

RESEARCH REVIEW

**AMSTERDAM INSTITUTE FOR
HUMANITIES RESEARCH**

ASCA

AMSTERDAM SCHOOL FOR CULTURAL ANALYSIS

UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

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REPORT ON THE RESEARCH REVIEW OF THE AMSTERDAM SCHOOL FOR CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

1. FOREWORD BY COMMITTEE CHAIR

While we all felt honoured to be invited for this research review, we were also a little daunted by the prospect of an intensive three-day inspection of four distinct but related research organisations covering a broad spectrum of humanities disciplines. As it turned out, we were in for an exciting and encouraging ride: exciting, because we learned much about cutting-edge work in contemporary cultural scholarship; encouraging, because instead of having to weather the doom-and-gloom jeremiads so common in humanities meta-talk today, we were invited to join in conversation with enthusiastic and clear-sighted scholars, support staff and policy makers determined to keep up the good fight in trying times.

On behalf of the committee, I should particularly like to register our appreciation of the excellent conditions we were offered to carry out the task entrusted to us. Elske Gerritsen and Thomas Vaessens (representing AIHR) hosted us admirably both during business and after hours; the various representatives of ASCA we had the pleasure of meeting were invariably frank and forthcoming; and QANU secretary Fiona Schouten deserves a Medal for Advanced Cat-Herding—and indeed for meticulous note-taking and report-drafting.

Finally, my warm thanks to my colleagues in the committee for their cordial and constructive cooperation throughout the process and for their kind blind eye to the chairman's unrepresentative gender. I hope that, like me, they can sign off on this report happier and wiser humanities humans than when we first met.

Prof. dr. Ortwin de Graef

2. THE REVIEW COMMITTEE AND THE PROCEDURES

2.1. Scope of the review

The review committee was asked to perform a review of research in the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis (ASCA) at the University of Amsterdam. The review was part of the assessment of the Amsterdam Institute for Humanities Research (AIHR). This assessment included the research units ASCA, ASH, AHM, and ARTES, as well as the national research schools NICA, RMeS, OSL and Huizinga. The assessment was performed by two committees in two separate site visits. ASCA was assessed as part of Cluster I, which also included NICA, RMeS and OSL.

In accordance with the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP) 2015 – 2021, amended version, for research reviews in the Netherlands, the committee was asked to assess the quality, the relevance to society and the viability of the scientific research of the research unit as well as the strategic targets and the extent to which the unit is equipped to achieve these targets. Furthermore, a qualitative review of the PhD training programme, research integrity policy and diversity was part of the committee's assignment. Finally, in the Terms of Reference provided by ASCA the committee was asked to assess the viability of the research: is the strategy of the school sufficiently solid? What further measures could be taken to ensure the strength and scope of the ASCA-research?

2.2. Composition of the committee

The composition of the committee was as follows:

- Prof. dr. Ortwin de Graef (KULeuven)
- Prof. dr. Ruth Sonderegger (Akademie der Bildende Künste, Vienna)
- Prof. dr. Jenny Slatman (Tilburg University)
- Dr. Anne Marit Waade (Aarhus University)
- Prof. dr. Hilde van den Bulck (Drexel University, Philadelphia)
- Drs. Anke Bangma (TENT Rotterdam)
- Prof. dr. Maaike Meijer (Maastricht University)

The committee was supported by dr. Fiona Schouten, who acted as secretary on behalf of QANU.

2.3. Independence

All members of the committee signed a statement of independence to guarantee an unbiased and independent assessment of the quality of ASCA.

2.4. Data provided to the committee

The committee received the self-evaluation report from the unit under review, including all the information required by the SEP. The committee also received the following documents:

- the Terms of Reference;
- the SEP 2015-2021;
- lists of publications, consisting of ten key publications per research group within ASCA;
- the Quality and Relevance in the Humanities (QRiH) manual.

2.5. Procedures followed by the committee

The committee proceeded according to the Standard Evaluation Protocol 2015-2021 (SEP). Prior to the site visit, the committee members independently formulated a preliminary assessment of the units under review based on the written information that was provided by AIHR. This documentation also included quantitative data according to the SEP (see Appendix 3).

The final review is based on both the documentation provided by ASCA and the information gathered during the interviews with management and representatives of the research unit during the site visit. The site visit took place on 21-23 November 2018 in Amsterdam (see the schedule in Appendix 2). In assessing the research unit, the committee used the criteria and categories of the SEP (see Appendix 1). At the start of the site visit, the committee was briefed by QANU about research reviews

according to the SEP. It also discussed the preliminary assessments and decided upon a number of comments and questions. The committee agreed upon procedural matters and aspects of the review. After the interviews, the committee discussed its findings and comments in order to allow the chair to present the preliminary findings and to provide the secretary with argumentation to draft a first version of the review report.

The draft report by committee and secretary was presented to ASCA for factual corrections and comments. In close consultation with the chair and other committee members, the comments were reviewed to draft the final report. The final report was presented to the Board of the University of Amsterdam and to the management of ASCA.

3. ASSESSMENT OF THE AMSTERDAM SCHOOL FOR CULTURAL ANALYSIS

3.1. Introduction

The Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis (ASCA) was founded at the University of Amsterdam in 1994. It is an interdisciplinary research centre for the critical analysis of modern and contemporary culture, bringing together cutting-edge scholarship in philosophy, musicology, literary studies, cultural studies, art history, theatre and performance studies, and (new) media studies. ASCA is currently home to 96 staff members and 133 PhD students.

