

RESEARCH REVIEW

FRYSKE AKADEMY

2020-2023

De Onderzoekerij
Vondellaan 58
2332 AH Leiden

Email: info@onderzoekerij.nl
Internet: www.onderzoekerij.nl



Contents

Preface.....	4
1. Executive summary	5
2. Introduction.....	6
2.1 Aim of the assessment	6
2.2 The committee.....	6
2.3 Procedures followed by the committee	6
3. Assessment of the research of the Fryske Akademy.....	8
3.1 Management, organisation and strategy.....	8
3.2 Research quality	9
3.3 Societal relevance.....	10
3.4 Viability.....	10
3.5 Open Science	11
3.6 Academic culture.....	11
3.7 Human Resources Policy	11
3.8 PhD policy and training	12
3.9 Recommendations.....	13
Appendix A - Programme of the site visit	14
Appendix B - Quantitative data.....	15
B.1 Staff in fte.....	15
B.2 Funding (in k€).....	15
B.3 PhD enrollment and success rate.....	15



Preface

In this report we offer the Supervisory Board of the Fryske Akademy our assessment of the achievements of this institute during the years 2020-2023, using the national strategy evaluation protocol (SEP 2021-2027). The report is based on the self-evaluation and additional materials provided by the Fryske Akademy and on interviews during a site visit on June 4, 2024.

During the site visit the committee noted with pleasure that the Fryske Akademy has gone through a period of change and has come out of that period as a successful and enthusiastic research community, with dedication not only to research but certainly also to the needs of the Frisian community, and with significantly increased collaboration with regional and international partners.

The committee also identified certain areas in which there is room for improvement. These should not distract from the overall positive assessment but will hopefully help the Fryske Akademy to further strengthen its position in the academic landscape over the coming years.

The committee carried out its work in constructive collaboration, in which the committee members could fruitfully complement each other with their different competences. The conclusions offered in this report are unanimously supported by the committee members.

Kees Hengeveld, chair of the committee



1. Executive summary

The Fryske Akademy, with its rearticulated mission focused on conducting, sharing, and facilitating scientific research on the Frisian case from an international and multidisciplinary perspective, has made significant strides in its strategic approach. The four pillars of its strategy—profiling, acquisition, collaboration, and organizational developments—are commendable and have shown positive effects, despite the ambitious nature of the plan for a small organization. The emphasis on not only conducting research but also sharing and facilitating scientific endeavors, evidenced by the multitude of digital tools and databases available, is to be commended.

The organization's research quality has impressed the committee, particularly its efforts to promote internal collaboration across disciplines. While historically focusing on linguistics and history, the Fryske Akademy's expansion into new research areas like landscape and literature demonstrates responsiveness to societal wishes and scientific demands. These new ambitions will require increased external funding acquisition.

Collaborations with other institutions working on Frisian topics have notably increased, enhancing the institution's visibility both regionally and internationally. However, there's room for better integration of Mercator into the institution's activities. The strategy to position researchers as part-time professors at Dutch universities seems to be very effective and should be extended to foster more opportunities for collaboration and talent development.

The Fryske Akademy's societal relevance is evident through its numerous (digital) projects targeting societal groups and its involvement in teaching activities. The shrinking working groups highlight the need for alternative strategies to engage the public, such as co-creation and citizen science.

In terms of viability, the organization benefits from strong leadership, employee loyalty, and an improved average employee age, ensuring stability in research strategies. It is to be hoped that the newly developed acquisition strategy will help addressing challenges in obtaining external research funding. The committee advises against an overemphasis on personal grants, advocating for a greater focus on securing larger programme grants by leveraging the institution's digital assets.

The Fryske Akademy's commitment to open science, evidenced by its open-source software development and open-access publications, is commendable. Additionally, its academic culture fosters openness, safety, and inclusivity, although there is room for improvement in enhancing consultation between junior and senior staff and implementing a recognition and rewards plan.

