



## **RESEARCH REVIEW**

**2014-2019**

**UNIVERSITY OF HUMANISTIC  
STUDIES**

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# REPORT ON THE RESEARCH REVIEW 2014-2019 OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HUMANISTIC STUDIES

## 1. FOREWORD BY COMMITTEE CHAIR

The committee for the research review 2014 to 2019 is thankful for the warm welcome it received and the open academic culture it experienced during the preparations as well as during the site visit via ZOOM. What struck the committee during these two days were the university's open academic culture, the cooperative attitudes of its researchers, and the commitment of the researchers to the mission and vision of the institution, as well as to society and the specific stakeholders.

The University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht has a very special position in the academic landscape of the Netherlands, but also in the world, because it is a denominational university with its core identity, principles, norms and values constituted through a humanistic worldview.

The review committee has focused on the research conducted in the period 2014-2019, and considered the period including 2020, in which the university has been confronted with major changes, challenges as well as opportunities. It is important to mention here the Covid-19 pandemic, that had great impact on academic teaching and research while the university was also preparing the Self-Evaluation Report Research 2014-2019.

In the Preface of that Report, the University of Humanistic Studies formulated, in accord with the Strategy Evaluation Protocol 2021-2027, six additional questions for the review committee focusing respectively in pairs of two on: interdisciplinary research, the mission of the university in relation to its academic and societal environment, and the balance between academic and societal output. These questions are discussed in the sections on *Humanism*, *Internal cooperation*, *interdisciplinary and inclusive humanism* and *Societal relevance* of this report.

The research evaluation took place in December 2020. However, the University of Humanistic Studies convincingly decided in advance to be evaluated already by the new Strategy Evaluation Protocol 2021-2027, because the university not only wanted to look back, but also wanted to look forward from the new adopted framework for research evaluation.

We hope that our evaluation report might help the University of Humanistic Studies, being a unique university in the Netherlands and in the world, to strengthen its research policies and practices in the years to come.

Professor Siebren Miedema



## 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 conducted at the University of Humanistic Studies (UHS) in the period 2014-2019. The committee was specifically asked by the UHS to consider three criteria: 1) interdisciplinary research; 2) the mission of the UHS in relation to the academic and societal environment; and 3) the balance between academic and societal output.

In accordance with the Strategy Evaluation Protocol 2021-2027 (SEP) for research reviews in the Netherlands, the committee was requested to assess the quality of research conducted by the UHS as well as to offer recommendations in order to improve its quality and the strategy of the UHS. The committee was requested to carry out the assessment according to the guidelines specified in the Strategy Evaluation Protocol. The evaluation includes a backward-looking and a forward-looking component. Specifically, the committee was asked to judge the performance of the unit on the main assessment criteria and offer its written conclusions as well as recommendations based on considerations and arguments. The main assessment criteria are:

- 1) Research Quality;
- 2) Societal Relevance;
- 3) Viability of the Unit.

During the evaluation of these criteria, the assessment committee was asked to incorporate four specific aspects:

- 1) Open Science: availability of research output, reuse of data, involvement of societal stakeholders;
- 2) PhD Policy and Training: supervision and instruction of PhD candidates;
- 3) Academic Culture: openness, (social) safety and inclusivity; and research integrity;
- 4) Human Resources Policy: diversity and talent management.

### **2.2. Composition of the committee**

The composition of the committee was as follows:

- Prof. Siebren Miedema (chair), Professor Emeritus of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Behavioural and Movement Sciences, and Professor Emeritus of Religious Education, Faculty of Religion and Theology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam;
- Prof. Nancy Snow, Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Institute for the Study of Human Flourishing, University of Oklahoma;
- Prof. Ann Phoenix, Professor of Education, Institute of Education, University of London;
- Prof. Hanne Marlene Dahl, Professor of Social Sciences at Department of Social Sciences and Business, Roskilde University;
- Bareez Majid, MA, PhD candidate at the Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS), Leiden University;
- Drs. Marian Stet (non-academic expert), former member of the Board of Directors Hartekamp Groep.

The committee was supported by Dr Anna Sparreboom, who acted as project manager and secretary 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 the research performed by the University of Humanistic Studies from 2014-2019. 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 the 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 2021-2027;
- 12 key publications (2-3 per research theme).

#### **2.5. Procedures followed by the committee**

The committee proceeded according to the SEP 2021-2027. In preparation for the site visit, the committee members made preliminary assessments of the unit under review based on the written information that was provided prior to the site visit. These preliminary assessments were discussed by the committee during an online preparatory meeting before the start of the site visit.

The final review is based on both the documentation provided by the university and the information gathered during the online interviews with management and representatives of the research unit. The site visit took place on 3 and 4 December 2020 (see the schedule in Appendix 2). Because all interviews took place online it was difficult to get an impression of cultural aspects and the physical research environment. However, the committee did feel confident that it was possible to evaluate all assessment criteria and aspects.

Prior to the interviews, the committee was briefed by Qanu about research reviews according to the SEP 2021-2027. It also discussed the preliminary assessments and decided upon a number of comments and questions. It also agreed upon procedural matters and aspects of the review. After the interviews it 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 the committee and secretary was presented to the University of Humanistic Studies for factual corrections and comments. In close consultation with the chair and other committee members, the comments were reviewed to create 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 Strategy Evaluation Protocol 2021-2027. For more information see Appendix 1.

## 3. RESEARCH REVIEW OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HUMANISTIC STUDIES

### **3.1. Introduction**

The University of Humanistic Studies (UHS) pursues high-quality scientific research and education on the basis of core humanist values, thereby contributing to a humane society in which all people can live meaningful lives. Research at UHS addresses public issues with a normative component, answering both empirical and normative questions through a transdisciplinary approach that integrates humanities and the social sciences. The university's new research programme focuses on three themes: (1) *Humanism*; (2) *Meaning in Life*; and (3) *A Just and Caring Society*.

