

RESEARCH ASSESSMENT

ERASMUS SCHOOL OF HISTORY, CULTURE AND
COMMUNICATION

**ERASMUS RESEARCH CENTRE FOR MEDIA,
COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE**

QANU
Catharijnesingel 56
PO Box 8035
3503 RA Utrecht
The Netherlands

Phone: +31 (0) 30 230 3100
E-mail: support@qanu.nl
Internet: www.qanu.nl

Project number: Q0779

© 2020 QANU

Text and numerical material from this publication may be reproduced in print, by photocopying or by any other means with the permission of QANU if the source is mentioned.



CONTENTS

REPORT ON THE RESEARCH REVIEW OF THE ERASMUS RESEARCH CENTRE FOR MEDIA, COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE OF THE ERASMUS SCHOOL OF HISTORY, CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION..... 5

1. FOREWORD BY COMMITTEE CHAIR 5

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

3. GENERAL CHAPTER ESHCC 8

4. ASSESSMENT OF THE ERASMUS RESEARCH CENTRE FOR MEDIA, COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE 13

5. RECOMMENDATIONS..... 19

APPENDICES 21

APPENDIX 1: THE SEP CRITERIA AND CATEGORIES 23

APPENDIX 2: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT 24

APPENDIX 3: QUANTITATIVE DATA..... 25

This report was finalised on 29 June 2020

REPORT ON THE RESEARCH REVIEW OF THE ERASMUS RESEARCH CENTRE FOR MEDIA, COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE OF THE ERASMUS SCHOOL OF HISTORY, CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

1. FOREWORD BY COMMITTEE CHAIR

The scholarly endeavor, at its core, is a collective one. Despite the myth of the individual scholar working in isolation to advance knowledge, the reality is that most scholars benefit from the insights of their predecessors, peers, and students when making discoveries both small and large. This collective nature is also evident in the academic units of higher education—such as departments, institutes, and schools. Therein, groups of scholars come together to create what each alone could not—including expansive programs of study that benefit scholars and students alike, as well as the broader community.

The collective nature of scholarship is especially manifest in the review process encountered by both individual scholars and academic units. While reviews can vary in terms of their quality, the review process *ideally* provides a constructive assessment of scholarly strengths and weaknesses, as well as helpful advice on how to leverage those strengths and correct those weaknesses.

This document grows out of a particular review process, one that included the site visit of two committees in March 2020. Our charge was to offer a research assessment of the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (ESHCC). One committee focused on History @ Erasmus and the other focused on the Erasmus Centre for Media, Communication and Culture—the two institutes that comprise ESHCC. As chair of the two committees, I can confirm that all the committee members were impressively committed to the ideals of what a review should be. Indeed, it was my honor to work with them.

Our review efforts were greatly aided by a number of people. First, my colleagues and I thank the leadership of both institutes for the wealth of information that they provided prior to our site visit. The cogent detail of their reports provided much needed context and evidence for our review. We also thank those professors, students, and administrators who met with us during the site visit. The comments they shared helped us fine-tune our review in important ways. We also thank the staff at ESHCC for the hospitality and pleasant environment they provided on and off campus. Finally, we especially thank Anna Sparreboom and Anke van Wier for their tremendous guidance and support. They truly played vital roles in the work of the two committees. This review process was thus a collective one that extended well beyond the committees themselves.

In the pages that follow, we not only offer a research assessment, we also seek to situate the institute in terms of its present situation. We hope that the leadership and professors of ESHCC will find this assessment helpful as they chart ways forward. We also hope that the leadership of Erasmus University Rotterdam will find this assessment informative as they contemplate current and future resources allocated to the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication.

Timothy J. Dowd, PhD
Professor and Chair of Sociology, Emory

2. THE REVIEW COMMITTEE AND THE PROCEDURES

2.1. Scope of the review

The review committee has been asked to perform a review of research at the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication. This review includes the Erasmus Research Centre for Media, Communication and Culture (ERMeCC).

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. As requested in the Terms of Reference, the qualitative review of the PhD training programme, research integrity policy and diversity was performed at the level of the Erasmus School of History Communication and Culture (chapter 3). Strategies and targets and Governance and leadership were also evaluated on School-level.

2.2. Composition of the committee

The composition of the assessment committee was as follows:

Chair: Prof. Timothy Dowd, Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology, Emory University.

Subcommittee Erasmus Research Centre for Media, Communication and Culture (ERMeCC):

- Prof. Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, Professor and Director of Research and Development at the School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University;
- Prof. Andre Jansson, Professor in Media and Communication Studies, Karlstad University;
- Prof. Lee Harrington, Professor of Sociology and Social Justice Studies, Miami University;
- Prof. Kim Oosterlinck, Vice-Rector and Professor of Finance, Université Libre de Bruxelles.

Subcommittee History @ Erasmus:

- Prof. Teresa da Silva Lopes, Professor of International Business and Business History, University of York;
- Prof. Em. Jay Winter, Professor Emeritus of History, Yale University;
- Prof. Em. Robin Cohen, Professor Emeritus of Developmental Studies, University of Oxford.

The committee was supported by Dr. Anna Sparreboom and Anke van Wier MSc, who acted as secretaries 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 ERMeCC at the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication. 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 five key publications per unit.

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 the School 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 5-6 March 2020 in Rotterdam (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 material to draft a first version of the review report.

