

**RESEARCH REVIEW**  
**NETHERLANDS GRADUATE SCHOOL OF**  
**LINGUISTICS (LOT)**

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# REPORT ON THE RESEARCH REVIEW OF NETHERLANDS GRADUATE SCHOOL OF LINGUISTICS (LANDELIJKE ONDERZOEKSCHOOL TAALWETENSCHAP – LOT)

## 1. FOREWORD BY COMMITTEE CHAIR

The evaluation committee that penned this report was assembled by QANU (Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities) at the request of the participating universities (including the University of Utrecht), and it included expertise from a broad spectrum of linguistic sub-disciplines, consisting, as it did of Prof. Dr. B. (Balthasar) Bickel, Zurich; Prof. Dr. N. (Ann) Bradlow, Northwestern (Chicago); Prof. Dr. S. (Seana) Coulson, University of California at San Diego; Prof. Dr. J. (Jane) Grimshaw, Rutgers (New Jersey); Prof. Dr. A. (Alison) Mackey, Georgetown (Washington, D.C.); Prof. Dr. Ir. J. (John) Nerbonne [chair], em. Groningen and Freiburg, and Prof. Dr. W. (Wendy) Sandler, Haifa (Israel). Beyond their specialist expertise, the members were remarkable and valuable for their broad view of linguistics and their willingness to examine scientific areas well outside their research foci proper and for their energy in considering practical issues of organization, financing and management that often seemed foreign. These, too, formed the subject of the evaluation we conducted. The committee also enjoyed its collaboration and I am grateful to all of them for their professional attitudes and pleasant interaction.

Jetje De Groof served as secretary to the committee, and she was essential to the process at all stages, suggesting a division of labour, providing more concrete instructions to committee members on how to follow the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP), as well as on how to keep the “Terms of Reference” (ToR) of our particular evaluation in mind, and sitting at my right hand during meetings and keeping notes to ensure that the committee was addressing *all* the crucial points of the SEP and the ToR. She also received the rough drafts of all the various parts of the report, which she edited with me, and where I was very grateful not only for her close attention to the report’s expected topics, but also for her efficient and clear style of writing. One committee member – confusing the various specialized meaning of the word ‘secretary’ – objected that she be referred to at all in this way: “She was so much more!”. I am grateful for all the very competent work that she invested in this report.

The director, staff and board of LOT provided us with a very complete self evaluation of more than 70 pages, including records of the twelve intensive training programmes it organized in the reporting period. Everyone we spoke to was candid about LOT’s functioning as well as proud of how much it has accomplished.

Our visit was well organized and our reception at LOT, provided by Prof. Henriette de Swart and Prof. Frank Wijnen, LOT directors during the 2012-2017 period, was cordial.

John Nerbonne  
Chair of the committee

## 2. THE REVIEW COMMITTEE AND THE PROCEDURES

### **2.1. Scope of the review**

The review committee has been asked to perform a review of the research in Linguistics at four research institutes (at the universities of Amsterdam, Leiden, Utrecht and Nijmegen), and the Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics (LOT). This report includes the committee's findings on the Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics (LOT).

The Terms of Reference (ToR) state that the evaluation of LOT has to be carried out according to the Standard Evaluation Protocol 2015 – 2021 (SEP) for research reviews in the Netherlands. For the purpose of the review of the Graduate School LOT, the committee was asked to assess

1. the quality of the education of PhD candidates provided by LOT, and
2. the added value of LOT as a national forum for the discipline in the period 2012 up and including 2017, against its own mission statement and formulated goals.

### **2.2. Composition of the committee**

The composition of the committee was as follows:

- Prof. Dr. ir. J. (John) Nerbonne [chair]
- Prof. Dr. B. (Balthasar) Bickel
- Prof. Dr. N. (Ann) Bradlow
- Prof. Dr. S. (Seana) Coulson
- Prof. Dr. J. (Jane) Grimshaw
- Prof. Dr. A. (Alison) Mackey
- Prof. Dr. W. (Wendy) Sandler

The committee was supported by Dr. Jetje de Groof, 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 Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics (LOT). Personal or professional relationships between committee members and the research unit under review were reported and discussed at the start of the site visit amongst committee members. The committee concluded that no specific risk in terms of bias or undue influence existed and that all members were sufficiently independent.

