RESEARCH REVIEW

CENTRE FOR RELIGIOUS STUDIES

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN

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REPORT ON THE RESEARCH REVIEW OF THE CENTRE FOR RELIGIOUS STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN

1. FOREWORD BY THE COMMITTEE CHAIR

The present report contains the conclusions of the international Peer Review Committee that assessed the research activities of the Centre for Religious Studies (CRS) at the University of Groningen. More particularly, the committee focused on the research quality and strategy of the institution concerned as well as on the relevance to society of its research output and the viability of the research programme. In addition, the committee gave special attention to training and supervision of PhD students, to research integrity policy, and diversity issues.

The CRS has provided the committee with a carefully prepared self-evaluation report regarding its research in the period 2012-2017. This well thought-out presentation served as a solid basis for the committee's first impression of the quality control that CRS practices in its research and organisation as well as of its well-oriented critical reflection on research policy and strategy.

During the site visit, the CRS made available publications and other relevant materials to the committee. The committee greatly appreciated the straight talks with staff and PhD students. We had the opportunity to meet with Faculty and institutional boards as well as with senior and junior scholars who are strongly committed to collaborative interdisciplinary research on subjects of societal relevance. We were impressed by the sense of community and the collegial atmosphere as well. In addition, the commitment of the administrative staff to the support of researchers is remarkable. All these interviews have been extremely helpful to the committee in reviewing CRS's research and in coming to clear conclusions.

The committee found that the outcome of the previous research evaluation, which took place in 2012, stands very firm. Generally speaking, the Groningen CRS continues to be an international centre of excellence in the non-confessional study of religion. Having assessed the CRS on the three dimensions of research quality, relevance to society and viability, the committee concludes that CRS is a very dynamic and well organised research environment, turning out a scholarly output, which can be rated from very good to excellent. In this respect, the world-leading position of the Qumran Institute must be put once more in the foreground. The committee also acknowledges that other sub-units have a great potential for excellent research. In order to keep this positive outcome, the committee emphasizes the need of maintaining the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies as an independent organizational setting for the CRS within the University of Groningen. The committee is of the opinion that this is an important precondition for giving full chances to the CRS to further develop as an outstanding international research institution, with a strong national impact as well.

As committee chair, I owe a debt of gratitude to the members of the Review Committee. It has been very inspiring to work together with my colleagues Professor Marcia Colish, Professor Kim Knott, Professor Hugh McLeod and Professor Robert Yelle. We are very obliged to Dr. Barbara van Balen, who acted as secretary on behalf of QANU. Her expertise was invaluable for the work of the committee. Furthermore, we extend a sincere word of thanks to Mrs. Debbie van den Berg, research policy officer at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies. Debbie and her colleagues extremely well supported the committee for all practical matters before and during the site visit.

Finally, we have very much appreciated the constructive cooperation with the dean and the governance board of both the Faculty and the CRS, as well as by all participants in the series of interviews. We hope that the comments and recommendations in the present report will be an

incentive to the further strengthening of the Centre for Religious Studies as an excellent research institution at the University of Groningen.

Prof. dr. Marc Vervenne

Chair

2. THE REVIEW COMMITTEE AND THE PROCEDURES

2.1. Scope of the review

The Board of the University of Groningen has requested the Peer Review Committee (PRC) to assess the research at the Centre for Religious Studies of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies. This review includes the following three research programmes that correspond to the Faculty's departments:

- Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Origins (CRS-1)
- Comparative Study of Religion (CRS-2)
- Christianity and History of Ideas (CRS-3)

In accordance with the Standard Evaluation Protocol 2015 – 2021 (SEP) 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 at 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.

2.2. Composition of the committee

The composition of the committee was as follows:

- Prof. dr. M. (Marc) Vervenne, emeritus full professor (ordinarius) associated with the Research Unit of Biblical Studies at the Faculty of Theology & Religious Studies of KU Leuven (Belgium) [chair];
- Prof. dr. M. L. (Marcia) Colish, lecturer in History at Yale University (United States);
- Prof. dr. K. (Kim) Knott, professor of Religious and Secular Studies in the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Lancaster University (United Kingdom);
- Prof. dr. D. H. (Hugh) McLeod, emeritus professor of Church History, University of Birmingham (United Kingdom);
- Prof. dr. R. A. (Robert) Yelle, professor for the Theory and Method of Religious Studies, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich (Germany).

The committee was supported by dr. B.M. (Barbara) van Balen, 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 the Centre of Religious Studies at the University of Groningen. 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;
- lists of publications, consisting of an overview of all publications in the review period, five scientific key publications and five societal key publications for CRS and an extended readings list of five publications for each research group.

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 unit under review based on the written information that was provided prior to the site visit.

The committee has based its final review on both the documentation provided by the CRS and the information gathered in the interviews with management and representatives of the research unit during the site visit. The site visit took place on 9-11 September 2018 in Groningen (see the schedule in Appendix 2).

