

# **RESEARCH ASSESSMENT**

ERASMUS SCHOOL OF HISTORY, CULTURE AND  
COMMUNICATION

**HISTORY @ ERASMUS**

QANU  
Catharijnesingel 56  
PO Box 8035  
3503 RA Utrecht  
The Netherlands

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

Project number: Q0779

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This report was finalised on 29 June 2020



# REPORT ON THE RESEARCH REVIEW OF HISTORY @ ERASMUS 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 research community History @ Erasmus.

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 argumentation 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 HISTORY @ ERASMUS

### **4.1. Strategies and targets**

The research of the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (ESHCC) is based in two research communities offering a unique interdisciplinary combination within the humanities and social sciences. The research community 'History @ Erasmus', the unit under evaluation, is linked to the history department. History @ Erasmus itself is organised into three distinct but interacting research groups: Economic History and International Relations, Theory of History and Historical Culture, and Global History. The first group focuses on processes of regional economic integration and trans-national relations. While focusing on political as well as on economic interests, it also investigates the tension between national politics and trans-national economic relations, and the continuity and change in the history of economic and political integration and disintegration. The second group, on Theory of History and Historical Culture, studies interpretations of the past and the emotions and debates it invokes. The group focuses on the encounters with violent pasts since around 1800. The final group, on Global History, analyses global flows and networks from the eighteenth century onwards, often using the encounters model as an alternative to the national and regional models of historical research. It emphasizes cultural and economic contact and exchange as agents of historical change. The committee states that the three groups reflect three broad areas in which the research unit has an established reputation. While they all have the commonality of conducting international and interdisciplinary research, each group focuses on different research agendas, and has distinct networks within and outside the university and also internationally.

According to the unit's self-evaluation report, its mission is to '(A) support the research community to conduct high-quality research and to disseminate its results at (inter)national forums of scholars, and to the public at large, and (B) to support the training and supervision of our PhD candidates.' In its budget plan for 2020-2023, ESHCC adds the following goal: 'ESHCC aims to expand interdisciplinary collaboration at all levels (international, national, university and school), extend its societal networks, and increase its external research funding' for its research activities. The budget plan also specifies performance indicators and individual targets per indicator. The committee judges that the School's mission and research objectives are clearly defined and take into account different current global economic, social and cultural concerns. They also envisage the involvement of multiple stakeholders, ranging from academics to PhD candidates, in the production of research and a wide range of institutions in disseminating the work they produce. The committee praises the School for the efforts made to address the recommendations provided in the previous research assessments with regard to strategic targets, in particular the need to increase external funding, to improve coherence within the group, to build collaborative networks nationally and internationally, and to increase societal impact.

In general, the committee concludes that the overarching strategy and targets for the period under review were ambitious and relevant, and a significant number seem to have been achieved. The strategy addressed the recommendations of previous 'research assessment exercises'. The strategy and targets mainly reflect the mission of History @ Erasmus to establish a distinctive national and international profile, when compared to other Dutch research centres. The committee does have two concerns regarding the unit's strategy and targets, however. The first is related to personnel; the unit has been able to reach its targets despite the reduction of senior chairs from 5 to 3 and in the face of a proposed merger with other faculties in the period under review, which created uncertainty and a decline in morale. This has to be addressed in the coming period. The second concern relates to the division of labour between senior and junior staff. It observed that the targets have been achieved partly by relying on a labour-intensive teaching programme to secure first-stream funding (also see research quality below). These teaching responsibilities have been borne in particular by junior members of staff. The committee recommends that the unit address these imbalances.

