

Performance Review

**Netherlands Interuniversity School for Islamic
Studies**

2010-2014

Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU)
Catharijnesingel 56
PO Box 8035
3503 RA Utrecht
The Netherlands

Phone: +31 (0) 30 230 3100
Telefax: +31 (0) 30 230 3129
E-mail: info@qanu.nl
Internet: www.qanu.nl

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Report on the evaluation of performance of the Netherlands Interuniversity School for Islamic Studies

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Foreword by the committee chair

This report presents the findings of the review committee invited to assess the activities of the Netherlands Interuniversity School for Islamic Studies (NISIS). The Committee consisting, apart from the chair, of professors François Déroche and Albrecht Fuess and supported by Kees-Jan van Klaveren, examined the self-evaluation report submitted by NISIS, and held its site visit, generously hosted by the Faculty of Humanities of Leiden University on 18 May 2015.

As will become clear in the remainder of this report, NISIS is in many respects an exceptional unit with a history of its own and with complex ties with the Dutch authorities and its individual partner universities. Notwithstanding these circumstances, we encountered a team of academics strongly committed to collaborative and innovative interdisciplinary research and training on topics of inevitable and increasing societal and political relevance. We were deeply impressed by the sense of community and the collegial *ambiance* transmitted during our talks with NISIS senior and junior members; and we see this as a vital asset for the future of NISIS. This future, in turn, is seen by us as greatly important: advanced scholarship on Islam is, now more than ever, of tremendous significance.

The tone and outcome of this report, consequently, are positive, and it is with pleasure that my colleagues and I submit it to the NISIS members and their institutional authorities. It is hoped that this report will encourage all those involved in the future development of NISIS to intensify and consolidate their efforts, presently judged by this Committee to bear great potential for further development.

Tilburg, June 2015
Professor Jan Blommaert
Chair of the review committee.

1. The review committee and the review procedures

Scope of the assessment

The Committee was asked to perform an assessment of the Netherlands Interuniversity School for Islamic Studies (NISIS). This assessment covers the period 2010-2014.

In accordance with the Standard Evaluation Protocol 2015-2021 for Research Assessment in the Netherlands (SEP), the committee's tasks were to assess the quality of NISIS on the basis of the information provided by the research school and interviews with management of the coordinating institute, directorate, board, senior and junior members, and to advise on how its work might be improved.

Composition of the Committee

The composition of the Committee was as follows:

- Prof. Jan Blommaert (chair), Professor of Language, Culture and Globalization, director of Babylon, Center for the Study of Superdiversity, Tilburg University, The Netherlands;
- Prof. François Déroche, Professor of the History of the Koran, Collège de France, France;
- Prof. Albrecht Fuess, Professor of Islamic Studies and director of the Center for Near- and Middle Eastern Studies, Philipps University Marburg, Germany.

Drs. Kees-Jan van Klaveren of QANU (Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities) was appointed secretary to the committee. A short curriculum vitae of each committee member can be found in Appendix 1.

Independence

All members of the Committee signed a statement of independence to safeguard that they would assess the quality of the Netherlands Interuniversity School for Islamic Studies and its research programme in an unbiased and independent way. Any existing personal or professional relationships between Committee members and the research school under review were reported and discussed in the Committee meeting. The Committee concluded that there were no unacceptable relations or dependencies and that there was no specific risk in terms of bias or undue influence.

Data provided to the Committee

The Committee has received detailed documentation consisting of the following parts:

- Self-evaluation report of NISIS, with appendices;
- Terms of Reference provided by the Board of NISIS and accepted by all universities involved.

Procedures followed by the Committee

The Committee proceeded according to the Standard Evaluation Protocol 2015-2021 (SEP). Prior to the first Committee meeting, all Committee members independently formulated a preliminary assessment of the research school. The final assessments are based on the documentation provided by the Netherlands Interuniversity School for Islamic Studies and the interviews during the site visit. The interviews took place on 18 May 2015 (see the schedule in Appendix 3) in Leiden.

Preceding the interviews, the Committee was briefed by QANU about the assessment of research schools according to SEP, and the Committee discussed their preliminary assessments and decided upon a number of comments and questions. The Committee also agreed upon procedural matters and aspects of the assessment. After the interviews the Committee discussed the scores and comments. The texts for the Committee report were drafted in six weeks after the site visit and finalised via email exchanges. The final version was presented to the Netherlands Interuniversity School for Islamic Studies, for factual corrections and comments. The comments were discussed in the Committee. The final report was printed after formal acceptance by the Board of Leiden University, which acts as coordinating institute of NISIS.