Preceding the interviews, QANU has briefed the committee 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 Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies for factual corrections and comments. In close consultation with the chair and other committee members, the secretary reviewed the comments to edit the final report. The committee presented its final report to the Board of the University and to the Management of the CRS.

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

3. ASSESSMENT OF THE CENTRE FOR RELIGIOUS STUDIES

3.1. Introduction

The Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies is one of eleven faculties at the University of Groningen. The Faculty dates back to the university's foundation in 1614.

Today, the University of Groningen is the only non-confessional public funded university in the Netherlands with a Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies. The Faculty's research community is organised through the Centre for Religious Studies (CRS).

The size of CRS in terms of research FTE has grown from 11,15 FTE in 2012 to 12,25 FTE in 2017 with a dip in 2015, when it was only 8,45 FTE. In 2017, 22 scientific staff members were involved, 4 postdocs and 23 PhD candidates (not counted as research FTE). For further details, see Appendix 3.

The present research review concerns the period 2012-2017. The previous research evaluation of Theology and Religious Studies (2005-2011) was conducted nationally at seven departments in one global assessment. Although the University of Groningen adhered to a national evaluation of research institutions in the field of theology and religious studies, the Board of the University of Groningen decided to perform the 2018 research review as a stand-alone review, following the decision taken by the Netherlands Council of Theology and Religious Studies (DGO).

3.2. Profile, strategy and management of the Institute/Faculty

The CRS aims to perform research in a wide variety of disciplines in the fields of theology and religious studies. The Centre investigates religion as a cultural phenomenon and social force in various contexts in the past and present.

The CRS seeks to provide the public, the government and non-governmental organisations with academically supported knowledge and insights as well as to contribute to the University of Groningen's encompassing theme on 'Sustainable Society'.

The CRS research covers three research programmes, which coincide with the Faculty's departments:
- Jewish, Christian and Islamic Origins (CRS-1)
- Comparative Study of Religion (CRS-2)
- Christianity and History of Ideas (CRS-3).

At the international level, the University of Groningen, Uppsala University, Ghent University and the University of Göttingen joined forces in the field of theology and religious studies; this network is known as U4.The collaboration consists of PhD Winter Schools, joint PhD supervision and research conferences and workshops.

At the national level, the Faculty cooperates with most other Dutch institutions in the field of theology and religious studies through NOSTER (the Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion) and NISIS (the Netherlands Interuniversity School for Islamic Studies). In addition, mention should be made of the disciplinary organisations such as NGG (The Dutch Association for the History of Religions) and OTW (Old Testament Society in the Netherlands and Belgium). Finally, the Faculty also developed strong ties with the Protestant Theological University (PThU).

Within the University of Groningen, the Faculty cooperates with the social sciences (Sustainable Society), the humanities (the Centre for East Asian Studies Groningen, the Centre for Digital Humanities, Agricola Seminar), the natural sciences (ERC project: The Hands that Wrote the Bible) and the university medical centre (Nationaal Programma Ouderenzorg). In addition, there is a

considerable disciplinary exchange between researchers of the CRS and colleagues in fields such as history, philosophy, psychology and anthropology.

The Faculty has five thematic centres of expertise, which act as network platforms to facilitate multi- and interdisciplinary research as well as cooperation with private and public organisations:
1. The Centre for the Study of Religion and Culture in Asia
2. The Qumran Institute
3. The Centre for Religion and Heritage
4. The Centre for Religion, Conflict and Globalisation
5. The Centre for Religion, Health and Wellbeing.

The board of CRS consists of the dean of the Faculty, the heads of the three departments, the director of the Graduate School and a representative of the PhD candidates. This board manages the quality control of research, governs the admission of PhD students and advises the board of the Faculty on research matters. The board leaves the execution of the mission to the researchers of the three programmes. The board encourages a high degree of autonomy for its researchers to create a productive balance between individual research and collaborative projects within and across the programmes and within the centres of expertise.

The committee highly estimates this organizational structure of the CRS. The programmes (CRS-1, CRS-2, and CRS-3) are departments, which are intellectually coherent, in line with the justifications for the programmes provided in the self-evaluation-report. Moreover, these research programmes are presumably the focus of faculty-wide decisions regarding how to grow, expand, hire, or, in the case of retrenchment, to conserve "core" areas. They therefore relate directly to the issue of how strategy is formulated. Although this issue was addressed during the site visit, it remains somewhat unclear to the committee precisely how the programmes are factored in when determining priorities.

3.3. Research quality

CRS-1
In the programme CRS-1, the intertwined histories of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are studied. The research combines humanities methods and approaches with insights from the social sciences. Each tradition is studied from a linguistic, literary, historical and archaeological viewpoint.