UHS has a special position in the academic landscape of the Netherlands, but also in the world, because it is a denominational university with a humanistic worldview at its core, conceptualised in core principles, norms and values. From this stance, one of the strong foci of the university has always been to strive for a balanced relationship between theory and practice. Along with providing solid academic insights, there is also the necessity to take into account the challenges that practitioners of different kinds and society are facing, including stakeholders and users. UHS contributes philosophical, historical and social scientific insights to fostering more humane practices and more humaneness in situations and relations. Its researchers work from a moral, normative perspective, with humanism as a frame of meaning, and humanism is intended to be also the object of study in research projects. During the online site visit, this combination was characterised by the research director as a 'productive tension'.

### **3.2. Organisation, management and governance**

The University of Humanistic Studies is a foundation with a supervisory board, whose members are formally appointed by the main board of the Dutch Humanist League (Humanistisch Verbond). The daily management is in the hands of the Executive Board, consisting of the rector and a second member. The academic staff are in chair groups, which are led by chair group leaders. The five chair groups are: Care Ethics; Citizenship and Humanisation in the Public Sector; Education; Humanism and Social Resilience; and Humanist Chaplaincy Studies for a Plural Society. The research director is responsible for the research activities and research support and the graduate school. There are support departments of management & facilities, education, and research & valorisation.

The committee observed that UHS has implemented a number of significant changes in the past few years, such as the development of the new research programme and the reorganisation of the graduate school. The new research themes are a clear attempt to channel the activities of the different chair groups in a more fruitful way.

The research director also heads the graduate school. Although this combination of tasks ensures a strong relationship between research priorities and the selection of candidates, it also puts an enormous amount of work on the person in charge of the two positions. The committee therefore suggests realising a division of labour.

The committee was impressed by the commitment to flat structures of management and to participatory equality. However, one of the disadvantages of this approach is that unless it is anchored in clear management structures, it can lead to a lack of strategic direction. In other words, it can result in a kind of institutional drift. The committee recommends enhancing the leadership structures - appointing people already at UHS - with more supervisory oversight in order to channel the considerable creative energies currently in evidence in the university. These leadership structures would enable the strengths of the distributed leadership and short communication chain that characterises UHS to be maintained while giving direction and guidance to the university as it makes future strategic plans. In this report, the committee will provide some examples of possible directions.

### **3.3. Strategy**

The Strategic Plan for 2017-2021 built on the advice given by the 2014 Research Review committee as well as the 2017 Midterm Review. The underlying principles of this plan are a cooperative culture, a fruitful alliance between academic quality and societal relevance, and diversity. It lists four strategic goals:





1. Strengthen the focus of research;
2. Reinforce the alliance between academic quality and societal relevance;
3. Increase the research budget;
4. Strengthen the PhD budget and raise the PhD success rate.

The committee considers these goals appropriate and important. They have been further broken down into achievable goals, and it is useful that there are indicators for assessing when they are achieved. The strategic interventions described in the self-evaluation report, such as shifting the focus to publishing in international refereed journals and investing in (inter)national cooperation, appear to have been sensible, although some goals require more work. The committee commends the university for the attention it paid to the report of the 2014 SEP evaluation.

In the coming years, UHS's mission will continue to be contributing to a humane society in which all people live meaningful lives. For 2021-2026 nine strategic goals for research have been formulated:

1. Develop UHS's transdisciplinary humanistic profile.
2. Reinforce the university's position in academic and societal networks.
3. Tune into its users.
4. Turn the shared research programme into a lively cooperative practice.
5. Further shape the graduate school.
6. Strengthen the research capacity by expanding the educational programs and stimulating excellence.
7. Adapt the HR policy to current ambitions.
8. Adapt the administration and support structure to current ambitions.
9. Improve the quality assurance cycle on research policy.

The committee fully supports these strategic aims. With regard to the first aim, the development of UHS's transdisciplinary humanistic profile, it wishes to emphasise that the balance of disciplinary backgrounds of its scholars should be a serious point of attention for the Board, because the specific mission and vision are at stake here. It also strongly advises paying attention to the conceptualisation of the concept of 'humanism'. It noticed that there are mixed views among the staff on the importance as well as the connotation and denotation of this core concept. The necessary disciplinary background of scholars needed for concretising a clear and workable concept for all staff members should be taken into account in respect to the university's specific identity.

The committee noted that many of the current initiatives, such as the new research programme and connected research seminars, have been introduced very recently. In general, it agrees that UHS will benefit from more fine-grained strategic plans with milestones, time frames and agreements about responsibilities and accountability. This will also provide a safety net to identify and address problems. It recommends that a thorough evaluation system for different aspects of the research policy should be instituted.

### **3.3. Research quality**

As noted, UHS has recently developed a new research programme with three themes. The research programme, which was finalised in 2020, was the result of a bottom-up process to strengthen the focus of research. The five chair groups all contribute to one or two of these themes. The three themes are meant to guide strategic choices, encourage internal and external collaboration, and augment visibility to peers and societal partners.

#### *Humanism*

The research theme *Humanism* studies the foundations of humanism, its core concepts and values, its historical manifestations, and its significance for the present and future. It draws on insights and expertise taken from philosophy, history, and the social sciences. Humanism and its constituting concepts and ideals are, it is suggested, evaluated and presented critically with the help of a transdisciplinary approach. The research in this theme is inspired by three pressing contemporary challenges to humanism: globalisation and the diversity and confrontation of



worldviews, the criticism of anthropocentrism in the face of the ecological crisis, and social resilience in the face of social forces that isolate people and pit them against each other.