The draft report by committee and secretary was presented to the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication 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. GENERAL CHAPTER ESHCC

The Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (ESHCC) houses three departments: History, Arts and Culture Studies, and Media and Communication. Its research is organised into two research communities: History @ Erasmus and the Erasmus Research Centre for Media Communication and Culture (ERMeCC), which was founded in 2008.

3.1. Strategies and targets

ESHCC has formulated eight strategic targets for 2012-2018:

1. Produce high-quality research;
2. Enhance scientific impact through academic publications;
3. Increase acquisition of external funding;
4. Increase participation in European projects;
5. Invest in realising societal impact;
6. Improve PhD success rates;
7. Increase the diversity of the personnel;
8. Implement policies on research ethics.

ERMeCC and History @ Erasmus added targets to them that are specific, measurable and time-bound, for example: 'by 2018 at least 25% of the academic staff has a non-Dutch nationality'. Since the targets are to a large extent derived from the SEP criteria, the strategies to meet targets 1-5 will be discussed in the respective reports of both units in section 4.1. (strategies and targets) and their results in 4.3. (research quality), 4.4. (societal relevance) and 4.5. (viability). The strategic targets 6-8 will be discussed on the School level in sections 3.3.-3.5. below.

3.2. Governance and leadership of ESHCC

The committee characterises ESHCC as a School with a flat hierarchical structure. The research of the School is run by a director of research (0.2 fte) and the heads of the three departments. The dean, currently on an *ad interim* basis, is ultimately responsible for the School's research.

ESHCC went through a turbulent period in 2019 because of an intended merger with the faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences. In the end the merger did not take place, and it was decided that the School will remain independent for the next 10 years at least. The committee was impressed by the collegial and supportive atmosphere it encountered in the School, despite the difficult period it had been through. Its researchers are highly motivated, but a number of them suffer from heavy workload and pressure. The committee concluded that at this point, now that the situation is stable again, there is momentum to set out a clear future direction for the School.

ESHCC combines research in the humanities and social sciences. In doing so, it clearly distinguishes itself from other humanities or social sciences faculties in the Netherlands. The School's research profile is international and interdisciplinary and focused on making a societal impact. During the site visit, the committee understood that the School has grown organically, and it noticed that on the social level ESHCC is indeed an integrated environment. Although such integration is clearly evident from conversations with staff from both units, the partnership between History @ Erasmus and ERMeCC is not articulated in the self-evaluation reports the committee received. They do not mention a shared vision or communal strategy for the future or, for example, a SWOT analysis of the School as a whole. The committee believes that ESHCC would benefit from developing and implementing a shared strategic plan which is based on the School's distinctive research profile and the synergy between the two research centres. Such a strategy could strengthen the School's position, both within the university, nationally and internationally. It could, for instance, help ESHCC to attract international research staff.

As noted, the School has grown organically and is managed in an informal way. This seems to have had positive effects in terms of collegiality, which the committee sees as a great accomplishment of

the School's leadership. The results achieved in the period under review demonstrate that the strategies and actions employed by the School's management have been successful. However, the committee observed that the strategies and actions are not explicitly communicated. As ESHCC is still growing, the committee believes that there will be more need for a more explicit and more formalized policy and management. The School could, for instance, benefit from a comprehensive framework for promotion decisions and clear-cut publication strategies, which take into account the balance between academic publications and those aimed at society at large. A tool to monitor output could help the School to steer the direction of its productivity and provide the basis for a discussion about the quality versus the quantity of publications. Without a clear-cut publication strategy, it is likely that quantity will become the norm to gauge productivity.

3.3. PhD programme

The committee also assessed the ESHCC PhD programme, including its content and structure, as well as the supervision and career guidance of PhD candidates, and the duration and success rates of PhD projects.

Within ESHCC there are three types of PhD candidates. First, the 'regular' PhD candidates have a four-year contract with 0.8 FTE research time and a teaching load of 0.2 FTE. Second, there are PhD lecturer candidates, with 0.6 FTE for research and a teaching load of 0.4 FTE. At ERMeCC there are also two junior lecturers who combine their PhD with teaching in a six-year trajectory (0.5 FTE teaching and 0.5 FTE research). The final group are the external PhD candidates, who are not employed by the School. They are also invited to participate in the facilities and schooling opportunities of the ESHCC. The committee is positive about the selection and admission of candidates to the PhD programme, ascertaining that it succeeds in selecting candidates with great potential for doctoral research. The process uses international advertising and a competitive application process.

The committee understood that the candidates' experiences of the program are generally positive, as evidenced by both PhD club survey results and the interview during the site visit. The candidates described a non-hierarchical structure, being treated as colleagues, and an intellectually engaging work environment. They have a strong and unified understanding of the School's unique identity or brand, and they experience the School as open-minded and supportive toward their research initiatives, and appreciate faculty support for their overall well-being. ERMeCC has an active student-led PhD club, which is commendable in terms of community-building, peer-mentoring and sharing of best practices.

PhD candidates are expected to spend between 10-20 (for candidates with a research master's degree) and 20-30 EC (for those with other types of degrees) on educational programmes to develop their skills as researchers. These programmes are aimed at training and skills in areas such as data management, scientific integrity, and methodology. Candidates are encouraged to attend educational programmes relevant to their research topics and interests, to help them further develop their interdisciplinary skills as researchers and also support them with their teaching.

Internal PhD candidates are required to join a national research school. In the period under review, ESHCC PhD candidates participated in the Research School for Media Studies (RMeS), the Netherlands School for Communication Research (NESCoR), the Huizinga Research Institute and Graduate School of Cultural History, N.W. Posthumus Institute Research School for Economic and Social History and the Interuniversity School for Islamic Studies (NISIS).