The committee is of the opinion that the CRS-1 programme has a clear research profile that generates a strong coherence. Each of the three research clusters applies the same approach, i.e. the study of the reception and interpretation of written traditions, on the one hand, and the study of the historical and cultural contexts of the three interrelated monotheistic religions in Antiquity, on the other. The combination of Biblical and Islamic Studies is a very strong feature of this programme, in particular, the recent integration of the latter. However, capacity in the study of Islam is not yet at the same strength as in the other two clusters. The committee finds this sub-unit very promising, both in research and in societal valorisation, and therefore recommends enhancement of expertise in Islamic Studies.

There is no doubt that within CRS-1 the Qumran Institute continues to be a world-class leading research centre. It is internationally highly valued for its outstanding contributions to the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) and ancient Judaism. The publications by scholars belonging to this research programme have a strong impact in the field. Since its establishment, the Qumran Institute has codetermined the major developments in this study area. Moreover, the Qumran Institute is very successful in acquiring research funds (ERC Starting Grant; NWO/FWO Research Grant). Finally, this institute has been very successful in enhancing its scholarly work in a societal context through the excellent exhibition about the DSS in the Drents Museum in Assen (2013).

The other research units within CRS-1 are also very productive, with a large number of relevant publications. The strong Groningen scholarly tradition of many decades in the area of Biblical Studies has continued and been consolidated by a new generation of scholars, who have developed the above-mentioned double approach.

Apart from the strength of each of the sub-units and their individual scholars, CRS-1 seriously invests capacity and resources in joint research projects that build up coherence within CRS-1. The committee encourages the programme to continue in this line, and, more particularly, to further integrate Islamic Studies as well as to develop this field of research transversally in connection with the two other CRS programmes.

CRS-2

The programme CRS-2 concerns the study of religion, in the past and the present. This programme includes the Centre for the Study of Religion and Culture in Asia, and its members participate in the Faculty's other Centres. Moreover, it includes experts of the historical and comparative study of religion, anthropology of religion, sociology of religion, and psychology and spiritual care. The programme focuses on method and theory in the study of religion, and the study of 'Lived Religion', religion as being concretely embedded in diverse social, cultural, or political frameworks and in the experiences of everyday life.

The committee finds CRS-2 in general very strong academically, with several internationally renowned researchers. The programme produces serious and efficacious scholarship. With its orientation toward method and theory, it has responded to the challenge of studying religion 'in general' rather than in all its many manifestations. It has not been the aim of the programme to cover every religion or all aspects of religious life. Nevertheless, there has been a strong research focus on 'pluralities of knowledge' that connects this programme with CRS-3, in part through work on the secular, post-secular and secularism. It also connects with CRS-1 through shared interests in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The CRS-2 research programme has the capacity to include various religions and geo-political areas, different historical periods and disciplinary approaches. Furthermore, the two strategic themes of 'Lived Religion' and method and theory, whilst broad and inclusive, have allowed programme members considerable freedom to specialise. The challenge for this programme, therefore, is how to sustain both breadth and focus. The committee encourages the CRS-2 programme to continue to reflect on ways to integrate historical and humanistic as well as social scientific approaches in order to fulfil its objective of studying religion in all of its manifestations.

CRS-3

The CRS-3 programme Christianity and the History of Ideas was set up in 2012 with the aim of combining the Faculty's expertise in the history of Christianity with that in the philosophy of religion. The common focus lies on the continuing formative role of religion, in particular Christianity, and on the contestations around the 'secular' in Western societies. Another focus has been an increasing emphasis on cultural heritage.

The committee is of the opinion that CRS-3 has clearly defined its research aims. The committee sees an evident coherence in the programme. In one way or another, all the programme members focus on medieval or modern Christianity. Moreover, many of them have a special concern in the relationship between religion and secularism or secularity. The very different disciplinary backgrounds, including history, philosophy, theology and political science, are both a strength as well as a challenge for this programme.

The publications by members of CRS-3 have been of a very high standard. Several members of staff have a strong international profile, as reflected in membership of editorial boards and numerous invitations to give keynote lectures. Particularly encouraging is the recruitment of outstanding younger scholars in the department.

The two centres based partly or wholly in the department are both flourishing, and provide solid ground for collaborative work. The Centre for Religion, Conflict and Globalization, which grew out of CRS-3, but also includes members based in CRS-2, has already an impressive record, including academic publications, collaboration with similar centres in other countries, giving advice to national and international organisations, addressing the European Parliament and reaching a wider public through its blog 'The Religion Factor'. In this respect, the committee would advise the CRS-3 programme to reflect about integrating also relevant components of the Islamic religion in order to contribute to further developing the transversal research approach to Islamic Studies within the CRS. The Centre for Religion and Heritage has made a promising start, building on the foundations of the long-standing Institute for Christian Cultural Heritage. It has made links both within the Netherlands and internationally with a wide range of religious institutions, heritage organisations and museums.