The committee noted that the academic output within this theme, both in Dutch and English, has been solid in the past review period. The peer-reviewed publications indicate that the value of this research theme is recognised internationally. Based on the two key publications it reviewed and the conversation held during the online site visit, the committee concluded that the philosophical component (humanism as a frame of meaning) has not been fully integrated into this theme; it still stands on its own. Furthermore, the ratio between staff members representing the three domains of expertise is a bit unbalanced due to the lack of philosophical expertise, i.e. the input from the humanities.

The committee believes that a more substantial input from scholars from the humanities could result in concretising the favoured concept of 'inclusive humanism'. In this way, a more cultivated understanding of humanism around the globe could be developed. Such an approach would contribute to the underlying principle of 'multivocality'. A broader and more theoretical definition of 'humanism', which includes cultural diversity, could be especially beneficial for internationally oriented research projects, and could also strengthen the position of UHS within the multicultural Dutch society.

The components 'humanism as moral agency' and 'humanism as a political and social endeavour', in relation to the concept 'social resilience', have been and will be further strengthened by the new head of the Humanism and Social Resilience chair group in 2020. This group also cooperates with members of the Citizenship and Humanisation of the Public Sector chair group. These are positive developments, especially within the field of the social sciences. However, the committee advises strengthening the interconnectedness of the social sciences with the humanities input in due course.

#### *Meaningful living*

In this theme, the moral dimension of the good life is investigated conceptually, theoretically as well as empirically: how do people pursue meaning over their life course? This research focuses on three major contemporary challenges to meaningful living: rising life expectancy; rediscovering meaning in life in the wake of social injustice, moral injury, or social trauma; and constraints to meaningful education.

The committee concluded that the aims of this research theme are well grounded in both humanist aims and meaningful issues for contemporary society and people. The theme cuts across the work of all five chair groups, though it has greater applicability in some chair groups than in others. For example, the focus on meaning in life is central to Humanist Chaplaincy Studies for a Pluralist Society but carries less weight in the chair group Education.

According to the committee, the topics that are the focus of the *Meaningful Living* theme are very important and have important contributions to make to scientific knowledge. In particular, very little is known about the links between meaningful ageing and decisions to terminate life. The need to examine recovery and repair following social injustice has been highlighted in many societies with the resurgence of Black Lives Matter and movements for epistemological and reparative decolonisation. One issue that arises, however, is whether this theme runs the risk of individualising meanings when the issues it is tackling are psychosocial. The paper by Immler & Scaglioga in the set of key publications made available to the committee helpfully elaborates the entanglement of histories, but it would be useful to have further consideration of the implications for meaningful living in diverse societies. The paper on the well-being and upbringing and education of children is also interesting and important. However, the overall strategy aims to move beyond a focus on well-being.

The committee concluded that within its specialism of humanist work, UHS has clearly made an important mark in the Netherlands, and there are international collaborations with some internationally recognised scholars (such as Gert Biesta, although there are no joint publications with other staff members of UHS). The researchers associated



with this theme have fruitful collaborations with researchers from other departments and some internationally. There is room for more international collaborations and gaining more recognition. The committee therefore encourages the leadership to devise strategies to increase visibility internationally and nationally, for instance in seminars or podcasts.

#### *A just and caring society*

The third research theme, *A just and caring society*, addresses issues surrounding the creation of a socially just and caring society. Social justice is approached through the lenses of redistribution, recognition and representation. Researchers associated with this theme seek to advance knowledge about how best to promote caring, high-quality public services that contribute to social justice. Research in this theme can be conceptual (historical, analytical and philosophical), directed at the role of institutions and organisations, or focus on the role of public professionals in promoting a just and caring society.

The committee concluded that the theme of *A just and caring society* is clearly set out in the self-evaluation with a highly relevant, dual focus on institutions and professionals. The publications assigned to this theme are in leading, international journals about key issues such as dignity and dependence. The scientific articles submitted to the committee as key publications for this theme all present substantial, excellent contributions to the existing literature. The articles are not just piling up evidence, but critically reflecting upon existing theorisations using a second-order analysis and combining knowledge from various studies. This critical, constructive attitude also shows in their self-reflexive approach to taken-for-granted notions within action research. The committee notes that the attention to justice is important and looks forward to the contributions of this theme to international research. The committee, however, wonders why justice is not discussed in terms of different approaches than the one chosen a priori. Opening up the discussion of justice to include different understandings and approaches including boundary lines between ethics (the ethics of public professionals) and justice might be worth exploring. The committee also notes that the reviewed publications use case studies and comparative design, where references to the more updated methodological literature could be strengthened in this theme.

During the site visit, this theme came to the fore as one on which the various chairs collaborate intensively. In addition, this theme also includes exposure to and collaboration with external partners. There is, for instance, structural cooperation with healthcare organisations and with the community of chaplains.

#### *Internal cooperation, interdisciplinarity and inclusive humanism*

The three research themes are meant to guide strategic choices, encourage internal and external collaboration, and augment visibility among peers and societal partners. Although the analysis from the Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS) demonstrates that internal cooperation between the research groups has increased in the last years (many articles are the product of co-authoring), it also indicates that internal cooperation and co-authorship are not yet common practice for all researchers. During the site visit, it became clear to the committee that the researchers still feel more connected to their chair groups than to the research themes. Publications were assigned to the research themes post-hoc. Currently, the research themes appear to function as points of attention or a heuristic framework, but the chair groups are still the organising platforms. For the research themes to function as catalysts of strategic cooperation with external parties in society and academia, more investment in community building within the themes and external communication about them seems necessary. The existing research seminars can be an effective instrument in fostering internal connections between researchers, for instance in developing collaborative research proposals and the further exploration and profiling of the themes, but this will require leadership and more time. The committee suggests developing and following a structured implementation plan for the shared research programme and scheduling evaluation moments to monitor progress.

