

RESEARCH REVIEW

**AMSTERDAM INSTITUTE FOR
HUMANITIES RESEARCH**

OSL

NETHERLANDS RESEARCH SCHOOL FOR LITERARY
STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

QANU
Catharijnesingel 56
PO Box 8035
3503 RA Utrecht
The Netherlands

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

Project number: Q0691

© 2019 QANU

Text and numerical material from this publication may be reproduced in print, by photocopying or by any other means with the permission of QANU if the source is mentioned.



CONTENTS

REPORT ON THE RESEARCH REVIEW OF THE NETHERLANDS RESEARCH SCHOOL FOR LITERARY STUDIES (OSL) AT THE UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM..... 5

1. FOREWORD BY COMMITTEE CHAIR 5

2. THE REVIEW COMMITTEE AND THE PROCEDURES..... 6

3. ASSESSMENT OF THE NETHERLANDS RESEARCH SCHOOL FOR LITERARY STUDIES (OSL)..... 8

4. RECOMMENDATIONS.....11

APPENDICES 13

APPENDIX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT 15

APPENDIX 2: QUANTITATIVE DATA..... 17

This report was finalized on 21 February 2019.

REPORT ON THE RESEARCH REVIEW OF THE NETHERLANDS RESEARCH SCHOOL FOR LITERARY STUDIES (OSL) AT 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 OSL 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 the Netherlands Research School for Literary Studies (Onderzoekschool Literatuurwetenschap, OSL) 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. OSL was assessed as part of Cluster I, which also included NICA, RMeS, and ASCA.

The committee followed the Terms of Reference provided by OSL, which were based on the Terms of Reference for the assessment of National Research Schools in the Humanities as decided by the Deans of the Dutch Humanities Faculties (DLG). Following these Terms of Reference, the committee was asked to assess the quality of the education of PhD students provided by OSL and the added value of OSL as a national forum for literary studies in the period 2012 up to and including 2017, in relation to its own mission statement and formulated goals.

2.2. Composition of the committee

The composition of the committee was as follows:

- Prof. dr. Ortwin de Graef (KULeuven), chair
- 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 OSL.

2.4. Data provided to the committee

The committee received the self-evaluation report from the unit under review. It also received the following documents:

- the Terms of Reference;
- the Quality and Relevance in the Humanities (QRiH) manual.

2.5. Procedures followed by the committee

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 (see Appendix 2).

The final review is based on both the documentation provided by OSL 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 1). At the start of the visit, the committee was briefed by QANU about research reviews. It also discussed its 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 OSL 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 the OSL.

3. ASSESSMENT OF THE NETHERLANDS RESEARCH SCHOOL FOR LITERARY STUDIES (OSL)

3.1. Introduction

The Netherlands Research School for Literary Studies (Onderzoekschool Literatuurwetenschap, OSL) is the national Dutch research school for literary theory, comparative literature, Dutch literature, and the literatures of the major modern languages, as well as the rich field of literatures of less commonly taught languages. Eight universities participate in OSL: Radboud University, the University of Groningen, Maastricht University, Leiden University, Utrecht University, the University of Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and Tilburg University. Affiliated institutions are the Open University and Fryske Akademy. OSL offers PhD and research master students from all these institutions scholarly training in literary studies.

OSL was established in 1995, and has been hosted by the University of Amsterdam since 2011. In 2015, the Deans of the Dutch Humanities Faculties (DLG) decided that the hosting of national research schools in the humanities should rotate between participating universities. As a consequence, OSL is relocating to the University of Groningen per 1 January 2019. OSL's funding derives from two sources. Its office is maintained by a contribution from the DLG, and its teaching activities are supported by funds paid for each PhD researcher (€ 1.000) and research master student (€ 400 in 2017) registered with the School by their local universities. OSL does not have financial resources for the funding of research activities that go beyond its research master and PhD training programme.

The ambition of OSL is to:

- provide high standard and cutting edge academic education in literary studies for PhD researchers and ReMa-students;
- provide an intellectual and academic forum for the discussion of the state of the art of literary studies, including its rich traditions in the Netherlands and elsewhere; and
- offer researchers and staff members a platform for the exchange of expertise and ideas and opportunities for building academic networks.

During the assessment, it became clear to the committee that it has not always been possible for OSL to convince the humanities faculties involved to contribute (as per the agreement reached by the Deans of the Faculties of Humanities in the Netherlands in 2011) an adequate amount of teaching hours for specific courses in specific periods. The committee calls on the faculties to ensure that the necessary provisions are made to give the national research schools the full amount of teaching hours to which they are entitled, irrespective of time and topic of the courses the school programmes require. The highest level of humanities education in the Netherlands must receive all the support it needs to maintain its quality.