The medieval sub-programme seems to be the least developed subject in CRS-3. Both in its geographical range and in its subject matter coverage, there are notable gaps in the study of medieval Christianity. However, given the size of the research staff, one can hardly expect that every aspect of medieval Christianity in relation to the history of ideas be covered. The title of this sub-programme could probably be misleading here since it might rather reflect the teaching programme. The committee therefore advises to rethink the description of its research programme with respect to medieval Christianity and, if it retains its current medieval subject matter focus, to consider renaming it.

The Centre for Religious Studies
The committee finds the CRS as a whole a very dynamic and productive scientific environment. The committee appreciates that the Centre recognizes that there are various ways of doing research and that both individual research and collaborative projects are encouraged and valued. The committee has the impression that not all researchers are yet aware of this flexibility. The committee would therefore recommend that CRS ensures that this is more widely understood.

There are some areas of deep engagement amidst the general scope and range of research topics. This is illustrated by the treatment of key crosscutting themes, e.g. secular studies (the secular, post-secular and secularism). The attention to theoretical issues is impressive as well.

The top five publications of the CRS have been produced by major international publishing houses. A fair number of the edited collections also seem to be innovative and ground-breaking. Many of the journal articles have been published in so-called 'A' journals (though some major journals are rated as 'B' or even 'C', so finding the most appropriate location for an article is at least as important as the journal's place in the ranking system). The quantitative output of the CRS is high. However, more important is the quality and the scholarly impact of its research, as especially demonstrated in the reviewed publications (articles in journals, books, contributions to books) as well as in the successes in acquiring research funding. CRS researchers actively contribute to the scholarly debate by being cited in publications. The reputation of a number of Groningen scholars in the area of Religious Studies is indisputable.

CRS has invested in recruiting internationally known and talented scholars, from PhD candidates to professors. The international character of the research staff is a strength. It also brings in a variety of scholarly mentalities and cultures. The fact that the research output is published in various international forum languages (English, French, and German) not only manifests the diversity of the staff, but also demonstrates CRS' broad impact.

CRS has been very successful in acquiring external research funding. With respect to the period under review, the ERC Starting Grant is the most important grant and it constitutes a considerable part of the total research budget.

In summary, the committee assesses the quality of CRS's research as very good with elements of excellence. The committee appreciates the quality of the publications and the diversity of publication channels and forms. In particular, the committee appreciates the fact that the Centre recognises the importance of monographs as academic output, as indicated in their choice of representative publications, and hopes that future assessments, which are often focused on journal articles, will be adjusted as necessary to reflect this fact. Furthermore, the quality of the grants received by the members of CRS and the range of the grants across the board are excellent.

3.4. Relevance to society

The committee was very impressed by the societal engagement, relevance and impact of the CRS. This was particularly evident in the achievements of the five CRS centres. The organisation into centres seems to be effective for this aspect of CRS's work.

The scale and range of societal contributions are noteworthy. Different types of engagement have been employed, including work with secondary schools and health care providers, ongoing professional development, briefings in the area of politics, public debates, blogs, MOOCs, reports for NGOs, museum exhibitions, and engagement with practitioners. These contributions are indisputably highly relevant, as they contribute to contemporary public concerns and engage with popular cultural interests. Many publications of CRS aim at the general public. In all three of the departments, there is an impressive array of different kinds of recognition.

When compared to other theological and religious studies faculties and departments in Europe, this aspect of the work is really impressive as it is relevant on so many different fronts. A lot of research focuses on questions of pressing importance to Dutch society or to other parts of the contemporary world. As regards the Netherlands, the work on spiritual care is especially significant; as regards the contemporary world in general, the work on religious diversity, on religion and development and on peace making is evidently addressing issues of urgent concern. Furthermore, the blog 'The Religion Factor' is doing an excellent job of presenting a wider public with well-informed perspectives on areas of public debate. The CRS has also been working hard at reaching a wider public through exhibitions, lectures, the press and television.

The committee appreciates the level of public outreach by CRS and recognizes that it is crucial to publish in Dutch to be able to achieve this high impact as indicated by the representative publications submitted in this area. The committee therefore recommends that CRS continues to publish also in Dutch with a view to disseminating the results of its scholarly work in local contexts.

The high societal impact of the activities of the CRS is obvious to the committee. The committee was impressed by the concrete achievements of these activities. To make them even more transparent, we recommend that CRS should indicate the kinds of changes which their activities have brought about, for instance, in police operations and health organisations.

The committee brings to the attention of the CRS that a very important societal impact of research is the training of students at all levels, since these students will have a direct impact on society through their professional commitment. In this respect, the committee recommends that CRS enhances the synergy between research and teaching in the study programmes of the Faculty in order to encourage students to reflect critically in line with the research programmes of the CRS.

The committee assesses the societal relevance of CRS research as excellent.

3.5. Viability

The committee has recorded that the CRS has addressed the issues raised in the previous assessment and that it has met its overall targets. The CRS has put various measures in place to ensure the delivery of the strategy for the period under review in terms of support of individuals, oversight of research programmes, target setting and monitoring. The CRS and its staff have been

able to operate in a supportive university environment that endorses and values the CRS as a Faculty. Researchers have been able to avail themselves of support (funding advice, grant-writing help, training opportunities) and promotion opportunities. The support that CRS provides for its researchers in preparing project applications is a very positive action that should be maintained.