Regarding human resources policy, clear efforts have been made to increase diversity, particularly in terms of gender representation, but there still is a need for a more explicit strategy to support diversity in all aspects. Furthermore, facilitating a PhD community within the organization would enhance the doctoral experience and knowledge exchange.

In conclusion, the Fryske Akademy has demonstrated impressive strengths in various areas, including research quality, societal relevance, and academic culture. The committee has noted a number of areas in which there is room for further improvement, which include funding acquisition, interdisciplinary collaboration, and diversity. The committee recommends the active development and implementation of strategies to address these issues, ensuring the institution remains at the forefront of Frisian studies.



2. Introduction

2.1 Aim of the assessment

All publicly funded university research in the Netherlands is evaluated at regular intervals in compliance with a national strategy evaluation protocol (SEP 2021-2027), as agreed by Universities of the Netherlands (UNL), the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). The evaluation process, which is applied at the research unit level, consists of an external peer review conducted every six years.

The committee is requested to assess the quality of research conducted by the Fryske Akademy as well as to offer recommendations to improve the quality of research and the strategy of the Fryske Akademy. This report describes the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this external assessment of their research.

2.2 The committee

The Supervisory Board of the Fryske Akademy appointed the following members of the committee:

1. Prof. Dr. P.C. (Kees) Hengeveld, Full Professor in Theoretical Linguistics, Department of Linguistics and Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam.
2. Prof. Ddr. 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, Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences.
3. Dr. S. (Shari) Boodts, Assistant Professor Department of History, Art History and Classics / Institute for Culture and History, Radboud University Nijmegen. Medieval reception, manuscript transmission and Digital Humanities. Member Jonge Akademie.
4. Prof. Dr. R. (Rory) Naismith, Professor of Early Medieval English History, Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, University of Cambridge. Fellow of Corpus Christi College.
5. Dr. M. T. (Mirjam) Günther-van der Meij, Professor of applied sciences in Multilingualism & Literacy, Multilingualism & Literacy Research group, NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences.
6. M.T. (Machteld) de Vos MPhil, PhD candidate at Centre for Language Studies, Radboud University, & the Dutch Language Institute (INT).

The Supervisory Board appointed Dr. Annemarie Venemans of De Onderzoekerij as the committee secretary. All committee members signed a declaration form stating no conflict of interest and ensuring impartiality and confidentiality.

2.3 Procedures followed by the committee

Before the site visit, the committee reviewed detailed documentation comprising the self-assessment report of the institute including appendices.

The committee proceeded according to the Strategy Evaluation Protocol (SEP) 2021-2027. The assessment was based on the documentation provided by the Fryske Akademy and the interviews with their management, selections of senior and junior researchers, and PhD candidates. The interviews took place on June 4, 2024 (see Appendix A).



The committee discussed its assessment at its final session during the site visit. The committee chair had a coordinating role in the writing procedure. The committee members commented by email on the draft report. The draft version was then presented to the institute for factual corrections and comments. Subsequently, the text was finalised and presented to the Supervisory Board of the Fryske Akademy.



3. Assessment of the research of the Fryske Akademy

3.1 Management, organisation and strategy

Mission and strategy

The mission of the Fryske Akademy was rearticulated in 2022 as conducting, sharing, and facilitating scientific research on the Frisian case from an international and multidisciplinary perspective as a future-oriented network institution. The strategy to achieve this mission contains four pillars: profiling, acquisition, collaboration, and organizational developments. The committee welcomes this new strategy and noticed the first positive effects of it during the site visit, despite the fact that the strategy is quite ambitious for a small organization such as the Fryske Akademy, and has been implemented relatively recently. Given the special position of the Fryske Akademy as a unique research institute, it is laudable that, apart from conducting research, much attention is given to the sharing and facilitating of scientific research, which is also reflected in the large number of digital tools and databases that the Fryske Akademy makes available to fellow researchers and to society at large.