### **4.2. Governance and leadership**

The governance of History @ Erasmus is divided between the higher university authorities, the leadership of ESHCC and the members of the research unit. The committee got the impression of a clear structure of governance within the unit. This is organised through group chairs, who work together with endowed chairs. There is a Head and Vice Head of History @ Erasmus, and there are group chairs that are supported by secondary endowed chairs in providing the necessary leadership in the areas in which the group has an international reputation. History @ Erasmus' research themes



are linked to the areas of expertise of the full professors. There are also links between the postgraduate programmes and the research themes of the research unit. Academics also have the flexibility to create new modules based on their areas of expertise and with relevance to the programme. The committee judges this to be a fitting way of organising the unit. It praises the unit's management, especially its head and vice-head, on their achievements in successfully navigating the group through a difficult period since the last evaluation – characterised by an uncertain future and reduced resources (human and financial).

The committee has concerns regarding forward planning and the future aims of the School. The imminent retirement of the unit's head is creating uncertainty about the feasibility of the current strategy, and potentially aggravates the gender imbalance in the School. In order for the unit to continue to enjoy sound leadership and effective governance, the committee considers that the School should give priority to providing for an adequate replacement of the unit's head.

### **4.3. Research quality**

In reviewing History @ Erasmus' research quality, the committee assessed the quality, quantity, impact and recognition of the School's research output, as well as its publishing strategies and collaborations in the period 2012-2018.

The organisation of research around three interacting groups with distinct research agendas that also collaborate with other departments within and outside the ESHCC is fitting in the committee's view. All three groups participate in the common research programme Histories of Encounters. The encounters model not only informs methodological approaches and theory but is also understood in terms of historical praxis. It is central to all three groups individually as well. The committee was impressed by the self-published edited volume, 'Histories of Encounters'; it is a creative way of drawing together and presenting the department's work. The need to increase coherence between the different research groups was one of the areas identified in the previous research assessment as a strategic priority. The committee observed that the evidence provided indicates that the History @ Erasmus group has made efforts to increase collaboration between the members of the group and also internationally. Several of their research grants, even those obtained internationally, involve a number of members of the research unit.

ESHCC states that the research community's focus during the assessed period was on international and interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed output. History @ Erasmus has selected publications of national and international books, articles in scientific journals, book chapters as key indicators of performance, in addition to lecture invitations, scientific awards, research grants and PhD supervision leading to completion of the project.

The committee observed that the research group has a significant number of peer-reviewed scientific publications. They include journal articles published in high-quality international journals. Between 2012 and 2018, History @ Erasmus researchers generated 309 peer-reviewed products: 24 History PhD theses, 110 articles in high-ranked or prestigious journals, 24 books (edited volumes and monographs) and 151 book chapters. The books and book chapters are published by well-known and in some cases prominent publishers, e.g. Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Fischer Verlag, Palgrave Macmillan, Bloomsbury, and Routledge. The School achieved its target of 4 awarded PhD degrees per year on average (2 per department). History @ Erasmus awarded 3,4 PhD theses per year; in total 24 PhD theses were completed. The committee states that the large number of demonstrable products, as provided in the self-assessment report, is indicative of the high productivity of the research unit, including not only publications, but also seminars, conferences and symposia, completed PhD theses, and service on PhD examination juries. History @ Erasmus scores very high on all these criteria, providing clear evidence of the international standing of the group in terms of their contribution to scientific knowledge. The committee did note, however, that among international publications, there have been a high number of book chapters rather than other peer-reviewed publications such as monographs and journal articles. In general, it judges that History @ Erasmus produces high-quality, original and interdisciplinary research which examines long-term trends associated with economic, social and cultural phenomena of current interest.

The committee observed that under the circumstances, the productivity of History @ Erasmus is high, in particular if we take into account the teaching demands made on the staff. Furthermore, History @ Erasmus has significant constraints in terms of both human and financial resources, which negatively impact the unit's potential research outputs. These constraints are especially manifest in the first money stream. The allocation of this first stream of research funding, which the university receives from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, is dependent to quite a large extent on the educational performance of the ESHCC. Numbers of enrolled students and conferred diplomas have a large impact on the size of a school's research budget. In the period 2012-2018, between 46% (2012) and 72% (2018) of the group's funding came from direct funding. Part of this has been grants based on competition. Grants (second stream) varied between 38% (2012) and 12% (2018). Contract research (third stream) was responsible for 17% (2012), 21% (2013) and 16% (2018). Personnel costs make up about 90% of the expenditure. The large reliance on the first money stream means that teaching demands made on research staff are especially pressing.