Together with the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Faculty of Philosophy and the International Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, ESHCC also participates in the Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities. The Graduate School typically offers courses that strengthen multidisciplinary thinking and collaboration, which the committee approves of. Its courses are regarded as complementary to those of the national research schools. The committee also praises this endeavour as it ensures that the training of PhD candidates contributes to the School's strategic



goal to foster transdisciplinary research. All internal PhD candidates receive an individual budget to attend these courses and master classes. The committee was glad to hear that candidates experience considerable flexibility and autonomy to pursue their research and teaching interests.

Since 2015 each candidate has had two supervisors, one being a daily supervisor, with whom the candidate has bi-weekly supervision meetings. The regular support given by supervisors is sufficient in the committee's eyes. The commitment of the staff and the effectiveness of their supervision are emphasised by both PhD candidates and staff as being among the strengths of the School. The committee also commends the mentoring system in place for PhD candidates, which extends to the level of preparation for the defence of the thesis. The effectiveness of the supervision is also illustrated, in its opinion, by the high-quality dissertations produced by the candidates. After speaking with the PhD candidates from History @ Erasmus, the panel observed that supervision was in one specific case limited when the main supervisor was absent for a long period. It recommends that ESHCC should take care of this kind of incidental situations.

Every PhD candidate at ESHCC is examined by a progression panel which takes place 1.5 years after his/her enrolment. This panel provides the necessary approval for the candidates to continue their PhD studies. In addition, every candidate submits an annual progress report to the standing committee for research performance of the ESHCC. Finally, the School has a mechanism in place to "counsel out" under-performing candidates early in their graduate careers. The committee concluded that these measures have a positive effect on the success rates of PhD trajectories. It observed a low rate of dropouts: only three candidates out of 36 in the period under review. The 2012-2015 midterm assessment identified meaningful workload challenges for candidates, which the School has addressed via a variety of mechanisms including teaching development opportunities, a bonus for timely completion, and the possibility of teaching a single course multiple times. Exempting the candidate from teaching in the first and last semester of their contract period is also a measure the committee endorses.

The committee expressed concern about the long completion times of many candidates. At History @ Erasmus no PhD was finished within the four-year timeframe in the period under review, with four candidates finishing within five years and eight candidates within six years. At ERMeCC 11% of the regular candidates, and 13% of the PhD lecturers finished within their contract period. The School's management indicated that these numbers have led them to reconsider the PhD lecturer positions, as the combination of teaching and research in these positions has often been too demanding for the candidates. The committee observed that the delays are found in both groups of internal graduate candidates, those studying for PhDs in the department and those working on teaching contracts. While it regards the combination of teaching and research as a positive initiative to help the candidates find jobs, enhance their future careers, and provide them with an additional source of income while studying, this strategy has some major disadvantages. In particular, a substantial teaching burden leaves less time for research and writing and helps account for subsequent delays in the completion of dissertations. It therefore supports the unit management's decision to offer these positions with caution. Although the School has mechanisms in place to enable meeting targets for the future, the committee believes timely completion rates remain an area of concern.

The committee is positive about the job market guidance for PhD candidates offered by the School. Candidates are given opportunities to develop their skills at multiple levels, including participation in the organization of conferences and events. They also attend different formal and informal meetings organised by ESHCC's research communities, there is funding support to attend conferences, and candidates can receive guidance with regard to publishing their work. Candidates clearly feel supported in these efforts. There are procedures in place which allow them to seek private counselling as needed, which is valuable in the committee's eyes. The majority of PhD graduates continue their careers in academia/higher education.

In general, the committee confirmed that the ESHCC PhD programme provides high-quality training and supervision to candidates, equipping them with different types of skills and helping them to

produce high-quality dissertations and pursue different career paths, including employment outside university settings. The committee has two further suggestions for the improvement of the duration and completion rates. First, it encourages the programme to intensify the use of progression panels for PhD candidates, preferably annually. These panels could also provide advice on the amount of teaching the student should not exceed in order to be able to complete his/her PhD within 4-5 years. Secondly, it recommends the establishment of a mechanism to ensure that when the first supervisor is unable to supervise, the second supervisor or another member of staff with suitable expertise is able to immediately step in as an interim first supervisor.

3.4. Research integrity

ESHCC safeguards research integrity through its Ethics Review Board and has a designated scientific integrity officer. The Ethics Review Board oversees the ESHCC's compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation and the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. It reviews proposals with regard to ethics and data management associated with research projects. ERMCC has submitted a total of 39 proposals to the Board since its inception in 2015. History @ Erasmus has submitted relatively few proposals to the Board, due to the fact that the kind of historical research conducted in this department very rarely raises the ethical issues found in other disciplines. However, the School has indicated that even for historical research, ethical review has become more common, with historians also carefully considering humans and protecting private information, which the committee commends.

The committee states that the research culture in place at ESHCC embraces concerns with scientific research integrity at all levels of seniority of academics, ranging from full professors to PhD candidates. There are facilities such as training programmes for PhD candidates and 'dilemma games' which foster debate about scientific integrity and provide knowledge transfer and learning within the unit.

Researchers submitting a project for ethics review are expected to draft a data management plan and receive advice on it from the Erasmus Data Service Center. After that, the second version of the plan is reviewed by the Ethics Review Board according to Erasmus University standards for long-term data storage. The committee is positive about the mechanisms in place, which are common across the university and facilitate the storage of research results and safe access on campus and remotely. This has also facilitated collaboration at the university level and externally at the national and international levels.