3.2. Profile, strategy and management of the school

Profile and strategy

According to ASCA's mission statement, the research school is dedicated to the critical and innovative study of culture from a broadly interdisciplinary perspective grounded in the humanities, but increasingly extending to non-humanities fields. The research conducted at ASCA is not bound to any one discipline, theoretical approach or type of cultural object, but follows five principles of cultural analysis that are taken as point of departure and ASCA's foundation. ASCA research is interdisciplinary, theoretically grounded, socially relevant, places the detailed analyses of cultural objects at its centre and engages with culture and society from a contemporary perspective. ASCA's ambition is to be world-leading in the interdisciplinary analysis of culture, fostering diversity and autonomy among its researchers and creating room to experiment and do pioneering work in new interdisciplinary research fields.

In line with its profile, research at ASCA is wide-ranging. There are no less than 63 research groups: funded research projects (13), reading groups and seminars (8) and network groups (43). This proliferation of research initiatives is a direct consequence of ASCA's strategy. ASCA promotes an open, bottom-up approach in order to enable curiosity-driven, innovative and topical research. ASCA researchers are invited to create their own research groups to share and advance research findings, to organise academic events, to apply for grants, and to produce articles, books and dissertations. This open structure is meant to inspire innovative research, support individual excellence, and allow for cross-disciplinary collaboration. In this way, a dynamic, non-hierarchical research environment is created. The common ground of ASCA research is a preoccupation with urgent and topical debates in culture and society. Its groups and projects are always part of one of five constellations identifying ASCA's broader research areas: Mediality, Arts & Aesthetics, Globalisation & Migration, Identities, and Cultural & Social Critique (MAGIC). The MAGIC constellations have not been imposed on ASCA research, but were introduced as a way of categorising and describing the many types of research conducted at ASCA.

The committee considers ASCA's profile and identity clear and attractive. ASCA occupies an important and unique position in the field world-wide. Nonetheless, the committee points out that the research landscape is changing and that ASCA needs to remain a step ahead of these upcoming changes. While research funding mechanisms and developments in the field seem to indicate an increase in interdisciplinary approaches, the role of the humanities in this type of interdisciplinarity is under pressure. In a collaboration with non-humanities scholars, humanities researchers run the risk of ending up in an auxiliary role, answering the questions posed in and by other domains. In its position as a leading interdisciplinary humanities research group, ASCA should advocate and defend its own type of interdisciplinarity, where new and pioneering questions are raised by the humanities scholars themselves. ASCA scholars demonstrated a clear awareness of this issue in their conversations with the committee. In order to deal with it, ASCA should sharpen its research profile and define more clearly what kind of interdisciplinarity it aims for. This also entails formulating a more sophisticated research strategy, which determines more clearly where ASCA's focus lies in terms of initiatives and projects, and clear targets.

Organisational framework

While ASCA research is primarily shaped through a bottom-up structure, the research school is firmly embedded within the organisational framework of the University of Amsterdam Faculty of Humanities, from which it receives an annual budget. ASCA has a daily management team consisting of an Academic Director, a Vice-Director, and a Managing Director, as well as administrative support. It also has a board consisting of senior and junior staff members and a PhD representative. From 2014 onwards, ASCA has been one of five research schools organised under the umbrella of the faculty-wide Amsterdam Institute for Humanities Research (AIHR). Within the AIHR framework, ASCA develops shared policies with the other research schools in the areas of funding and support for grant applications, assessment of research output, appointments and career development, and doctoral policies (recruitment, funding, supervision and training of PhD students). ASCA's Academic Director is a member of the AIHR Research Council chaired by AIHR's Director, which discusses the implementation of faculty policies in the research schools.

During the site visit, the committee discussed the added value of AIHR, an extra management layer adding to the complexity of the organisational structure, with representatives from AIHR and ASCA. It established that as an administrative body located between faculty and research schools, AIHR effectively acts as a go-between. AIHR influences the research school's strategy so that it aligns with faculty- and university-wide ambitions. Conversely, AIHR is able to defend the interests of the research schools in a faculty-wide setting. In conversation with ASCA and AIHR representatives, the committee was told that the Research Council plays an active role in protecting the research time (40%) allocated to AIHR scholars. It has also gained influence in the hiring process of new faculty. Previously, teaching duties were the faculty's only priority; now, a research perspective has been added to the process. Due to AIHR, the recurrent problem of friction between teaching obligations and research opportunities has been resolved (as far as possible) in a more structural manner.

AIHR provides useful support to the research schools under its umbrella, including ASCA. It awards extra scholarships to talented scholars in order to complete grant applications or build their CV. AIHR also has a grant team, which assists designated scholars in writing funding applications, and allows for researchers to be relieved of teaching duties while writing an application. Furthermore, AIHR has the resources to appoint five researchers each year who have been awarded a substantial grant. It also assists heads of department in making HR decisions. The committee noted that this umbrella structure is effective. It is pleased to see that the more top-down strategic agenda stimulated by AIHR complements and gives direction to ASCA's bottom-up approach. The committee also noticed that ASCA is seen as an exemplary research group within AIHR and that it has inspired some good practices disseminated by AIHR. Most notably, ASCA's finishing scholarships for self-funded PhD candidates about to finish their PhD thesis have been implemented on an AIHR level.

