

# Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University Rotterdam (RSM) Strategic Evaluation Protocol (SEP) Evaluation 2015-2020: Reflection on the International Peer Review Committee Recommendations

## Background

The Strategic Evaluation Protocol (SEP) assessment of the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University (RSM) for the period 2015-2020 was conducted within the context of the national research assessment 'Economics and Business', with the following Universities as co-participants: Maastricht University, University of Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Utrecht University, Open Universiteit and Groningen University.

The assessment concluded with an online site visit of the International Peer Review Committee (IPRC) on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2021. The IPRC report provided RSM with valuable feedback and with a set of recommendations for future improvement.

The general feedback of the IPRC committee reads as follows:

*"RSM is a highly ranked research-driven business school with an open research culture and a high level of societal engagement. The school stands out in terms of research quality and competes in a truly international league. RSM's achievements and contribution of outstanding quality are underpinned by its impressive long-term vision and the implementation of an effective research and publication policy, along with strong incentive and reward systems which clearly place emphasis on impactful top journal publications. RSM has managed to offer an effective balance between teaching load and research time, together with the use of teaching assistants/lecturing staff. This appears attractive particularly among junior faculty in their attempt to succeed in the tenure and promotion process. The relatively large size of ERIM also enables economies of scale in offering excellent research facilities, support to research excellence, and opportunities for interaction and collaboration. Like other schools, RSM is facing diversity issues but acknowledges them and pledged commitment to change. A concern is the small (and decreasing) size of RSM's full-time PhD programme. Having limited numbers of PhD candidates may not be in the PhD candidates' and the school's best interest. With respect to open science, the committee saw evidence of strong policies, with some indication that colleagues are compliant with these policies."*

The IPRC also offered specific recommendations for the school, as listed in Table (1). The aim of this memo is to address these recommendations, in the form of responses jointly formulated by or in consultation with the relevant RSM executive board (EB) members, and accompanied by a set of action points. While the recommendations received relate to RSM's research domain, we acknowledge that the majority of the recommendations will require school-wide collaboration and action, in a way that extends beyond RSM's research function alone.

Table 1: IPRC recommendations for RSM's SEP evaluation 2021, accompanied by a plan of action and the RSM lead and working group members for its implementation.

IPRC Recommendation	RSM response & action points
<p>1. RSM is advised to intensify grant applications and diversify its funding sources. Senior faculty who are currently not as involved in grant writing as they could be, should be incentivised to apply for grants and be rewarded for their efforts/ achievement. As research funding is increasingly driven by societal demand, the school is also advised to follow this trend and pair curiosity driven research with more applied, societally relevant research. Contract funding, especially when combined with longer term strategic partnerships with external stakeholders, could be explored further.</p>	<p>This recommendation aligns with one of RSM's key strategic priorities. RSM seeks to address this challenge by both cooperating more closely with ERS in the area of developing collaborative grant proposals and developing its own capacity in this area to meet RSM-specific challenges. Several of the action points listed below are already being implemented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Hiring of a funding advisor for collaborative grants, who will report to RSM's Funding Director (interview phase).</li> <li>-Expand RSM's existing funding strategy (i.e., using research intelligence to identify the most promising faculty, reaching out to them 12 months ahead of the deadline, and coaching and mentoring them along the way) to collaborative grants/(inter)national consortia with a strong element of societal relevance/engagement.</li> <li>-Develop/intensify research support infrastructure for collaborative projects/contract research (especially for pre-award phase), also tapping into available expertise and ongoing projects at university level (e.g. ERS)</li> <li>-Intensify collaboration with ERS, for example by actively participating in the ERS scheme: 'Talent Enablement Package'.</li> <li>-Collaborating with ERS, develop a COFUND application together with ISS and TU Delft (submitted).</li> </ul>
<p>2. RSM is encouraged to (i)act upon its ambition to measure societal impact in terms of outcome and to (ii)engage more with external stakeholders in various important, value-creating ways.</p>	<p>The recommendations received are wholly aligned with the priorities RSM has set for the domain of 'Engagement and Partnerships'. Therefore, RSM welcomes this recommendation as it emphasises that the ongoing efforts, led by the Dean of Engagement and Partnerships and coordinated with RSM's research and educational domains, provide fertile ground for further improvement.</p>

In response to this recommendation, RSM will proceed with the following action points:

