality and independence. We have no reason to question the integrity of the researchers but active participation in the policy making process, strong involvement in contract research and consulting activities and the practice of dual employments might create a possible challenge on the ability to 'speak truth to power'. In addition, contract research and international publications very often have divergent requirements in terms of methodology, data quality and proceeding. The research departments try to cope with these dilemmas; each with its own accents, strengths and weaknesses. TSPPA formulates this tension explicitly in its mission, and this is also reflected in the action research methodology that is a strong feature of this department. The USG separates consultancy and research on an organisational level.

The institutional context of the assessed departments has had a remarkable impact on the organisations and their achievements. It was very clear that the competitive academic culture of the Utrecht University had an impact on the strategy and achievements of the USG. The focus and mass strategy of the UU was one of the major reasons for the USG to have considered stronger links between the two research programmes. The Tilburg University has stimulated good completion rates of PhD theses by granting a bonus for every dissertation, producing an increase in the overall number of finished PhDs. The size of the EUR department of public administration is certainly reflected in the heterogeneity of the research, while the position of the dean in Rotterdam seems to be more important for the direction of the department than at the other two universities.

The departments informed the committee that there have been changes in the funding of universities: a considerable part of the budget for universities provided by the ministry of

OCW has been shifted to NWO. The consequence is that more research money now has to be acquired on a competitive basis. Public administration research however does not have a strong position in NWO in the competition with the other social science disciplines. Traditionally only a small part of the research funds of the public administration departments is 2nd stream money. This is especially the case for Erasmus. The committee recommends that the departments and their universities develop a common strategy to strengthen the position of public administration research with regard to NWO.

Public administration research has strong links to many disciplines. The committee considers this multidisciplinary to be one of the very strong aspects of the research area. The input of expertise and knowledge from various fields and disciplines creates an innovative and lively environment. The strong institutional separation between Public Administration and Political Science is however a bit odd. The synergy between the two programmes with a different disciplinary background in Utrecht has great potential. The multidisciplinary in Rotterdam and Tilburg is especially strong in the contacts with other public institutions, while the disciplinary contacts are mainly with political sciences.

We generally appreciate the practice of having a formalized research program in each department. It stimulates a stronger focus, greater concentration and a clearer profile. On the other hand the programmes reveal a delicate balance between a top-down and bottom-up based research strategy, between an overarching programme and concentration and between an overall and general programme and a specific operationalized and binding programme. We also observe a theoretical and methodological pluralism and diversity in the research programmes and the theoretical foundations are not always that clear.

The committee discussed with the departments whether it would be possible to strengthen public administration as a discipline or to put greater emphasis on public administration as a field of engagement with policy and practice issues. There are positive arguments for both strategies and each department is developing their own specific balance between the strategies. The pressure to publish internationally however has grown since the last research assessment and forces the departments to put more emphasis on the disciplinary strategy. This is a strategy that we support. But it is a challenge to stimulate increased international publication and to strengthen public administration as a scientific discipline without hurting the national and policy oriented responsibilities of public administration scholars. Generally we would recommend that the research programs should become somewhat less general and more specific and focused.

A further set of issues we addressed concerned questions of present capacity and future vitality. Staffing profiles and career management policies are important here. For 'foreigners', as the committee members are, the gender imbalance in Dutch universities is very evident. This is also apparent for the Public Administration Departments. The most striking imbalance was found in Rotterdam, while Utrecht has a more balanced gender profile and the gender balance in Tilburg can be seen as in-between Rotterdam and Utrecht. In Rotterdam the gender imbalance added to the age composition of the staff (a relatively small proportion of the staff is younger than 40) which leads to some concerns about future capacity and prospects. The age composition in the two other departments is, in the opinion of the committee, more promising, not least because of positive PhD strategies. One personnel policy tool that is rather underdeveloped in at least two of the three departments is the use of sabbaticals, which could have been upgraded to a more active and comprehensive tool.

Another concern is that some of the most internationally recognized researchers have left the departments recently. Even if they all continue to have some relationships to their previous departments, their exits represent a challenge. They represent scholars who are not easy to replace and so far the departments have not succeeded in recruiting scholars with matching international reputation. Recent recruitment of some promising young scholars with a high academic potential gives however a more promising forecast.