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

The committee received the self-evaluation report from the units 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;

### **2.5. Procedures followed by the committee**

The committee proceeded according to the SEP. Prior to the first meeting, all committee members independently formulated a preliminary assessment of the units under review based on the written information that was provided prior to the site visit.

The final review is based on both the documentation provided by LOT and the information gathered during the interviews with management and representatives of the research unit during the site visit. The site visits of all institutes mentioned in 2.1. all took place in one week (30 September-5 October 2018). The site visit of LOT took place on 3 October 2018 in Utrecht (see the schedule in Appendix 2).

Preceding the interviews, 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 also 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 the Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics 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 and to the management of the research unit.

The committee used the criteria and categories of the Standard Evaluation Protocol 2015-2021 (SEP). For more information see Appendix 1.

### 3. DESCRIPTION OF THE NETHERLANDS GRADUATE SCHOOL OF LINGUISTICS

This section provides a description of LOT, as provided by the self-evaluation report.

LOT is a collaborative enterprise of seven university research institutes and two KNAW institutes: the Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication (ACLC, University of Amsterdam), the Leiden University Centre for Linguistics (LUCL, Leiden University), the Nijmegen Centre for Languages Studies (CLS, Radboud University Nijmegen), the Linguistic research of the faculty of Humanities at VU-Amsterdam (VUA), the Center for Language and Cognition Groningen (CLCG, University of Groningen), the Utrecht institute of Linguistics (UiL OTS, Utrecht University), the Meertens Institute (Amsterdam), the Department of Communication and Cognition (Tilburg University), and the Fryske Akademy. At the international level, LOT collaborates with the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium), Ghent University (Belgium) and with LOT's sister organization in Norway, the Norwegian Graduate Research School in Linguistics and Philology.

LOT's mission is to create a scientific community in the Netherlands in which linguistic research can be optimally pursued, as well as to educate the next generation of researchers with an open mind toward (1) new disciplinary and interdisciplinary developments, (2) different theoretical and methodological approaches, and (3) applications of scientific results in society.

LOT is responsible for providing a postgraduate curriculum that is complementary to the institutes' training and supervision programmes. The core of the LOT curriculum consists of semi-annual, two-week long Summer and Winter Schools. By organizing postgraduate education on a national level, it becomes possible to attract leading researchers in the field and offer a broad range of courses, so that PhD and research master students can follow courses tailored to their specific needs, which would otherwise not be attainable.

The LOT executive office, headed by the academic director, is currently based at Utrecht University. LOT is scheduled to move to the University of Amsterdam by January 1, 2019 to comply with the decision made by the Council of Deans of the Faculties of Humanities in the Netherlands (DLG) to rotate the executive office of the national research schools every five to ten years to ensure national coverage and visibility. The LOT bureau currently consists of 0,2 FTE director, 0,4 FTE programme coordinator and 0,6 FTE secretary, with occasional help from student assistants. The LOT board consists of representatives of all nine participating institutes, the LOT management committee of the directors of all nine participating institutes. In the LOT curriculum committee, representatives of all nine participating institutes, plus PhD representatives and RMA student representatives decide on the School's programmes and monitor their evaluation.

## 4. ASSESSMENT OF THE NETHERLANDS GRADUATE SCHOOL OF LINGUISTICS

### **4.1. Focus and mission**

Internationally, LOT is a unique institution, involving a partnership among nine Dutch research institutes in the field of linguistics. The nine member institutes, on the one hand, have primarily the responsibility for the research of their members and for the supervision of the PhD projects conducted there. LOT, on the other hand, has the mission to develop and maintain a curriculum of semi-annual schools for graduate students in linguistics, and to serve as a national forum for collaboration among linguists nationwide. We evaluate its performance in these tasks in this document (see 2.1., above).