The committee considers the CRS to be a well-run and successful unit. CRS has developed a clear vision and mission on the critical study of religion. The CRS appears to be thriving. Its faculty numbers have grown, it has renewed its existing competences while expanding into emerging subfields of religious studies, and it has sustained the quantity and quality of its scholarly output at the same time. Within this conceptual framework, well-conceived research programmes have been built up along the main research axes of the three departments. The mix of bottom-up and top-down management of the CRS assures stability, according to the committee.

The committee has established that the Centre has taken care to build capacity by addressing diversity, promotion and tenure issues in its human resources management. An illustration of this policy is the measure taken to retain an important staff contributor as an affiliated researcher after she had moved elsewhere. The number of early career researchers has grown since the last review, especially PhD students. The CRS has made efforts to internationalise the staff and to improve research opportunities. An International Fellows scheme has helped. Many staff members have engaged and collaborated internationally in projects and workshops, enhancing their own reputations whilst successfully representing Groningen. The committee recommends that CRS establishes for and publishes to faculty members clearer guidelines concerning how the CRS's publication goals (emphasis on monographs and on fewer, higher-quality journal articles) correlate with university-level Tenure and Promotion guidelines.

The five centres organisational pattern is, according to the committee, one of the most impressive aspects of CRS. During the site visit, the dean explained that centres are built around specific themes. They function as platforms for both the CRS itself and for outside communication and networking. The centres aim at organising research and societal engagement. They create a fruitful, vibrant environment for interdisciplinary cooperation and provide a forum for collaboration with scholars in other faculties as well as with stakeholders from society.

The committee is convinced that the CSR has done what it could do to make itself viable within the structure of the university. During the site visit, the committee got an impression of how the decision-making procedures work. Although it had some hesitations before the visit, the committee believes in the bottom-up approach that the CRS applies. The process is democratic and effective. The committee welcomes the fact that the CRS is aware of the levels of stress caused by high workloads and other aspects of the contemporary academic environment, and is taking measures to address this issue. The committee recommends that CRS develops and communicates a clear sabbatical policy to relieve time pressure for faculty. Where constraints in this regard may be established at the university-level, the CRS can serve as an advocate for its faculty.

The committee observed that the good, cooperative atmosphere in the Faculty is very positively enhanced by the fact that the University of Groningen preserves the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies in contrast to other general public universities, where Theology and Religious Studies became part of the Faculty of Humanities. The committee is convinced that the Groningen option to maintain its Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies as an independent faculty of the university positively adds to the quality of the research environment, but also strengthens the national and international impact of the CRS that studies theology in a non-confessional way as a branch of intellectual history applying the perspectives of humanities and social sciences. The Groningen Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies succeeds in transcending the perennial tension between theology and religious studies by developing synergy through an integral interdisciplinary approach. Moreover, the historical, and ongoing, balanced connection with Christian theology represents a strong rationale for excellent research and teaching programmes. The committee therefore recommends the university continuing to retain the Faculty as an independent faculty within the university.

With respect to the organisational structure of the CRS, the committee recommends that CRS designs an organisational chart making clear the structure of CRS, and, more particularly, showing the intertwining of the division into units, programmes and centres. As far as the latter are concerned, the committee presumes that they generate a matrix structure, which can be an important organisational component for stimulating the interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary character of the research conducted in various areas.

The Centre for Religious Studies is, according to the committee, excellently equipped for the future. The committee therefore assesses 'viability' as excellent.

3.6. PhD programme

The Graduate School of Theology and Religious Studies provides positions for different types of PhD candidates. All candidates apply via the website. Some candidates focus exclusively on completing their PhD thesis supported by a scholarship or working within a larger research project funded by NWO or ERC. Others work on their thesis part-time, alongside their responsibilities in society (as teacher, minister or otherwise). Full-time PhD positions are advertised internationally. Every year there are two PhD positions internally available for the three programmes. Staff can apply to NWO and ERC to get finances for more PhD positions in their research projects.

All PhD candidates pass through a strict admission and selection procedure. They must have a master's degree. The quality of their research plan, the feasibility of the plan and the quality of prior education are assessed. At least two supervisors coach each PhD candidate.

At the start of their trajectory, the candidates draw up a Training and Supervision Plan, which is reviewed annually. This TSP includes a selection of courses and training activities. PhD students are required to follow a few courses. Graduate School seminars take place once a month. Supervisor and student decide individually about the frequency of contact but at least once a month. After nine months (or a part-time equivalent thereof), a go/no-go interview is scheduled to assess the progress of the candidate. If progress is insufficient, the contract may be dissolved. The School has an arrangement for part-time students, who receive a bench fee of € 1250 per year to spend on travel and conferences. Furthermore, the School tries to accommodate travel costs for PhD students coming from outside of Groningen.