(i) Develop a methodology to measure, track and trace research societal impact, in accordance with RSM's strategy and based on international methodologies (e.g., the UK's Research Excellence Framework) and available reporting tools (e.g., Almetrics, RSM's SDG tracker). Also see: <https://rsmmetrics.nl/sustainable-development-goals/triple-crown-sdg>

(ii) In close collaboration with the '*Evaluating societal impact*' project, and by employing a Theory of Change approach, RSM will further explore the significance of engagement for the school as whole via a constructive dialogue with the academic and professional services departments of the school. Considering the diverse epistemic communities in which our researchers are embedded, we will seek to identify how the theory of change approach applies to RSM's different research groups/areas. In the same vein, we will continue to work towards codifying the role of engagement across the school's domains and, in the context of the research evaluation, how this feeds back into the school's research and research support. In order to achieve these objectives, we will employ a 'hands-on' approach, for example by organising workshops or formulating a mini-campaign tailored to the needs of our epistemic communities.

(iii) RSM has prioritized its centers – such the Erasmus Center for Data Analytics, the Erasmus Center for Entrepreneurship, and the Erasmus Leadership Center – as its primary engagement vehicles. The centers act as 'free spaces' where faculty and PhD students can meet and team up with corporations and other societal actors. It is RSM's explicit intent to increasingly position its centers as EUR-wide centers in which other EUR schools can also partake and use these centers as vehicles for meeting their own

	<p>engagement ambitions. In recognition of this open architecture, these centers have also explicitly been labeled as 'Erasmus' centers, even though they are currently financed by RSM.</p> <p>(iv) RSM's part-time PhD programme is rapidly becoming one of the larger PhD programs of EUR and is an impact and engagement powerhouse. The programme is exceptionally international, has grown to a cohort size of 20+ students per annum, and ties RSM to many influential organizations and institutions worldwide. RSM's part-time PhD students regularly perform research of the highest standards, usually in an extremely engaged and impactful setting. RSM considers its part-time PhD programme as one of its 'crown jewels', and as one of its primary vehicles for effectuating positive change.</p>
<p>3. RSM will need to tackle issues with respect to staff retention, in particular regarding mid-career staff. This could be achieved by taking a more balanced approach in the allocation of research time and by making RSM a more attractive intellectual hub. To diversify staff profiles, RSM is advised to hire more faculty at senior levels. This would contribute to the development of a more plural, richer, and potentially more stimulating academic environment.</p>	<p>As already noted by the IPRC members, RSM acknowledges its inclusion and diversity challenges and is committed to intensify its efforts in this area of work. The Associate Dean for Diversity and Inclusion, together with RSM's HR Director, will be playing a leading role in the implementation of the following action points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Revision of professorial policy.</li> <li>- Revision of internal research evaluation (e.g. ERIM membership charter), research support (e.g. ERIM Support Programmes) and research allocation time (i.e. voucher system) instruments to accommodate retention, diversity, equity, and inclusion challenges across faculty ranks, individuals with part-time or fulltime employment relationships with the school, and a diversity of academic profiles, including the emerging education track faculty.</li> </ul> <p>-In line with the IPRC's recommendation, RSM has recently (partially) broken with its own tradition of appointing senior faculty exclusively from its own ranks, and has externally hired professors Nicola Kleyn, Tal Simons, Flore Bridoux, and Tine de</p>

	<p>Moor. An external search for a (preferably female) full professor in data analytics is currently underway (interview phase).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Creation of a Transition Matrix for faculty, in combination with the operationalisation of the Faculty Model.</li> <li>-Promotion of the use of the EUR inclusive hiring toolkit.</li> </ul>
<p>4. RSM is advised to capitalise on its strong scholarly research achievements and promote long-term partnerships with world-leading research institutes to further elevate its brand reputation and take its standing up to a global level. Faculty should be encouraged to team up with top researchers worldwide and engage in long-term research collaborations.</p>	<p>We appreciate this comment fully, but would also like to point out that RSM already has many long-term partnerships with world-leading institutions. RSM's researchers continuously collaborate with top researchers worldwide, as evidence by co-authored research publications, the international academic visits of our PhD candidates, the increasing number of international guest lecturers during our research summer school, and the strong international academic placement record of RSM's fulltime PhD program. As an acknowledgement of these collaborative efforts, RSM performs particularly strong in international rankings that have a reputational component, such as the Shanghai Index (in which EUR achieved first place globally for the academic subject area of business administration in 2021, which is RSM's core domain). Nevertheless, RSM is very willing to work towards buttressing and expanding its academic reputation as a research institute. Valuing the input received, RSM will focus its efforts on the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Core to RSM's academic reputation is the representation of RSM faculty in crucial gatekeeping roles, especially editorships of top international journals. To this end, RSM launched an editorial incentives policy in 2019. Since then, the number of top journals under RSM editorship has expanded from 5 to 16.</li> <li>(ii) RSM recognizes the open science movement as a key vehicle for stimulating international collaboration and reputation building through the sharing and reuse of data, code, research instruments, and research publications. Through ERIM, RSM has been at the forefront of the open science movement at EUR, and</li> </ul>