Research organisation

The Fryske Akademy's overall functioning is overseen by a Supervisory Board with members appointed by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and the Province of Fryslân. The Supervisory Board was advised in the past by a separate Scientific Committee and by a Societal Council. In a reorganization in 2020, the latter two entities disappeared, and their tasks were taken over by members of the Supervisory Board itself, which are appointed in such a way that scientific and societal interests are both represented in the Board. The current Board is satisfied with the way this change has worked out. The committee has confirmed that the societal and scientific aspects of the Fryske Akademy's work are being considered in a balanced manner.

The director is responsible for the daily management and is supported by a Management Team that consists of one member responsible for finance and facilities and one member for strategic collaboration and research funding. In 2020 a flat organizational structure was introduced, which was partly adapted by the end of 2023. The resulting organizational structure is not really transparent to the committee, as it seems to mix up responsibilities in the area of human resource management with those that have to do with the organization of the research. The committee is of the opinion that in a small organization such as the Fryske Akademy there is a certain danger in creating a situation in which the roles of research supervisor and functional manager may be conflated. The committee observes that the newly implemented structure appears to be work in progress, with further clarification needed regarding task allocation and responsibilities. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the Fryske Akademy appears to be running smoothly, and there is clear leadership that finds support in all layers of the organization.

Based on the interviews conducted, it became clear that while the Fryske Akademy wants Mercator, the European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning, to be an integral part of its activities, it is often perceived as a separate entity, both internally and externally. It would be advisable to clearly communicate the nature of this relationship.



Collaborations

The committee was highly impressed by the large number of collaborations with other institutions working on Frisian topics inside and outside the Frisian area. This is a big change compared to the situation six years ago, when such collaborations were hardly visible. The committee spoke with a number of representatives of these institutions, and the picture that emerged was one of many vibrant and enthusiastic activities in collaborations between varying combinations of entities. Mercator also plays an important role in international collaborations, enhancing the visibility of the Fryske Akademy on a global scale.

The Fryske Akademy also strives for positioning some of their researchers as part-time professors by special appointment and secondment at universities in The Netherlands. Currently there are two chairs of this type, one at the University of Amsterdam and one at the University of Utrecht, and further options are being considered. The committee values this initiative, as it provides an important bridge between students interested in Frisian studies and the Fryske Akademy, facilitating opportunities such as internships. The committee recommends extending this strategy to other universities and universities of applied sciences in The Netherlands.

A final type of collaboration concerns the membership of the Fryske Akademy in various national research schools in The Netherlands. This is important not only for the training of its PhDs but also for contacts with researchers in The Netherlands along disciplinary lines.

3.2 Research quality

The committee was positively impressed by the quality, quantity, and diversity of the research output of the Fryske Akademy. Not only is there a substantial list of publications, the number of digital resources that have been made available is also impressive. In its publication targets the Fryske Akademy rightly stresses the importance of peer-reviewed journal articles, but it is important that all these other types of output be appreciated as well, as this diversity is crucial for the Fryske Akademy.

There is a strategy to promote internal collaboration, not only between linguists and historians as distinct groups, but also between these two groups, as when a certain historical period rather than one of these disciplines is taken as the point of departure. The committee evaluates this development into the direction of team science positively and sees room to apply this strategy in other areas. Senior researchers have a primary responsibility here, but junior researchers should also be involved in support of their career path.

The Fryske Akademy currently mainly focuses on linguistics and history as research areas, where traditionally the linguistics section is larger, which is understandable, as the Fryske Akademy has an important task in supporting the vitality of Frisian. It now also aims to cover new areas of research, such as the study of landscape and of literature, responding to societal wishes and scientific desiderata. The committee applauds this extension, although it will require the acquisition of larger external research funds than are currently being obtained.