In general, the committee concludes that the School has a policy and procedures in place to ensure that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards. The policies and procedures in place reflect the clear commitment of the School to uphold the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research and data management.

3.5. Diversity

ESHCC set up diversity policies first in 2012 and subsequently in 2017 with the aim of stimulating more awareness about diversity and inclusion. Another goal of these policies was to monitor gender ratios at the different levels of seniority of staff - with a particular emphasis on full professors and associate professors. However, despite these efforts, the gender ratios and diversity of the research staff remain unbalanced to the present day: with only 19% female professors, women are clearly underrepresented. Although the School's room for manoeuvre in this respect largely depends on university-wide policy and measures, the committee encourages ESHCC to reflect on the causes of this imbalance and to set more ambitious targets, as the lack of gender diversity is likely to have an effect on the research culture.

There have also been policies put in place with the aim of internationalizing the body of academic staff. In their recruitment of new staff, the departments of Arts and Culture and Media and Communication have actively targeted international candidates. On this front the targets seem to have been more easily achieved, in particular with regard to PhD candidates and postdocs, which the



committee commends. It was surprised, though, that there was no mention of ethnic diversity and encourages the School to consider this.

The committee noted that History @ Erasmus is aware of the need to take into account diversity and the impact that it has on its research culture. However, despite the efforts made towards creating equal opportunities for all staff and achieving a better gender balance, there is still an overrepresentation of male scholars, in particular at senior levels. It is essential to take further steps in future appointments to achieve a better gender balance.

4. ASSESSMENT OF THE ERASMUS RESEARCH CENTRE FOR MEDIA, COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

4.1. Mission, strategies and targets

ERMeCC's mission is to operate as an international, national and local centre of expertise for high-quality research into the relationships between media, society, culture and business. The Centre wishes to provide an intellectual framework for researchers, students and professionals from the field of media, communication and culture. Bottom-up research, collaborations and exchange with societal partners are actively encouraged. While the subject areas covered by ERMeCC are broad, there is a clear focus on the social, organisational and economic dimensions of media and culture. It finds ERMeCC's mission to be clear, reasonable and original, especially due to the combination of subject areas and the strong links to relevant sectors in society.

The committee examined the targets and performance indicators ERMeCC set for the review period 2012-2018. These are based on the strategic priorities formulated by ESHCC and the university board, but specified for ERMeCC and SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound). For example, ESHCC's goal is to 'increase participation in European projects'. ERMeCC set itself the following target: 'ERMeCC aspires to generate three major grant applications for at least two key areas over a six-year period, either as coordinator or as project partner'. According to the committee, the Centre's targets and strategic priorities are relevant, ambitious and aligned with its mission and focus. The strategic priorities for 2020-2024 are important in the increasingly competitive academic environment. For instance, 'increased participation in interdisciplinary H2020 and other international projects'. Given the demonstrated ability of the Centre to build a unique and flourishing environment in a short period of time, the committee expects that these targets are realistic.

4.2. Governance and leadership

ERMeCC houses two departments: Arts & Culture and Media & Communication. Each department has its own head. The 6 full-time chair groups are situated in one of the two departments and have a strong connection to the departments' educational programmes. The everyday management of the Centre's research activities is carried out by the managing director and the academic director, in close consultation with the two department heads who are in charge of the financial and human resources for research. The Centre's Board, which discusses strategic issues, developments and opportunities as well as ongoing projects and activities, consists of ten staff members and two PhD candidates. ERMeCC has a PhD club that looks after the interests of PhD candidates and facilitates peer-to-peer support and feedback on research work.

ERMeCC seems to have a robust management structure, and the committee sees the clear and obtainable targets with measures of success as a sign of good leadership. Given the Centre's achievements in the review period and the good atmosphere it observed during the site visit, it gained the impression that the unit is managed well. It noticed that, despite the difficult period that the Centre has been through and its rapid growth, the atmosphere in the team and support for its management seem to be good. It found it interesting to notice during the site visit that the researchers at all levels of seniority, PhD candidates included, described the Centre in a similar way: as an inspiring and supportive environment in which highly active and ambitious researchers work with a high degree of autonomy. This is an important accomplishment of the management.

The committee observed that the informal style of management and the organic structures in the Centre have been successful thus far. However, as noted above, it expects that this may become more difficult as the unit grows. In addition, although it felt that the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats described in the SWOT were relevant and important, the analysis could have been elaborated in more detail. It suggests considering how S, W, O and T are related to one another, and especially how the strengths can be managed in a way that reduces threats and allows grasping opportunities, but also to which extent weaknesses may reinforce threats or prevent taking



advantage of opportunities. For example, the report mentions the following weakness "The success of the recently established international degree programmes makes a heavy claim on researchers at ERMeCC, as they are bound to invest additional time on running, developing and teaching these programmes." To which extent is the fact that faculty is over-committed running these programmes going to prevent exploiting the following opportunity: "Well placed to acquire external research funding, in terms of in-house expertise, current research themes, international and local networks within and beyond academia, and prior fundraising track record." There might be an opportunity to acquire this research funding but how will the management guarantee enough time for its faculty to grasp it.

4.3. Research quality

In reviewing ERMeCC's research quality, the committee assessed the quality, quantity, impact and recognition of the School's research output, as well as its human resources and earning capacity in the period 2012-2018.