ASCA management and HR policies

During the site visit, the committee discussed ASCA's internal management with its representatives. It learned from scholars and PhD candidates that the school's management is experienced as solid and supportive. An important instrument in achieving this solidity is the annual 'fleet review'. The ASCA director and managing director review every staff member, one by one, with the heads of department. They look at each individual's performance, challenges and needs, and draw up strategic road maps with regard to their publications, grant applications, valorisation activities and PhD supervision. As a result of this process, scholars may be allowed to write grants, stimulated to organise activities, or given extra research time or schooling. The fleet review is essential in stimulating scholars to perform and blossom, while aiding ASCA in monitoring staff members, identifying problems and taking timely and suitable measures to solve them.

The main threat confronting ASCA and its management, shared by the humanities at large, is the lack of funding and funding opportunities, accompanied by budget cuts at a faculty level. In spite of this threat, which creates insecurity for researchers in various stages of their career, the committee was struck by the positive atmosphere and team spirit it encountered during the site visit. It noted that the school is made up of a tightly knit and dedicated community of researchers. A core figure in



this community-building is ASCA's Managing Director, who serves as a point of contact for all researchers, PhD candidates, and the management. The Managing Director helps researchers in gaining support and funding for initiatives, informs all members of activities, assists in their organisation, and steps in when researchers encounter issues or need advice. The committee noted that community management is not a very explicit part of ASCA's management structure and suggests that the ASCA management team should recognise it as a core element in the success of the research school which cannot be taken for granted and, as such, requires careful support.

3.3. Profiling of the school and viability of research

The committee was asked to specifically assess ASCA's profiling and the viability of its research. Its views on these aspects have been stated above as well as in the section on viability below. In brief, the committee considers ASCA's profile to be strong, with its focus on topical and pioneering interdisciplinary research. The committee recommends ASCA to stay ahead of changes in the research landscape and take an active role in advocating its own version of interdisciplinarity, where the humanities ask and explore new and pioneering questions of their own rather than answering the questions asked by and in other disciplines. In order to do so, ASCA should define more clearly what kind of interdisciplinarity it aims for, formulating a strategy and clear targets. This would make its research, as well as humanities research on a national level, viable for the near future.

3.4. Research quality

In discussing whether ASCA's research could be considered as world-leading, the committee debated how to define 'world-leading' in the case of interdisciplinary humanities research. It came to the conclusion that ASCA is very difficult to compare with other humanities research organisations both in size and in setup, and that speaking of 'world-leading' in this particular field is difficult and can be misleading. The committee would therefore like to replace this concept with the term 'excellent'.

Particularly when it comes to its research culture and structure, ASCA research can be considered excellent. ASCA stimulates innovative research; it is open and non-hierarchical. As a result, ASCA research manages to transcend disciplinary boundaries and has a creative and innovative quality that can be considered unique in the field. In its interviews with ASCA staff members, the committee learned that it is the open, yet well-organised and inspiring research community which attracts researchers from at home as well as abroad, bringing with it a sense of adventure, creativity and academic freedom. ASCA has managed to retain this unique identity in spite of the retirement of one of its founding members, and actually opened up to include fields previously deemed incompatible with ASCA's approach, such as cultural studies. The committee considers this laudable.

An important indicator of ASCA's research quality is the external funding its researchers have gained. Here, ASCA's policy of picking grant-writers and the support from AIHR's grant team seem to have paid off. ASCA gained 5 NWO PhD scholarships, 2 Rubicon grants, 4 Veni and 2 Vidi grants, 4 ERC grants, 4 NIAS grants, 1 Marie Curie IF grant and 2 Aspasia grants for female researchers. It was also involved with the grant acquisition of 17 other NWO projects, 5 other EU grants and 15 international PhD scholarships. ASCA scholars occupy a number of influential positions as members of the Board of Associates at the Institute for Advanced Studies or the Royal Netherlands Society for Arts and Science (KNAW). They are editors of international, peer-reviewed journals and members of prominent scientific committees, and are frequently invited as guest professors or keynote speakers both nationally and internationally. The committee finds these marks of external recognition impressive. It suggests increasing the presence of ASCA scholars in NWO committees in order to become even more effective in obtaining grants.

ASCA scholars are required to publish at least two academic peer-reviewed articles per year, or one monograph per five years and one article a year. In spite of this policy, the committee noticed a drop in the amount of refereed articles (see Appendix 3): 107 were published in 2012 against 75 in 2017. During the site visit, the committee gathered that there are various explanations for this drop, such as a stronger focus on quality instead of quantity regarding output, the retirement of prolific scholars, a complex and labour-intensive administration which not all researchers fill out properly and in a

timely fashion, and contingencies in the timing of publications (some falling just outside the scope of the review). The committee also noticed that the lists of key publications showed a rather wide variety, including both publications in top tier journals or with prominent publishers, and publications in outlets of lesser standing. It concluded that whereas ASCA's research is excellent, it should work on demonstrating this clearly to outsiders. The websites of ASCA and its various groups and departments yielded a useful wealth of extra information to support the committee's assessment.