Before turning to LOT's education and forum functions, we wish first to note its very broad view of linguistics (§2.1 in the self-evaluation report), encompassing not only the classical topics found in introductory textbooks – phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics and pragmatics – but also all the many sub-disciplines that have ensued from interdisciplinary efforts, such as communication studies, historical linguistics, psycholinguistics, first- and second-language acquisition (including language pedagogy), neurolinguistics, language pathology and language therapies, sociolinguistics (including dialectology), mathematical linguistics, computational linguistics, language evolution, stylistics, and forensic linguistics. This all-encompassing view is exactly right for a federation wishing to provide research education and to serve as a national forum for a discipline still very actively seeking its boundaries and opportunities for further scientific insight. We likewise applaud LOT's refreshingly open attitude to applications of linguistics in computer interface technology, in language learning and instruction, in public communication and language and speech pathology and therapy. Over the long term, serious applications of science remain one of the strongest motivations for continued investment.

Given that LOT is a federation of nine research institutes embedded in seven faculties in different universities as well as within the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), its activities must tread a delicate line promoting cooperation among institutes that compete with each other for external funding. The faculties and universities involved also have their own expectation of what their research institutes should be doing locally and are in general circumspect when it comes to committing funds to any external organizations. The panel notes this to emphasize that it respects LOT's achievements all the more given the complexity and sensitivity of environment in which it operates.

### **4.2. Education**

The LOT Winter and Summer schools each take place every year, typically involving more than 150 graduate students and 75 students in research masters' (hence: RM) programmes (the latter group is new since the last evaluation). The schools each last two weeks and comprise 18 one-week long courses, of which half are taught by researchers from abroad. Because local graduate training is often focused on a single dissertation topic, the schools provide participants with both broader perspectives and also novel views into cutting-edge developments from internationally leading scholars (see curricula and staff in recent years). Although LOT has a clearly national remit, one sign of its success is the collaboration with two Belgian institutes and one Norwegian federation of institutes. The continued great popularity of the Summer and Winter Schools (Appendix B of the self-evaluation report) is testimony to their success. Both Dutch and foreign students have regularly attended them in large numbers and regularly scored the courses as 4.1 (on a scale of 1-5). The committee appreciates the efforts made to cover the discipline of linguistics broadly and to respond to participants needs, e.g. through the introduction of the poster sessions and the research discussion groups.

We note two developments for which we urge further careful monitoring: first, compensation for PhD student accommodations will be less generous from 2018 on, and second, the addition of RM students, which involves a 50% increase in the number of students as well as designating one-third



of the courses as 'RM1', reduces the more advanced curriculum. The less generous compensation for PhD students can clearly threaten the level of participation in the schools, a prerequisite for the continued success of the Summer and Winter schools. We urge continued vigilance toward this threat, of the sort proposed in §5.2 of the self-study, where it is also noted that the number of PhD students per year is dropping. The reduction in the more advanced part of the curriculum (because of the smaller proportion of PhD students) may threaten the popularity of the schools among potential visiting staff members, and the quality of the schools will suffer if the same outstanding level of staff cannot be attracted to teach.

We note a third issue with respect to the schools, namely the need for PhD-level courses on (i) data management, (ii) ethics and (iii) extra-academic career opportunities. There is discussion about the third sort of course in the self-study report (p.19), but not about the other two. We find that all three such courses should be included as part of PhD training, and we can see clear advantages to offering courses specifically for linguists, who encounter special issues in both data management and ethics. We urge the LOT board to consider whether the courses might not best be offered in the LOT Summer and Winter Schools, as they are not always offered with the required level of attention to specifically linguistic topics in the local graduate schools.