The committee considers that diversity should be higher on the university's agenda. The university's research would benefit from a more inclusive perspective, for instance in collaborating with groups in society with different cultural backgrounds or worldviews. The committee would suggest that UHS can also strengthen its research by



accommodating insights from studies of immigration, post-colonialism and diversity in Dutch and European society. By putting lessons learned from colonialism in dialogue with the classical tradition of Dutch humanism, and by examining diversity and gender as part of a humanistic framework, especially in the areas of meaning of life and social justice, UHS can take a leading role in rethinking what it means to be human in Dutch society and reinvigorate the meaning of humanism in Dutch society in light of current trends, also contributing to international theorisation of humanism. These topics require a trans- or interdisciplinary approach and a better disciplinary balance in research staff between philosophy, history and the social sciences.

#### *Research output*

In evaluating the research output, the committee did not distinguish between the three themes. Firstly, because the new research programme was established so recently, most of the research output of 2014-2019 was attributed to the themes *post-hoc*. And secondly, most of the quantitative information the committee received was organised per chair group and not per research theme.

UHS proposes the following indicators to determine research quality:

- research products for peers (articles and dissertations);
- use of research products by peers (collaborations with academic partners);
- marks of recognition from peers (research grants, memberships of academic bodies or editorial boards, and fellowships abroad).

The committee noted that the number of high-quality academic publications both national and especially international has increased, and UHS is much to be commended for this. Although there were some fluctuations from year to year, the output of peer-reviewed publications has grown significantly in the review period, which is impressive for a small university like UHS. The increase in the number of peer-reviewed publications indicates that UHS's research programme is well on its way to consolidating itself in an international context. The number of finished dissertations has improved from 6.5 on average per year in 2008-2013 to 9.5 per year in 2014-2019.

In the past years, UHS has collaborated fruitfully with numerous national and internal academic partners. The work of UHS researchers is well-cited internationally, which indicates that within its specialism of humanist work, the university has clearly made an important mark in the Netherlands and abroad. Though it is hard to benchmark, since there are no comparable universities in the field, the committee believes that there is room for more international collaborations and alliances, which will strengthen UHS's position internationally. In particular, collaborations with universities that are researching similar themes and with other worldview-based universities could further strengthen its research programme.

The representation of senior staff on editorial boards, academic bodies and committees in the Netherlands and abroad indicates that UHS's expertise is noted in academic circles nationally and internationally. UHS researchers also managed to secure a number of highly regarded individual NWO grants (VENI and VICI), which is a clear indicator of their quality and that of their research.

The committee concludes that UHS, though small, has made considerable strides in the quantity and quality of its research in multiple areas since 2014. The university has established its influence nationally and internationally; its researchers are perceived as experts in their fields. The newly developed research programme with three cross-cutting themes has great potential but needs further profiling and community building. Increased internal cooperation (co-authoring) and international alliances and collaborations can make the university's research stronger.

### **3.4. Societal relevance**

UHS proposes the following indicators to determine relevance to society:

- research products for societal groups (publications in journals for professionals or the general public)



- use of research products by societal groups (collaborations with societal partners)
- marks of recognition from societal groups (funding for contract research)

UHS has had a strong, persistent focus upon societal relevance since its inception. UHS researchers are highly visible in Dutch society and have extensive social networks. The university's research, for instance that on quality of life as well as social resilience and loneliness, is frequently taken up by the Dutch news media. The work on death and euthanasia has generated impact in the Dutch parliament and the European Union as well as in other policy spaces. The number of publications for professionals and the general public has declined somewhat since the beginning of the review period, probably because publishing for peers has understandably received more attention.

Frequent users of UHS's research products are found in the areas of health and care, education, and chaplaincy, for example, though these areas seem to appeal to specialised audiences. There are collaborations with external partners such as branch organisations and healthcare insurance companies. For example, the 'Dignity among Vulnerable Groups of Citizens in Utrecht' project, carried out with the municipality of Utrecht, is an excellent demonstration of the university's societal relevance. The fact that UHS has achieved a major and impressive increase in the amount of contract-based research funding is a clear indication of the societal recognition of the university's work and demonstrates that collaborations and partnerships are stable and fruitful for both parties.

The committee sees that there is a balance between academic and societal output, but it recommends investing in establishing and sustaining strategic alliances with external partners and stakeholders. It is important that UHS reflects on the current collaborations and the manner in which they make choices in this regard, because at the moment, the societal output and impact seem to result from serendipity. The committee encourages the University to develop a more focused and strategic plan for this and to be more pro-active instead of responsive to the needs of their external partners and stakeholders.

#### *Open science and research integrity*

The committee sees great potential for an open science approach at UHS. There is a large pool of societal organisations and partners with whom the university has long-standing collaborations. The societal relevance of the university's research could be strengthened even further by inviting these users and stakeholders to design and conduct research together with UHS researchers. Such close collaborations can have a positive impact on the application of research outcomes in practice and policy, and thus greatly enhance the societal relevance of research. The Centre of Expertise, which is currently being redeveloped, could be an ideal environment to locate such strategic open-science collaborations. The committee noticed that UHS has plans to explore aspects of open science further and encourages it to work on a clear and distinct conceptualisation of this notion and plan practical actions to realise its ambitions.