The Committee used the rating system of the Standard Evaluation Protocol 2015-2021 (SEP). The meaning of the scores is described in Appendix 2.

The Committee notes that while the SEP is designed for assessments of research programmes, the present review is of a research *training* programme. Some aspects of the SEP, therefore, cannot be linearly applied to the present object of review. It is recommendable to communicate this small complication to those using the SEP in similar review exercises.

2. Performance review of the Netherlands Interuniversity School for Islamic Studies

Assessments:	Interuniversity cooperation:	1
	Interdisciplinarity:	2
	Quality of training:	1
	International cooperation:	3
	Relevance:	2
	Viability:	2

1 Introduction: organisation, objectives, resources

In January 2010 the Netherlands Interuniversity School for Islamic Studies (NISIS) was founded as the Dutch national research school for Islamic Studies. Initially, eight universities participated in the research school, each of them represented by a Board member: Erasmus University Rotterdam, Leiden University, Radboud University, Tilburg University, the University of Amsterdam, the University of Groningen, Utrecht University and VU University Amsterdam. In 2013 Maastricht University joined the partnership. Leiden University acts as coordinating university, which entails that the director of the school, its executive secretary and its office are based at the Leiden Faculty of Humanities.

Although the scale of the current collaboration within NISIS is unprecedented in the Netherlands, NISIS was in fact preceded by an interuniversity research institute funded by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and four participating universities, the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM). ISIM was closed in 2009 after funding by the Ministry was discontinued. In turn, NISIS has been founded after the Ministry invested €3 M, intended to advance interuniversity cooperation, to provide high-quality training and research in the study of Islam and Muslim societies, to reinforce the international profile of Dutch scholarship in Islamic studies and to let societal debates on Islam profit from scholarly excellence.

NISIS is governed by its Board, consisting of nine members representing the participating universities. The board decides on the policy of the school and selects the PhD candidates directly funded by the school. The director of NISIS implements the school policy and is responsible for developing its activities. He is assisted in his tasks by an executive secretary and an office, staffed by an office manager, an editor and several student assistants.

NISIS has spent over 70 percent of its budget on funding a total of 12 PhD candidates. Within the field of humanities and social sciences, NISIS is quite unique in having resources available for PhD research. Most of the PhD students have been selected during the first years of the school's existence, as NISIS' current resources need to be spent within a fixed term (initially 31 December 2015, but extended to 31 December 2017).

The core activity of NISIS consists of providing a specific training programme for PhD candidates and research master students active in the field of Islamic studies, as a service to the local graduate schools which are responsible for their general training and supervision.

2. Interuniversity cooperation

NISIS aims to advance cooperation between the nine participating universities by bringing together Dutch scholars in the field of Islam and Muslim societies. In doing so it intends to offer junior as well as senior researchers a forum for exchange and collaboration. It regards its annual Spring and Autumn Schools as one of the key instruments to provide networking opportunities and the exchange of ideas on relevant themes in the field of Islamic studies.

The self-evaluation report states that NISIS has actively encouraged researchers at Dutch universities to join NISIS as a member. It has developed its own research portal, providing contact details and identifying fields of interest of its members. Furthermore it initiated the creation of a PhD network which provides a national platform for PhD candidates for collaboration and the exchange of ideas. Over the years, NISIS succeeded in attracting a pool of 50 senior members and 40 junior members.

Assessment

Recent fears about cohesion and continuity in the field of Dutch Islamic studies due to the discontinuation of ISIM have been clearly overcome by a clever low-profile approach that helped start from afresh, generate a positive involvement by the members of NISIS and foster inter-university cooperation. Its extent is certainly the most visible contribution of NISIS to a new landscape of Islamic studies in the Netherlands. The fact that NISIS has been able to enlist Maastricht University during the period under revision is a proof of success of its efforts to advance interuniversity cooperation on a national basis. Although some scholars in the field are not members of NISIS, they are clearly a minority. The 'open door approach' by NISIS seems the best option to include the highest number of Dutch scholars in its activities, which by no means reduces the global achievement of NISIS.

At the institutional level, the incentives (mainly in the shape of PhD scholarships available for the PhD candidates) are clearly effective, each university 'gaining' students who will generate an extra income when he defends his dissertation. The position of the NISIS training programme avoids carefully any redundancy with the courses found at the local level and relies on the complementarity/synergy between the two levels of local graduate schools and national research school. However, some competitive provisions of the system are clearly leading the universities to avoid going a step further in cooperation since they feel that sharing more could mean losing local opportunities.