During the site visit the committee was confronted with three aspects of the academic career system that seem to be somewhat counterproductive.

The first is the lack of career possibilities for high achieving scholars. The Dutch formation system prevents individual promotion steps on the basis of achievements. The involved departments however all reported that a start was made to introduce some kind of 'tenure track' or personal UHD and professor positions.

The second 'system' problem is the absence of career prospects in teaching. While teaching is an important task of a university, an academic career is mainly based on research achievements. The management of the assessed departments recognised this problem.

Although a tenured teaching position seems to be possible in Utrecht, a real solution to this problem has not yet been found in the other departments.

The third aspect is the position of PhD students. The current Dutch system to appoint PhD students as academic staff is too expensive and confusing. As it is now there is no internationally competitive PhD programme and PhD students from abroad are almost non-existent. The committee would recommend the creation of a PhD bursary system. We noted with approval the proposal from Tilburg to fund a small number of post doctoral fellowship positions in order to build capacity, especially around future publications.

A general impression from the site visits is that we have met research communities that are confident in their own fields, well managed, committed and dedicated to research. Although we take this as partly being due to evaluation procedure itself, one concern is nonetheless that, during our site visits, we have not observed any strong signs of a lively, active and controversial intellectual scientific discussion between different theoretical or methodological approaches challenging existing paradigms. Such a discussion is however obvious in several of the scientific publications.

5. USG Utrecht University

5.1. Introduction

The Utrecht University/ School of Governance is a relatively new department established in 2000 to provide BA and MA programmes, research and consultancy in the areas of Public Administration and Organisational Science. From 2004 onwards university funding for the department was provided on a structural basis. In 2007 the USG is one of the three departments within the Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance (LEG). The department has two research programmes, one in Public Administration (Management of Responsibilities) and one in Organisational Science (Management of Meaning).

The Dean of the LEG Faculty is formally responsible to the rector of the university with regard to research conducted in the LEG. This responsibility is delegated to the head of the USG Department. Within the USG Board, the Research director is responsible for the general strategy and policy formulation regarding the research and consultancy units. The USG Board made from the start of the department a deliberate decision to organize the academic research and the commercial consultancy activities into two separate units. USG Consultancy has its own budget and financial targets, its own staff of professional consultants, and it has formulated specific strategies and policies. The USG Consultancy unit was not assessed by this committee. This causes some bias with regard to the assessment of the other departments that have the consultancy and contract research integrated into their research programmes.

The USG has two regimes for contracted research: the commercial regime for USG consultancy and an academic regime which is run through the research programmes. The latter contracts often involve subsidies or matching funds for research already undertaken at the USG. These types of contracts are only permitted when there is a clear academic interest and output involved.

The focus of the research of USG is on the interaction between social transformations and organizations with a public function, and the way in which these organizations make sense of and react to these transformations and their consequences from a public responsibility perspective. It involves three elements: social transformations, public administration and organizations.

- a. Social transformations; the research is centered on three closely related transformations: internationalization of economy, government and society; immigration and migration; informatisation.
- b. Public administration; public responsibility and public accountability are central concepts within the research of USG.
- c. Organizations; research at UCG concentrates on organization with a public function.

The research capacity of the two research programmes shows an increase in the assessed period, especially in the Management of Responsibilities-programme. Management of Meaning grew from 4.15 in 2001 to 5.73 in 2007. Management of Responsibilities grew from 3.1 in 2001 to 10.11 in 2007. Prof.dr M. Bovens is research director from the start of the department.

The department is working on a new research programme 'public matters' with the aim to establish more integration and networking between the two existing research programmes and

without losing the two research traditions. The ambition of the new research programme is coherence in terms of focus and locus. The research profile for the new period of research 2008-2013 will build on the current research focus while introducing some new elements. The programme will consist three lines of research, namely:

- public accountability;
- public management;
- managing social issues.

