

The Self-Evaluation Exercise of the N.W. Posthumus Institute for 2009-2014

Report of the Assessment Committee

1. Overview

This report concerns the activities of the Nicholas W. Posthumus Institute (NWP) during the period 2008-2014. It is the result of a visit paid to Leiden on the 20th and 21st April, 2015, at which time a series of interview-sessions were held with members of the General Board, the Science Director, the Director of Studies, the Education Committees, members of the Faculty, leaders of the five Research Themes, and MA and Ph.D. students. It culminated in a presentation of the preliminary results to the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities of Leiden University. The Committee's enquiries during this visit and the making of the present document were guided by the principles drawn up in the mission statements present in the 2003-2008 and 2009-2015 Self-Evaluation Reports, as well as by the LOGOS criteria of 2011. The purpose was to assess NWP's multifarious activities during the quinquennium and make recommendations aimed at assisting the achievement of its stated goals in a changing and highly challenging environment.

NWP is a remarkable institution from various points of view. One of them is its long life and durability. Despite its flexible nature, its floating and dispersed population, its changing procedures, and its regularly shifting location and leadership, it has been in continuous existence, with great success, ever since 1988. For most of these years, it has enjoyed the distinction of being a Research School, a coveted accreditation given to it by the Royal Academy of Arts in 1994, and which it still possesses at the present moment. In the second place, the scale of NWP is impressive. As a "hub" for research it cannot be strictly compared to departments in this area, like those at the LSE, Lund or Barcelona. Nevertheless, the current population of just over 300 affiliated researchers, comprising about 160 tenured and non-tenured staff members and 140 students, makes it probably one of the largest agglomerations in the field of Social and Economic History in Europe. NWP stands out, in the third place, because of its outpouring of scientific publications and Ph.D. theses. On the one hand, there is the output from the many advanced research projects which it helps promote by bringing together projects and researchers from universities spread out all over its area of influence. This has represented since 2010 a yearly volume of between 250 and 300 articles, chapters and monographs. At the same time and as importantly, one must consider the almost 200 theses approved during the last eight years, in several languages and concerning subjects relating to all parts of the world.

Not all of the accomplishment of NWP can be measured by numbers alone, however. This Committee, during its visit, could not but be impressed also by the atmosphere of energy, zest and dedication, as well as by the spirit of cooperation which exudes from the institution at all levels. All of its members appear to be heartily engaged in the pursuit of academic excellence, in creating a truly integrated community of scholars, where differences of status do not appear to matter much, and in engaging in the selfless exchange of knowledge and ideas. That it has been possible to sustain and probably augment this spirit over several generations of students and staff is one of the wonders of this establishment. On present form, the signs are that this is likely to continue. One can only hope that exogenous influences will also continue to foster the development of this enthusiasm, and not stifle it.

2. Governance and Budget

2.1 Governance

The system of governance of NWP is a normal 3-tiered arrangement, in which the Board, the top layer, represents the subscribing institutions and takes major decisions, meeting bi-annually. Day-to-day matters are the purview of a Scientific Director, an Education Program Director and an Office Manager. They liaise with the Board via an Executive Committee. Educational quality is monitored by two Committees, which include Ph.D. representatives. The Research Themes are led by their own Program Directors.

The Assessment Committee formed the impression that this system functions in a very satisfactory way. There seems to be a considerable degree of autonomy in decision-making. At the same time, the openness and informality of inter-personal relations at the NWP makes it possible for a great deal of communication, between and within the various layers of the institution, to occur and this favours efficiency and creativity. The Committee noted also that students felt completely comfortable about their access to professors, supervisors and Fellows and about the possibility of in-putting their points of view in the process of decision-making.

According to rule, the host university for NWP, currently the University of Leiden, changes every quinquennium. This is obviously a critical moment in the institution's life and a matter of some concern for all. Although not the subject of this formal evaluation, the Assessment Committee realized that this transition, which was to take place in 2015, has lacked smoothness and has been surrounded by a certain degree of uncertainty. No doubt all this has entailed costs for NWP and has had repercussions throughout its activities. **Recommendation:** without wishing to dwell at any length on this issue, the Committee felt that it merited some reflection, perhaps by the Board and by the Deans of the Faculties of the subscribing bodies, so that in future such transitions should become an even greater opportunity for improvement and renewed enthusiasm. Probably, this would not take more than a constitutional amendment which could determine that the decision would have to be taken from 1 to 2 years ahead of the actual removal. The problem would thus cease to be structural, as some of our interlocutors feared it might become.

2.2 Budget

The annual budget of NWP is remarkably small given the range and volume of its activities and the number of persons and universities who benefit from its existence. In 2014, it was 126,500 euros, which makes it without a doubt a truly lean operation. Funds come from the subscribing institutions, some of which pay per student enrolled, while others, presumably with fewer students, pay a fixed annual fee. If this is correct, it seems a reasonable arrangement. On the other hand, it is somewhat threatening in that there are considerable year-to-year fluctuations in numbers enrolled: the average for 2007-2014 was 25.9 students but the standard deviation was 5.6. Thus, a couple of bad years could lead to financial disruption or, alternatively, to a severe cut-back in activities which would threaten NWP's work and reputation. Neither of these outcomes is desirable and it might be therefore worth agreeing to the creation of a smoothing mechanism for coping with such contingencies.