The commitment of NISIS senior members in inter-university cooperation has to be stressed. It is actually deeper than that found at the institutional level. All participants are committed to sharing experience or skills and coordinating efforts in order to offer to the students a comprehensive programme which cannot be found locally. The interviews with the various components of NISIS showed that this approach had positive outcomes at every level. Interestingly, the students established informal links mirroring or emulating the cooperation found at the senior staff level.

From a purely foreign point of view, and in comparison with the situation prevailing in other countries, the lack of interuniversity cooperation in the supervision of NISIS doctoral candidates could be seen as a failure, but it turns out that this is the result of Dutch policies amounting to a structural obstacle to any interuniversity or even international development in this respect. Actually, it was all the more striking to observe that some NISIS members were

actually offering co-supervision in some cases, although their contribution could not be officially acknowledged. The committee found more instances in which interuniversity cooperation is hampered by issues related to distribution of funds. Although awarding EC's is part of the standard revenue model for national research schools, quite a few PhD candidates at their local universities do not have the obligation to reach a target number of EC's. The strong spirit of cooperation within NISIS going beyond the boundaries set by the system is also reflected by the fact that a high number of participants were welcomed into the Spring and Autumn Schools, even if they did not opt for receiving EC's.

Although participating universities acknowledge the benefits of NISIS as a whole, the need for local assertion blurs the national picture. But at the grassroots level, both senior and junior participants massively support NISIS and convey the image of a positive, intellectually and scientifically stimulating concept.

3. Interdisciplinarity

The self-evaluation report distinguishes two main scholarly traditions in the study of Islam and Muslim societies: the *classical humanities approach*, encompassing disciplines such as history, philology, Islamic theology and Islamic law; and the *social science approach*, focusing on empirical research and fieldwork and emphasising an understanding of Islam as a social practice. NISIS aims to bridge the gap between those approaches, and to 'overcome misleading oppositions' between them. The research school is dedicated to combining and joining approaches, as it holds the opinion that they can enhance each other and provide a more comprehensive understanding of Islam and Muslim societies.

As a reflection of this mission, the NISIS board members represent a variety of disciplinary backgrounds ranging from Islamic law to anthropology, and cover expertise in many regions: the heartlands of the Arab world, Indonesia, Morocco, Turkey and the West. Consequently, this diversity in regional expertise and disciplinary backgrounds is also represented by the PhD candidates funded by NISIS. The interdisciplinary mission of NISIS has also been a key selection criterion for inviting key note speakers and setting themes for the annual Spring and Autumn Schools.

Assessment

NISIS has successfully avoided choosing sides in the methodological debate between "classic philology" and "social and political science". Apparently, this had constituted a problem with ISIM, which was perceived by critics as giving the anthropological approach too much influence. NISIS has therefore decided to put the focus on the multidisciplinary study of Islam and Muslim societies in the past and in the contemporary era. A very important point in this context is the teaching of and about Oriental languages at the member universities and in the NISIS Training Programme.

Each member can decide upon his or her preferred methodology, given his or her own disciplinary background and the richness of expertise available within the participating universities. In doing so, NISIS stays out of disciplinary disputes, while promoting interdisciplinary cooperation and allowing members from different fields to learn about the benefits of alternative approaches. This also enables smaller fields to participate in NISIS as there is no need to fear that a larger field like Political Studies dominates the debate.

4. Quality of training of PhD candidates and research master students

The core activity of NISIS over the past four years consists of developing and providing a training programme in the field of Islamic studies, aimed at the PhD candidates directly funded by NISIS, at PhD candidates at Dutch universities with different types of funding, and at advanced research master students at all Dutch universities.

The programme consists of an annual Spring School abroad, an annual Autumn School in the Netherlands, a yearly Islamic Studies Network Day in the Netherlands and additional courses offered by the participating universities. NISIS Board members are intensively involved in the content of the programme, thus safeguarding its quality. The quality of the programme at course level is further controlled through regular evaluations by its participants.

The Schools consist of keynote lectures by internationally acknowledged scholars in the field and workshops in which students and PhD candidates actively engage with those scholars. The network days aim to provide junior members with an opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences with other (senior) members and to get themselves acquainted with the latest developments in the field.

The Schools did attract an average of 34 participants over nine separate meetings. The number of European Credits (EC's) awarded to PhD candidates and research master students has been relatively modest at 93 EC, which can be explained by the aforementioned fact that a significant number of attendants did not formally need to obtain EC's.