The School participates in the federation of graduate schools of the university. This federation provides, among other things, training and courses for PhD students and develops activities for professional development of PhD students that prepare them for careers other than those in academia. The School has some information about the careers of its graduates, but does not systematically follow those careers. According to the oral report during the site visit, several graduates progressed into academia. The committee would recommend keeping data on the career destinations of the PhD graduates.

The committee was impressed by the quality of the PhD students it met during the site visit. The PhD students reported that they were all very happy with their position as well as with the possibilities offered to follow courses and conferences, and the supervision they received. The PhD students described the Graduate School as a platform for communication, and talked positively about the contact they have with each other and with the post docs and the researchers in CRS as well. The students are actively stimulated to build their network. The committee appreciates the positive, supportive and communicative atmosphere in the graduate school.

The CRS can improve the completion rates of the PhD trajectories. The figures presented in the self-evaluation report (Appendix 3) show that only an average of 39% of the PhD students finish their trajectory within 5 years, which is a better result than the national average in the Netherlands in the area of Languages and Culture (30%). The average percentage of PhD students who do not finish at all (17%) is 8% down on the overall percentage in the Netherlands (25%). The Graduate School has taken some measures to improve the completion rate, for instance by developing

writing boot-camps within the Groningen Federation of Graduate schools in Social Sciences and Humanities with a view to building up sufficient critical mass. The committee is of the opinion that the arrangements for training and progress monitoring are impressively thorough. The committee finds the PhD programme well-developed and very well managed.

3.7. Research integrity

The self-evaluation report states that the Faculty is compliant with and contributes to the development of University policies on matters as research integrity and data management. The Faculty adheres to the code of conduct of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands and the Regulations for the Protection of Academic Integrity of the University of Groningen. The CRS discusses these regulations in the annual appraisal interviews. Since 2015, the Faculty has further developed its policy concerning academic integrity by the installing an interfaculty Ethical Review Committee between the faculties of Arts, Philosophy, and Theology and Religious Studies. The Ethical Review Committee examines whether the proposed research project complies with the ethical rules for conducting research with human participants. In March 2016, the Faculty set up a Data Management Policy Plan. This stipulates that a data management plan concerning types of data, storage of data and archiving after research, must be drawn up for all new and current research.

The committee ascertained that the University and the Faculty have a well-developed integrity policy and data management plan. The committee also verified that the PhD students are aware of the subject.

3.8. Diversity

The committee established that the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies is an international research environment in which researchers of different ages, genders and nationalities are participating. Sixty percent of the staff comes from outside the Netherlands. The Faculty has a reasonably good balance in the age division.

Recently some prominent female staff members continued their career at other universities, which is one of the reasons why the gender balance in the staff is now below the national average. The committee saw an obvious predominance of male persons in the top positions at the Faculty. It recommends that CRS takes all appropriate measures to restore the gender balance. The measures that according to the self-evaluation report have already been taken appear to be a good start. The committee recommends CRS to remain alert to gender diversity.

3.9. Conclusions

The committee was very pleased and honoured by the invitation of the University Board to visit and assess the Centre for Religious Studies. The CRS has submitted a well thought-out self-evaluation report (SER) that contains detailed information on the research output, including internal quality assessment, benchmarking and societal impact, as well as on the organization of the Centre (units, programmes and centres) and its management. The CRS has meticulously followed up on the conclusions of the previous assessment regarding the period 2005-2011 by taking specific actions. During the site visit, the committee met with a very ambitious but friendly, enthusiastic and open community. The committee finds the CRS as a whole a very dynamic and productive scientific environment. The CRS has several strong points among which are the international diversity of the research staff, the quality of the publications and the diversity of publications channels and forms, the five CRS centres and their success in acquiring external research funding. The committee assesses the quality of the research of the Centre for Religious Studies as very good with elements of excellence.

The committee was very impressed by the societal engagement, relevance and impact of the CRS. This was particularly evident in the account of the five CRS centres. When compared to other

faculties in Europe, this societal relevance of the work by CRS is really impressive. The committee assesses the societal relevance as excellent.

The committee is convinced that during the period under review the CSR has done what it could do to make the centre viable within the structure of the university. The CRS is very well equipped for the future. Staff and PhDs all seem happy with their working environment. The CRS has an adequate research integrity policy and a good PhD training programme.

3.10. Overview of the quantitative assessment of the research unit

After having assessed the CRS on the three dimensions of research quality, relevance to society and viability, and comparing these to the developments and standards in the field of Religious Studies, the committee comes to the following quantitative assessments:

Research quality:	very good
Relevance to society:	excellent
Viability:	excellent

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The committee encourages the CRS-1 programme Judaism, Christianity and Islam to continue investing in joint projects, and, more particularly, to further strengthen and integrate Islamic Studies as well as to develop this field of research transversally in connection with the two other CRS programmes.