5.2. Reflection on leadership, strategy and resources of the Utrecht University / School of Governance

The focus and locus of the USC research programme revolves around public administration, organizations and social transformation. Up to 2007 these were organized in two programmes, management of meaning and management of responsibility. From 2008 these two programmes will be merged into an adjusted programme.

The committee noticed that working on the new research programme itself created a lot of energy and synergy within the department. The processes instigated by the management of the department seems to be both democratic (perception of the collaborators) and autocratic (perception of the directors), and this style of leadership seems to be very well appreciated by the researchers. The sphere at the department is challenging as well as encouraging, competitive and stimulating. The researchers reported that they experienced their entrance in the department as becoming a member of 'the family'. The committee noticed a remarkable conceptual consensus in the department during the site visit despite the differences that are apparent in the individual publications. It hopes that this is not a sign of a lack of debate within the department.

The committee congratulates the department with the research programme title 'public matters'. It appreciates the reasons for the department to develop a new integrated research programme and can see the benefits for the strategic position of the department with regard to the own university and NWO. The capacity to build synergies between topics will, in the opinion of the committee, grow when the two research groups are more integrated. Multidisciplinarity is inherent in the organisation of the USG. The new programme reinforces this aspect and proceeds on the synergy and capacities of the staff. However, there is some ambiguity about how different parts are to be linked together; while we appreciate that a complete merger between the two programmes may not be advisable, the long separation of public administration and organizational studies may have produced barriers to achieving coherence that may not be all that easy to overcome. It is also a bit unclear how the rather general programmes are linked to specific and more concrete research projects that cross the boundaries of the formerly separated research programmes.

The committee's evaluation of the personnel management of the department is very positive. The staff appears to feel very stimulated and valued. The department seems to be able to attract talented and dedicated researchers and to keep them as well. The strategy of deviating from the traditional Dutch academic career structure in order to promote researchers on a personal basis when they perform well is very positive. A more Anglo Saxon model is also evident in relation to PhD students (see also paragraph 2). This adds up to a proactive, smart and innovative personnel policy.

The leadership of the department and of both programmes is very good, stimulating and internationally at the forefront.

The resources of the department are very good and so are the facilities. The housing of the department in one, specially adapted building, certainly adds to the possibilities of formal and informal collaboration within the department.

The academic reputation of the programme Management of Meaning is very good but this programme is more a clustering of topics than MoR. The reputation of the programme Management of Responsibilities is excellent, internationally at the forefront. The societal relevance of both programmes is very good. Both programmes have a high academic reputation; there is a high level of international collaboration and academic exchange. In 2007 they had together 35 articles in English refereed journals and they presented about 60 papers at international conferences and workshops. This is an impressive degree of high international scientific activity for a rather small group of researchers especially taking into consideration the fact that the department was founded not long ago.

5.3. Review of the research programme Management of Meaning

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| Programme director | Prof.dr P.Leisink |
| Research staff 2007 | 5.73 |
| Assessments: | Quality: 4 |
| | Productivity: 4.5 |
| | Relevance: 4 |
| | Prospects: 4.5 |

Explanation of the scores

QUALITY

The ideas and approach of the Management of Meaning programme are original and rather coherent. The theoretical basis of the programme is very solid and good. The research makes a very significant contribution to the field. The publication strategy of this group is excellent, so is the prominence of the programme director in the international (European) field. Other members of the research group are also very well known in the international academic community. The committee assessed the quality of the scientific publications as very good.

PRODUCTIVITY

The research group is very productive. The number of scientific publications is very good to excellent. The number of professional publications is very high. This high productivity is the result of almost all the researchers of the group. The publications are well distributed in the group.

RELEVANCE

The research of this group contributes at a high level to the advancement of knowledge. The knowledge is very well disseminated and implemented in the field and in the disciplines, although there is more than one academic community involved.

PROSPECTS

The prospects of this group in terms of viability and feasibility are very good to excellent. The group contains both experienced highly qualified researchers as well as young, talented scholars. The gender balance in the group is very good. The committee was positive about the future plans and ideas of the group.