ERMeCC's research is empirical, interdisciplinary, comparative and informed by the social sciences and humanities, particularly media and communication studies, the sociology of culture and arts, and cultural economics. Currently, there are seven research areas: 1. media and creative/cultural industries; 2. cultural economics and entrepreneurship; 3. diversity and identity in media and culture; 4. socio-political impacts of media and culture; 5. production and consumption of culture; 6. media technologies, users and effects; and 7. digital communication media and international business. The committee established that this organization of research in seven areas was not imposed in a top-down manner, but emerged bottom-up. The themes evolved over time and have a clear relation to the staff's teaching. Each of the researchers is associated with one or two areas, which are also interconnected. Many of the team members mentioned interdisciplinarity when they described the Centre, which indicates to the committee that ERMeCC is a strong 'brand'. The committee believes that the structure with seven research themes allows ERMeCC to organise and focus its research, while providing flexibility and facilitating exchange between researchers. The committee suggests emphasising interdisciplinarity even more in the Centre's profiling, since it really is the backbone of its research.

ERMeCC has a strong publication record, with staff routinely publishing in high-quality, international, and interdisciplinary outlets. In 2012-2018 the unit produced 611 peer-reviewed publications, including 387 journal articles, 204 book chapters and 20 books, which is an impressive increase of 11% per FTE compared to the previous review period (see Appendix 3 for figures about output). The volume of research and the share of publications in top journals are continuously growing (44% in the top 10% of journals). The Centre achieved its target of 4 awarded PhD degrees per year on average; in total 29 PhD theses were completed. The committee established that some members of staff make widely recognised cutting-edge scientific contributions. It concludes that ERMeCC's research is truly interdisciplinary and highly original as it stems from a unique constellation of people and disciplines.

ERMeCC encourages its researchers to carefully consider their publication output, and to make deliberate choices to target reputed journals or publishers with a profound impact in their specific field of expertise. The researchers are given the responsibility to make these choices by themselves. Their publication track record registered in METIS is used in annual Performance and Development interviews of individual researchers and their supervisors. The information about quartiles mentioned in the self-evaluation report is provided by the research services department of the University library that provides regular reports on the research performance of research units at Erasmus. The committee believes that although this information is valuable, it is only of limited use as a monitoring tool for the Centre's direction. Although it is obviously hard to create a journal list or a point system to assess the value of publications given the diversity of disciplines, the committee believes that the freedom given to researchers as regards their own publication strategy may lead to frustration or feelings of inequity when research is discussed in the framework of promotions. It might therefore be useful to engage in a debate about this issue at least. Without this, it will be hard to discuss the

trade-off between quantity and quality, which can lead to quantity becoming the norm to gauge productivity. The Centre may also want to reflect on the priorities it wants to set in terms of scientific output and the balance it intends to achieve between reports aimed at society and academic publications.

Citation data clearly point to the impact and relevance of the Centre's publications: 15% of publications during the review period were among the top cited publications worldwide. Another clear indicator of the external recognition of ERMeCC's work is their record in contributing to selective international academic conferences with keynotes, papers and posters (see Appendix 3 'Output'). Some team members have received "best paper" awards. A number of the Centre's researchers belong to well-established international research networks or are active as members of editorial boards of top-ranked journals. The Centre has encouraged and facilitated international staff exchange, hosting numerous visiting researchers (19 in 2018). ERMeCC has also organized and hosted an impressive number of events, including international conferences, symposia and seminars. The committee commends ERMeCC for its activity in this respect, which has made it visible and well-connected in the field. However, it believes that in view of its ambitions, the School could strive for an even stronger presence on editorial boards.

In terms of human resources, the School has a highly motivated staff. Staff members at all levels are actively engaged in research. Some researchers are without any doubt leading experts in their fields. It seems, from the on-site visit, that collegiality and the significant freedom given to researchers have had positive effects on their productivity and the quality of their research.

Its earning capacity is another demonstration of ERMeCC's quality. ERMeCC has managed to increase the level of external research funding substantially, and thanks to its growing international network it is well-positioned to continue this (see Appendix 3 'Funding'). Individual researchers have secured some very competitive funding from schemes including NWO vidi and ERC consolidator. The Centre has also obtained a number of collaborative research grants, such as Erasmus+ and H2020.

The committee concludes that the quality of ERMeCC's research is very good. It has a strong research profile and the organization of the unit in seven research themes works well. It has a very good record in producing original and interdisciplinary research that has a very good impact. Its impact is strengthened by the group's visibility in the field, which is a result of frequent national and international exchanges with peers. It has very good human resources; the staff is research-active and highly ambitious. The successful acquisition of substantial external funding also indicates its very good quality. The committee believes that a stronger presence on editorial boards could further strengthen its visibility. It advises the development of publication strategies which take into account the balance between academic publications and those aimed at society at large.

4.4. Relevance to society

In reviewing ERMeCC's relevance to society, the committee considered the quality, scale and relevance of contributions targeting professionals, general audiences and policy makers, as well as the unit's collaborations with actors outside of academia, contract research and media coverage and, finally, memberships of advisory bodies, invited lectures and presentations.

The enhancement of societal relevance is essential to ERMeCC's core mission. ERMeCC aims to provide an intellectual framework for researchers, as well as professionals in the field of media, communication and culture. Its goal is to have an impact on society by including social partners in the phase of formulating and conducting research, resulting in, for instance, general public-oriented publications, consultancy and guest editorships.