In this respect, the Fryske Akademy has been successful in obtaining smaller research grants, mostly from entities that are close to it, such as the Frysk Akademyfûns and the Provincie of Fryslân, but has recently not been very successful in obtaining larger grants from elsewhere. A clear support structure for grant acquisition has been put in place and will hopefully produce results in the near future. The committee noted a strong focus among the researchers of the Fryske Akademy on the acquisition of grants based on personal merits, while the Fryske Akademy may be expected to be more successful in the acquisition of larger programme grants or as part of consortia, especially those in which its important digital assets would play a major role.



3.3 Societal relevance

There are strong expectations of the Fryske Akademy in Frisian society, and the Fryske Akademy complies with them in an exemplary way. There is an amazing number of (digital) projects that immediately target societal groups. Websites such as frysker.nl, taalportaal.org, and frisian.eu provide a large array of language tools that are directly relevant to supporting the acquisition and use of and research on Frisian. They also provide important historical information, as exemplified by hisgis.nl, which was originally developed at the Fryske Akademy and is now based at the Humanities Cluster of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). Other activities directly targeted at society include exhibitions, the development of school curricula, contributions to the language policy debate, and language learning. The collaborations with other institutions working on the Frisian case, mentioned earlier, greatly enhance the opportunities to reach the general public.

Researchers of the Fryske Akademy also occasionally engage in teaching activities, in the form of guest lectures, for example. According to the committee, teaching is an excellent way to disseminate the knowledge of the Fryske Akademy to a wider audience. Moreover, this provides an opportunity to identify young talent. The committee therefore suggests making these teaching activities more systematic.

The Fryske Akademy traditionally also involves society in its working groups, in which laypeople engage in research. These working groups are shrinking, and it is hard to acquire new members, so it is important for the Fryske Akademy to think of other ways to involve the public in considering strategies such as co-creation and citizen science.

3.4 Viability

Starting with *strengths*, it is clear to the committee that the Fryske Akademy is in good shape and in its current state may be expected to engage successfully with the challenges it faces. It has a strong and unique position in Frisian society and in the field of Frisian studies. The organization benefits from strong leadership and exceptional employee loyalty. The Fryske Akademy has also managed to attract new young researchers, and, importantly, significantly increased its cooperation with regional and international partners who share similar interests. The research quality is very good, and the digital tools and databases are a gold mine.

As for *opportunities*, a recent report by a committee of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) on the Future of Frisian Studies has led to a decision by the Dutch Government to allot more money to Frisian Studies. The report also recommends the formation of a *Raad voor de Frisistiek* ('Board of Frisian Studies') in which the Fryske Akademy will take part. The political climate is thus propitious for Frisian Studies, and there are opportunities for the Fryske Akademy to take a leading role in these developments. Apart from these general developments, it is noteworthy that the Fryske Akademy is in good shape with the average age of employees decreasing. This trend ensures opportunities for developing stable research strategies. In terms of funding, it is important that the Fryske Akademy has developed a new acquisition strategy, which it is currently implementing.

Coming to *weaknesses*, it should be noted that the Fryske Akademy has not been very successful in obtaining external research funding over the last few years, while their envisaged budget is heavily dependent on these. The committee noted a strong emphasis on personal grants at the Fryske Akademy, which could potentially hinder the institution's ability to secure external funding for its projects, for which programme grants are more suitable. The committee has reservations about this strategy given the low success rates that characterize the programs for personal grants. Another weakness is that quite some



research within the Fryske Akademy still seems to be carried out in isolation, without making use of the excellent opportunities for interdisciplinary research that the Fryske Akademy offers.

Turning now to *threats*, the first to be mentioned is that, at the macro level, the Fryske Akademy depends on funds from the national and provincial governments that may fluctuate depending on the political stance of the parties involved. As regards to the Fryske Akademy itself, it is a threat that Frisian studies is a discipline with relatively few practitioners. This means that it is difficult to attract new young talented researchers that can bring new perspectives to the Fryske Akademy. Also, researchers at the Fryske Akademy have high visibility within the area of Frisian Studies itself, but not necessarily within their wider disciplinary field, such as in the field of linguistics or history in general, which generally is the basis for evaluation in applications for external funding.