5.4. Review of the research programme Management of Responsibilities

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| Programme director | Prof.dr.M.Bovens |
| Research staff 2007 | 10.11 |
| Assessments: | Quality: 4.5 |
| | Productivity: 4.5 |
| | Relevance: 4 |
| | Prospects: 4.5 |

Explanation of the scores

QUALITY

The committee was very impressed by the achievements of this group that almost started from scratch in 2000 and has reached the European forefront in its field in 2007. The quality of the research is very good to excellent. This group has a rather coherent and focused research programme. It has produced a number of top publications and it has a very solid publication strategy. The programme director as well as other members in the research group have an excellent reputation in the academic community. The research of this group is very significant for the research area. They are conducting innovative and original research.

PRODUCTIVITY

The productivity of this group is very good to excellent in all categories. It produced a large number of scientific and professional publications to which all the members of the group contributed. Considering the young age of this group the number of completed PhD projects is good.

RELEVANCE

Research within this group contributes at a high level to the advancement of knowledge. The knowledge is very well disseminated and implemented within the group. The significance of the research is especially high within the academic field.

PROSPECTS

The prospects of this group in terms of viability and feasibility are very good to excellent. The group contains both experienced highly qualified researchers as well as young talented scholars. The gender balance in the group is very good. The committee was impressed by the future plans and ideas of the group.

6. Research master

6.1. Introduction

The research master programme was initiated by the USG. At first, an attempt was made to establish a research master within the NIG (the Netherlands Research School for Public Administration). However, a number of universities decided not to participate, due to the respective university strategies to establish faculty-wide research masters. Thereupon, the USG set up a partnership with the UvT and the EUR. The strategy to organize a 'disciplinary' research master has turned out to be very effective. The University Utrecht coordinates the master that was accredited in 2005 and therefore is financed by the Ministry of Education. In 2007/2008 15 students were recruited for the research master. Students have to apply and are selected on basis of a selection interview and achievements in previous study. An overview of the programme can be found in Annex C.

6.2. Review of the research master programme

The committee assessed the discipline oriented research master programme as a very positive development. The initiative to establish the research master programme was clearly taken by the USG Utrecht. It is in the opinion of the committee that there are significant benefits accruing from the fact that this research master is a joint programme of the three assessed departments. The research master offers a very positive experience for those students who are interested in research or who want to have a more in depth theoretical basis. Not all students however are interested in a PhD position; some choose to build their career in consultancy or policy advice. But all students we met valued the programme highly.

The research master programme brings benefits to each of the departments involved. In addition it supports the existing collaboration between the departments and provides a common recruitment basis for PhD students. Each of the departments has recruited some students from the RM for a PhD position. The RM is even more positive for the USG, in that its role in coordinating the programme confirms its leading position in public administration in the Netherlands; and thus also strengthens the position of the department within the Utrecht University itself. At the same time, however, there seems to be a problem recruiting students from outside Utrecht.

The students we met were very committed to and appreciative of the programme and the supervision they receive. In the opinion of the committee the programme is deemed to be a success, thanks to the excellent resources and the possibility of selecting the most motivated, clever and bright students.

The committee has some concerns regarding the career possibilities for the best students that are interested in research, in line of the earlier remarks concerning the three institutions involved in this assessment. The number of PhD positions is limited due to the high costs of such positions. The committee would recommend the creation of more flexibility in financing the PhD students and opening the possibility of securing PhD grants. In addition, the committee would wholeheartedly support the management of the Research Master to collaborate with other European universities and to create an international research master degree programme.

APPENDIX A:

PROTOCOL REGARDING THE EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH PROGRAMS OF THE DEPARTMENTS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION OF ERASMUS UNIVERSITY AND TILBURG UNIVERSITY AND THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL SCIENCE OF UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

1. Introduction

The departments of public administration of Erasmus University Rotterdam and Tilburg University and the department of public administration and organizational science of Utrecht University have decided to organize the evaluation of their research programs together. In doing so, the three departments deliberately choose to have an evaluation in which the discipline itself, has become the major frame of reference. Three reasons underlie this choice. First, a comparison of the results between the organizations within the same discipline makes it possible to recognize the specific character and context of the discipline itself. Second, public administration and organization science as a discipline has two faces: a) an academic, theory driven orientation, in which scientific publications play an important role, and b) a policy and management orientation, in which policy relevant and organization relevant research and contributions to the public and political debate are important. Both sides should be taken into account, when evaluating the research results of the three organizations. Third, the three departments already work together in a joint master research in public administration and organizational science, while at the same time a number of issues which are addressed in the three research programs have a certain familiarity, which facilitates the comparison.