3.2. The quality of the education of PhD students

In assessing the quality of the education of PhD students provided by OSL, the committee first investigated the added value of its educational programme in relation to other education PhD students receive. PhD students are embedded in a university, and are provided with local training. The importance of the national research school in PhD training is therefore not immediately obvious. Based on the documentation and especially on the interviews with OSL representatives during the site visit, the committee concluded that the national research school is actually of great value to the participating PhD students. Literary scholars, including PhD students, are scattered across universities and are frequently isolated from other literary scholars, since they often pertain to (sub)departments in languages. At OSL, literary researchers from across these shrinking fields can encounter the breadth and diversity of literary studies. Therefore, the scope and focus of the training offered here is vital in connecting the PhD students to the field of literary studies.

OSL is not the only national research school in which PhD candidates in literary studies can enrol. A school such as NICA, which was also assessed by the committee, also hosts PhD candidates who investigate literary works. This reflects a shift within the humanities where literary studies becomes (partially) engulfed by cultural studies and cultural analysis. It became clear to the committee that OSL representatives are aware of this shift. OSL is currently rethinking and rearticulating its role and position in this shifting field. During the site visit, the committee gathered that an explicit view on OSL's role had already been formulated by its management and representatives, something which had not become apparent from OSL's self-assessment. The committee was told that OSL is defined by a multilingual focus, an historical approach (in contrast to the broader domain of cultural studies/cultural analysis predominantly committed to contemporary cultural work) and a focus on literature as the central object of study. The committee considers this identity unique and innovative. With it, OSL provides a clear delineation (and defence) of literary studies as an independent field within the humanities. According to the committee, OSL should advertise its identity and its innovative outlook much more explicitly in order to strengthen its position within the humanities. The committee praises the way OSL is trying to adapt its organisational structure to reflect this redefined identity, for instance by including multilingual perspectives in its board and opening up its educational programme to the Fryske Akademy.

The educational programme offered by OSL includes a broad collection of courses, seminars, master classes and other events, which has recently been expanded. The committee considers the programme to be very diverse and wide-ranging and noticed it is generally well evaluated by participants. It is pleased to see that skills courses are offered on creative and academic writing, and appreciates the fact that a skills course on computational literary studies is also included.

Distinguishing features of the educational programme are the Winter School and the OSL seminar. The Winter School or Ravenstein Seminar is a three-day annual event organised by PhD candidates in cooperation with OSL staff members. It brings together PhD candidates, research master students and (inter)national researchers, and focuses on current issues in literary studies. The committee appreciates the fact that PhD students organise this event. The OSL seminar is initiated by senior OSL staff members and carried out in cooperation with the PhD students. It is a series of masterclasses with (inter)national experts aimed at exploring a current topic or concept (e.g. a 'turn') in literary studies. The committee found the topics addressed to be aptly chosen and sufficiently topical. Both the Winter School and the OSL seminar are well attended and positively evaluated by the participants.

OSL also offers an international Summer School: the HERMES Seminar. This is organised by the HERMES Consortium for Literary and Cultural Studies, a collaboration of OSL with doctoral schools in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain and the US. The Summer School takes place in June every year at one of the participating universities. Set up as an intensive workshop, the HERMES Seminar offers PhD students the opportunity to present their research in an international context and get feedback from fellow PhD candidates and senior researchers from different backgrounds and universities. The best papers presented at each meeting are collected in a volume that is published by UCL Press. According to the committee, this seminar provides PhD candidates with a unique opportunity to present and discuss their research in an international context. The seminar itself contributes to OSL's explicitly international and multilingual identity.

Since the number of PhD students participating in the HERMES seminar is limited due to financial and organisational constraints, the committee is pleased that OSL also offers a national forum for PhD students to present their research. In 2014-2015, the PhD Newsroom was a regular OSL PhD event for the discussion of research in progress. PhD candidates presented samples of their research to fellow PhD candidates and an expert in the field. In 2015, the Newsroom was transformed into regular PhD workshops organised around the research projects of PhD candidates. While their exact format varies, the workshops aim at providing specific feedback on research projects from experts



in the field and at creating a symposium-like interaction between PhD candidates, OSL staff members and guest speakers.

The OSL curriculum includes courses and events that welcome research master students. Their numbers have been increasing, as can be seen in Appendix 2. In 2017, OSL activities were attended by 129 research master students and 24 PhD students. While the contribution of research master students to the courses may be valuable and their financial contribution increasingly necessary (see Appendix 2), the committee supports OSL in restricting part of its programme to PhD students and selecting a limited number of research master students for particular courses. In this way, the quality of education of PhD candidates is safeguarded. Monitoring the balance between research master students and PhD students remains of importance in the near future.

In this context, a challenge faced by OSL is to boost its PhD influx, which has been in decline due to developments in the field at large (see Appendix 2). Such a boost would not only improve OSL's viability but also add to the quality of education by including more linguistic and scholarly diversity and striking a better balance between research master and PhD students. The committee noticed that the school has limited insight into the number of PhD students who are enrolled within OSL, and into the number of PhD students who have chosen to attend other national schools even though their research fits the focus of OSL. The committee recommends looking into these numbers, since they might provide information on how to make the educational programme more visible and attractive to potential PhD members. OSL could also make the unique niche of its educational programme visible, for instance by explicitly referring to the object of study, literature, in its course titles.