The committee concludes that ASCA remains an excellent and pioneering research group nationally and an important competitor in the international field. The bottom-up ideology underlying ASCA research may seem to be at odds with the need for structured and concerted efforts at gaining funding and focusing research, but in the current structure of ASCA, this tension turns out to be a productive one in terms of research quality and output. According to the committee, various research initiatives offer very promising directions for the near future, such as the digital methods group in media studies.

3.5. Relevance to society

Research at ASCA addresses urgent societal questions. Relevance to society is therefore part of ASCA's core ambitions, and its scientific output is paired with outreach activities. ASCA researchers actively disseminate their research beyond the academic community by writing for non-academic readers in popular magazines, online forums, and newspapers, appearing in the media, and organising and participating in public events at various cultural institutions. ASCA has contributed to the National Science Agenda. Its scholars have been invited to give public lectures at international cultural venues such as Tate Modern in London and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Finally, ASCA has set up long-standing collaborations with cultural institutions such as the Stedelijk Museum and the EYE Film Institute, as well as the Goethe and Cervantes Institutes. ASCA events are open to and attended by artists, activists and other interested members of the public.

The committee concludes that in terms of societal relevance, ASCA wants to operate on a network basis, creating wider circles around its community. According to the committee, ASCA manages to make this work very well. The cultural field is recognising ASCA, joining its activities and becoming a part of ASCA's sphere of influence. The committee learned from PhD candidates and young researchers that they frequently encounter representatives from the cultural field at ASCA activities and that they appreciate their presence as a welcome new perspective and a link to the world outside academia.

At the same time, the committee feels that ASCA's choices in achieving societal relevance and outreach suggest a somewhat narrow understanding of such relevance. Many of ASCA's activities and collaborations have a decidedly local orientation and focus on the cultural field. While there are notable exceptions, such as globalisation research dealing with China and India, the overall focus seems to be on Dutch and especially Amsterdam-based cultural institutions. Collaborations are often ad hoc and have no formalised status.

In order to disseminate its findings more widely, ASCA should consider reaching out to a general national as well as international public beyond the 'high-brow' cultural sphere. The committee formulated several directions ASCA could explore. ASCA could enter into the field of (secondary) education or focus more on media presence. Another viable option for the transmission of ASCA's research is to give policy advice on migration and globalisation. Co-research between academics and practitioners is another direction worth exploring, as is the possibility of giving a further impulse to (debates on) artistic research. All in all, the committee sees a great potential for ASCA as a whole to branch out and disseminate its research much more widely. In order to do so, the committee advises ASCA to incentivise publications, more structural and long-terms collaboration and co-research, and activities aimed at a larger audience and to develop a clear policy concerning the aims and strategy of societal outreach.



3.6. Viability

According to the committee, the viability of ASCA and its research is evident. ASCA has been embedded successfully in a new faculty structure, and reaps the benefits of AIHR's grant team, support and additional funding. ASCA retains an open and bottom-up research structure which allows it to adapt to changes quickly. This combination of innovative and adaptable research with a supportive managing structure enables ASCA researchers to explore upcoming new directions and to quickly make use of new funding possibilities. The committee concludes that the viability of ASCA's research is excellent because of this. The humanities are facing a critical time in which they are forced to reinvent themselves. This requires reaching out beyond the traditional boundaries of the field. ASCA's interdisciplinarity and its openness to other fields and innovative approaches makes the research school uniquely qualified for meeting future challenges and breaking new ground, from which humanities research at large can profit.

The biggest threat to ASCA is the one shared by the humanities at large: that of a lack of funding. ASCA actively looks for ways to gain scholarships and grants. It has created various ways to encourage selected members to apply for grants, for instance by relieving them of other duties, or rewarding them for a proposal that did not obtain funding but was deemed fundable by peers. More in general, ASCA looks at the needs and challenges of its individual members and tries to create the circumstances for each of its members to perform to the best of his or her abilities. Its success in this regard is partly due to its current active community management ethos, which it should seek to secure for the future.

The committee learned from the self-evaluation report that ASCA is having trouble holding on to advanced researchers and associate professors who cannot be promoted due to faculty limits and lack of vacancies. Staff members who gain prestigious grants may be lost to ASCA, since their grant allows them to go elsewhere and gain a full professorship. Young and advanced researchers and PhD candidates also have rather limited perspectives and are often lost to ASCA. While confirming this, the assistant and associate professors interviewed by the committee showed a clear dedication to and enthusiasm about ASCA. Some mentioned that they had decided to stay on in spite of the lack of options. The committee considers it a great achievement that ASCA manages to attract and keep so many promising researchers. It also recognises that the University of Amsterdam's decision to make use of new national regulations that lift the restriction of the *ius promovendi* to full professors has been beneficial in this regard and it congratulates the University on this decision.

3.7. PhD programmes

According to the self-evaluation report, ASCA has a population of 133 PhD candidates. At present, 88 are self-funded PhD students and 45 are directly funded. Directly funded PhD candidates are often hired within the context of larger nationally or European-funded projects; their number has increased over the past few years. Up until 2014, ASCA was able to hire up to 4 PhD candidates annually, but this has not been possible since then for financial reasons. The self-evaluation report notes that ASCA would like to increase their number, since internally funded PhD students have more freedom to deviate from their original plan and conduct more innovative research. The committee praises the support within ASCA of such idiosyncratic individual projects, which allows for creativity and matches ASCA's bottom-up approach. It noticed during the site visit that many PhD students are working on a research project of their own design, and hopes this will remain the case in future.