3.5 Open Science

The Fryske Akademy shows a strong involvement in open science. This is illustrated, among others, in the development of open-source software and the provision of free language tools, such as the ones mentioned above. The Fryske Akademy clearly has a long and strong tradition and commitment in making data available to the public. In addition, the Fryske Akademy has data management plans with a focus on making research data available to other researchers in compliance with privacy and copyright regulations. With respect to open access, the committee finds it noteworthy that in 2023 71% of the publications were published in open-access venues. The committee is positive about the dedicated budget that has been allocated to further increase open-access publication.

3.6 Academic culture

Openness, (social) safety and inclusivity

The Fryske Akademy has a flat management structure, and the management team aims at making every staff member feel at home with an open-door policy in an informal atmosphere. Researchers of all levels of seniority very much appreciate this approach. There is also enormous loyalty of the employees towards the Fryske Akademy, which is an important asset for the organization. The environment is experienced as a safe one, and communication among researchers has increased over the past years. A training programme to further improve internal communication is in place.

Research integrity

The committee was satisfied with the policies in place to ensure research integrity. All employees, both scientists and support staff, share the responsibility of upholding the institute's collective scientific integrity, aligning with the principles and guidelines set by the KNAW. The committee noted that the institute doesn't have its own ethics review committee but collaborates with other organisations such as the campus Fryslân to ensure adherence to ethical standards. This seems to be an appropriate strategy given the relatively small size of the Fryske Akademy.

3.7 Human Resources Policy

Talent management

As mentioned above, it is not easy to attract new and talented young researchers in a relatively small field of research. The committee appreciates that the Fryske Akademy tries to solve this issue in a number of



different ways, i.e. by organizing research internships, hosting visiting researchers, and teaching at several universities. The Fryske Akademy also dropped the requirement that new staff members should be fluent in Frisian and offers them the possibility to acquire Frisian on the job. The fact that new PhD candidates will be hired provides an opportunity to open new lines of research. The committee observed instances in the past where PhD positions were filled without following an open hiring procedure. It advises that positions should always be announced widely and internationally.

A balance between junior staff (PhD students, post-docs and assistant professors), associate-level staff and senior-level staff is of prime importance for a healthy academic environment. At the Fryske Akademy the middle layer seems to be relatively thin. In such a context, it is very important that senior staff members engage actively in knowledge transfer to the junior generation. This is crucial not only to support junior staff but also to safeguard the institution's heritage for the next generation. The committee observed a lack of consultation between junior and senior staff at present.

The committee advises the Fryske Akademy to actively develop and implement a recognition and rewards plan. Establishment of clear guidelines e.g. for internal promotions could be a first step. While these guidelines are typically well established for research performance, the committee strongly believes that attention should also be given in the recognition of activities that are centred around teaching and impact. For every staff member it should be possible to excel in at least one of these areas, but not necessarily in all of them at the same time. Recognizing and rewarding teaching and impact talents is in the committee's opinion as important as rewarding research performance.

Diversity

In the period 2020-2023 the number of female scientific staff members increased from 23% to 38% of total staff. The committee has the impression that there is strong awareness of and ample examples of proactive action regarding diversity in terms of age and gender. However, representation of women, especially at senior staff level, is still too low. Other aspects of diversity, such as nationality, people with disabilities, migration background or ethnicity, get less attention. An explicit strategy regarding the support for diversity in all its aspects appears to be lacking. The committee recommends that the Fryske Akademy continues to build increased awareness of diversity in many aspects to promote the establishment of a more balanced representation at all levels.