Assessment

NISIS offers an effective answer to the challenge of providing PhD candidates and research master students at Dutch universities with the best training given the limited availability of resources. By going national, it covers a broad spectrum of disciplines taught at the nine participating universities. The different elements of the training programme, notably the Spring and Autumn Schools, have succeeded in reaching their objectives as indicated by the attendance. During one of the interviews, a junior member of NISIS explained that as a result of the training he received, he had been able to widen the methodological scope of his dissertation and to add a chapter to his dissertation. This point was taken over by other junior members who stressed the very positive effect of the interdisciplinary approach found behind the NISIS training programme. Both PhD candidates funded by NISIS and other (PhD) students taking courses developed by NISIS stated that their vision has been widened as a result of the training. This training has not only been largely available to all PhD candidates of the various Dutch universities, but also to foreign students.

Students are not only 'receiving'. An important point of their training lies with the need to at various stages submit a public presentation of their results. In a number of cases, it helped accelerating the pace of their research, thanks to the contacts established with various specialists in other fields of Islamic studies or with their fellow candidates. In this way, NISIS provides a very effective answer to the project outlined by NISIS to foster the emergence of a new generation of scholars, well rooted in a strong Dutch tradition of Oriental scholarship, but also aware of new approaches of Islamic studies.

The international dimension of the training programme produced effects in two directions. First, the inclusion of foreign scholars in the programme of the Spring and Autumn Schools as well as the organisation of some of these courses abroad greatly contributed to the 'mind

opening' effect NISIS has had on (young) scholars. Second, the cooperation with foreign institutions and the interest of foreign students in participating in the courses underline the interest in NISIS and the capacity of Dutch scholarship and teaching about Islam to reach wider audiences.

The training is not restricted to the organised activities. It has a lasting effect, being carried further by the emergence of informal networks involving both Dutch and foreign students who continue to exchange and reflect on their projects in the aftermath of the Spring and Autumn Schools. It would perhaps be interesting to involve the advanced students in some form of tutorship with the younger students and to promote this sharing of experience. The NISIS board should also seek to include field-work related papers.

As a whole, NISIS succeeded in providing a viable solution for the training of students on the basis of local possibilities with a clearly defined project - understanding Islam "as a historical and socio-cultural phenomenon". The formula has not only won recognition with NISIS students, but also with a foreign audience beyond the official ties established by the board during the period under review.

5. International cooperation

During the period under review, NISIS has tried to improve international cooperation and international outreach of Dutch scholarship in the field of Islam and Muslim societies in a number of ways. First, it has attracted Dutch junior and senior research to participate in the Spring Schools abroad – and vice versa, attracted international speakers and junior researchers to participate in the yearly Autumn Schools in the Netherlands. Each of the Autumn Schools was attended by an average of ten PhD candidates from abroad, for whom NISIS covered travel and accommodation expenses.

Second, NISIS has developed several partnerships with international academic organisations in the field. The Spring Schools abroad took place in Morocco (twice), Turkey, Tunisia and Spain, all of which were organised in close cooperation with the Institut d'études de l' Islam et des sociétés du monde musulman (IISMM – Paris) and the Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD – Marseille). For the Spring School in Turkey, NISIS collaborated with the Institut für Islamwissenschaft and the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies based at the Freie Universität Berlin, and with the Dutch Institute in Turkey (NIT) and the Institut Français d'Etudes Anatoliennes (IFEA). For the two Spring Schools in Morocco, NISIS joined forces with the Dutch Institute in Morocco (NIMAR) and the Centre Jacques Berque (CJB).

Third, NISIS has had informal contacts with a number of European institutes, including the Erlanger Zentrum für Islam und Recht in Europa (EZIRE) and the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies in Exeter. The NISIS director and Board members have pursued cooperation with several renowned scholars, particularly in Europe, Morocco and Indonesia.

Assessment

The Committee observes the obvious complexities involved in international networking on the themes covered by NISIS. There are, on the one hand, the historical ties between the Netherlands and its research community, and certain regions in the world (e.g. Indonesia). Those ties are valuable, and an intensification of the collaboration between NISIS and Indonesian partners was announced in the self-evaluation report, potentially greatly

contributing to the profile and viability of NISIS in the future. There are, on the other hand, also the constraints involved in broadening the spectre of international partners because of the fragile nature of nation-state contexts and international political relations in regions such as the Middle East and Central Asia.

The Committee notes with appreciation the intensive international contacts maintained by individual NISIS members, revealing a higher level of international collaboration than reported in the self-evaluation report. These forms of collaboration need to be extended and deepened, for instance by seeking joint doctoral degree agreements with selected international partners. With its Spring and Autumn Schools and the regular study days NISIS has developed standard tools which are definitely of great interest for other European Countries where such a scientific infrastructure and the know-how to maintain it simply do not exist. Therefore NISIS should approach its current European partners and European organisations for Islamic Studies in order to enter talks about participating in its endeavour, allowing NISIS to develop into the nucleus of further development in the field.