Due to the increasing workload, the reorganisation of the department and decline in research staff, the group has experienced a decrease research grants obtained. Nonetheless, History @ Erasmus has been able to obtain a number of prestigious research grants in the period under review, including an NWO Veni/National Science Agenda grant for the 'Brainstorms' project, two Research Excellence Initiatives (REI) as well as two Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA) grants. Despite the increasing international competition for external funding, the group is doing remarkably well on this front, which is an indication of its very good quality. A further complication is posed by the loss of administrative staff who provided the administrative support necessary for the preparation of grant applications. Nevertheless, the group has been successful in their quest for external funding, and despite all these obstacles, they have been able to meet established goals and targets. The committee feels that the acquisition of these grants speaks to History @ Erasmus' strength in research quality as well as its attractiveness as an innovative research centre. The lack of support for grant applications aside, it concludes that the facilities supporting the research environment are adequate and appropriate.

The committee is impressed by the three groups within History @ Erasmus. They have produced significant research with scientific impact. The prominence of the staff in academia and the impact and significance of their research are demonstrable by the marks of recognition they receive from peers. These include visiting positions at other universities, scientific awards, research grants, membership of scientific committees and international networks, invited lectures and keynote speeches, editorial positions in journals and book series, among other academic services provided. Once again, the evidence provided is illustrative of the international reputation of some of the research staff in their areas of specialization. Their contributions are notable. Several members of staff are leading international scholars in their fields.

The scale of the scientific impact of History @ Erasmus is visible in the wide range of networks and institutions in different parts of the world with which its members are connected. These include memberships of scientific committees and invitations to visit and present research. These networks extend to different countries in Europe, Africa, Asia, and North and South America. Again, these are all indicative of the international standing of History @ Erasmus and the scientific impact of the research developed by the members of this group. This high impact has also led to them receiving prizes in recognition for their contributions.

In general, the committee concludes that the quality of the scientific research of History @ Erasmus is of international standing. A distinctive characteristic of the group lies in the focus on 'trans' and global phenomena of relevance to modern society. As will be elaborated on below under 'viability', the committee believes that the unit would benefit from more investment to ensure future research quality. Crucial here is the division of the teaching workload between junior and senior research staff, and restoring administrative support for grant applications. The committee also believes the unit could improve its output in terms of monographs and scientific articles. Increasing output of these forms of publication could improve the impact of the unit's research.



#### **4.4. Relevance to society**

In reviewing History @ Erasmus' relevance to society, the committee considered the quality, scale and relevance of contributions targeting specific groups and society as a whole, as well as the unit's policy to enhance societal relevance and the concrete outputs, use of these outputs and marks of recognition of societal relevance.

The ESHCC board stressed the following strategic priority, in their list of strategic priorities for 2013-2018 for History @ Erasmus: 'Invest in realising societal impact. History @ Erasmus contributes to social impact by including societally relevant partners in the phase of formulating and carrying out research projects. These efforts result in public-oriented publications, consultancy, guest editorship in book publishing, and other deliverables.'

The committee judges the History @ Erasmus group to have been highly effective in achieving this strategic aim. Some of the outputs the group realised in the period under review were: an educational website for secondary education on the topic of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery, datasets on sport and nationality, collaborations with the Foundation for Heritage of the Netherlands, the Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and the Maritime Museum. Various members of staff have been involved in societal projects and organisations in an advisory capacity, have been appointed board members of such organisations, or have lectured at events and conferences on societal themes related to their expertise. The committee confirmed that it is possible to see the societal impact of the research produced by History @ Erasmus in international journals, edited volumes and chapters in books published by reputable publishing houses, TV interviews, keynote speeches, exhibitions of public history, and non-academic publications targeting wider audiences.

