

Research Review 2024

Position of the Supervisory Board of the Fryske Akademy

October 28, 2024

Position of the Supervisory Board of the Fryske Akademy regarding the Research Review 2024

Introduction

In the period March – June 2024, an international review committee assessed the scientific research of the Fryske Akademy conducted during the reference period 2020-2023, with reflections on the period since 2018. The assessment was carried out using the Strategy Evaluation Protocol 2021-2027 (SEP) for public organizations in the Netherlands.

The assessment committee consisted of:

- Prof Dr P.C. (Kees) Hengeveld (Chair), Full Professor in Theoretical Linguistics, Department of Linguistics and Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam.
- Prof Dr M. (Marjo) van Koppen, Full professor in Variation Linguistics of Dutch at the Department of Languages, Literature and Culture and the Department of Dutch Language and Culture, University of Utrecht & Senior Researcher, Meertens Institute, KNAW.
- Dr S. (Shari) Boodts, Assistant Professor Department of History, Art History and Classics /Institute for Culture and History, Radboud University Nijmegen.
- Prof Dr R. (Rory) Naismith, Professor of Early Medieval English History, Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, University of Cambridge.
- Dr M.T. (Mirjam) Günther-van der Meij, Professor of applied sciences in Multilingualism & Literacy, NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences.
- M.T. (Machteld) de Vos MPhil, PhD candidate at Centre for Language Studies, Radboud University & the Dutch Language Institute (INT).

The committee assessed the Fryske Akademy's research and performance considering the proclaimed aims and strategies. The three main SEP criteria—research quality, relevance to society, and viability—were central to the evaluation, alongside four key aspects: open science, PhD policy and training, academic culture, and human resources policy. The committee gave special consideration to the institute's ambitions and the mechanisms it has introduced (or intends to introduce) to achieve these goals, as well as to the questions the institute put forward to the committee in the self-evaluation report.

The Supervisory Board of the Fryske Akademy has received the final report. The Board accepts the findings and recommendations and extends its gratitude to the committee for their considerable time and effort.

In this position document, the Board articulates its stance in response to the findings.



Summary of findings

The audit report recognized the significant progress made by the Fryske Akademy in its research quality, societal impact, and organizational viability including diversification. The institution's commitment to its rearticulated mission, which emphasizes a multidisciplinary approach to Frisian studies, and their strategic plan was commended. The report highlighted the success in enhancing regional and international collaborations and the institution's responsiveness to societal needs through expanding research areas and digital initiatives.

The audit noted several noteworthy strengths, including increased internal collaboration, societal relevance through digital projects, and a strong academic culture. Exceptional employee loyalty and strong leadership were noted. Areas for improvement along the policy lines were also identified, such as the need for better integration of Mercator, further enhancing interdisciplinary collaboration, a more explicit diversity strategy and emphasizing the crucial role of senior researchers towards younger researchers in a flat organization structure. An ongoing commitment to enhancing a flat organization structure and culture and collaborative acquisition strategies to secure larger programme grants by leveraging the institution's digital assets, were also advised.

Position of the Board

The Supervisory Board acknowledges the recognition of the significant achievements of the Fryske Akademy during this period. They especially want to echo the finding that the Fryske Akademy has gone through a period of change and emerged as a successful and enthusiastic research community, dedicated not only to research but also to the needs of the Frisian community. The Board is pleased to read that the research quality has impressed the committee, that the direction of research is seen as a positive development, and that the increased collaboration on all levels is recognized.

The Board takes the recommendations to heart and, together with the Director and Management Team, sees these as helpful inputs for further development of the Fryske Akademy along the policy lines. The need to strengthen the integration of Mercator, to keep improving diversity and collaboration, keep fostering a collaborative working culture and to focus on a broader acquisition strategy and invest in acquisition, are specifically embraced.

All twelve recommendations have been discussed between the Supervisory Board and the Director. Below indicated for each of the recommendations how the Fryske Akademy aims to follow-up on these, and how future policy incorporates and secures the intended outcomes.



1. Keep the organizational structure as flat as possible, and make sure it is understood by all parties involved. Avoid staff members having the double role of functional leader and PhD-supervisor.

The aim remains to stay a flat organization. This involves not only a flat organizational structure but also a flat organizational culture. The latter is being pursued by promoting new working methods. Our staff members need to adapt to this new style of working and grow in confidence to work horizontally. For those with a longer history in the organization, this involves a significant shift since they have always worked in a hierarchical structure. To make the flat organization functional, non-hierarchical points of contact have been introduced, and we will monitor the need for this. We will continue to look at how to shape this effectively, and, if considered necessary, make use of external advice and training to fully implement new practices. We will avoid double roles (such as PhD-supervisor and functional leader) as much as possible and have already resolved the one instance where this was present. Furthermore, we plan a reordering of the physical location in such a way that researchers will be grouped together as much as possible in the same building, breaking any isolation of specific groups of researchers. This may also facilitate horizontal communication and interdisciplinary cooperation between researchers.

2. Reinforce the perception of Mercator, both internally and externally, as an integral part of the Fryske Akademy.

As a continuation of the steps we have already taken towards clarification of the position of Mercator within the Fryske Akademy, the Mercator project manager will be asked to develop a vision which explicitly addresses the position of Mercator in the Fryske Akademy in the future, based on our strive for synergy. We are currently integrating the communication teams of Mercator and the Fryske Akademy, and have aligned our outreach, such as newsletters. Members of the Mercator team play an active role in the Fryske Akademy overall, and we will keep encouraging them to do so, as we are convinced the close collaboration is a win-win situation. Furthermore, we will adapt our hiring policy, in such a way that future researchers can be deployed on both Mercator and other projects. Sensitivity regarding this issue concerns the subsidy situation, which we must closely monitor.