This would also be of great advantage for the Dutch senior and junior scholars in the field as they would open up European resources for the Netherlands and find new work opportunities. Such collaboration would not only diversify the teaching and research possibilities within NISIS, but would also lead to diminish the actual work load on each single member – which is quite considerable at the moment.

Building on this, the new cooperation networks could, once installed successfully, serve to transform current National research centers in the Islamic world into true European research centers. However, the aim would not be to merge multiple centers into one small unit, but to create bigger European institutes which can then grow on a stable basis despite national developments or budget cuts in single European countries. In this context NISIS might also add a country in the Arab Mashriq (East) and maybe Iran as partner destination for future Spring or Autumn Schools. Here they could draw for example on existing networks in France and Germany.

Overall the assessment is that NISIS has very well achieved to build a remarkable structure in the Netherlands and now has all possibilities to become a European hub for Islamic Studies, facilitating educational collaboration through the ECTS-bearing activities presently developed by NISIS and enabling joint large funding applications for programmatic research under Horizon 2020 or similar large funding schemes. The Committee sees this process as crucial for the consolidation of NISIS beyond the ending of the current funding period in 2017.

6. Relevance to society

In the self-evaluation report NISIS states that it strives to act as a knowledge broker for the field of Islam and Muslim societies by disseminating reliable knowledge suitable for application in society at large, while complying with academic standards. In the period 2010-2011, NISIS was involved in the organisation of an expert meeting on Islam and museums in the Tropenmuseum (Amsterdam), and it sponsored the conference ‘How can a Humanistic Approach to Islam Be Realized?’ which took place at the University of Humanistic Studies (Utrecht). In 2011 the NISIS Board decided to reallocate its resources reserved for public outreach in order to appoint an extra PhD candidate, a decision which was approved by the Ministry.

The Board agreed that NISIS would still act as an organising partner in valorisation activities, but that those activities would depend on funding by its participating universities. Among other activities, NISIS has been co-organiser of an international symposium on the Arab Spring in Morocco at Utrecht University, and of a two-day expert meeting about future research on Islam and Muslims in Europe (in collaboration with VU University Amsterdam, Leiden University and partner institutes in Denmark and Germany). It also co-organised the symposium ‘Hajj: Global Interactions through Pilgrimage’ in cooperation with the National Museum of Ethnology.

NISIS Board members were also involved in research projects commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment: *Turkse Islam. Actualisatie van kennis over Turkse religieuze stromingen en organisaties in Nederland* (“Turkish Islam. An update of knowledge on Turkish religious trends and organisations in the Netherlands”) and *Zo zijn we niet getrouwd. Een onderzoek naar omvang en aard van huwelijksdwang, achterlating en huwelijksgevangenschap* (“That was not the deal. An analysis of the extent and nature of forced marriage, abandonment and marital captivity”).

Assessment

The Committee underscores the *a priori* relevance of NISIS’s mission. At a time when Islam and its many manifestations in core countries as well as in the diaspora capture the attention of many and appear of tremendous geopolitical as well as local-political importance, concerted efforts at gathering and disseminating accurate and up-to-date knowledge of Islam is of enormous importance. The Committee, consequently, considers the continuation of NISIS beyond its current funding period an absolute necessity.

NISIS has achieved much in the period under review. It has been successful in gathering the largest possible community of scholars in the Netherlands; its interdisciplinary and inclusive approach yields important results; it is at present constructing a generation of young scholars, many of whom are of outstanding quality; and it has made great efforts in establishing international networks and local infrastructures for research, using the strength of a sense of community as a compensation for the vulnerable positions of individual scholars and/or teams in their own universities. Scale-jumping solves some of the problems of local isolation and competition. In that sense, NISIS is ready to carry its mission forward into the next stage of development.

The Committee encourages NISIS to develop and consolidate a true consortium structure, integrating the research capacity dispersed over Dutch institutions even further and extending it to tighter links with international teams and institutions. The current cohort of PhD candidates could act as important agents in setting up and deepening such a consortium. Such a consolidated structure could lead to clearly defined programmatic research initiatives contributing to the visibility and recognisability of NISIS as a voice in Islam-related knowledge production. An internationally visible and jointly produced working papers series, offered in open access on the internet, could also contribute to the optimization of NISIS’s profile, and could intensify the circulation of its research output in view of societal impact.