Internally funded PhD students are hired upon application and are supervised by a team of two supervisors, according to university regulations. At the start of their PhD trajectory, they are invited to a welcome meeting with ASCA's Vice-Director and their supervisors. At this meeting, an ASCA working plan and an individual Training and Supervision Plan are signed by all. The first year of the PhD trajectory is dedicated to writing a pilot study, which is assessed by the supervisors, ASCA's Vice Director and an external reader. A negative assessment can lead to non-renewal of the candidate's contract. After the first year, annual evaluation meetings are held with ASCA's Vice-Director to monitor progress and signal problems. Currently, the majority of ASCA's PhD candidates is self-funded. Their admission and trajectory is arranged in a less formal manner than that of internal

PhD students. They usually apply directly to ASCA and are accepted when their research interests match that of the supervisors. Supervisors usually meet up with the PhD student before embarking on the project, but this is not a formalised rule. External PhD candidates also write a pilot study at the start of their project, and can also be told to stop the project when it does not meet the standards. The pilot is either assessed at the end of the first year, or at a time previously agreed upon by PhD student and supervisors.

At the start of the trajectory, all PhD candidates are given an extensive welcome package, which includes practical information and a guide to writing a PhD thesis. The committee studied the package and considered it a useful set of documents. It did notice that the welcome package, especially the guide, needed further updating, as it advises PhD students not to publish articles during the writing of their thesis. This runs counter to the actual practice within ASCA.

The training programme followed by PhD candidates is offered by the faculty's Graduate School of Humanities (GSH). Here, academic and transferable skills courses are offered on such topics as academic writing, presentation skills or building a career. For more content-oriented courses, PhD candidates can turn to a national research school. In addition, ASCA itself organises a great number of larger and smaller events such as reading groups, masterclasses and conferences. The committee appreciates the course offerings in ASCA and GSH. The largest problem PhD students are confronted with is that so much is on offer that they have to pick carefully which events to be a part of. The individual training plan established at the start of the PhD trajectory is a helpful and necessary tool. The committee recommends adding an obligatory course on research ethics and on digital scholarship to GSH's programme (see the section on research integrity).

Supervision can vary greatly between projects, but monthly contact between the candidate and the supervisors is a requirement. This supervision is evaluated annually. In case of problems, ASCA's Managing Director plays an important role in smoothing the process and even assisting in changes in the supervision team. During the site visit, PhD students stated their appreciation for the role of the Managing Director in this role. They also praised her efforts in introducing them to the ASCA community, informing them of events and possibilities, stimulating them in developing initiatives and having an open-door policy for all PhD students.

Directly funded ASCA PhD students belong to disciplinary departments within the faculty and often have their desks there. However, PhD candidates mentioned to the committee that they feel at home with ASCA. Their ASCA membership allows them to work in a more interdisciplinary manner, connecting them to a large community of scholars working beyond one discipline. The vibrant interdisciplinary community of ASCA with its many activities is clearly of great added value to them. Internal PhD students also appreciate the fact that they are given an annual budget of € 1200 (for four years) to cover costs of conferences and travel. Self-funded PhD students receive a one-time bench fee of € 3000 to cover these costs. They have full access to ASCA's activities and facilities and are encouraged to participate in and organise events. They also have the possibility to apply for a finishing scholarship of 0.5 fte for one year to complete their thesis. All in all, ASCA offers all of its PhD students a stimulating and pleasant working environment and empowers them to make use of its network, support system and communication structure.

The committee is pleased about ASCA's inclusion of self-funded PhD candidates as members of its research community. Nevertheless, it recommends formalising certain aspects of the policies concerning these PhD candidates. Self-funded PhD candidates form an important part of ASCA's community and will continue doing so in the near future, as state funding for this highest form of humanities education is increasingly limited. The committee advises ASCA to formalise the admission of self-funded candidates, monitor them more closely and reconsider their status within the research school. The committee learned during the site visit that supervisors receive 300 hours of supervision per PhD candidate. In the case of internal PhD projects, half of this amount is received at the start of the trajectory and the other half after its completion. In the case of self-funded PhD candidates, the 300 hours are only received if and when the candidate finishes his or her thesis. This means that



supervisors have to invest in self-funded candidates without being guaranteed a reward for their effort. This policy should be reconsidered, since the risk of taking on a self-funded PhD candidate should not lie with the supervisors alone.

3.8. Research integrity

ASCA researchers are bound to the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Academic Practice. PhD students are informed about this code in their first meeting at the Graduate School for Humanities. Furthermore, research integrity is addressed in one of the optional skills courses for PhD students offered by the GSH. The Faculty of Humanities has an ethics committee which uses a documented review procedure with clearly defined criteria. The ethics committee approves all interviews or experiments with human test subjects before the research commences. Research data management takes place according to university policy. Research data are managed in a data management system called UvA Figshare.

The panel studied these policies and concluded that they are rather generic and not attuned to the faculty's needs and practices. For instance, no thought is given to the use of digital sources. Given the challenges that come with digital data and the citation of on-line sources, the committee feels that more attention should be paid to ethical and digital procedures. This could be done at the level of the GSH, which could create a mandatory module on research data management to replace the current optional one. In it, every PhD student should write a research data management plan relevant for his or her research. ASCA should also make sure to inform all its members of these aspects of research integrity.

