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Report

Date

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Subject

Development dialogue Research Master Theology and Religious Studies

1. Future directions for the programme

The research master's programme in Amsterdam is relatively small in terms of students and affiliated faculty. This makes it relatively difficult to offer distinct specializations. How can the research master be positioned in such a way as to create a sustainable future for the programme? What would be the advantages of setting up exchange arrangements with partner universities, with a similar yet complementary profile?

The panel expresses appreciation for the international profile of the research master, which attracts students from all over the world. It would therefore advise against a merger with the research master History if this would involve a change to Dutch as its main language. Collaborating with departments or faculties elsewhere would be a more suitable alternative in the opinion of the panel members, considering the important place of interdisciplinarity in the research master and its connection to other fields such as sociology for instance. A second issue is the replacement of the staff members who will be retiring in the coming years. The panel advises to approach the hiring of replacements strategically. The panel is pleased to hear the capacity group is drafting a replacement plan and has hired new staff members recently.

2. Interdisciplinary Research and Methodology

Could we take further advantage of the inter- and transdisciplinary nature of our programme? How could we improve the way this is addressed in our courses and the thesis project, for instance?

The panel was very impressed by the quality of the research master theses. It nevertheless advises the programme management to reconsider the central place of methodology in the programme so as to introduce students to a wide variety of approaches, considering not all of them will advance to a PhD position. Teaching methodology is a challenge however, as the programme management acknowledges, not the least because of the different backgrounds and research skills of the students, which is why this is mainly done in electives and tutorials. Although this approach certainly has its advantages, it might also be considered to offer methodological training in a more systematic fashion and to train students in the more practical aspects of conducting research. The panel suggests that courses could be offered on a faculty level, in order not to overburden the limited number of staff members. It also offers the suggestion that some students might benefit more from a focus on historical and literary skills, so perhaps they can be offered a choice for training in these approaches, within the available tutorial slots.

3. Career perspectives

Research master programmes were traditionally primarily aimed at training students to become PhD students. With research funding for PhD positions generally in decline and students wishing to pursue research careers elsewhere, what additional improvements could be made in the programme to prepare students better for their research careers?

The panel signals that obtaining a PhD position was the main goal of practically all students and alumni that were interviewed. These (former) students however do feel prepared for a career outside of academia, because they consider their skills to be transferrable. Considering the importance of developing such transferrable skills, the panel suggests that students could be encouraged to develop a broader skill set, for example by drawing on a wider range of methods in the courses or by diversifying the tutorials.