7. Viability/Strategy for the future

The strategy for the future as described in the self-evaluation report consists of several aspects. First, NISIS intends to continue to strengthen multidisciplinary cooperation between scholars studying Islam and Muslim societies, preferably by bringing together international

researchers. Second, it strives to expand its training programme, attuning stronger to the educational programmes provided by the local graduate schools. Third, it plans to cooperate with other Dutch research schools, such as the Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion (NOSTER), whilst holding on to its own scope and identity. Fourth, NISIS intends to develop into a centre of expertise for society by matching researchers and societal partners and by organising meetings once or twice a year addressing current debates in society and amongst policy-makers. Finally, NISIS strives to expand its international network and to strengthen existing ties with academic institutions around the globe, focusing especially on Indonesia, Morocco and Turkey. During a visit of a NISIS delegation to Indonesia in January 2015, options to advance cooperation between the nine participating Dutch universities and Islamic institutes for higher education were explored. The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs has recently communicated its intentions to send 30 or more Indonesian PhD Candidates to the Netherlands for (training in) research.

Assessment

The Committee notes the complexities of the institutional configuration of NISIS, summarized as an inevitable tension between trans-institutional cooperation and individual institutional pressures. Cooperation within NISIS demands loyalty and effort for a common goal, which might sometimes be at odds with the targets and strategies of individual partner universities, engaged with each other in a competitive environment with money as the prime mover. There is, thus, an uncomfortable tension between Dutch national research schools and individual university-based graduate schools, which appears to prevent shared cross-institutional supervision of PhD projects within NISIS and, in that sense, operates as a constraint on maximizing the collaborative potential of NISIS.

Such constraints arising from the tension between collaboration and competition will have to be addressed in view of the viability of NISIS, but the Committee notes that NISIS and its members have to rely on the decisions of others in this respect: the Dutch authorities and senior management of individual partner institutions. It is important to address these issues early enough, given the ending of the funding period in 2017.

Having noted these constraints, the Committee acclaims the role of Leiden University as the coordinating institution for the NISIS activities. Having its “base” in a university with a robust and continuous tradition of Islamic and related studies is part of NISIS’s success at present and guarantees continued efforts in the future. The important new links between NISIS and Indonesia, furthermore, promise continued success, expansion of activities even, and a possible clear focus and visibility for NISIS. Given the forecasted intensity of this developing collaboration, NISIS will *de facto* become a central actor in studies on Indonesian Islam worldwide. And finally, the sense of community and the excellent level of collegial debate and collaboration within NISIS are real assets for the future of NISIS.

The Committee therefore finds that NISIS is ready for the next step in its existence, and adds a number of thoughts to this.

NISIS could benefit greatly from widening and deepening its structure in the direction of a genuine consortium of institutions, teams and individual researchers, consolidating the collaboration between Dutch researchers and extending the collaboration to selected international teams. This move could be especially important in view of, for instance, joint applications for programmatic research funding under the Horizon 2020 or other large funding schemes. It would also contribute to the continuation and expansion of ECTS-

bearing training initiatives, which will require new patterns of institutional arrangements between national research schools and individual graduate/doctoral schools in the participating institutions.

Furthermore, the present cohort of talented PhD students offers great potential as a future research community. Therefore, the Committee encourages NISIS to develop a plan for postdoctoral research opportunities.

Finally, the Committee urges NISIS to be proactive with respect to the future of the research school after the present funding period. The relevance of NISIS is such that it merits careful and meticulous planning for the future.

8. Conclusion

The Committee thanks the members of NISIS and of Leiden University involved in the preparation and execution of this review for submitting accurate and detailed information, and for the open and congenial discussions with the Committee during the site visit.

The Committee congratulates NISIS on its excellent achievements in the period under review. It is clear that NISIS has achieved many of its important ambitions and is ready for the future. Especially the effect of community formation and cross-institutional loyalty in collaboration, in view of institutional pressures towards the opposite, is commendable. This effect is noticeable across the entire NISIS structure: among senior members, junior members, and especially among the cohort of PhD students currently being trained within the NISIS framework. It compensates the isolation and fragmentation of research efforts dispersed over several institutions and will contribute to a clear and recognizable profile for Dutch Islamic studies.

The Committee finds the continuation of the activities presently deployed by NISIS of extreme importance scientifically as well as in terms of valorization and societal relevance, and encourages all actors involved in the process to be proactive in securing the consolidation of these activities.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Curricula vitae of the committee members

Prof. Jan Blommaert (chair) is Professor of Language, Culture and Globalization at Tilburg University. He is the director of Babylon, Center for the Study of Superdiversity, and coordinator of the International Consortium on Language and Superdiversity (INCOLAS). Blommaert received his PhD in African History and Philology from Ghent University in 1989. After graduation Blommaert started as research director at the International Pragmatics Association hosted at the University of Antwerp. In 1999 he went back to Ghent University, where he was appointed Associate Professor and head of the Department of African Languages and Cultures. In 2005 he was appointed Professor and Chair at the Institute of Education, the University of London. In 2008 he moved to Finland, where he was appointed Finland Distinguished Professor at the Department of Languages of the University of Jyväskylä, which he held until 2010. In 2007 he was appointed at his current positions at Tilburg University.