3.9. Diversity

ASCA adheres to the Faculty policy on diversity, which was provided to the committee. Upon studying this policy, the committee noticed to its disappointment that it is outdated: it focuses mainly on gender balance. This is surprising within a university which hosted a Diversity Committee that produced a report touching on ethnicity and economical background as further aspects of diversity.

The ASCA community itself is still predominantly white and western, as the self-assessment states, but the number of female full professors has increased, and researchers from different ethnic backgrounds and the Global South have been added to the team. The committee invites ASCA to formulate a clearer policy on this issue. Due to the content of ASCA's research, it would expect this research group to be ahead of the pack in addressing diversity issues within the university. In raising its ambitions here and leading instead of following, ASCA could pave the way for further steps taken across the university.

3.10. Conclusions

ASCA is an excellent research school defined by an interdisciplinary and bottom-up approach to cultural analysis and adjacent fields. ASCA distinguishes itself through its innovative and creative approaches, its dynamic and non-hierarchical structure and its tightly-knit and vibrant research community. ASCA is embedded in a well-designed organisational structure, including the umbrella organisation AIHR, which provides support and ensures the link of ASCA research to faculty and university policies while allowing for ASCA's idiosyncrasies. In light of financial issues throughout the humanities and a turn towards interdisciplinary collaboration beyond the humanities, ASCA needs to assert its own form of interdisciplinary research. As a leading and large humanities research group, it is uniquely placed to play a role in redefining the position of humanities research in the current climate. ASCA should expand its societal relevance to include such areas as policy-making and secondary education, reaching out to a general public beyond the academic and cultural world. Diversity and research integrity policies need to be revised and updated. The increase of self-funded PhDs requires adapted policies regarding their monitoring and the compensation for supervision. Overall, ASCA is qualified to play a leading role in advancing the humanities into a new research landscape.

3.11. Overview of the quantitative assessment of the research unit

After having assessed the research quality, relevance to society and viability, and comparing that to the developments and standard in the field, the committee comes to the following quantitative assessments:

Research quality:	excellent	(1)
Relevance to society:	very good	(2)
Viability:	excellent	(1)

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Sharpen ASCA's profile to define more clearly what kind of interdisciplinarity it aims for, in order to advocate an active role for the humanities within interdisciplinary research. Formulate a strategy and targets connected to this profile.
- Make community management an explicit and formal part of the management structure.
- Increase the presence of ASCA scholars in NWO committees to become even more effective in obtaining grants.
- Demonstrate ASCA's research excellence more clearly to outsiders by making sure all publications and activities are registered well and by explaining drops in output numbers and the choice for certain outlets or events as well as the absence of others.
- Broaden societal outreach to include the general public, for instance by entering the field of secondary education, giving policy advice, initiating co-research with practitioners, giving an extra impulse to (debates on) artistic research, or increasing media presence. Develop a clear policy on increasing and incentivising outreach aimed at a larger audience. Strive for long-term societal impact and not only for occasional projects for / with a larger audience.
- Continue supporting self-designed and idiosyncratic PhD projects.
- Update the welcome package handed out to new PhD students.
- Add an obligatory course on research ethics and digital procedures to the PhD training programme of the GSH. Pay attention to relevant aspects, such as citing on-line sources, and let PhD students write a research data management plan for their project. Make sure all other ASCA members are informed of the aspects of research integrity addressed in this course.
- Formalise policies concerning self-funded PhD candidates. Make sure these candidates are monitored closely and compensate supervisors right from the start of the supervision process.
- Formulate a more ambitious diversity policy which includes ethnicity and economical background.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: THE SEP CRITERIA AND CATEGORIES

There are three criteria that have to be assessed:

- Research quality:
 - Level of excellence in the international field;
 - Quality and Scientific relevance of research;
 - Contribution to body of scientific knowledge;
 - Academic reputation;
 - Scale of the unit's research results (scientific publications, instruments and infrastructure developed and other contributions).

- Relevance to society:
 - quality, scale and relevance of contributions targeting specific economic, social or cultural target groups;
 - advisory reports for policy;
 - contributions to public debates.

The point is to assess contributions in areas that the research unit has itself designated as target areas.

- Viability:
 - the strategy that the research unit intends to pursue in the years ahead and the extent to which it is capable of meeting its targets in research and society during this period;
 - the governance and leadership skills of the research unit's management.