The committee concluded that ERMeCC has been successful in achieving its goals. Communication of its research findings to professionals, policy makers and the general public takes a range of forms, including websites, blogs, newsletters, podcasts, popular publications, media appearances and public engagement in debates. The Centre focuses on research areas that are inherently of great societal



relevance, and likely to become even more important in the future. For example, researchers in ERMeCC produced a high-profile magazine-style publication identifying alternative Sinterklaas celebrations departing from the “Zwarte Piet” tradition and contributed to curation of a museum exhibition on the topic.

ERMeCC has developed numerous research projects in cooperation with actors outside academia. The self-evaluation report provides an impressive list of partnerships with a wide range of actors including pop music associations, the Alzheimer’s Foundation, IBM India, and Football Against Racism. Members of staff are widely engaged in making contributions targeting specific groups, through activities including publications and events aimed at the general public as well as specific stakeholders, such as project reports for civil society and governmental institutions (e.g. UNESCO, the European Commission, the Hague, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science). Team members also perform contract research and other types of collaborations with external partners at national and international levels. Societal relevance is further enhanced through specific clusters of research excellence and collaboration, e.g., the focus upon privacy and surveillance (MAPS) and the music/culture industry (MICS), as well as more experimental projects like the Rotterdam Arts and Sciences Lab (RASL).

Activities directed at enhancing societal relevance cut across international, national and regional levels, ranging from reports on the cultural sector in the cities of Rotterdam and The Hague, to multiple collaborations with, and projects funded by, the European Commission, UNESCO and UNHCR. Staff members frequently take advisory roles in relation to policy-making bodies, exhibitions, documentaries and skills training. Many researchers are members of advisory bodies in line with their research expertise (especially cultural industries and institutions).

The committee noted that members of staff across all levels of seniority have embraced participation in engagement activities. Many PhD graduates have gone on to leadership positions in policy-making institutions and NGOs. Such activities are central to the history and identity of the School and appear essential to the staff’s ethos across the board. The combination of high-quality research and educational programmes pertaining to distinct societal sectors and stakeholders (notably media/creative industries and tourism) facilitates these projects.

Although enhancing societal relevance is clearly a priority at university level, measures to enhance societal relevance in ERMeCC do not appear to be based on a top-down strategy. Instead, they seem to have grown organically out of the activities of staff members, often collaboratively. As much as the committee values this, looking towards the future, it highlighted potential issues around balancing the workload associated with activities enhancing relevance to society against other responsibilities, including core research and publications, teaching and administration. To prevent this, it advises developing a policy in which the expectations concerning staff members’ activities in this respect are clearly articulated.

The committee concludes that ERMeCC is extremely strong and world-leading in terms of enhancing relevance to society. It is engaged in activities directed at enhancing societal relevance at all levels; internationally, nationally and regionally, and the entire staff, from PhD candidate to full professor, is engaged. The connection between research and the educational programmes strengthens the Centre’s embeddedness in society. ERMeCC has clearly met its 2012-2018 target to “Invest in realising societal impact”. The committee advises that ERMeCC initiates the development of a policy in which expectations regarding core research, teaching, administration and activities to enhance societal relevance are clearly established.

4.5. Viability

In reviewing ERMeCC’s viability, the committee examined the School’s funding, the upcoming challenges, the effects they will have on quality and sustainability, and strategies for safeguarding and strengthening the School’s viability.

The committee noted that ERMeCC's strategy is in line with the overall strategy of EUR; it is growing its interdisciplinary potential, fostering societal impact, and embedding research in society. Its research focus has great societal relevance and is likely to become even more important in the future. The committee feels that ERMeCC is doing well in sustaining the strong and synergetic links between education, research and societal engagement, since these are key to the internal coherence of the School and its activities.

The "ERMeCC brand" is well perceived among the Centre's researchers and PhD students. It is mostly associated with interdisciplinarity and independent research. For outsiders this identity is probably less clear, and interdisciplinarity will not be the first characteristic that springs to mind, because it is not part of the Centre's name. The committee therefore encourages the unit to consider the development and external communication of its brand to stakeholders and potential funding bodies, in order to improve its international visibility, recognition and reputation.

In recent years the Centre has taken significant steps to support its research activity. It has realised a robust increase in funding resources, particularly grants, EU funding and contract research (see Appendix 3, Funding). Securing research funding leads to a form of reward since successful applicants get more time for their research. The committee concluded that this is a useful policy. Collaboration was raised as a potential area of concern in the last mid-term review, but the committee has seen that it was successfully addressed; ERMeCC now has an impressive record of collaboration on cutting-edge issues with a range of academic and non-academic partners. This indicates that ERMeCC is attuned to rapidly changing funding landscapes. However, the Centre is understaffed when it comes to research support. The university would therefore be wise to increase the support staff dedicated to the School. This would not only allow research opportunities to be seized, it would also have a positive effect in terms of reducing the workload of researchers. The committee encourages ERMeCC to keep up and perhaps intensify its efforts to promote a healthy work-life balance in order to avoid future stress-related problems.

ERMeCC has grown organically, and it is obvious that its researchers as well as PhD students find the organic structure a very good model that sustains interdisciplinarity and independence. The seven research areas seem to work mostly as a way of communicating the Centre's research foci. Staff members do not experience them as "forced" themes, but as spaces of encounter. The committee believes, however, that the organisation of the Centre requires some thought in order to handle future growth. At a certain level, it expects there will be a need for more formalized sub-entities or platforms. As mentioned also in the mid-term review, it foresees a risk of fragmentation, in spite of the collegial atmosphere and strong identity of the Centre.