Prof. François Déroche studied Semitic languages and archaeology while at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, then worked at the Bibliothèque nationale in the Department of Oriental manuscripts. After a period in Istanbul (1983-1988), first as resident scholar of the French Institute for Anatolian Studies, then with a grant of the Max van Berchem Foundation (Geneva), he was elected to the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris, as Director of Studies at the Historical and Philological Sciences Section. Déroche is associated with the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, first as a French corresponding member (2001), and since 2011 as French member. In 2006, he was elected president of the Société d'études du Maghreb préhistorique, antique et médiéval (SEMPAM), and since 2003, he is president of the International Congress of Turkish Art. In March 2015, Déroche was appointed Professor of the History of the Koran at Collège de France.

Prof. Albrecht Fuess studied History and Islamic Studies at the University of Cologne and at the University of Cairo. He graduated 1996 in Cologne with a study on the German community in Egypt in the Interwar period (1919-1939). As a fellow of the German National Merit Foundation he performed his PhD research in Cologne on the subject of the Syro-Palestinian Coast during the Mamluk era (1250-1517). While he was working on his PhD, Fuess spent a one-year research stay as a guest scientist at the Orient Institute in Beirut and the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. After working as a freelancer for the foreign desk of ZDF in Mainz he became a research associate at the Chair for Islamic Studies in Erfurt. As a fellow of “Le Studium”, the science college of the “Région Centre”, at the Equipe Monde Arabe et Méditerranée (Université de Tours), he worked on a research project engaging in a comparison between the Ottoman, Safavid and Mamluk system in the 16th century. Fuess is Professor of Islamic Studies at the Center for Near- and Middle Eastern Studies at the Philipps University Marburg since January 2010.

Appendix 2: Explanation of the SEP scores

Two of the six criteria (Relevance and Viability) are based directly on the standard criteria of the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP). The other four criteria are part of the Terms of Reference, and have been provided by the Board of NISIS and confirmed by all universities involved to specifically assess a national research school such as NISIS.

Scores for criteria according to SEP:

	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Relevance to society</i>	<i>Viability</i>
1	World leading/ excellent	The relevant research unit is recognised for making an outstanding contribution to society.	The relevant research unit is excellently equipped for the future.
2	Very good	The relevant research unit is recognised for making a very good contribution to society.	The relevant research unit is very well equipped for the future.
3	Good	The relevant research unit is recognised for making a good contribution to society.	The relevant research unit makes responsible strategic decisions and is therefore well equipped for the future.
4	Unsatisfactory	The relevant research unit does not make a satisfactory contribution to society.	The relevant research unit is not adequately equipped for the future.

Societal relevance covers the social, economic and cultural relevance of the research. Aspects are:

- societal quality of the work. Efforts to interact in a productive way with stakeholders in society who are interested in input from scientific research, and contributions to important issues and debates in society.
- societal impact of the work. Research affects specific stakeholders or procedures in society.
- valorisation of the work. Activities aimed at making research results available and suitable for application in products, processes and services. This includes interaction with public and private organisations, as well as commercial or non-profit use of research results and expertise.

Vitality. This criterion regards the school's ability to react adequately to important changes in the environment. It refers to both internal (personnel, training programme) and external (developments in the field, in society) dynamics of the school. On the one hand, this criterion measures the flexibility of a group, which appears in its ability to close activities that have no future and to initiate new venture projects. On the other hand, it measures the capacity of the management to run the school in a professional way. Policy decisions and management are assessed, including the school's SWOT analysis.

In its Terms of Reference, the NISIS Board defined four other assessment criteria relevant for the evaluation of a national research school. Those criteria replace the assessment of Quality in SEP, which focuses on scientific output. Although NISIS does influence the quality of the scientific work put forth by NISIS senior and junior members, their scientific work is to be evaluated by Committees assessing the local research units of those members.

The Terms of Reference document provides four additional criteria that have been formulated in line with SEP and with the SODOLA-VSNU agreement on the assessment of research schools ('Handreiking kwaliteitsbeoordeling onderzoekscholen', 2014). Those criteria are: Interuniversity cooperation, Interdisciplinarity, Quality of training and International cooperation.