Expenditure by NWP has been shrinking rather rapidly in per student terms. Over the 2009-2014 period and in nominal terms it fell by 35 percent, if we compare the start and the end of the period. On a linear trend, a better measure, the overall decline was less, but still 25 percent. The real variation will not have been very different from this. This change no doubt

reflects the general climate of austerity but also demonstrates a laudable increase in efficiency, as well as a capacity to obtain economies of scale. While the situation described is not untenable, the Committee considers that to make any further cuts in the near future would be highly deleterious to the health of this excellent institution. Indeed, it would be in favour of a moderate increase in funding, in the conviction that NWP would thereby reap substantial gains, namely by enlarging some of the more successful components of the Training Program (e.g. master classes, the NWP Conference and Ph.D. placement activities).

The sum received by NWP goes to three main expenditure rubrics: management/administration (53,4 percent), training program (20,0 percent) and research (24,7 percent). The Committee examined this distribution carefully and concluded that it is possibly misleading and indeed might support an incorrect and less favourable evaluation of how NWP spends its money in terms of **education**. In order to assuage such suspicions, it **recommends** that in future the expenditure account be reorganized to achieve greater transparency and give a fairer picture of how resources are allocated. This should involve some notes, to clarify the purpose of what is included in the different categories. It should also require certain transfers between expenditure categories, with the advantage that it would show a larger rubric in Training and a smaller one in Research. For example, all or at least a large part of the Ph.D. Annual Conference should be moved to Training. This would be more pertinent given the nature of this event. The same is true of Research Themes expenditures which in fact also contribute directly, to some extent, to the Training effort. A deeper look at Management/Administration might reveal further potential gains of this type too. Arguably, dissemination of information, career orientation and the alumni data, are all beneficial to the value added embodied in the Ph.D.s produced yearly. Finally, it would be proper to disclose the amount in the Reserve Fund for each year.

3. Graduate Training

Training at this level is one of the two intellectual pillars of NWP and indisputably a success story worthy of emulation by many. From its inception, it has been an obvious solution for the specific problems of training Ph.Ds in a country like the Netherlands with a small scale, a lack of critical mass at any one University and a high degree of geographic dispersion. Before it, work was done in excessive isolation relative to other national centres of learning and to the international context, at a cost to efficiency and quality of output.

3.1 The Ph.D. Program

The Program has three aims: 1) to enlarge and deepen students' knowledge in the field of Economic and Social History; 2) to encourage students to get started on organizing their research materials and on writing papers of diverse length and for different audiences; and 3) to socialize students into their respective national and international communities of Social and Economic History. Points 2) and 3) deserve particular attention because they are key to the achievement of an obviously highly dynamic, interactive and well-connected body of students. The latter seem quite capable of writing, discussing and commenting in any setting, whether domestic or international, both their own papers, and those of others. In the view of the Committee, they are being especially well-equipped to produce high quality theses and to communicate their findings to both broad and narrow audiences, as well as to attempt related publications in well-ranked journals. Not surprisingly, they tend also to be front-liners when it comes to competing in the academic job market.

NWP's main contribution to this education lies especially in the first two years of students' enrolment. This takes them through a variety of learning and academic socialization

experiences, during which they are called upon to play a number of roles, at the same time as becoming capable of formulating their hypotheses and the plan of exposition of their theses. This is done through a process of interaction with colleagues and NWP fellows in which the accent on not permitting any individual to get lost or isolated deserves emphasis. It is complemented by a demanding evaluation of individual results, at the end of the first and second years (but also continually along the way), in which their efforts are scrutinized jointly by their home-university supervisor and NWP staff.

The Committee was struck by the general excellence of the program, but would like to single out certain particularly positive aspects:

- the master-class system, in whose management students play an important direct role and which is a very intense and concentrated form of tuition;

- the Annual Conference, where students get the chance to participate in various capacities, in a major academic event where entry is competitive, yet on their home ground, and thus get tested to the utmost;

- the intensive seminars and courses (including the Research Design course), where students not only present their own work and assess that of others, in English, but get the chance of exchanging views and ideas more generally;

- the emergence of specialized new courses in methods, whenever needed, starting now with Quantitative Methods but hopefully extending in the future to other fields (this flexibility is a hallmark of NWP);

- the workshops and other training activities of the five Thematic Areas, which unfortunately have not been recorded in the Self-Evaluation report with sufficient focus on graduate training effects. This must be a major contribution to total value added but thus far is not getting appropriate external recognition.

Statistics and some thoughts about them:

The preceding remarks, of a qualitative nature, support a flattering portrayal of the Ph.D. training program and indicate that, from the point of view of quality, there is every reason to be satisfied. If we take a look at the corresponding statistics, while this impression is not challenged, we do find some worrying signs which mitigate this picture and ought to be pondered.