As noted under 4.1., ERMeCC has formulated a set of ambitious strategic priorities for 2020-2024 which are clearly aligned to its mission and focus. Although the targets are well-defined, the strategies to achieve them are less clear. This seems to be connected to the Centre's style of management, which is characterised by flexibility and relatively loose decision-making structures. This seems to have worked well in the past and has led to a supportive and collegial atmosphere, but the committee believes that in the future, ERMeCC needs a more formalized structure in order to ensure that the direction is clear.

In recent years, the Centre has attracted a large number of high-achieving and relatively junior researchers. This, and also the growing mobility of researchers (in- and outgoing), testifies to the attractiveness and viability of ERMeCC as a research environment. Human resources management, more specifically career planning and opportunities for associate professors, should be carefully considered. Since a full professorship is almost always connected to a chair in the Dutch system, ERMeCC and the university run the risk of losing promising researchers currently at the associate level who are ready to be promoted to professor. These candidates may accept positions at universities abroad, because their chances of becoming a professor at EUR are slim. The committee encourages the Centre to consider possible strategies to retain these talents. In addition, it believes



that the culture of the School may be negatively affected by the gender imbalance in top positions (see 3.5.).

The committee concludes that ERMeCC focuses on a viable research field that has great societal relevance, now and in the future. This research focus is strongly connected to its educational programmes and is well aligned with the university's mission. Interdisciplinarity is of central importance in the Centre's profile, but the committee feels that it could feature even more prominently in its external communication to strengthen its international visibility, reputation and recognition. In the review period, ERMeCC achieved a robust increase in external funding and set up an impressive list of collaborations. This indicates that the unit is able to adapt to changing funding opportunities. The committee advises investing in support staff for grant acquisition, which would increase the Centre's chances and take some pressure off its research staff. ERMeCC appears to be an inspiring place to work, but the lack of career opportunities for associate professors within the Centre and gender diversity in senior positions are points of attention.

4.6. Overview of the quantitative assessment of the research unit

After having assessed the research quality, relevance to society and viability, and comparing that to the developments and standard in the field of History, Culture and Communication, the committee comes to the following quantitative assessments:

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

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a shared strategic plan which is based on the synergy between the two research centres;
- Invest in improving PhD duration;
- Develop and communicate clear-cut publication strategies, which take into account the Balance between academic publications and those aimed at society at large;
- Develop a clear framework for promotion decisions that includes expectations regarding a candidate's publication record as well as activities to enhance the societal relevance of research;
- Use a tool to monitor research output and steer the direction of research;
- Emphasise interdisciplinarity as the Centre's key strength in external communication;
- Reflect on the ideal balance between work aimed at enhancing societal relevance and academic publications;
- Strive for an even stronger presence on editorial boards;
- Invest in more support staff for grant acquisition;
- Keep up and perhaps intensify measures to promote a healthy work-life balance in order to avoid future stress-related problems;
- Develop a plan to improve the career opportunities at EUR for talented associate professors;
- Reflect on the causes of the gender imbalance in senior positions and set more ambitious targets to improve the gender diversity in senior positions;
- Consider formalizing the Centre's management and decision-making structures in order to handle future growth.



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

Research Assessment ESHCC

Date: 4 - 6 March 2020

Location: Erasmus University Rotterdam

Day 0 – 4 March 2020

Arrival Committee members

19:00 - 22:00 Dinner meeting / introductions

Day 1 – 5 March 2020

08:30 - 09:00 Preliminary meeting

09:00 - 10:30 Committee meeting, preparation

10:30 - 11:15 Meeting with the board and Heads of Department

11:15 - 11:30 Evaluation

11:30 - 12:00 Meeting with the Standing Committee for Research Performance (VCW)

12:00 - 12:15 Evaluation

12:15 - 13:00 Lunch

13:00 - 14:00 Writing session

14:00 - 14:30 Committee meeting, preparation

14:30 - 15:15 Meeting with ERMeCC management

15:15 - 15:30 Evaluation

15:30 - 16:00 Committee meeting, preparation

16:00 - 16:45 Meeting with History @ Erasmus management

16:45 - 17:00 Evaluation

Day 2 – 6 March 2020

10:00 - 10:15 Committee meeting

10:15 - 11:00 Meeting with staff members ERMeCC

11:00 - 11:15 Evaluation

11:15 - 12:00 Meeting with PhD-students ERMeCC

12:00 - 12:15 Evaluation

12:15 - 13:00 Lunch

13:00 - 13:15 Committee meeting, preparation

13:15 - 14:00 Meeting with staff members History @ Erasmus

14:00 - 14:15 Evaluation

14:15 - 15:00 Meeting with PhD-students History @ Erasmus

15:00 - 16:00 Evaluation

16:00 - 17:00 Private final meeting

17:00 - 17:30 Presentation of first results

APPENDIX 3: QUANTITATIVE DATA

Research staff

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
ERMCC	# / fte	# / fte	# / fte	# / fte	# / fte	# / fte	# / fte
Scientific staff	32/9,9	32/11,66	34/11,83	44/12,8	45/14,66	43/14,85	47/16,61
Postdocs	3/1,41	2/0,38	2/1	2/0,66	2/0,53	3/0,73	4/2,43
PhD candidates	3/2,09	7/3,86	8/5,63	12/6,55	17/7,91	25/11,85	20/15,47
PhD lecturers	13/7,39	14/7,57	13/6,83	11/6,44	9/3,95	6/1,78	2/1,01
Total Research staff	51/20,79	55/23,47	57/25,29	69/26,45	73/27,05	77/29,21	73/35,52
Visiting fellows	0/0	0/0	1/0	3/0	4/0	5/0	5/0
External PhD candidates	11/0	9/0	9/0	12/0	13/0	14/0	17/0
Total staff	62/20,79	64/23,47	67/25,29	84/26,45	90/27,05	96/29,21	95/35,52

