

Reflections on Research, towards a Renewed Strategy

Introduction

These reflections contain the response of both boards to the report of the Evaluation Committee and their assessment of the research of the TU Apeldoorn and TU Kampen in the period 2012-2017. We recognize the general picture given in this rich report and we are glad to notice several improvements, higher scores and a better overall performance of our research programs, compared to the previous period (2006-2011). The quality and quantity of research output has increased, whereas at the same time valorization and the production of publications for a wider public increased as well. BEST and EMRT scored in nearly every category (research quality, relevance to society, viability) between good and very good (2/3). As expected the viability (not the output as such) of the RTSE-program was vulnerable and, therefore, the boards took their measures already.

We agree with the Committee that TU Apeldoorn and TU Kampen do have combined potential in several areas. The Committee expresses concerns about the effect of the failed merger in 2017 on the future collaboration between the two institutions, given the small size of the programs. However, the Committee observes also that both institutions do have a broader network than suggested and should collaborate more intensely on program-level with other institutions and researchers, also internationally. That will indeed be the strategy for the years to come. We recognize long-standing problems with regard to program-leadership and decision-making that need to be resolved. Research strategy and stronger viability require the ability to implement research policies on institutional level in a uniform way and to make sharper choices by the respective boards.

Reorganizing the research groups

The TU Kampen restructured its research capacity in RTSE – in fact the main contribution to this program - and started with two institutes: Church and Mission in the West (CCMW) and the Neocalvinist Research Institute (NRI). Both institutions reflect profiled research themes of TU Kampen, that could be expressed more profoundly now. Both institutions were equipped with strong leadership, budget and support in order to perform on a high level. By this measures lack of coherence and focus will expectedly be solved. Since EMRT could not be continued in the existing form, church history research will follow separate routes. In Kampen the Centre for Dutch Reformation Studies is integrated in NRI. The promising dialogue between historical, philosophical approaches and theological interests will be stimulated, as the Committee recommended. The TU Apeldoorn has expanded its research groups Practical Theology and Church History and these groups are in the process of setting up an innovative research program. The BEST-program will continue to be the most comprehensive research program of TU Apeldoorn and TU Kampen.

Issues to be addressed

The general observations and recommendations of the Committee concentrate on the following issues that will be (and is) addressed by the board. The response of the board is in italic.

1. Stronger research leadership

The Committee observes several weaknesses in the leadership-structure of every program. This includes problems with obtaining external research resources and funds, inability to attract qualified staff and issues of integration and steering capacities. We recognize these problems that we also noticed six years ago, although improvements were achieved.

The board in Kampen has strengthened the position of the leader of the program. The directors of CCMW and NRI are program-leaders and will direct the quality and quantity of the program's output. The leadership of the joint program of BEST is also strengthened. The three program-leaders and the rector have regular meetings about common research policy, discussing projects and targets. TU Apeldoorn has redefined the procedure for acceptance and guidance of PhD-projects in order to have a more effective monitoring as well as steering of research.

2. Enlarging external funding

The Committee observes a lack of external funding and wants to see higher ambitions in this area. This is true for BEST, EMRT and RTSE. The Committee has the opinion that the research capacity can grow by NWO-funding and other financial support ('tweede en derde geldstroom') and suggests that the university becomes less dependent in this respect of funding by the church.

The boards agree with this observation and the TU Kampen started already to train all staff-members that are involved in research-projects to become more able to write proposals and attract external resources. Financial targets will be discussed with the program-leaders and incentives are already implemented (with regard to PhD-funding for example).

3. Higher quality of output

The Committee wonders whether more time can be spend for publication in peer-reviewed journals, given the amount of professional publications and church-related output (the number of scientific publications is 20% of the total amount). More publications should be in English and, given the fact that some outstanding researchers publish more than others, improvement of performance and number of peer-reviewed publications is desirable.

The boards agree that in the output-production of the TU the amount of peer-reviewed articles (and book-chapters) should shift to a relative higher proportion. The research-strategy is aiming at such a shift in percentage which can be higher than 20%. At the same time, our role as theological universities, addressing Christians in church and society implies valorization, making research accessible for others. We will continue to do that. However, in this focus on valorization we aim to be less general and more precise, working with partners, growing in societal relevance.

4. A better context for PhD-students

The Committee expresses concerns about the coaching of PhD's in Apeldoorn and Kampen. Both universities lack a graduate school and training on program-level is not well-developed. Some students don't attend NOSTER. The general level of supervision and training can be improved. Therefore the Committee recommends the creation of a doctoral school that spans the two institutions.

The boards has taken steps to improve the coaching of PhD's substantially and wants to implement a research track and graduate school, together with other partners. The three (protestant) theological universities can work together and improve the research environment for their PhD's. Membership of NOSTER is obligatory for PhD-students and participation is stimulated.

Renewed strategy

A renewed research strategy will be implemented in the years to come. It will serve the university to develop its profile on a high level, dedicated to reformed theology and interdisciplinary academic

research, facing the challenges of churches and Christians in today's society. In this strategy high quality standards of research and peer-reviewed publications are combined with valorization on high levels with partners and target-groups.

The Committee remarks that the TU (this counts for Kampen and Apeldoorn) are not embedded in a comprehensive university and has to overcome theological 'isolation'. The interaction with other disciplines and inter- and multidisciplinary work has to be developed and both universities want to create this interaction in networks and at home. This strategy of broadening academic perspectives is not only a response to the analysis of this and former Committees, but belongs to the approach and fabric of the theological discipline as we see it.

In the next period we hope to make this restructuring of our research capacity and this renewed strategy fruitful for a stronger scientific performance of the universities of Apeldoorn and of Kampen.

Apeldoorn/Kampen, 2 July 2019