This evaluation protocol is an elaboration and further specification of the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP) 2003-2009 for public research organisations in The Netherlands. SEP stipulates the requirements for assessments of research institutes of Dutch universities, the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), as agreed by the governing boards of the Association of Dutch Universities (VSNU), NWO and KNAW. For items not covered in this protocol, the provisions of SEP apply.

2. Nature of the evaluation

The evaluation of the research programs involves four indicators that according to the standard protocol must be used for the evaluation of research, and takes into account some specific features of the research in the discipline. These indicators and elements will be elaborated on below.

- The goals and criteria of the evaluations should be based on the Standard Evaluation Protocol 2003-2009. According to this standard evaluation protocol the research programs should be assessed in relation to the following criteria (p. 9-11 of the protocol: a) the quality of the research, including innovativeness, b) the productivity, c) relevance and d) viability and feasibility. The three departments will prepare a study in which a self-assessment is produced, based on this standard evaluation protocol. Furthermore, the study prepared by each department will provide the information on the research program as required by appendix 3 of the Standard Evaluation Protocol.

- Due to the two aspects of the disciplines of public administration and organization science, it is important that the evaluation committee will also explicitly assess the added value of the research activities in terms of relevance for the practice of public administration and organization science as well as their contribution to the public and political debate. In the assessment of the relevance of the research programs, attention should equally be paid to the scientific and practical relevance of the research programs.
- The evaluation committee should acknowledge the fact that all the three research programs are in a phase of transition. At Tilburg University a fundamentally new research orientation has been developed during the last two years, while at Erasmus University two separate research programs have merged (in 2006) into a new, unified program. At the University of Utrecht two research programs exist. The public administration program is relatively young and started in 2001. The organization science program, which is older, originally focused on the management of diversity and of human resources. The intention is that in the coming years these two programs will be linked and that cross-program collaboration will be established. Due to the fact that the research programs at the three departments are in a phase of transition, it is important to recognize that the effects of the measures and changes that have been implemented, are not always visible yet. The programs are in a phase of settling, which creates specific adjustment issues. The committee is invited to evaluate the progressive changes.
- Although the evaluation of the three programs is based on a relative comparison of the results, it is important that each program is individually assessed, in terms of its own aspiration, emphasis and orientations.
- The national and international relevance of the research programs should also be taken into account in the way in which national and international publications are assessed. The grading of these two kinds of publications is part of the common frame of reference, which has been developed by the Netherlands Institute of Governance (NIG), the Dutch research school for public administration and political science. All the three departments are a member of this research school and have accepted the research quality system that has been adopted by NIG. The organization science research program of the University of Utrecht participates in a research school, which is called CERES. CERES has a publication appraisal system similar to NIG. In the NIG and CERES system, credits can not only be acquired by international scientific journal publications, but also by articles in Dutch scientific journals, professional journals and research reports, although they are valued in another way. In 2006, the international evaluation committee that has looked at the overall performance of the NIG has positively assessed the NIG research quality system.

3. The required expertise of committee members

The chairman of the committee

- should be independent and should have an indisputable status which is also demonstrated by his curriculum vitae and his academic achievements;

- he/she should acknowledge the two aspects of public administration and organization science in which academic and theory driven knowledge is combined with having practical significance;
- he/she should have substantial knowledge and oversight to understand the development of public administration and organization science and the themes that are being discussed – both within the Dutch and the international context.