#### **4.3. LOT as a national forum**

Turning to LOT's function as a national forum, we note that it succeeds once again more than convincingly in this task. The *LOT Newsletter* is read widely for the posting of jobs, calls for papers for conferences and special issues of journals, announcements of events, calls for nominations for prizes, etc. The LOT Dissertation Series is a showcase for Dutch linguistics and also serves to let researchers in the Netherlands as well as in the rest of the world know about the work in the PhD projects. We note with respect to the series that it may be sufficient to continue it in digital form alone, since printed books are expensive and losing their importance. We further note that the Winter and Summer Schools also contribute to LOT's forum function, rotating as they do among member institutes and normally involving Dutch researchers from outside the hosting group. The informal contact the schools provide are useful in facilitating communication in the LOT community. In addition, LOT is clearly serving a function in coordinating researchers who wish to apply for larger scale projects, typically involving several million euros. The successful examples in §2.2 of the self-study report – an NWO programme on comprehensible language; the *Taalportaal* site on Dutch grammar, which may constitute the best reference grammar for the language anywhere; the CLARIN/CLARIAH projects, harnessing language technology for linguistics and for broader humanities research involving texts – are all evidence of successful collaboration. Given that NWO is channelling more of its money into very large programs, such as the "Gravitation programs", the LOT's forum function emerges as a significant potential facilitator in developing the sorts of very large (€20Mil.) proposals called for. The unfortunately unsuccessful proposal submitted to the NWO gravitation programme mentioned in "Opportunities" in §5.2 (SWOT analysis) is evidence of LOT's initiatives in attracting NWO funding, and during the site visit the committee learned that a new proposal was submitted after the materials for the evaluation were completed (in September 2018).

Finally, the committee agrees that the long list (in §2.2 in the self-evaluation report) of inter-institutional research and training activities, workshops and workgroups further confirms LOT's value in providing a national forum for linguistics. Two aspects of these activities are especially noteworthy. First, many of the activities mentioned are meetings of specialists in linguistic sub-disciplines who have taken advantage of the LOT's national communication (see remarks above on the newsletter) to organize fora for scientific exchange. These researchers have demonstrated LOT's value very clearly, as their meetings might not exist without the LOT infrastructure. Second, the outreach activities sponsored by LOT (§2.3) are effective. LOT sponsors a special lecture by an outstanding researcher during both Summer and Winter schools, it awards a prize for the popularization of linguistic research, and it co-sponsors *De Grote Taaldag* together with the Dutch professional organization for applied linguistics. We are especially charmed by *Kennislink* (NEMO), where roughly 1,000 brief and attractive articles on linguistic topics may be found. This is an excellent way to make

research results accessible to the interested public, including students in high school who might be interested in studying language, communication and related subjects.

#### **4.4. Conclusions**

LOT functions admirably well. It is a very lean organization, its community supports it enthusiastically, and its leadership has been strong and astute. The reflective remarks in the section in the self-evaluation report discussing the organization's strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats convince us that the organization is aware of the complex environment within which it works, and will pilot its future course skillfully and cautiously. We especially agree about the threats posed to the Summer and Winter Schools by admitting RM-students (see the remarks above), and we hope that the organization will find a way to deal with these.

At our site visit, LOT shared some thoughts with us on whether it ought to be engaged in advocacy for linguistic research or perhaps in seeking industrial support for some activities (see "Opportunities", p.18). We agree that both sorts of activities might be useful, and only caution prevents us from urging attention to further sensible tasks on an organization that is already accomplishing so much.

## 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

10:00-11:00	Closed session Committee
11:00-11:30	Interview with LOT Bureau
11:30-12:30	Interview with LOT Board and LOT Management
12:30-13:00	Lunch
13:00-13:30	Interview with LOT Curriculum Committee
13:30-14:00	Interview with LOT PhD students
14:00-14:15	Break
14:15-14:45	Interview with non-tenured staff members – representatives from institutes
14:45-16:45	Closed session (deliberation and writing)
16:45-17:15	Presentation of preliminary findings