Category	Meaning	Research quality	Relevance to society	Viability
1	World leading/excellent	The unit has been shown to be one of the most influential research groups in the world in its particular field.	The unit makes an outstanding contribution to society	The unit is excellently equipped for the future
2	Very good	The unit conducts very good, internationally recognised research	The unit makes a very good contribution to society	The unit is very well equipped for the future
3	Good	The unit conducts good research	The unit makes a good contribution to society	The unit makes responsible strategic decisions and is therefore well equipped for the future
4	Unsatisfactory	The unit does not achieve satisfactory results in its field	The unit does not make a satisfactory contribution to society	The unit is not adequately equipped for the future



APPENDIX 2: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

Day 1: 21 November 2018

Time	Who/What	Where
<i>12:00-13:00</i>	<i>Lunch</i>	E1.01D
13:00-15:00	Private meeting for committee members only with secretary Qanu	E1.01E
15:00-15:30	Prof. Fred Weerman (dean), prof. Thomas Vaessens (director AIHR and vice-dean), dr. Elske Gerritsen (head of research)	E1.01E
<i>15:30-15:45</i>	<i>Tea break</i>	E1.01D
15:45-16:15	Meeting on the educational programme for PhD's: dr. Carlos Reijnen (director Graduate School of the Humanities), Thomas Vaessens, and dr. Eloe Kingma (coordinator of the educational programme)	E1.01E
16:15-17:00	Prof. dr. Patricia Pisters (director of ASCA), Prof. dr. Esther Peeren (co-director of ASCA) and Eloe Kingma (coordinator of ASCA)	E1.01E
<i>17:00-18:00</i>	<i>Drinks committee, secretary Qanu, Fred Weerman, Thomas Vaessens, Carlos Reijnen, Patricia Pisters, Esther Peeren, Elske Gerritsen, Eloe Kingma</i>	F1.01
<i>18:30-21:00</i>	<i>Dinner committee, secretary Qanu</i>	<i>Hemelse modder</i>

Day 2: 22 November 2018

Time	Who/What	Where
9:00-9:30	Private meeting for committee members only with secretary Qanu	E1.01D
9:30-10:00	Meeting with PhD students of ASCA: Noortje de Leij, Divya Nadkarni, Laura Vermeeren, Nadia de Vries, Daniel de Zeeuw	E1.01E
<i>10:00-10:15</i>	<i>Coffee break</i>	E1.01D
10:15-11:00	Meeting with Assistant Professors and Associate Professors of ASCA: Gaston Franssen, Jaap Kooijman, Stefania Milan, Ben Moore, Hanneke Stuit, Esther Weltevrede	E1.01E
11:00-12:00	Meeting with Professors of ASCA: Caroll Clarkson, Giovanna Fossati, Jeroen de Kloet, Julia Kursell, Ellen Rutten	E1.01E
<i>12:00-13:00</i>	<i>Lunch with members of ASCA</i>	E1.01D
13:00-14:15	Private meeting for committee members only with secretary Qanu	E1.01E

14:15-14:45	Tea break with Patricia Pisters, Thomas Vaessens, opportunity for further questions	E1.01D
14:45-16:00	Private meeting for committee member only with secretary Qanu	E1.01E
16:00-16:30	Travel time	
16:30-18:00	Visit Eye Filmmuseum, Eye collection center	Eye collection center, Asterweg 26, Amsterdam
18:30-21:00	Dinner committee members, secretary Qanu	EYE Bar Restaurant

Day 3: 23 November 2018

9:00-10:30	Private meeting (committee members only)	E1.01E
10:30-11:15	Meeting with representatives of the Board of NICA, including PhD's Maaïke Bleeker (UU), Frans-Willem Korsten (UL en EUR), Pepita Hesselberth (UL), Sandra Becker (RUG), Tingting Hui (UL), Sofia Apostolidou (UvA), Murat Aydemir (UvA), Eloë Kingma (coordinator NICA)	E1.01E
11:15-12:00	Meeting with representatives of RMeS, including PhD's Frank Kessler (UU), Marcel Broersma (RUG), Richard Rogers (UvA), Maryn Wilkinson (UvA) Stephanie de Smale (PhD), Tim Groot Kormelink (PhD), Chantal Olijerhoek (coordinator RMeS)	E1.01E
12:00-12:15	Coffee Break	E1.01D
12:15-13:00	Meeting with representatives of the Board of OSL, including PhD's Brigitte Adriaensen (RUN en OU), Geert Buelens (UU), Jesse van Amelsvoort (PhD), Marileen La Haije (PhD), Alex Rutten (PhD), Stephan Besser (UvA), Paul Koopman (coordinator)	E1.01E
13:00-14:00	Lunch	E1.01D
14:00-14:30	Meeting with directors of National Research Schools for further questions Henk van der Liet (UvA), Richard Rogers (UvA), Murat Aydemir (UvA)	E1.01E
14:30-16:30	Private meeting (committee members only)	E1.01E
16:30-17:30	Presentation of preliminary conclusions by the Committee	V.O.C. Room
17:30-	Drinks	V.O.C. Room



APPENDIX 3: QUANTITATIVE DATA

Table A: Composition of the research unit

	2012	2012	2013	2013	2014	2014	2015	2015	2016	2016	2017	2017
	#	fte										
ASCA												
Full Professor	14	6,6	16	7,8	16	7,1	21	9,6	20	9,6	15	7,9
Associate Professor	20	8,3	21	9,8	20	9,2	18	7,8	12	5,9	15	6,9
Assistant Professor	59	18,4	58	18,5	59	20,5	69	26,0	69	25,9	60	23,9
Scientific staff	93	33,3	95	36,1	95	36,8	108	43,4	101	41,3	90	38,7
	8	5,6	5	4,8	6	5,7	4	3,9	4	3,9	6	4,5
Post-docs	8	5,6	5	4,8	6	5,7	4	3,9	4	3,9	6	4,5
PhD student (PID)	45	33,3	37	27,5	41	30,3	49	37,2	42	34,0	45	36,5
PhD student (PNID)	61		65		68		76		80		88	
Total Research staff	207	72,2	137	68,4	210	72,8	237	84,5	227	79,3	229	79,6
Support staff		2,6		2,7		2,7		2,9		2,9		3,0
Total staff	207	74,8	202	71,1	210	75,5	237	87,4	227	82,2	229	82,6

	female	male	total
Full Professor	8	7	15
Associate Professor	7	8	15
Assistant Professor	24	36	60
Postdoc	3	3	6
Total	42	54	96
Percentage	44%	56%	

