

Response of the Board to the Research Assessment 2018 of the Protestant Theological University

In June 2018 the research and its relevance to society of the Protestant Theological University in the period 2012-2017 was assessed by a committee of internationally acknowledged experts in the diverse fields of theology and chaired by Dr James Kennedy, Professor of Modern Dutch History and Dean of the University College in Utrecht.

The committee concluded that the university “has improved its position within the Dutch field of theological research and that it has taken significant measures since the previous evaluation”. The research quality of the PThU is -according to the committee- “in a very good state” and the university has taken “substantial steps” since the previous research assessment and midterm review “that contributed to both the quality and quantity of the PThU’s academic publications”, resulting in qualitatively and quantitatively higher productivity: more refereed articles in authorized (QRiH terminology; www.qrih.nl) and/or A-rated journals (DGO-list) instead of non-refereed articles.

The academic reputation of the PThU is, as stated in the committee’s report, comparable to that of Princeton Theological Seminary and Fuller Theological Seminary and considered as “strong” within the global Reformed world.

Furthermore, the committee applauded the higher extent of coherence within the recognisable research programmes of the university and the positive impact of the embeddedness within the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the University of Groningen for its research infrastructure and facilities. Positive remarks were also given with regard to the “re-staffing and rejuvenation of the research groups” and the stability of the research staff formation.

Besides the high quality of the institution’s research, the committee also recognises the efforts made by the university to increase its relevance to church and society. The overall quality of the results are rates as “very good”.

The Board is proud of these results in the fields of academic quality and relevance to society and the observed improvements.

The viability of the university as a research unit is considered “good”, to a large extent because of its “very dedicated, motivated and enthusiastic staff” and “the embeddedness within VU and RUG allowing efficient use of shared facilities and shared support”.

The committee also compliments the university with its prudent HR policy, hiring good personnel and offering “tailor-made measures to accommodate researchers”. The relatively high percentage of female staff members was recognised by the committee - with 25% of its research staff (including the rector, the director of education and one of the three research leaders) the PThU ranks among the top of higher education institutions in the Netherlands.

In the assessment report attention is also paid to the diverse measures implemented in the framework of the PThU Graduate School as a result of the recommendations of the midterm review committee (2015). Encouraging is also the expressed satisfaction of the interviewed PhD students concerning their “supervision and the stimulating environment at the PThU as well as within the context of NOSTER”. Important is also the committee’s conviction of the awareness of the PThU of the importance of academic integrity and the attention paid to it.

Important feedback and recommendations were given by the committee with regard to, among other things, a further elaboration of the vision, strategy and effective planning of research. The university was stimulated to extend and increment its supportive research staff, especially also because further strategic steps should be taken with regard to external funding in national and international competition. A clear distribution of mandates and definition of roles is necessary so that responsibilities can be adequately exercised. Furthermore, the panel stimulated the university to recalibrate the responsibility between university and its stakeholders with regard to knowledge transfer. Another recommendation concerned the further professionalisation of the Graduate School and the third cycle of education, as well as its control structure.

The Board recognises these issues raised by the assessment committee. Special attention will be paid on a strategic vision with realistic ambitions and an effective planning. In 2019 a university research agenda will be constructed around two overarching themes strongly related to the distinguishing identity of the Protestant Theological University.

The Board has already invested in strengthening the support for research through (the fulfilment of) two vacancies. The concrete responsibility of one of these new staff members will be to offer concrete support for research funding applications.

A plan for the further professionalisation of the Graduate School was already developed by a project team and a pilot will be run in the academic year 2019 – 2020.

Prof. dr. Mechteld Jansen, rector