	<p>the ERIM open science initiatives have become the blueprint for the 'Open and Responsible Science' pillar of the EUR strategy.</p> <p>(iii) RSM is increasingly penetrating in 'Ivey league' dominated high status networks like ARCS (<a href="https://corporate-sustainability.org">https://corporate-sustainability.org</a>), RRBM (<a href="https://www.rrbm.network">https://www.rrbm.network</a>), and SEI (<a href="https://www.seiconsortium.com">https://www.seiconsortium.com</a>), and has in fact been invited to host the extremely prestigious annual conferences associated with each of these communities</p> <p>(iv) RSM is developing a communications strategy based on research strengths and identifying key allies for collaboration (e.g., exploit established networks for business schools to build collaborative efforts, e.g. shared PhD courses).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthening engagement with RSM's research-focused alumni (i.e. ERIM PhD alumni)</li> <li>- Improve reporting on international collaboration for future research assessments, utilising available EUR tools (e.g. Pure).</li> </ul>
<p>5. It is important that RSM further invests in the new five-year PhD programme, by increasing the number of full-time PhD candidates and improving their completion rate. Efforts should also be made to make labour market preparation more formal and to improve communication on initiatives to promote wellbeing in the programme.</p>	<p>Further investments in the FT PhD programme are ongoing:</p> <p>(i) In response to the IPRC's comments, RSM has committed to increasing its cohort size of 5-year fully funded fulltime PhD students from 10 to 15 per annum – or from 2 to 3 per ERIM research program. This represents a substantial additional investment in research in general and in PhD education in particular, of 1.5 million Euro per annum.</p> <p>(ii) RSM is also seeking to increase the number of externally funded PhD positions and is investing resources in those PhD students. For example, RSM is regularly attracting bursary students from China and (recently) Taiwan. RSM furthermore incentivizes the acquisition of grants that finance PhD positions (4-year projects) by financing the 5<sup>th</sup> year of these incoming PhD candidates, to harmonize labor conditions amongst all PhD students employed by RSM. Furthermore, all PhD candidates (regardless of source of funding) have access to the same</p>

financial support for collecting data, attending external courses, participating in conferences and workshops, and for completing an international research visit (in preparation for their academic job placement).

(iii) We had a relatively high number of dropouts in 2018, due to personal circumstances outside of our control. We also expect an impact of Covid-19 on dropout rates. We have already seen an increase in dropouts in the two cohorts affected the most by the confinement (i.e., PhD students who started in 2019 and 2020). We do not believe, however, that these effects will persist, and that these dropouts do not reflect appropriately the overall picture of the completion rate of the full-time PhD programme over time. We expect dropout rates to return to normal (<10 percent) from 2022 onwards.

(iv) Starting in 2019, we have been working on improving our PhD students' job market preparation. In this improvement trajectory, our first step has been to offer pitch training, a CV writing workshop, and services to create short videos of candidates 'on the job market'. Since this 2022 academic year, we are also targeting PhD students in their first half of the PhD trajectory with job market preparation events. The goal is to make sure that PhD students use all the opportunities ERIM offers (e.g., networking at conferences, international research visit) to prepare themselves for the job market. In addition, career plans are now a topic of discussion during the 2,5-year assessment of the PhD students.

(v) Now that confinement is over, we have reestablished the PhD council, which plays an important role in the communication with the PhD students and organizes many social events that can contribute to PhD students' well-being. Information about the resources the university offers to support PhD students' well-being will also be shared on the revised ERIM website.