The members of the committee should:

- be independent and indisputable, which also implies that they do not have an immediate working or administrative relationship with the three departments;
- acknowledge the two aspects of public administration and organization science in which academic and theory driven knowledge is combined with having practical significance. This implies that they are aware of the publication traditions which have been linked to these two aspects;
- reflect the following themes which are being addressed in the research programs:
 - Public Management
 - Governance, including good governance
 - Democracy, citizenship and leadership
 - Multi-level governance (state versus local government) as well as the relationship between the state and the civil society
 - Diversity and human resource management.

Based on these considerations it is proposed that the evaluation committee will consist of the following persons, who have no working relationship with the three departments, who are experts in their own field and who as a committee cover the core themes of the research programs thoroughly. These persons have been consulted informally in order to verify that they are willing and able to take part.

- Prof.dr. F. de Rynck (University College Ghentp, who acts as chairman
Prof. dr. F. de Rynck is full professor of public administration at the departement of public administration at the University College Ghent. He was president of the High Council of Public Administration (Hoge Raad van het Binnenlandse Bestuur). Moreover, as a Belgian, Dutch speaking academic, he is well aware of the current debates within Dutch Public Administration.
Professor De Rynck is a Belgian expert on subnational government and home administration. He has published widely on these topics, not seldom taking the Netherlands as a case in point. Like earlier visitation committee chairmen, prof De Rynck combines a foreign and comparative perspective with a long-lasting and deep understanding of the study of public administration and organisation in the Netherlands. He has succesfully chaired a visitation committee and procedure before.
- Prof. J. Newman (Open University, UK)
Professor Newman is an expert in the field of public management, public policy and governance. She has published widely on changing state forms and their impact on public services. Her 1997 book “The managerial state” (together with J. Clark) is a reference point for studies of public management reform in Europe. She also has a wide experience as an advisor of local authorities.

- Prof. dr. R Meyer (Department of Public Management, Economic University of Vienna)
Professor Meyer is an expert in organization theory and public management (including public personnel policies) as well as public governance. Her articles have appeared in scientific journals such as *American Behavioral Scientist*, *Public Policy and Administration*, *Organization*, *Organization Studies*, and *Public Administration*. She is Head of Department.
- Prof. dr. P. Laegreid, Department of Administration and Organization Theory, University Bergen Norway.
Professor Laegreid is an expert in organization and management and has expertise in economics and social sciences. He is a member of the Norwegian Academy for Arts and Sciences. He published in well-know high level journals like 'Governance', 'Public Management Studies', 'International Review of Administrative Science', 'Public Productivity and Management', 'Public Management Review' and 'International Journal of Political Studies'.
- Dr. B. van Balen (secretary).
Dr Van Balen is an independent consultant in the field of education, research, quality assurance and organization development. She has been secretary to university research evaluations before, such as the research evaluation of legal research (Leiden), of gender and diversity research (Maastricht), culture and history (Utrecht), urban and regional research (National) and theology and religion (Utrecht).

4. Procedures

The procedures to be followed are similar to those that are laid down in the SEP. Part of the assessment is a site visit to each of the three departments, which is foreseen for April 2008. The dates and the programme for the visit will be agreed between the chairman and the members of the committee. The programme will include interviews with key faculty, among whom the directors of research and the deans. The Evaluation Committee will receive all relevant information (see below), this Protocol and the programme of the site-visit at least four weeks in advance of their visit.

5. Information

In order to support the Committee's work, it will receive:

- (a) The self-study reports made up by the departments
- (b) The applicable Annual Reports of the Institutes
- (c) A copy of SEP, the Standard Evaluation Protocol for Public Research Organisations
- (d) A set of key publications

APPENDIX B: Assessment criteria and rating

The committee acted upon the description of the protocol, concerning the interpretation of the four main assessment criteria.

Quality is to be seen as a measure of excellence and excitement. It refers to the eminence of a group's research activities, its abilities to perform at the highest level and its achievements in the international scientific community. It rests on the proficiency and rigour of research concepts and conduct; it shows in the success of the group at the forefront of scientific development. As a rule, experts in the field - the peers - judge this. They rely on their own knowledge and expertise, on discussions with the group leaders and other members, and on various kinds of systematic information. When an institute provides high quality state of the art facilities to the research community this can be considered as a measure of excellence.

