

**RESEARCH REVIEW**

**AMSTERDAM INSTITUTE FOR  
HUMANITIES RESEARCH**

RMES

RESEARCH SCHOOL FOR MEDIA STUDIES

**UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM**

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# CONTENTS

**REPORT ON THE RESEARCH REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH SCHOOL FOR MEDIA STUDIES (RMES) AT THE UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM ..... 5**

1. FOREWORD BY COMMITTEE CHAIR ..... 5

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

3. ASSESSMENT OF THE RESEARCH SCHOOL FOR MEDIA STUDIES (RMES)..... 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 RESEARCH SCHOOL FOR MEDIA STUDIES (RMES) 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 RmeS 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 Research School for Media Studies (RMeS) 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. RMeS was assessed as part of Cluster I, which also included OSL, NICA and ASCA.

The committee followed the Terms of Reference provided by RMeS, 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 RMeS and the added value of NICA as a national forum for the field of media 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)
- 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 RMeS.

### **2.4. Data provided to the committee**

The committee received the self-evaluation report from the unit under review. The committee 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 RMeS 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 RMeS 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 RMeS.

## 3. ASSESSMENT OF THE RESEARCH SCHOOL FOR MEDIA STUDIES (RMES)

### **3.1. Introduction**

The Research School for Media Studies (RMeS) is a national Dutch network of academic experts in media research. Eight universities participate in RMeS: the University of Amsterdam, Utrecht University, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Leiden University, the University of Groningen, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Radboud University and Maastricht University. RMeS offers PhD and research master students from these institutions scholarly training in media studies.

RMeS was established as recently as 2011, 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. In the same year, however, RMeS decided that the University of Amsterdam would be the coordinating faculty until 2021 in order to have administrative continuity for this recently established national research school. In 2021, RMeS will move to another university. The school is considering a relocation to the University of Groningen. RMeS is funded by a contribution from the DLG, additional funding by the University of Amsterdam, and contributions of PhD and research master students registered with the school.

The ambition of RMeS is:

1. to provide excellent, state of the art education in media studies to PhD candidates and research master students;
2. to provide a platform for academics to exchange expertise, build coalitions between various research groups, coordinate and prepare joint grant applications, and represent the field of media studies at national and international levels;
3. to offer a platform for Dutch graduate students in media research at various universities in order to build academic networks with their peers and to become acquainted with specialist research and researchers in their field;
4. to offer an international platform which represents Dutch media scholars in international networks, funding bodies, and scientific/academic councils.

During the assessment, it became clear to the committee that it has not always been possible for RMeS 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**

RMeS was launched in 2011 in order to provide PhD and research master students with a course programme in the young, rapidly growing and interdisciplinary field that studies the content, history, technology, production and reception of various kinds of media types. Media researchers develop and employ theories from a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary angles, and the national research school is a place where students from the various strands of media studies that can be found in the Dutch universities can experience the broadness of the field. RMeS distinguishes itself from the national research school NESCOR, which is firmly grounded in the social sciences, in drawing primarily on traditions from the humanities for its theoretical and methodological approaches, while also borrowing from social sciences and information studies. The committee considers the focus and *raison d'être* of RMeS to be evident and clear.



Over the past few years, RMeS has been expanding its course programme to include a range of courses as well as teaching staff. The educational programme's format is repeated each year. The format includes a Summer and a Winter School. The Summer School is a three to five day event with lectures and workshops by national and international media studies scholars around a particular theme. The Summer School is open to research master and PhD students, and invites staff and faculty on one of the course days. During the two-day Winter School, PhD students present their research and comment on each other's work in small groups. They also attend lectures and workshops offered by media studies scholars working in the Netherlands. At least one workshop focuses on professional aspects (e.g. academic integrity, valorisation, and career perspectives).

The RMeS curriculum further includes masterclasses: one- or two-day combinations of lecture and workshop, taught by national and/or international experts in a specific field of media studies. RMeS offers at least two masterclasses a year, in the spring and fall. It also hosts masterclasses in cooperation with other national research schools, such as NICA and Huizinga. Other courses offered annually are the Trending Topics course and tutorials. In the Trending Topics course, topical issues in media studies are addressed in eight to ten lectures during four separate sessions. The course is aimed exclusively at research master students, but PhD students are invited to participate in a limited number of sessions. The tutorials are primarily focused on research master students.

The committee looked at the setup of all these courses as well as their themes and teachers over the past years. It concluded that the topics are well chosen and topical or 'trending', and that the teaching staff consists of leading national and international researchers from across the field. Students are offered a good mix of skills and content. The range of the programme is as wide as might be expected of a national research school in such a broad and interdisciplinary field. The committee noticed that the courses are generally well attended and very well evaluated by the students, and this is a considerable achievement for such a recently launched school.

RMeS offers its educational programme to both PhD students and research master students. Over the past few years, the number of research master students has increased (see Appendix 2); in 2017, RMeS had 49 PhD student and 51 research master student members. RMeS has designed the curriculum in such a way that PhD students and research master students share courses, but also get education specifically directed at their own group. The committee considers this a good approach to guarantee PhD students education on their own level.