4.2 The committee encourages the CRS-2 programme Comparative Study of Religion to continue to reflect on ways to integrate historical and humanistic as well as social scientific approaches in order to fulfil its objective of studying religion in all of its manifestations.

4.3 The committee advises the CRS-3 programme Christianity and History of Ideas to rethink the description of the research programme with respect to the medieval Christianity, and, if it retains its current medieval subject-matter focus, to consider renaming it. The committee would advise the CRS-3 programme to reflect about integrating also relevant components of the Islamic religion in order to contribute to further developing the transversal research approach to Islamic Studies within the CRS.

4.4 The committee recommends that CRS makes all researchers involved in its programmes aware of the policy that various ways of doing research – both individual and collaborative – are encouraged and valued.

4.5 In order to maintain the high societal impact of the work, the committee recommends the CRS to keep on publishing in Dutch, besides the scholarly publications in international forum languages.

4.6 The committee recommends designing an organisational chart of the CRS to make clear the structure of the Centre, and, more especially, the role of the departments in building the strategy of CRS.

4.7 The committee recommends that the CRS collects data on the career destinations of the PhD graduates.

4.8 The committee recommends taking all appropriate measures to restore the gender balance in the Faculty. According to the self-evaluation report, the measures that the CRS has already taken are a good start. The committee advises CRS to keep gender diversity in mind.

4.9 The committee recommends that CRS monitors the integration of teaching and research in study programmes at various levels, since training students in research skills is an important factor for generating societal impact through research.

4.10 The committee recommends that CRS develops and communicates a clear sabbatical policy to relieve time pressure for faculty. Where constraints in this regard may be established at the university-level, the CRS can serve as an advocate for its faculty.

4.11 The committee recommends that CRS establishes for and publishes to faculty members clearer guidelines how the CRS's publication goals (emphasis on monographs and on fewer, higher-quality journal articles) correlate with university-level Tenure and Promotion guidelines.

4.12 The committee recommends maintaining the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies as an independent faculty within the university.

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

Programme site visit

Site visit: 9-12 September 2018
Location: Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, Oude Boteringestraat 38

Day / Time	Event	Persons	Location
Sunday, September 9			
17.00h (pick-up at hotel)	Tour of the Faculty, Housing and Equipment; and Drinks	PRC and secretary, Faculty Board, CRS Board, Funding officer, Research policy officer	Faculty building
18.00h	Dinner	PRC and secretary, Faculty Board, CRS Board, Funding officer, Research policy officer (Executive Board member of the University?)	
Monday September 10			
9.00 – 12.00h	Private kick-off meeting PRC and secretary		
12.00 – 13.00h	Lunch	PRC and secretary	
13.00 – 13.45h	Interview	Faculty Board: Prof.dr. Mladen Popović (Dean) Dr. Sipco Vellenga (Vice-Dean and Director of Education) Mr. Philip Broeksma (Managing Director)	
14.00 – 14.45h	Interview	Board of the CRS: Prof. dr. Mladen Popović (Director of Research) Prof. dr. Jacques van Ruiten Prof. dr. Todd Weir Dr. Peter Berger Dr. Kim Knibbe	
15.00 – 15.45h	Interview	Research Programme CRS-1: Prof. dr. Jacques van Ruiten (Chair) Prof. dr. Geurt-Henk van Kooten Prof. dr. Steve Mason	
16.00 – 16.45h	Interview	Research Programme CRS-2: Dr. Peter Berger (Chair) Prof. dr. Kocku von Stuckrad Prof. dr. Marjo Buitelaar Dr. Joram Tarusarira	
18.00h	Dinner	PRC and secretary	
20.00 – 22.00h	Closed meeting PRC and secretary		
Tuesday September 11			
9.00 – 9.45h	Interview	Research programme CRS-3: Prof. dr. Todd Weir (Chair) Prof. dr. Christoph Jedan Dr. Mathilde van Dijk	
10.00 – 10.45h	Interview	PhD students and Postdocs: Jason Zurawski, PhD (postdoc) Dr. Brenda Bartelink (postdoc) Ayhan Aksu, MPhil (PhD candidate) Christoph Grüll, MA (PhD candidate) Fardo Eringa, MA (PhD candidate) Gemma Hayes, MA (PhD candidate)	
11.00 – 11.45 h	Interview	Graduate School: Dr. Kim Knibbe (Director)	

		Philip Broeksma (Coordinator)	
12.00 – 13.00h	Lunch	PRC and secretary	
13.00 – 16.00h	Private final meeting	PRC and secretary	
16.15 – 17.00h	Presentation of provisional findings	Faculty Board, CRS Board, Executive Board of the University, Faculty's academic staff, PhD students and support staff, member of the Executive Board of the University	
17.00h	Drinks	PRC and secretary, Faculty Board, CRS Board, Faculty's academic staff, PhD students and support staff, member of the Executive Board of the University	Faculty hall
18.30h	Closing dinner	PRC and secretary, Faculty Board, CRS Board, Faculty's academic staff, PhD students and support staff, member of the Executive Board of the University	
Wednesday September 12			
Departure PRC and secretary			