With regard to the accessibility of research outcomes, the committee has seen that UHS has a policy and subsidies for making academic publications in English and dissertations open access. This is visible on the website, where many publications include a link which gives online access. Publications with societal relevance are less well accessible through UHS's website. And although the UHS research is often made available to societal stakeholders through publications and the active engagement of researchers in media and conferences, the university's website contains no articles, blogs, podcasts or videos. The committee recommends investing in this.

The policy on research integrity and data management, which includes the collection, processing, analysis, storage and archiving of research data by researchers, was fine-tuned in 2016 and is in line with the *Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice* and *General Data Protection Regulations*. In 2020 UHS installed an ethical review committee that monitors the integrity of empirical research involving human subjects. All researchers make a data-management plan. Research data are stored on the university's server for 10 years. When the data sets need to be accessible to third parties after the completion of the research, they will be stored at DANS (the Dutch national centre of expertise and repository for research data) or in a comparable data archive.



### **3.5. Viability**

In the past years, UHS has shown its viability by being flexible in responding to developments in the fields studied. The new research programme makes this possible for the future as well, because the research themes *Humanism*, *Meaningful living* and *A just and caring society* are timeless and of deep relevance for the Netherlands and internationally. The committee understood that UHS is participating in a national project to investigate how COVID-19 affects local governance, as well as meaning in life for various populations. It was glad to see that the university responded to COVID-19 as an urgent and topical issue. This indicates that its researchers and policy are flexible enough to react to unforeseen opportunities. The impact of COVID-19 also appears to be a promising area for future research and the acquisition of research funding.

The committee sees two challenges for the university's viability, which are also identified as weaknesses or threats in the SWOT analysis: the availability of research funding, and diversity and inclusivity. As mentioned above, the committee expects that more focus, structure and strategy, and stronger leadership will contribute greatly to UHS's viability.

In 2014-2019, UHS took several measures to increase its research budget. These included the organisation of training in the acquisition of research funding, the appointment of a grant advisor, and the intensification of peer-review of research grant proposals before they were submitted. This led to an impressive increase in research grant and contract-based research funding (See Appendix 3 Table E3). The committee applauds the university's success; in the past three years the targets were easily met.

However, as a result of the university's moderate size, acquiring sufficient research funding will require continuous attention in the years to come, including attention to developing quantitative methodological skills. The committee noted that although individual researchers managed to secure a number of highly regarded NWO grants in the VENI and VICI scheme, UHS's success rate for NWO grants is below the national average. It believes that an increase in internal cooperation within UHS and international collaborations can further strengthen the university's research programme and success rates in grant acquisition. It advises developing an even tighter and more comprehensive plan for increasing the budget in the future. This would have to include long-term goals for financial sustainability for research efforts and specified budgetary growth milestones for each funding stream. It can also contain incentives for the faculty to increase their productivity in writing and pursuing funding for research. With regard to the university's ambition to fund part of its research with gifts and bequests, the committee also recommends developing a plan and policy to achieve what can be a difficult goal.

#### *Human resources policy and academic culture*

In the past years, UHS has taken several measures to improve its human resources policy. These include procedures for selecting, assessing and promoting academic staff. Three-year Professional Development Plans were introduced as a means to structure the decision-making process about tenure and promotions. Responding to the recognition and reward movement in the Netherlands and elsewhere, the university has started to experiment with different career paths, which allow its staff to put emphasis on research, teaching or societal relevance. In the coming years, it will adapt its HR policy to these ambitions by investing in training, coaching and mentoring and by creating tenure-track positions. It also has plans to improve the compensation (in time) for PhD education and supervision, grant proposal writing and valorisation projects.

The committee endorses all of these plans and ambitions, which will have to be developed in more depth and detail. It suggests also exploring opportunities for training outside UHS. It advises paying attention to succession planning as well as promotion decisions in the HR policy for early career academics. The committee considers that the early career academics (and UHS as a whole) would benefit from training in leadership and management skills, as well as teaching.



Currently, the majority of the research staff are white Dutch or European. The fact that the curriculum and research foci are also monocultural compounds notions that UHS is ethnically exclusive. The committee encourages UHS to take steps in this regard, because such a homogenous cultural environment and lack of attention to diversity and inclusivity can give researchers as well as graduate school students with a migrant background the feeling that they do not belong and thus affect the quality of the university's academic culture. Equally, it limits possibilities for staff and students fully to realise their humanist aims. A more diversified faculty would strengthen the university's ability to respond to pressing social issues such as the Black Lives Matter movement and European reactions to migration and Islamophobia.

### **3.7. PhD policy and training**

In the review period 2014-2019, UHS had 59 PhD candidates. Characteristic for UHS is that almost 80% of the entire PhD population consists of external PhD candidates, who are pursuing a PhD part-time, alongside their professional careers in healthcare, universities of applied sciences, social work organisations or other public institutions. In contrast to most PhD candidates in the Netherlands, they are not employed by the university. All PhD candidates are connected to one of the three research themes. Because of the connection to professional practice, *Meaning in life* and *A just and caring society* have more external PhDs (22 and 21 candidates, respectively) than Humanism (3). In 2016 the selection and admission procedures were adapted to ensure that all PhD projects are aligned with the university's research programme and the expertise of the staff. UHS chose to admit all candidates who present a solid research proposal and evaluate and select them after the first year on the basis of the credits earned in the doctoral programme and three peer-assessments of their work.