According to the committee, it is very noticeable that a lot of thought and planning has gone into the design and setup of RMeS and its curriculum. This has resulted in a clear and tightly knit structure. The committee considers this a positive aspect of RMeS. The organisational structure is carefully designed, with an academic director, an executive board and an advisory board representing all participating institutions. Board memberships rotate and the replacement of members is discussed from a strategic point of view. The management is attuned to the fact that RMeS is still developing its position and curriculum, which results in an ongoing dialogue on the challenges and weaknesses the school is facing. The resulting educational programme is balanced and well-structured. RMeS also has a very well developed system of course evaluations, where the board is directly involved and adaptations to courses are quickly implemented.

The committee does point out that this setup has resulted in a predominantly top-down design of the course programme. The topics in the courses are decided upon by the advisory board, and the different parts of the curriculum are organized by senior staff members from the various universities. RMeS has a PhD council, which organizes a PhD Network Event where PhD candidates are invited to share experiences and best practices and discuss particular academic skills and activities. The committee advises RMeS, now that the school is up and running, to look for other places in the curriculum where PhD candidates can initiate events, themes and topics. Including such a bottom-up course or adding bottom-up elements to existing courses would give PhD students a valuable opportunity to contribute to the programme while gaining experience in organizing scholarly activities.



The committee learned from its interview with RMeS staff and PhD candidates that the school also contributes to the education of its PhD members by providing them with a national network of media researchers. The programme is designed in such a way that PhD students get to know all senior researchers in the field working in the Netherlands. In addition, the Summer and Winter School rotate every year between participating universities, so that PhD students visit other institutions and get acquainted with their staff and research focus. RMeS PhD candidates are enthusiastic about this aspect of their education in RMeS. The committee agrees that RMeS education is of great added value in providing such a wide and thorough introduction to the field.

### ***3.3. The added value of RMeS as a national forum for the field***

RMeS aims to play a role on a national level in connecting media studies researchers and providing impetus for new networking and grant-writing. Currently, the school involves many media studies experts in its course programme, either as a teacher or coordinator, but it aims to organise more activities for faculty and staff only. RMeS is discussing suitable formats for achieving this, such as expert meetings and skill shares. RMeS is also aware that a number of its partners are less involved in its activities than others and looks for ways to strengthen ties with these institutions, for instance by letting courses rotate in various locations. The committee applauds these initiatives.

The committee noticed that, over the brief period of its existence, RMeS has already contributed greatly to the development of the field. RMeS staff members have been very successful in obtaining grants, not only individually, but also in collaboration. RMeS members obtained five major grants in the NWO scheme for Creative Industries, and Media Studies obtained a major infrastructure grant (CLARIAH) for the development of digital humanities tools in image and sound data mining and data analysis. RMeS intends to play an important role in disseminating the digital research tools developed here among its members, including the faculty and staff of all contributing members. The committee concludes that the new, wide and interdisciplinary field of humanities-based media studies is successful and highly visible within academia, and that the perspectives of RMeS as a catalyst in this new field therefore continue to be excellent.

In order to grow and become more effective as a national forum for the field, the committee advises RMeS to invest in societal outreach and communication. The research's relevance to society is currently an integrated part of the projects, activities and processes in which RMeS partakes. By making this relevance more visible and by connecting with non-academic partners and audiences, RMeS could further contribute to disseminating research results and inspiring new network connections and collaborations.

### ***3.4. Conclusions***

RMeS offers PhD candidates in the young, rapidly growing and interdisciplinary field of (humanities-based) media studies a thorough and essential introduction to the field. The course programme is topical, balanced and well-structured and it is taught by nationally and internationally renowned senior researchers. PhD students are introduced to methods and strands of research performed at all partner institutions and get to know all researchers. RMeS also distinguishes itself through its careful design and organization. Now that RMeS has been firmly established, the committee recommends allowing PhD candidates more room to develop courses or contribute to existing courses. The added value of RMeS as a national forum is evident. The school contributes to collaboration in the field and actively disseminates research results. The committee applauds the school's ambition to take its catalyst function a step further, for instance by organizing activities for faculty and staff only, and advises RMeS to assume an active role in enhancing the visibility of the field's societal relevance.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Allow for more bottom-up initiatives in the course programme, organized by PhD candidates.
- Make the results of research more visible and strengthen the profile of the field of media studies by investing in societal outreach.
- Follow up on existing plans to organize more activities focused on network-building among staff and faculty of the partners. Involve the less prominent partners.



## APPENDICES



## APPENDIX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

Day 1: 21 November 2018

<b>Time</b>	<b>Who/What</b>	<b>Where</b>
<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

<b>Time</b>	<b>Who/What</b>	<b>Where</b>
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

<b>Inflow 2012 - 2017</b>	<b>PhD researchers</b>	<b>RMa students</b>
2012	8	21
2013	12	28
2014	8	39
2015	7	33
2016	9	31
2017	6	51

### *Financial Overview 2012 -2017*

	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Personnel Costs</b>	<b>Courses</b>	<b>Result</b>
2012	€ 79.883	-€ 56.385	-€ 6.256	€ 17.241
2013	€ 77.079	-€ 64.754	-€ 12.240	€ 85
2014	€ 68.500	-€ 55.000	-€ 11.529	€ 1.971
2015	€ 79.310	-€ 56.935	-€ 10.489	€ 11.886
2016	€ 79.385	-€ 59.339	-€ 8.900	€ 11.146
2017	€ 85.391	-€ 68.191	-€ 19.299	€ 2.099