Furthermore, the committee is especially impressed by the embeddedness of the research group within their local context: the city of Rotterdam. It learned of collaborations with local museums, education institutes, Rotterdam-based companies such as Unilever and the Rotterdam Port Authority and even the local football club, Feyenoord. Several members of staff are heavily involved in national debates around historical themes as well, and serve as opinion leaders on issues such as the Black Pete debate, anti-racism in sport and the future of the fashion industry.

The committee states that the research produced by History @ Erasmus has a very significant impact on public policy, industry, culture, and educational institutions. Several researchers have also built and strengthened collaboration with a wide number of stakeholders in industry and other types of institutions, nationally and internationally, for example through its work on the global fashion industry. It is furthermore of the opinion that the high quality of the societal impact is connected with the quality of the scientific research produced. This is also visible in the sustainable networks formed with a multiplicity of stakeholders. The scale and relevance of the contributions are diverse, targeting both public and private institutions.

In general, the committee concludes that by drawing on international and comparative research and using different levels of institutional analysis – ranging from the individual and family to the level of global networks – History @ Erasmus produces a substantial amount of research with great significance for society at the national and international level. The research produced by its academic staff provides clear illustrations of how history matters and helps us to understand and explain current global phenomena. The contribution of History @ Erasmus to making scholarship relevant to society is of great importance to the university and the community it serves. This unique achievement, not just at the level of the university but also nationally and internationally, deserves rightful recognition in the annual allocation of funding levels to the constituent parts of the university.

#### **4.5. Viability**

In reviewing History @ Erasmus' viability, the committee looked at the upcoming challenges, the effects they will have on the quality and sustainability of the School, and the strategies that are in place to safeguard and strengthen the School's viability.



According to the committee, provided there are appropriate levels of funding which will allow the hiring of staff at both academic and administrative levels, the overall strategy that the research unit intends to pursue in the future seems realistic and achievable. The research unit receives funding from a wide variety of entities. The financial resources available at History @ Erasmus reflect decisions taken during a period of instability and contraction. The committee identified a clear concern for the unit to increase funding for research from external sources, and to deal with the imbalance in age and gender in the department's composition of research staff. A point of concern that it would like to highlight is that not enough financial resources are being channelled to invest in the work of the unit, for both tenured academics and non-tenured academics. Additional resources are necessary to enable the staff to realise their potential.

The group's researchers also note the high work pressure associated with applying for external funding, especially for junior staff. The committee found that the pressures faced by them to apply for external funding are similar to those faced by other universities in the Netherlands and abroad, but steps should be taken to alleviate these pressures. Therefore, it believes it is essential to restore the unit's administrative support. It states that the unit would greatly benefit from returning to the administrative staff levels that it previously enjoyed. This will involve hiring at least two funding advisors. This is particularly relevant in a period when competition for large grant applications at the international level has become more intense.

The committee states that the physical 'research facilities', such as the library and staff offices, provide the required environment for academics to develop their research. It furthermore observed that all academic staff, both tenured and non-tenured, show great resilience and commitment despite the substantial obstacles they face in realizing their goals. It observed that History @ Erasmus is now entering a new phase of its work with confidence and an *esprit de corps* which bodes well for its future trajectory. Clearly, the staff has invested in the future by bearing a very heavy workload. The committee emphasises that it is now time for the university to make the necessary investment in order to see the realisation of its full potential. This would mean addressing the imbalance between the teaching workload of both senior and junior staff – increasing the number of associated and full professors is essential to remedy this problem. Additionally, the committee thinks it necessary to change the contracts of assistant teachers from short-term to long-term to provide them with the status and time that will enable them to develop as researchers.

Based on the track record of the research unit, collaboration is a clear strength of the group. There is every reason to believe that the collaboration of its members, at an internal and external level, and nationally and internationally, will continue to be strengthened in the future. Furthermore, History @ Erasmus also has plans to continue strengthening its international and interdisciplinary profile, and its commitment to societal impact. The committee judges that History @ Erasmus is a place of great collegiality, and academics consider it to be an attractive place to work. The interdisciplinarity, international scope of the unit's research, and their outreach to society and concern with addressing contemporary connections are key strengths attracting both staff and students to the unit. The committee concludes that as a social unit, History @ Erasmus is a success. Solidarities expressed by people at all levels of the unit is remarkable.