Productivity refers to the total output of the group; that is, the variegated ways in which results of research and knowledge development are publicised. Usually, quantitative indicators measure this. In most cases this will be bibliometrics, which are indicators concerned with publications and citations of publications. The output needs to be reviewed in relation to the input in terms of human resources.

Relevance is a criterion that covers both the scientific and the technical and socio-economic impact of the work. Here in particular research choices are assessed in relation to developments in the international scientific community or, in the case of technical and socio-economic impact, in relation to important developments or questions in society at large.

Viability, includes vitality and feasibility, and refers to the internal and external dynamics of the group in relation to the choices made and the success rate of projects. On the one hand, this criterion measures the flexibility of a group, which appears in its ability to close research lines that have no future and to initiate new venture projects. On the other hand, it measures the capacity of the management to run projects in a professional way. Assessment of policy decisions is at stake, as well as assessment of project management, including cost-benefit analysis.

The review committee presents its assessment on quality, quantity, relevance and viability according to a five-point scale, specified in the SEP:

Excellent = 5

Work that is at the forefront internationally, and which most likely will have an important and substantial impact in the field. Institute is considered an international leader.

Very good = 4

Work that is internationally competitive and is expected to make a significant contribution; nationally speaking at the forefront in the field. Institute is considered international player, national leader.

Good = 3

Work that competitive at the national level and will probably make a valuable contribution in the international field. Institute is considered internationally visible and a national player.

Satisfactory = 2

Work that is solid but not exciting, will add to our understanding and is in principle worthy of support. It is considered of less priority than work in the above categories. Institute 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. Work not worthy of pursuing.

Appendix C Master Research in Public Administration and Organizational Science

Programme overview 2008-2010

Year I (2008-2009)

| Semester 1 | ECTS | Semester 2 | ECTS |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Core themes and modern classics Public Administration | 9 | Advanced thematic course: Multiculturality, the organization of diversity | 6 |
| Core themes and modern classics Public Management and Organization | 9 | Advanced thematic course: State and Network Society | 6 |
| Advanced thematic course (electives) or Statistics (compulsory for students without sufficient level of knowledge) | 6 | Research methods 2: design and planning from a critical constructionist perspective | 6 |
| Philosophy of Science | 6 | Research and master thesis track A (start) | |
| Research methods 1: design and planning in quantitative research | 6 | | |

Year II (2009-2010)

| Semester 1 and 2 (courses in semester 1; research track throughout the year) | ECTS |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Research methods 3: Reception and Reporting | 6 |
| Advanced Thematic courses (optional) | 6 |
| Research methods specials: | 12 |
| - compulsory: survey research (3 ects) and qualitative data analysis (3 ects); | |
| - elective specials 6 ects (depending on chosen research design in individual research project) | |
| Thesis Track, consisting of:- Research and master thesis track A (12 ects) | 42 to |
| - Research seminar: research design and planning (3 ects) | |
| - Research seminar: research reception (3 ects) | |
| - Research and master thesis track B (24 ects) | |

Janskerkhof 3, 3512 BK, Utrecht

**Faculteit Recht, Economie,
Bestuur en Organisatie**

Aan de rector magnificus
de heer prof. dr. J.C. Stoof
Heidelberglaan 8
INTERN

Bestuurssecretariaat

Datum

4 september 2008

Onderwerp

Evaluation research Utrecht School of Governance

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Blad

Blad 25 van 1

Dear Rector,

We have appreciated the diligent and careful evaluation of the 2001-2007 research at the Utrecht University School of Governance by the committee. We are extremely grateful for the very positive evaluations of both research programmes and the research master.

According to the committee, USG research is not only the best among the assessed Dutch programmes in Public Administration, it has also reached the European forefront. This is even better than we had expected when we started the USG research programmes in 2001. We also appreciate the very positive reception by the committee of the theme and the direction of our new combined research programme Public Matters and we take it as an incentive to proceed firmly along this path.

We concur with the commission's recommendations, particularly with its suggestions to explore the possibilities to create more flexibility in funding PhD students and to create an international research degree programme.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. dr. Henk Kummeling,
Dean