Scores for criteria in line with SEP:

	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Interuniversity cooperation</i>	<i>Interdisciplinarity</i>	<i>Quality of training</i>	<i>International cooperation</i>
1	World leading/ excellent	The research school is recognised for providing an excellent platform for interuniversity cooperation in Islamic studies.	The research school performs excellently in bringing together and joining the various disciplines related to Islamic studies.	The research school is recognised for providing an excellent contribution to the education of its junior members and to providing them with a beneficial research environment.	The research school is recognised for providing an excellent platform for international cooperation in Islamic studies.
2	Very good	The research school is recognised for providing a very good platform for interuniversity cooperation in Islamic studies.	The research school has performs very good in bringing together and joining the various disciplines related to Islamic studies.	The research school is recognised for providing a very good contribution to the education of its junior members and to providing them with a beneficial research environment.	The research school is recognised for providing a very good platform for international cooperation in Islamic studies.
3	Good	The research school is recognised for providing a good platform for interuniversity cooperation in Islamic studies.	The research school performs good in bringing together and joining the various disciplines related to Islamic studies.	The research school is recognised for providing a good contribution to the education of its junior members and to providing them with a beneficial research environment.	The research school is recognised for providing a good platform for international cooperation in Islamic studies.
4	Unsatisfactory	The research school does not make a satisfactory contribution to interuniversity cooperation.	The research school does not make a satisfactory contribution to bringing together and joining the various disciplines related to Islamic studies.	The research school does not make a satisfactory contribution to the education of its junior members and to providing them with a beneficial research environment.	The research school does not make a satisfactory contribution to international research cooperation.

Interuniversity cooperation

The committee has assessed the scale of interuniversity cooperation between the nine participating universities as well as the ways in which NISIS enables and facilitates networking opportunities between its members. The most pertinent question to be addressed is what role NISIS plays in terms of added value: what is possible with the existence of NISIS which otherwise would not be feasible?

Interdisciplinarity

The committee has assessed to what extent NISIS has succeeded in bringing together and joining various disciplines related to Islamic studies, thereby stimulating new perspectives on the field of Islamic studies in the Netherlands.

Quality of training of PhD candidates and research master students

The committee has assessed the quality of the school's training programme and the contribution it makes to the education of PhD candidates and research master students. The committee also assessed the scale of the school's training activities (instruments and infrastructure developed by the school, and other contributions to education) as well as its contribution to the creation of a beneficial research environment for its junior members.

International cooperation

The committee has assessed the extent to which NISIS has contributed to the international visibility of Dutch scholarship in Islamic studies, as well as the extent to which NISIS has succeeded in establishing relevant international partnerships.

Appendix 3: Programme of the site visit

Date: 18 May 2015

Venue: Humanities Faculty Room, Academy Building, Rapenburg 67-73, Leiden.

09.15-10.15	Introduction by QANU/NISIS: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– the academic infrastructure for graduate students in the Netherlands– Standard Evaluation Protocol 2015-2021
10.15-11.15	Preparatory meeting of the committee
11.15-11.45	Meeting with the Dean of the Leiden Faculty of Humanities, Prof. Wim van den Doel
11.45-12.00	Short break
12.00-12.45	Meeting with the NISIS directorate: Prof. Léon Buskens (academic director) and Dr Petra de Bruijn (executive secretary)
12.45-13.30	Lunch break
13.30-14.15	Meeting of the committee with the NISIS board and NISIS senior members: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Prof. Maurits Berger (Leiden University, board member)– Dr Marjo Buitelaar (University of Groningen, board member)– Prof. Dick Douwes (Erasmus University Rotterdam, board member)– Dr Jan Jaap de Ruiter (Tilburg University, senior member)– Prof. Thijl Sunier (VU University Amsterdam, board member and chairman of the board)
14.15-14.30	Short break
14.30-15.15	Meeting of the committee with NISIS junior members: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Sami Al-Daghistani (PhD candidate at WWU Münster and Leiden University)– Pieter Coppens (NISIS PhD candidate at Utrecht University)– Ammeke Kateman (NISIS PhD candidate at University of Amsterdam)– Mahmood Kooria (PhD candidate at Leiden University)– Maryse Kruithof, PhD (former NISIS PhD candidate at Erasmus University Rotterdam)– Arjan Post (PhD candidate at Utrecht University and representative of the NISIS Junior Research Council)
15.15-17.15	Final meeting of the committee and drafting of provisional assessment report
17.15-17.30	Preliminary oral report of assessment results
18.00	Diner (review committee and secretary)