PhD training is organised by UHS's graduate School. The programme consists of courses in academic skills and research methods for a total of 22 ECs, two international guest lectures and the graduate School conference day. Candidates are required to attain 10 EC's in their first year and can spread the rest of the coursework over the remaining years as long as they have 12 EC's at the end of their second year. They develop an education programme tailored to their needs together with their supervisors. They can also take specialised courses from other universities, institutes and/or research schools in the Netherlands.

All PhD candidates have at least two supervisors, whom they meet on a regular basis. The university established a peer support system for supervisors so that they can exchange experience and strategies. The committee understood that UHS aims to invest further in the quality of PhD supervision by developing a programme to educate PhD supervisors and train them, for instance in how to deal with delays. There are also plans to allocate more time for the supervision of doctoral candidates. The quality of the research proposals that candidates finish in the first year and submit to the doctoral board is evaluated by three peers, but after that the monitoring of quality and progress is left to the supervisors.

The committee appreciates the important steps in reorganising its PhD programme and graduate school that UHS has taken in the past years. During the site visit, the extent and character of the changes became visible, along with the intentions driving them. The aims of the reorganisation were to strengthen the PhD education and raise the success rate, particularly for external PhD candidates. The committee expects that the measures taken, some of which are quite recent, will have a positive effect, but it is too early to see the results. It also wants to raise a number of other issues that require attention: the recruitment process, the duration of PhD study and completion rates, community building and career guidance and UHS's 'family culture'.

The recruitment process has become more strategic in the sense that the University invites candidates to connect their research proposal to one of the research themes. The committee applauds this, because it will help to further the research programme and its three themes as well as create synergies between the work of the PhD candidates, their supervisors and the chairs. However, it wonders whether this strategic approach might also have problems if it is applied too strictly, for instance by not admitting a candidate with a promising proposal that is not connected





to the themes. Perhaps UHS could consider having one fully funded PhD position that is open to all topics annually within the overall theme (but not specified on selected themes) to allow innovative ideas to emerge from below.

With an eye to the long (sometimes very long) duration and completion rates, the committee suggests raising the bar for starting candidates (see Appendix 3 Table E4). In the past ten years, 20% of all candidates dropped out of the programme within their first year. And of the candidates who were admitted between 2011-2015, only 21% has graduated so far. The remaining 79% has either dropped out (41%) or has been working on their project for more than 5 years (38%). This indicates to the committee that a considerable part of the energy and time dedicated to supervising PhDs is lost, because the candidates do not finish their projects. The graduate school has downsized, admitting 14 candidates on average per year between 2016-2018. The committee thinks this is realistic given the resources available for courses and supervision. Perhaps UHS could benefit from prioritising resources and downsizing even further, aiming for a smaller graduate school with higher success rates and lower completion times.

The committee believes that a compulsory, joint element of PhD training is vital for the success of the graduate school, but is uncertain whether the present form is catering to the needs of the differentiated group of PhD candidates. The incoming external candidates have different qualifications, needs, job and family situations and are facing different challenges in their studies than internal PhDs. The committee suggests paying more attention to catering to their needs and taking their differences into account organisationally. One way could be to start two different tracks for these groups so that more attention can be spent on the instructions and conditions that both groups need to finish their thesis on time. The annual or bi-annual self-evaluations by the PhD candidate and her/his supervisor could be more effective in encouraging progress and detecting challenges at an early stage in order to ensure a higher success rate and reduced completion times.

Community building and career guidance also require attention. From the conversations during the site visit, the committee understood that not all PhD candidates feel equally connected to their peer-PhDs and the university community. The introduction of a PhD Student Board in 2020 is an important step in improving this. It can give PhD candidates a democratic voice, provide valuable input to the head of the graduate school about the needs of candidates, and provide feedback to improve the quality of the course portfolio. Career guidance and orientation appear to be left to the initiative of the supervisors and the PhD candidates themselves. The committee advises including this in the activities organised by the graduate school.

By 'family culture', the committee means that in a small and informal academic community such as UHS, there is a danger that 'getting along' becomes more important than addressing problems. From the interviews with PhDs during the site visit, the committee considers that the institutional structures to deal with issues of academic integrity and discrimination can be strengthened. The lack of institutional responsiveness to concerns about an academic integrity issue and lack of diversity and inclusivity in the research environment expressed by some of the PhD candidates worried the committee. It urges UHS to take these signals seriously and tighten the procedures for reporting and dealing with such complaints. It also recommends exploring the possibilities to improve accessibility of the UHS buildings for wheelchair users.





## 4. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

The committee was impressed with what UHS has achieved in the past years. It expects that the University's research programme will benefit from stronger strategic planning, further structuring and taking more robust steps to foster a culture of inclusivity. It has formulated the following recommendations:

- Enhance leadership structures, for instance by giving present senior staff more supervisory oversight.
- Separate the positions of director of research and of head of the graduate school.
- Develop more fine-grained strategic plans with milestones, time frames and agreements about responsibilities and accountability.
- Develop a structured implementation plan for the shared research programme and schedule evaluation moments to monitor progress.
- Strengthen the interconnectedness of the social sciences and humanities input.
- Reconsider the conceptualization of the concept of 'humanism'.
- Invest in establishing and sustaining strategic alliances with external partners and stakeholders. Develop a more focused and strategic plan for this.
- Devise strategies to increase visibility internationally and nationally, for instance in seminars, blogs, videos and podcasts and enhance international collaborations.
- Invest in enhancing diversity and inclusivity of staff, curricula and research content and in fostering a culture of inclusivity, for instance by appointing a diversity officer.
- Invest in forging more international collaborations and alliances.
- Invite users and stakeholders to design and conduct research together with UHS researchers according to open science principles.
- Develop a more comprehensive plan for increasing the budget in the future.
- Pay attention to succession planning as well as promotion decisions for early career academics (and UHS as a whole).
- Invest in training in leadership, management and teaching skills of staff.
- Strengthen the institutional structures to deal with issues of academic integrity and discrimination.
- Include career guidance and orientation for PhD candidates in the graduate school programme.
- Consider creating separate doctoral tracks for internal and external PhD candidates.
- Implement annual or bi-annual self-evaluations by the PhD candidate and her/his supervisor or other methods to improve success rates and completion times.