Table B: Financial structure

	2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
	fte	%										
ASCA												
HL	6,4		7,6		6,9		8,4		8,4		6,7	
UHD	8,3		9,8		9,2		7,0		5,1		5,8	
UD	18,1		18,5		19,1		21,2		22,1		19,0	
PD	1,8		2,8		1,8		0,0		0,0		0,0	
PHD	28,4		24,9		26,6		24,3		17,8		17,8	
Direct funding	63,1	87	63,6	93	63,6	87	60,9	70	53,4	66	49,4	60
HL							0,6		0,6		0,6	
UHD							0,8		0,8		1,0	
UD	0,2				1,5		4,1		3,0		4,2	
PD	3,4		2,0		3,9		3,9		3,9		4,5	
PHD	4,9		2,8		3,2		8,0		10,4		11,2	
Research grants	8,5	12	4,8	7	8,6	12	17,4	20	18,7	23	21,5	26
HL	0,2		0,2		0,2		0,6		0,6		0,6	
UHD												
UD	0,1						0,8		0,8		0,8	
PD	0,4						1,0		1,0		1,0	
PHD					1,0		7,0		7,0		9,0	
Contract research	0,6	1	0,2	0	1,2	2	9,4	11	9,4	11	11,4	14
Other	0,0											
Total funding	72,2	100	68,6	100	73,4	100	87,6	100	81,5	100	82,2	100
Expenditure												
Personel costs (direct)	€ 4.863.493	57	€ 4.912.938	57	€ 4.986.310	58	€ 5.057.086	58	€ 4.823.710	59	€ 4.984.699	59
Personel costs (indirect)	€ 3.191.781	38	€ 3.257.681	38	€ 3.303.662	38	€ 3.433.911	40	€ 2.982.900	36	€ 3.154.421	37
Other costs	€ 438.874	5	€ 456.166	5	€ 358.715	4	€ 176.122	2	€ 431.819	5	€ 320.577	4
Total expenditure	€ 8.494.148	100	€ 8.626.785	100	€ 8.648.687	100	€ 8.667.119	100	€ 8.240.429	100	€ 8.459.697	100

Table C: Output indicators

Main Categories of Research Output at Institutional Level												
	2012	%	2013	%	2014	%	2015	%	2016	%	2017	%
Refereed articles in journals	107	22	99	23	79	23	87	27	85	25	75	23
Non-Refereed articles	26	5	32	7	28	8	22	7	23	7	26	8
Books	40	8	37	9	20	6	21	7	26	8	30	9
Book chapters	159	33	137	32	123	35	86	27	100	29	110	34
Dissertations	24	5	18	4	13	4	17	5	19	5	9	3
Conference papers*	21	4	24	6	11	3	12	4	7	2	5	2
Professional publications	33	7	30	7	18	5	13	4	33	10	22	7
Publications aimed at public	52	11	25	6	26	7	37	11	28	8	14	4
Other research output	24	5	27	6	32	9	28	9	25	7	31	10
Total publications	486		429		350		323		346		322	
Tenured staff in fte	36		41		43		46		46		44	
Total academic publications	332		305		250		216		234		241	
<i>Average per person</i>	<i>3,7</i>		<i>3,0</i>		<i>2,3</i>		<i>1,9</i>		<i>2,0</i>		<i>2,2</i>	

Table D: PhD Success rates

Directly Funded PhD Candidates																
Enrollment	M	F	Total	<4	<5	<6	<7	>7	Total	Pending						
2008	6	7	13	1 8%	4 31%	3 23%	3 23%	3 23%	12 92%	1 8%						
2009	4	3	7	3 43%	1 14%	2 29%			7 100%	0 0%						
2010	0	0	0	0												
2011	3	7	10	5 50%	3 30%	1 10%			9 90%	1						
2012	5	4	9	4 44%	2 22%	1 11%			7 78%	2						
2013	2	3	5	1 20%	1 20%				2 40%	3						
Total	20	24	44	14 32%	11 25%	7 16%	3 7%	3 7%	37 84%	7 16%						
	45%	55%														

Self-Funded PhD Candidates																
Enrollment	M	F	Total	<4	<5	<6	<7	>7	Total	Pending						
2008	2	3	5	4 80%	1 20%				5 100%							
2009	3	1	4			1 25%	3 75%	3 75%	4 100%							
2010	3	5	8	3	1 13%				4 50%	1 13%						
2011	2	5	7			2 29%	1 14%	1 14%	3 43%	4 57%						
2012	2	6	8	2 25%					2 25%	5 63%						
2013	4	8	12	3 25%					3 25%	7 58%						
Total	16	28	44	12 27%	2 5%	3 7%	4 9%	4 9%	21 48%	17 39%						
	36%	64%														