3.3. The added value of OSL as a national forum for literary studies

As mentioned previously, literary scholars are often embedded in language sections and departments within their university, and this can isolate them from the diverse and multilingual field of literary studies. As a result, OSL is of vital importance for many scholars and PhD candidates. During the site visit, the committee spoke to senior and PhD researchers from non-Randstad locations, such as Heerlen and Leeuwarden, who testified to the pivotal role OSL plays in connecting them with the national as well as international field of literary studies.

Aside from its educational events, OSL has started organising a series of annual research meetings for all staff members, postdocs and PhD researchers. The first of these meetings took place in 2016. Their purpose is to stimulate and facilitate research collaborations in literary studies in the Netherlands. Participants are invited to discuss and plan future collaborations, such as joint funding applications, publications or symposia. The OSL Board has made seed money (€ 1000) available for the most promising initiative. The research meetings have led to the creation or strengthening of various inter-university research groups. OSL also awards two annual prizes for the publication of an outstanding scholarly book or article.

OSL also acts as a representative of literary studies in the Netherlands. For instance, OSL gave input for the Dutch National Research Agenda in 2013. Furthermore, the school was actively involved in developing an instrument for assessing the quality and relevance in humanities research in the Netherlands (QRiH). In the interview with the committee, OSL representatives also mentioned outreach activities. Occasionally, collaboration is established with art institutes or literary festivals. Secondary education is also seen as a promising field for achieving societal impact, as is demonstrated by the inclusion in the OSL board of a member with a background in secondary education.

The committee approves OSL's efforts in acting as a national forum for literary studies. It considers OSL vital in bringing together literary scholars from very diverse locations, research topics and languages. However, it finds that more can be done to strengthen OSL's position and improve its longer-term viability. The research groups to which the OSL research meetings have contributed seem to have been selected relatively randomly. The committee recommends using the momentum gained in reconsidering OSL's identity to determine a clear course in deciding which research

directions to support. The committee is impressed by the national and international recognition of OSL as evidenced by its role in HERMES as well as its contributions to Dutch research agendas. Still, it finds that making OSL's unique identity explicit will enhance its position. It also advises expanding societal collaborations. A first step could be to attract more board members from promising fields.

3.4. Conclusions

The committee concludes that OSL offers PhD students from the field of literary studies an excellent educational programme, which strikes a good balance between events organised by PhD students and events organised by senior staff members. The programme is diverse and complete, and the HERMES seminar adds to its distinctly international orientation. OSL offers PhD students and scholars a place where they can experience the diversity of the field, which is all the more necessary since many of them operate in relative isolation. The national research school is therefore of clear added value to the field. The committee approves OSL's efforts to act as a national forum, e.g. by promoting inter-university research groups. Its role can be enhanced by bringing focus into the research directions it supports and by expanding societal collaborations. OSL is currently redefining its identity, which consists of a multilingual focus, an historical approach and a focus on literature as the central object of study. Making this identity explicit and using it to advertise and shape its activities could contribute to the quality of OSL's educational programme as well as to its value as a national forum.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Advertise OSL's identity and its innovative outlook much more explicitly in order to define and strengthen its position within the humanities.
- Keep monitoring the balance between research master students and PhD students in the educational programme.
- Gain insight into how many PhD candidates are currently enrolled and how many potential candidates decided not to enrol. This may provide information on how to make the educational programme more visible and attractive to potential PhD members.
- Refer explicitly to the object of study, literature, in the course titles. In this way, the unique identity of OSL is communicated much more clearly to course participants, OSL members and scholars external to OSL.
- Determine a clear course in deciding which research directions to support.
- Expand societal collaborations. A first step could be to attract more board members from promising fields.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: 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 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 2: QUANTITATIVE DATA

Educational Programme 2012-2017: courses (in EC1 participants)

Year	Courses (EC)	# ReMa-students	# PhD candidates
2012	21	40	73
2013	28,5	65	66
2014	37	45	79
2015	27,5 - 31,5	101	32
2016	42,5 - 51,5	170	32
2017	31 - 36	129	24

Financial Overview 2012-2017

Year	Budget	Personnel Costs	Courses	Result
2012	€ 113.803	€ -69.903	€ -20.019	€ 23.881
2013	€ 72.648	€ -56.648	€ -20.996	€ -4.996
2014	€ 74.840	€ -58.590	€ -20.365	€ -4.115
2015	€ 74.560	€ -61.310	€ -14.835	€ -1.585
2016	€ 98.029	€ -63.265	€ -17.963	€ 16.801
2017	€ 88.499	€ -65.499	€ -19.386	€ 3.614