3. Promote the appointment of staff members of the Fryske Akademy as professor by special appointment at more Dutch universities.

We will develop a strategy that sees to the appointment of several members of the senior staff as professors by special appointment at Dutch universities. It will be incorporated in our strategic personnel plan. At the point of writing there are already two such appointments in different stages of completion.

4. In assessing staff members, consider all types of research output (in line with Recognition & Rewards), as this diversity is crucial for the Fryske Akademy.

In our yearly round of performance and development reviews, there is an appreciative attitude towards different types of output. We not only address scientific output in the form of academic papers, but also recognize other ways of communicating scientific



results. As an institute with a clear societal assignment, we fully appreciate and recognize the importance of connecting to the broader public, and the need to realize societal impact. The aim to realize a broad spectrum of scientific output and societal impact is incorporated in our strategic personnel planning. We will need to develop instruments to weigh and benchmark different types of output in cooperation with the KNAW (see also 10. below).

5. Keep promoting interdisciplinarity, as there is room for more interdisciplinary research and the development of team science.

We are very pleased with the positive remarks on our interdisciplinary research agenda, and welcome the remark to promote this further as we fully acknowledge the room for more interdisciplinary research and team science. We will ask the program coordinator (under whose guidance the research agenda was developed) to identify possibilities within and outside the institute in line with the research agenda for further interdisciplinary cooperation and team science. Furthermore, we will also line this up with our acquisition policy for external funding. The reordering of our office space to facilitate contact, team work and interdisciplinary contact (see 1) will hopefully have a positive impact on this development.

6. Shift attention from the application for personal grants to the application for programme grants and participation in consortia. Make use of the excellent digital infrastructure as an asset for applications.

We are working with an acquisition strategy based on three pillars: program, project, and person, where the person only constitutes a small part. Currently, for a considerable part thanks to the Mercator-projects, 90% of the applications are already consortium applications. We hope that by strengthening the position of the Fryske Akademy, the workforce, our profiling, and our network, the chances of consortium applications for the Fryske Akademy will increase. In order to be more successful, investments are being made in more structural and long-term collaborations. We have identified that we lack a coordinating role in terms of digital infrastructure across disciplines. For this reason, we aim at appointing a Digital Humanities specialist and programme coordinator, who can help leverage the digital assets in such a way that these help in our acquisition and collaboration strategy.

7. Make teaching activities by staff members of the Fryske Akademy more systematic.

We are exploring the routes for this through collaboration with universities, currently with RUG and UvA. This also aligns with career development as described in the policy plan.

8. Involve the public in research in new ways by using strategies such as citizen science and co-creation.

We will develop a plan for the coming years which aims at using concepts such as citizen science and co-creation to involve the community in our scientific activities. The Fryske Akademy hosts a large number of so-called 'wurkferbannen' (working groups) consisting of interested members of the public, organized around different themes (archeology,



literature, language, etc.). These working groups form potentially interesting 'germ cells' in which new ways of collaboration in the form of citizen science can be explored and developed. This September, a new functionary has been appointed specifically aimed at developing a policy and formats to implement such developments.

9. Find ways of bridging the gap between senior and junior researchers, and make sure the valuable knowledge of senior researchers is transferred to junior researchers.

We recognize the need for bridging this gap. In close collaboration with our staff, we will investigate how we can make sure that this knowledge transfer will take place and which type of activities (meetings, tutorials, master-apprentice couples, other) we need to organize to facilitate this transfer, with the preference that this is bottom-up and owned by researchers. We believe that this is also connected to the somewhat segregated location of the researchers (see point 2 above). Bringing them physically together might be a first step.

10. Actively develop and implement a recognition and rewards strategy.

Apart from what we already have in place with respect to Open Science, and as part of our newly-introduced HR-cycle and strategic personnel planning where competences and individual development paths are leading, we will need to develop and implement a more explicit strategy. For this we will need to identify appropriate HR-resource. Where possible, we will welcome advice on this point by the KNAW.

11. Continue to build increased awareness of diversity in all its possible manifestations and continue to promote the establishment of a more balanced representation at all levels.

We are pleased that our first big steps in creating more diversity, especially with respect to gender, are recognized and that we are encouraged to continue on this path. We are aware that steps are necessary also, and maybe especially, in the area of the (non-)use of Frisian. To do so, we will develop an explicit policy that sees to an increased awareness of diversity. In this respect we can and will make use of the tools that have been developed by the KNAW.

12. Facilitate the creation of a PhD community within the organization.

We recognize the need to set up a PhD community. In our PhD-plan we have already formulated the intention to create such a community. However, we think more is needed to provide our PhD-students with a rich and inspiring working environment in which they can profit from each other and from PhD-students from other, neighboring institutes and the universities we collaborate with. We will start a conversation with our PhD-students about their ideas and wishes in this respect, complementary to the plans formulated in the PhD-plan.



The Director, together with the Management Team, is responsible for the implementation of the recommendations in alignment with the strategic policy plan. The Supervisory Board will oversee the development and implementation, ensuring they are aligned with institutional priorities.

With this position paper, the Supervisory Board of the Fryske Akademy has accepted the report and its recommendations and extends its gratitude to the assessment committee for their considerable time and effort.

On behalf of the Supervisory Board of the Fryske Akademy,

Drs Seerp Leistra
Chair of the Supervisory Board of the Fryske Akademy