#### **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 strategic plan which takes advantages of the synergies between History @ Erasmus and ERMeCC;
- Address the uncertainties and decline in morale among staff members after the turbulence around the merger;
- Increase the number of associate and full professors to remedy workload concerns, especially among junior members of staff;
- Provide security for assistant professors by changing contracts from short to long term;
- Restore administrative staff to levels previously enjoyed by the unit. This will involve hiring at least two funding advisors;
- Stimulate the writing of international refereed journal articles and monographs with renowned publishers, over other forms of output, such as chapters in edited volumes;
- Provide an adequate replacement for the retiring head of the unit;
- Use progression panels for PhD candidates in a more systematic way. Apart from evaluating the research produced by the student and evaluating their overall progress, this panel should also provide advice on the amount of teaching the student should not exceed in order to be able to complete the PhD within 4-5 years;
- Install a mechanism to ensure that when the first supervisor is unable to supervise, the second supervisor or another member of staff with the right expertise is able to immediately step in as an interim first supervisor;
- Address the imbalance in age and gender in the department's composition of research staff;
- It is time for the central university level to show appreciation for the hard work of this unit during turbulent times and shrinkage, by making the necessary investment in order to see the realisation of its full potential.

# 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
<b>History @ Erasmus</b>	# / fte	# / fte	# / fte	# / fte	# / fte	# / fte	# / fte
Scientific staff	24/6,22	24/5,79	23/5,13	21/4,62	17/3,86	19/4,15	18/4,05
Postdocs	6/3,84	5/3,8	2/1,73	2/1,12	2/1,38	2/1	4/1,95
PhD students	14/8,25	11/7,19	8/5,48	6/3,54	6/2,45	8/4,14	8/5,01
PhD lecturers	3/1,7	3/1,58	3/1,58	3/1,48	2/1,08	2/0,63	1/0,6
<b>Total Research staff</b>	<b>47/20,01</b>	<b>43/18,36</b>	<b>36/13,92</b>	<b>32/10,76</b>	<b>27/8,77</b>	<b>31/9,92</b>	<b>31/11,61</b>
Support staff	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Visiting fellows	0/0	0/0	0/0	1/0	0/0	2/0	1/0
External PhD Students	13/0	13/0	15/0	15/0	16/0	14/0	12/0
<b>Total staff</b>	<b>60/20,01</b>	<b>56/18,36</b>	<b>51/13,92</b>	<b>48/10,76</b>	<b>43/8,77</b>	<b>47/9,92</b>	<b>44/11,61</b>



## Output

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
*Refereed articles	21	17	19	13	15	9	16	110
Non-refereed articles	4	2	3	2	0	2	1	14
*Academic (including editorial) books	5	2	6	3	3	3	1	24
*Academic book chapters	19	25	22	28	12	25	20	151
*PhD theses	4	3	7	2	5	3	0 <sup>1</sup>	24
Academic conference proceedings	13	8	6	2	1	1	1	32
Professional publications	9	15	10	15	9	7	16	78
Publications aimed at general public	9	6	11	3	7	3	4	43
<b>Subtotal publications</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>477</b>
Other research output:								
(Audio/Video) Production	0	2	0	0	0	2	1	5
Book editorship	2	2	1	5	0	0	2	12
Book review	25	12	15	6	16	13	7	94
Conference contribution, paper, poster	81	72	44	25	16	18	24	280
Contribution weekly/daily journal	9	19	14	6	43	41	56	188
Dataset	2	8	2	0	0	0	2	12
Inaugural speech	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	3
Interview	4	64	9	13	1	7	15	113
Lectures	76	86	105	57	44	64	74	506
Newsletter/blog/podcast	11	26	10	8	1	2	4	62
Reports	1	5	2	4	1	1	0	14
Research case	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Television or radio appearance	12	20	15	13	5	3	7	75
Website	1	2	1	0	2	6	1	13
Workshop academic	12	7	11	2	0	3	2	37
Workshop professional	2	1	2	3	6	8	0	22
<b>Subtotal Other research output</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>1436</b>
<b>Total research output</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>407</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>1913</b>