Output

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total	
<i>Publications</i>									
Refereed Articles		41	44	46	71	53	47	85	387
Non-refereed articles		2	2	2	2	1	0	0	9
Academic books (excl. edited books) ¹		3	2	2	5	3	4	1	20
Academic book chapters		18	25	40	31	22	37	31	204
PhD theses		7	3	3	2	2	7	5	29
Academic conference proceedings		4	6	3	2	5	7	13	40
Professional publications		10	11	15	13	5	11	17	82
Publications aimed at general public		4	6	6	5	5	5	1	32
Subtotal publications		89	99	117	131	96	118	153	803
<i>Other research output</i>									
(Audio/Video) Production		0	0	0	0	1	1	1	3
Book editorship		1	3	3	3	2	2	0	14
Book review		2	1	3	3	7	3	6	25
Conference contribution (paper & poster)		66	86	98	105	73	72	116	616
Contribution weekly/ daily		10	4	7	3	4	3	3	34
Dataset		0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Inaugural speech		0	1	0	2	1	2	1	7
Interview		0	1	4	5	6	6	13	35
Lectures		27	32	45	48	95	82	126	455
Newsletter / blog / podcast		1	1	6	9	10	7	8	42
Reports		2	6	7	3	9	6	7	40
Research case		1	1	3	0	1	0	0	6
Television or radio appearance		0	4	6	5	11	6	13	45
Website		0	0	2	3	2	2	4	13
Workshop academic		2	1	7	3	4	5	7	29
Workshop professional		1	0	2	12	4	3	2	24
Subtotal Other research output		113	141	193	204	231	200	307	1389
Total research output		201	240	310	335	327	318	460	2191



Funding

	2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
<i>Funding:</i>	<i>fte</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>fte</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>fte</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>fte</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>fte</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>fte</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>fte</i>	<i>%</i>
Direct funding	17.27	72%	17.66	67%	17.08	63%	19.17	72%	18.05	67%	17.01	58%	20.65	59%
Research grants	5.18	22%	7.06	27%	7.62	28%	6.6	25%	6.78	25%	7.23	25%	8.61	25%
Contract Research	1.45	6%	1.45	6%	2.59	9%	0.98	4%	2.21	8%	5.18	18%	5.77	16%
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total funding	23.9	100%	26.17	100%	27.29	100%	26.75	100%	27.03	100%	29.41	100%	35.02	100%
<i>Expenditure:</i>	<i>€</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>€</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>€</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>€</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>€</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>€</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>€</i>	<i>%</i>
Personnel costs	k€1,457,9	92%	k€1,548,2	90%	k€1,649,7	89%	k€1,753,4	87%	k€1,711,3	90%	k€1,914,5	86%	k€2,423,9	87%
Other costs	k€ 133,6	8%	k€ 180,0	10%	k€210,6	11%	k€ 267,2	13%	k€200,5	10%	k€317,2	14%	k€356,0	13%
Total expenditure	k€ 1,591,5	100%	k€ 1,728,2	100%	k€1,860,3	100%	k€2,020,6	100%	k€1,911,8	100%	k€2,231,7	100%	k€2,779,9	100%

Research funding according to funding source per year*

Granted (k€)	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019*	Total	Aver. p/year
Direct funding	995	-	338,3	104,3	-	831,5	252,5	196,4	2.717,4	339,7
Grants	546,9	146,1	175,4	1.456,4	1.112,5	835,9	1200,5	412,4	5.886,0	735,7
EU funding / contract research	39,5	569,3	-	1.909,0	278,2	63	1339,7	1.626,8	5.825,9	728,1
Total	1.581,2	715,4	513,4	3.469,4	1.390,6	1.730,4	2.792,1	2.235,6	14.428	1.803,5

*Table 6 shows acquired funding in k euro according to the year that an application was submitted. The figures for 2019 are preliminary figures, as the outcome for several grant applications submitted in 2019 is still unknown.

PhD candidates and scholarships

Enrolment	Success rates*			Graduated in						
	Starting year	M	F	Tot	4 years	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years	Not yet finished
2009	1	0	1	-	-	-	1/100%	1/100%	0	0
2010	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2011	0	2	2	1/50%	2/100%	2/100%	2/100%	2/100%	0	0
2012	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2013	2	3	5	-	2/40%	4/80%	4/80%	4/80%	1/20%	0
2014	0	1	1	-	-	1/100%	1/100%	1/100%	0	0
Total	3	6	9	1/11%	4/4%	7/78%	8/89%	8/89%	1/11%	0

*Cells in light blue present preliminary figures, which will increase when later cohorts finish their thesis

PhD lecturers

Enrolment	Success rates*			Graduated in						
	Starting year	M	F	Tot	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years	Not yet finished	Discontinued
2009	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2010	1	2	3	1/33%	1/33%	1/33%	1/33%	2/67%	0	
2011	4	5	9	1/11%	4/44%	6/67%	6/67%	1/11%	2/22%	
2012	1	0	1	0	0	0	-	1/100%	0	
2013	1	0	1	0	1/100%	1/100%	1/100%	0	0	
2014	0	1	1	0	-	-	-	1/100%	0	
Total	7	8	15	2/13%	6/40%	8/53%	8/53%	5/33%	2/13%	

*Cells in light blue present preliminary figures, which will increase when later cohorts finish their thesis