3.8 PhD policy and training

PhD candidates of the Fryske Akademy are all affiliated with a university (currently the University of Amsterdam and the University of Groningen). At their university, they take courses and teach. Supervising and ensuring the quality of PhD trajectories is a collaborative effort between the university and the Fryske Akademy. Currently, the Fryske Akademy has three PhD candidates who are all very positive about their supervision. They appreciate the accessible, informal contact with their supervisors from both the Fryske Akademy and their university.

The committee notes that there is no PhD community within the Fryske Akademy. However, the PhD candidates do have varying degrees of contact with other PhD candidates at their university or research school. The committee believes that it is important for PhD candidates to exchange experiences locally as well, so, especially if the number of PhD candidates increases, it recommends facilitating this.



3.9 Recommendations

The previous sections of this report contain various recommendations that are presented here together.

Management, organisation and strategy

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.
2. Reinforce the perception of Mercator, both internally and externally, as an integral part of the Fryske Akademy.
3. Promote the appointment of staff members of the Fryske Akademy as professor by special appointment at more Dutch universities.

Research quality

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

Societal relevance

7. Make teaching activities by staff members of the Fryske Akademy more systematic.
8. Involve the public in research in new ways by using strategies such as citizen science and cocreation.

Human resources policy

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

Diversity

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.

PhD policy and training

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



Appendix A - Programme of the site visit

June 4	
08:30 – 09:00	Arrival of the members at Fryske Academy
09:00 – 09:45	Interview with Management team
09:45 – 10:00	Evaluation/break panel
10:00 – 10:45	Interview with 'Raad van Toezicht'
10:45 – 11:00	Evaluation/break panel
11:00 – 11:45	Interview senior researchers
11:45 – 12:00	Evaluation panel
12:00 – 12:45	Lunch
12:45 – 13:30	Interview junior researchers (postdocs, starting assistant professors)
13:30 – 13:45	Evaluation panel
13:45 – 14:15	Interview PhD researchers
14:15 – 14:30	Evaluation/break panel
14:30 – 15:00	Interview stakeholders
15:00 – 16:30	Internal meeting committee – review, writing, preparation preliminary findings
16:30 – 17:00	Presentation preliminary findings
17:00	(optional) Drinks



Appendix B - Quantitative data

B.1 Staff in fte

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total scientific staff	12.10	16.81	18.78	18.25
Total scientific support staff	12.20	8.30	10.30	10.00
Total	24.30	25.11	29.08	28.25

B.2 Funding (in k€)

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Central government	1,559	1,559	1,582	1,665
Province of Fryslân	1,163	1,272	1,235	1,299
<i>Total lump sum funding</i>	<i>2,722</i>	<i>2,831</i>	<i>2,817</i>	<i>2,964</i>
External project financing	1,147	1,152	1,080	1,106
Target to acquire	0	0	0	0
Matching out of lump sum	-324	-275	-288	-260
<i>Total project financing</i>	<i>823</i>	<i>877</i>	<i>792</i>	<i>846</i>
Other financing	193	148	219	182
Total income	3,738	3,856	3,828	3,992
Personnel costs	2,734	2,558	2,995	2,937
Material costs	679	1,086	733	821
Total costs	3,413	3,644	3,728	3,758
Operating result	325	212	100	234

B.3 PhD enrollment and success rate

Starting year	M	F	≤ 4 yr	≤ 5 yr	≤ 6 yr	≤ 7 yr	≤ 8 yr	≤ 8 yr	Not yet finished	Discontinued
2013		1						1		
2014		1				1				
2015		1			1					
2017	1		1							
2021	1								1	
2022	1								1	
2023	1								1	
Total	4	3	1		1	1		1	3	

Between 2010 and 2020, there were nine more projects. Six of these projects have been finished, one of them has not yet been finished, and two were discontinued. All of these PhD projects were collaborations between the Fryske Akademy and a Dutch university (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Universiteit van Amsterdam, Universiteit Leiden and Maastricht University).