## APPENDICES





## APPENDIX 1: THE SEP 2021-2027 CRITERIA AND CATEGORIES

The committee was requested to assess the quality of research conducted by the UHS as well as to offer recommendations in order to improve the quality of research and the strategy of the UHS. The committee was requested to carry out the assessment according to the guidelines specified in the Strategy Evaluation Protocol. The evaluation included a backward-looking and a forward-looking component. Specifically, the committee was asked to judge the performance of the unit on the main assessment criteria and offer its written conclusions as well as recommendations based on considerations and arguments. The main assessment criteria are:

- 1) **Research Quality:** the quality of the unit's research over the past six-year period is assessed in its international, national or – where appropriate – regional context. The assessment committee does so by assessing a research unit in light of its own aims and strategy. Central in this assessment are the contributions to the body of scientific knowledge. The assessment committee reflects on the quality and scientific relevance of the research. Moreover, the academic reputation and leadership within the field is assessed. The committee's assessment is grounded in a narrative argument and supported by evidence of the scientific achievements of the unit in the context of the national or international research field, as appropriate to the specific claims made in the narrative.
- 2) **Societal Relevance:** the societal relevance of the unit's research in terms of impact, public engagement and uptake of the unit's research is assessed in economic, social, cultural, educational or any other terms that may be relevant. Societal impact may often take longer to become apparent. Societal impact that became evident in the past six years may therefore well be due to research done by the unit long before. The assessment committee reflects on societal relevance by assessing a research unit's accomplishments in light of its own aims and strategy. The assessment committee also reflects, where applicable, on the teaching-research nexus. The assessment is grounded in a narrative argument that describes the key research findings and their implications, while it also includes evidence for the societal relevance in terms of impact and engagement of the research unit.
- 3) **Viability of the Unit:** the extent to which the research unit's goals for the coming six-year period remain scientifically and societally relevant is assessed. It is also assessed whether its aims and strategy as well as the foresight of its leadership and its overall management are optimal to attain these goals. Finally, it is assessed whether the plans and resources are adequate to implement this strategy. The assessment committee also reflects on the viability of the research unit in relation to the expected developments in the field and societal developments as well as on the wider institutional context of the research unit

During the evaluation of these criteria, the assessment committee was asked to incorporate four specific aspects. These aspects were included, as they are becoming increasingly important in the current scientific context and help to shape the past as well as future quality of the research unit. These four aspects relate to how the unit organises and actually performs its research, how it is composed in terms of leadership and personnel, and how the unit is being run on a daily basis. These aspects are as follows:

- 4) **Open Science:** availability of research output, reuse of data, involvement of societal stakeholders;
- 5) **PhD Policy and Training:** supervision and instruction of PhD candidates;
- 6) **Academic Culture:** openness, (social) safety and inclusivity; and research integrity;
- 7) **Human Resources Policy:** diversity and talent management.



## APPENDIX 2: PROGRAMME OF THE ONLINE SITE VISIT

### THURSDAY 3 DECEMBER

13.45 – 14.00	Arrival committee in meeting room	
13.55 - 14.00	UHS delegates enter waiting room	
14.00 - 14.30	Reception and word of welcome by the rector magnificus Notes on the organisation of UHS research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rector magnificus and president of the executive board.</li> <li>• Director of Research. Full professor Citizenship and the Humanization of Institutions and Organizations.</li> <li>• Head of the department of research and valorization policy.</li> </ul>
14.35 - 15.20	Four Strategic Goals - pitch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full professor Humanist Chaplaincy Studies for a Plural Society.</li> <li>• Full professor Care Ethics.</li> <li>• Full professor Humanism and Social Resilience.</li> <li>• Full professor of education.</li> <li>• Full professor Citizenship and the Humanization of Institutions and Organizations.</li> </ul>
15.20 – 15.35	Break and switch	
15.35 - 16.20	Contemporary humanism – pitch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistant professor Humanism and social resilience.</li> <li>• Full professor Humanism and Social Resilience.</li> <li>• Associate professor Citizenship and the Humanization of Institutions and Organizations.</li> </ul>
16.20 – 16.35	Break and switch	
16.35 - 17.20	Meaningful living – pitch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full professor Care Ethics</li> <li>• Assistant professor Education.</li> <li>• Assistant professor Chaplaincy Studies.</li> <li>• Associate professor Care Ethics.</li> </ul>
17.20 – 18.00	Break & Private meeting committee	



## FRIDAY 4 DECEMBER

13.45-14.00	Arrival committee in meeting room	
13.55-14.00	UHS delegates enter waiting room	
14.00 – 14.30	Graduate school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associate professor Education.</li> <li>• Director of research and Full professor Citizenship and the Humanization of Institutions and Organizations.</li> </ul>
14.30 – 14.36	Brief welcome to all	All PhD's and committee members start the conversation in 1 meeting room
14.36 – 14.55	One-to-one meetings with PhD students in 5 break-out rooms	5 PhD candidates Chair and secretary are made co-host so that they can choose which room they attend.
14.55 – 15.20	Plenary meeting with PhD students in 1 meeting room	Everyone back in the central meeting room
15.20 – 15.40	Break	
15.40 – 16.25	A just and caring society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistant professor Education.</li> <li>• Associate professor Citizenship and the Humanization of Institutions and Organizations.</li> <li>• Full professor Humanist Chaplaincy Studies for a Plural Society.</li> <li>• Assistant professor Citizenship and the Humanization of Institutions and Organizations.</li> </ul>
16.25 – 17.00	Deliberation time committee	
17.00 – 17.20	Preliminary outcome and last questions to the board and research director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rector magnificus and president of the executive board.</li> <li>• Director of Research. Full professor Citizenship and the Humanization of Institutions and Organizations.</li> </ul>
17.20 – 18.15	Deliberation time committee & preparation time chair feedback	
18.20 – 18.50	PUBLIC FEEDBACK FROM CHAIR	All are welcome