APPENDIX 3: QUANTITATIVE DATA

Financial resources

	2012		***2013***		***2014***		***2015***		***2016***		***2017***	
Research Unit												
Funding	FTE	%	FTE	%	FTE	%	FTE	%	FTE	%	FTE	%
Direct funding (1)	13,7	69,2	16,0	79,6	18,1	85,8	14,8	75,9	15,6	64,4	12,2	57,8
Research grants (2)	5,0	25,3	4,1	20,4	1,0	4,7	2,8	14,3	5,0	20,7	4,6	21,7
Contract research (3)	1,1	5,6		0,0	2,0	9,5	1,9	9,7	3,6	14,9	4,3	20,4
Other (4)												
Total funding	19,8	100	20,1	100	21,1	100	19,5	100	24,2	100	21,1	100
Expenditure:	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%
Personnel costs	1.386.126	82,3	1.524.887	83,0	1.570.132	84,3	1.435.896	82,9	1.759.355	80,5	1.606.374	76,6
Other costs	298.381	17,7	313.279	17,0	293.308	15,7	295.610	17,1	425.918	19,5	491.437	23,4
Total expenditure	1.684.507	100	1.838.165	100	1.863.440	100	1.731.506	100	2.185.274	100	2.097.811	100

Note 1: Direct funding ("basisfinanciering" / lump-sum budget)
Note 2: Research grants obtained in national scientific competition (e.g. grants from NWO and the KNAW)
Note 3: Research contracts for specific research projects obtained from external organisations, such as industry, government ministries, European organisations, and charitable organisations
Note 4: Funds that do not fit into the other categories

Staff overview

	2012		**2013**		**2014**		**2015**		**2016**		**2017**	
Research unit	**#**	**FTE**	**#**	**FTE**	**#**	**FTE**	**#**	**FTE**	**#**	**FTE**	**#**	**FTE**
Scientific staff (1)	22	8,15	22	8,00	20	7,90	19	7,45	22	8,00	22	8,50
Post-docs (2)	3	3,00	3	2,60	2	2,00	1	1	7	6,05	4	3,75
PhD candidates (3)[1]	17		18		19		18		21		23	
Total research staff[2]	**42**	**11,15**	**43**	**10,60**	**41**	**9,90**	**38**	**8,45**	**50**	**14,05**	**49**	**12,25**
Support staff[3]												
Visiting fellows	0		0		6		4		8		2	
Total staff	0		0		6		4		8		2	

Note 1: Comparable with WOPI categories HGL, UHD and UD; tenured and non-tenured staff (based on year of appointment)
Note 2: Comparable with WOPI category Onderzoeker (attributed to the year in which most of the appointment took place)
Note 3: Standard PhD (employed) and Contract PhDs (externally or internally funded but not employed; based on the starting year of a four-year PhD programme)
Note 4: Visiting fellow stay for a minimum of one month

[1] These numbers refer only to the PhD candidates who work on their thesis between 0.8–1.0 FTE. In the same years, we hosted approximately 43 part-time PhD candidates in varying stages of their project.
[2] The FTE totals do not include PhD candidates.
[3] There is no support staff that contributes directly to research output. However, support staff do assist research staff, as these are not taken into
account, because support serves research as well as education.

Research output

SEP output type	Publication category	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Refereed journal article	Scientific	13	24	24	12	14	34
Refereed comment to the journal editor	Scientific					1	
Refereed conference paper	Scientific						1
Non-refereed journal article	Scientific						2
Non-refereed comment to the journal editor	Scientific		1			2	1
Book	Scientific	6	2	3	1	5	2
Book chapter	Scientific	20	30	30	21	41	50
Entry for encyclopedia/dictionary	Scientific	5	3	9	8	6	9
Online publication	Scientific						1
Edited volume	Scientific	1	6	3	3	7	11
Special issue journal editing	Scientific	1	2	1	2	3	1
PhD thesis	Scientific		2	4	2	2	3
Book review	Scientific	6	6	6	3	7	19
Database	Scientific	1	1	1	1	1	1
Journal article	Professional	6	2	3	4	5	2
Book chapter	Professional	3	3	1	2	8	
Book	Professional	1	1			1	
Edited volume	Professional		1				
Report	Professional	1	1	1	2	1	11
Book review	Professional	2	4	1	1		
Online publication	Professional		1	1	1		
Journal article	Popular	9	20	17	6	8	2
Book chapter	Popular	4	15	2	7	2	3
Book	Popular		1			1	
Edited volume	Popular	1	1				
Book review	Popular			1			
Web blog/newspaper	Popular	4	25	12	10	10	3
Inaugural speech	Popular		3				2
		84	155	120	86	125	158
							728