\*Number of peer-reviewed output\*: 309  
(285 peer-reviewed publications + 24 History PhD theses)



## Funding

History @ Erasmus	2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
Funding:	fte	%	fte	%	fte	%	fte	%	fte	%	fte	%	fte	%
Direct funding	9.18	46%	7.01	39%	6.86	48%	6.49	57%	5.52	63%	6.88	73%	8.6	72%
Research grants	7.52	38%	7.16	40%	5.59	39%	3.67	32%	2.61	30%	1	11%	1.5	12%
Contract Research	3.31	17%	3.66	21%	1.97	14%	1.18	10%	0.64	7%	1.54	16%	1.92	16%
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total funding</b>	<b>20.01</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>17.83</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>14.42</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>11.34</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>8.77</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>9.42</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>12.02</b>	<b>100%</b>
Expenditure:	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%
Personnel costs	1,160,563	93%	1,043,555	88%	912,773	92%	773,152	90%	529,263	82%	576,947	91%	807,965	89%
Other costs	90,072	7%	140,304	12%	74,605	8%	83,990	10%	112,544	18%	58,190	9%	99,632	11%
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>1,250,635</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,183,859</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>987,378</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>857,143</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>641,807</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>635,137</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>907,597</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Acquisition of research funding per money stream

History @ Erasmus								
Year that the application was submitted is leading								
Granted	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	TOTAL
Direct funding	k€85,5	k€0	k€203,5	k€312,8	k€149,3	k€440	k€94,5	k€1285,6
Grants (NWO + HERA)	k€214,9	k€250	k€0	k€10	k€131,5	k€930,5	k€178,5	k€1715,4
Contract research I (EU funding)	k€0	k€0	k€0	k€0	k€0	k€0	k€240	k€240
Contract research II	k€175	k€0	k€34	k€0	k€7,6	k€267	k€0	k€483,6
<b>Total</b>	<b>k€475,4</b>	<b>k€250</b>	<b>k€237,5</b>	<b>k€322,8</b>	<b>k€288,4</b>	<b>k€1.637,5</b>	<b>k€513</b>	<b>k€3.724,6</b>



*PhD candidates*

Enrolment				Success rates							
Starting year	M	F	Total	Graduated in ≤ 4 years	Graduated in ≤ 5 years	Graduated in ≤ 6 years	Graduated in ≤ 7 years	Graduated in ≤ 8 years	Not yet finished	Discontinued	
2009	3	2	5	0	1 / 20%	4 / 80%	5 / 100%	5 / 100%	0	0	
2010	0	1	1	0	1 / 100%	1 / 100%	1 / 100%	1 / 100%	0	0	
2011	2	2	4	0	2 / 50%	3 / 75%	3 / 75%	3 / 75%	0	1 / 25%	
2012	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
2013	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	2 / 100%	0	
2014	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4 / 33%</b>	<b>8 / 67%</b>	<b>9 / 75%</b>	<b>9 / 75%</b>	<b>2 / 17%</b>	<b>1 / 8%</b>	

*Lecturer PhD candidates*

Enrolment				Success rates							
Starting year	M	F	Total	Graduated in ≤ 4 years	Graduated in ≤ 5 years	Graduated in ≤ 6 years	Graduated in ≤ 7 years	Graduated in ≤ 8 years	Not yet finished	Discontinued	
2009	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
2010	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 / 100%	
2011	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	1 / 50%	0	
2012	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
2013	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
2014	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1 / 50%</b>	<b>1 / 100%</b>	