## APPENDIX 3: QUANTITATIVE DATA

Research staff (Table E2)

	# 2014	fte 2014	# 2015	fte 2015	# 2016	fte 2016	# 2017	fte 2017	# 2018	fte 2018	# 2019	fte 2019
Assistant professor	20	5,68	23	6,85	25	7,58	23	6,62	25	7,22	23	7,61
Associate professor	7	1,60	6	1,76	7	1,39	8	2,34	9	2,07	7	2,22
Full professor (excluding extraordinary professor)	11	2,42	10	2,96	11	2,85	9	2,56	8	2,08	9	2,52
Extra ordinary professor	12	1,14	14	1,04	13	1,29	11	1,30	10	1,13	10	1,28
Postdocs	8	1,28	10	2,18	10	1,44	9	2,11	8	2,32	9	3,07
PhD Candidates (employed)	7	2,52	8	2,43	7	2,91	10	3,46	13	5,73	14	6,24
<b>Total academic research staff</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>14,64</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>17,21</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>17,47</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>18,39</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>20,54</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>22,95</b>
Support staff												
Visiting fellows												
<b>Total staff</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>14,64</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>17,21</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>17,47</b>	<b>70,00</b>	<b>18,39</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>20,54</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>22,95</b>

Funding (Table E3)

	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
Research Unit	FTE	%	FTE	%	FTE	%	FTE	%	FTE	%	FTE	%
<i>Funding:</i>												
Direct funding (1)	10,20	69,65%	13,35	77,55%	13,30	76,15%	11,15	60,62%	12,85	62,53%	13,87	60,44%
Research Grants(2)	0,22	1,53%	0,21	1,23%	0,64	3,64%	1,04	5,63%	2,03	9,90%	5,18	22,56%
Contract Research(3)	3,08	21,01%	2,61	15,19%	2,24	12,81%	4,91	26,68%	4,54	22,09%	2,62	11,40%
Other (4)	1,14	7,81%	1,04	6,03%	1,29	7,39%	1,30	7,07%	1,13	5,48%	1,28	5,59%
<b>Total funding</b>	<b>14,64</b>	<b>100,00%</b>	<b>17,21</b>	<b>100,00%</b>	<b>17,47</b>	<b>100,00%</b>	<b>18,39</b>	<b>100,00%</b>	<b>20,54</b>	<b>100,00%</b>	<b>22,95</b>	<b>100,00%</b>
<i>Expenditure:</i>												
Personel costs	€1.450.344	88,97%	€1.458.418	89,73%	€1.556.005	87,69%	€1.812.779	84,14%	€1.946.690	85,60%	€2.117.367	79,15%
Material costs	€179.743	11,03%	€167.011	10,27%	€218.349	12,31%	€285.486	13,25%	€268.299	11,80%	€441.199	16,49%
Other costs	€ 0	0,00%	€ 0	0,00%	€ 0	0,00%	€56.250	2,61%	€59.085	2,60%	€116.653	4,36%
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>€1.630.087</b>	<b>100,00%</b>	<b>€1.625.429</b>	<b>100,00%</b>	<b>€1.774.355</b>	<b>100,00%</b>	<b>€2.154.515</b>	<b>100,00%</b>	<b>€2.274.073</b>	<b>100,00%</b>	<b>€2.675.219</b>	<b>100,00%</b>

PhD candidates (Table E4)

Table 1: All PhD candidates

Starting year	#M	#V	Total	graduated in												not yet finished		discontinued	
				4 years		5 year		6 years		7 years		8 years		total		#	%	#	%
				#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%				
2011	19	9	28	1	4%	1	4%	5	18%	2	7%	2	7%	11	39%	3	11%	14	50%
2012	9	20	29	2	7%	0	0%	2	7%	1	3%	*	*	5	17%	7	24%	17	59%
2013	12	9	21	0	0%	2	10%	1	5%	*	*	*	*	3	14%	9	43%	9	43%
2014	5	10	15	1	7%	0	0%	*	*	*	*	*	*	1	7%	6	40%	8	53%
2015	6	14	20	0	0%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	0	0%	12	60%	8	40%
<b>total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>50%</b>

Table 2: External PhD candidates and externally financed PhD candidates

Starting year	#M	#V	Total	graduated in												not yet finished		discontinued	
				4 years		5 year		6 years		7 years		8 years		total		#	%	#	%
				#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%				
2011	19	9	28	1	4%	1	4%	5	18%	2	7%	2	7%	11	39%	3	11%	14	50%
2012	9	20	29	2	7%	0	0%	2	7%	1	3%	*	*	5	17%	7	24%	17	59%
2013	12	9	21	0	0%	2	10%	1	5%	*	*	*	*	3	14%	9	43%	9	43%
2014	5	8	13	1	8%	0	0%	*	*	*	*	*	*	1	8%	4	30%	8	62%
2015	5	11	16	0	0%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	0	0%	9	56%	7	44%
<b>total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>51%</b>