- Enrolment: in 2008, the Assessment committee was optimistic on the grounds of the high figure for 2007 (32), which was corroborated in 2008 (28). Since then, the figures for new candidates have settled at a lower level, about 25 per cent down, and this gives no indication of a change in trend. The climate of austerity is no doubt responsible, but in any case it must be assumed that an inversion is not likely in the next few years. If normal funding does not grow, the only solution may be to recruit more foreign students, a process already under way but probably subject to limitation.

- Time to completion: Again, our predecessors were hopeful about the decline of this vital statistic and all that it portends regarding the Program's efficiency. This time, the outlook is again very promising and reflects the tremendous effort made by all at NWP to combat "long lasting theses". The earlier level of 65 months to completion has dropped dramatically now, to the mid-50s in 2008-2010, which is excellent by international standards. One cannot be sure however whether this in fact corresponds to a new and better standard of achievement since

the latter figures correspond to smaller cohorts, which include students who completed in 4-5 years. The picture may change when all the students in these cohorts have obtained their degree. It must be noted also that this could be an area where there may be now little left to be gained. Shortening the time should not be allowed to harm quality.

-Internationalization: Several criteria can be employed here. The share of non-Dutch/Flemish recruits to the Program has been growing. It was 30 per cent in 2013 and 50 percent in 2014. This is a valuable symptom of recognition abroad of NWP's offer and also measures efficiency, apart from contributing to the financial health of the institution. In terms of making the nature of output more international, it is important to register the broadening of the geographic scope of thesis subjects. On the other hand, a large number of dissertations continue to be written in Dutch, which limits diffusion, there being no clear trend in this respect. This may change as a consequence of the pipeline effect in foreign recruitment. Finally and although the statistics are shaky, current graduate placement still supports the notion of the 2003-2008 Committee that most Ph.D.s found employment in academic environments. This appears to have been the case also in 2014, but it is hard to believe it can be kept up for long (see below).

3.2 The Research MA Program

This was started in 2011-2012 with the aim of broadening the scope of training activity at NWP and also of generating a stock of potential candidates, who would be well educated in Social and Economic History, for entry to the Ph.D. program. It is taught in English and has been highly rated in student evaluation as regards course content. Numbers are persistently low however – circa 9 a year - and therefore economies of scale have probably not been significant. The Self-Evaluation report did not provide statistics on the expectable vertical integration of the two courses.

The Committee felt strongly from conversation with the students that satisfaction was not particularly high, in contrast with that of the Ph.D. population whose degree of satisfaction was remarkable. One of the difficulties has been bringing together for short periods of tuition such small numbers from the dispersed universities from which they hail. This perhaps explains the complaints concerning the lack of cohesion of the group and the feeling of being disconnected from the rest of NWP.

The **recommendation** of the Committee would be to link more these students to the Ph.D. program as observers, for example, of master-classes and conferences. If this could be done, it should occur as soon as possible in the academic year. It might be worth considering also setting up a regular day meeting at which they could discuss their papers with the more advanced Ph.D. students, who would thus get additional teaching/supervising experience. Without wishing to appear negative about a venture which has obvious merits, the Committee felt, at the end of the day, that it could be that ResMA was not really a part of the NWP "core business" and was therefore draining away human and perhaps other resources too, without offering sufficient gains to the institution as a whole.

4. Research Themes

The second pillar of NWP is its function as the hub which integrates a number of important research clusters of the highest quality, currently in a total of five. Indeed, the great strength of NWP is the close integration and inter-action between its two pillars. This can be seen from several points of view. The immediate and most obvious one is the scientific value in itself which flows from research emanating from the projects which are set up under its aegis. The

second one consists of the projects which constitute the thematic areas and generate the substantial funds which serve to remunerate the great majority of the student population in the Ph.D. program. This enables them to operate full time. Without this vital support, this training program would never have reached the high level of academic excellence which we have noted at different points in this report. The third lies in the fact that much of the training NWP's Ph.D.s receive in a variety of capacities takes place within the projects with which they are associated, although the extent of this is difficult to evaluate and does not really emerge in the Self-Evaluation report.

The Committee was particularly impressed during its visit by the strong cohesion between scholars working on quite different historical periods, spaces, and themes. One gets the impression of a well-integrated national community of researchers whose work stretches over the whole of the last millennium and brings together local, regional and global perspectives. The combination of research network and graduate school seems to be an efficient driver for a high level of interaction, which creates a highly productive milieu. A considerable number of Dutch and Flemish scholars enjoy an excellent world-wide reputation and are leading figures in their respective fields. This is perhaps a unique situation in global social and economic history, which deserves unconfined respect. All of this adds up to the achievement of the foundational goals of NWP: reaching a critical mass, intensifying complementarities, promoting exchanges among participants as a 'way of life' and encouraging a high level of participation in all activities.

Notwithstanding this enormous success, the division into the five research themes looks sometimes artificial, with a good deal of overlap between them. One of the strengths of the entire network lies in the number of highly significant research themes, which show up in several programs, such as 'varieties of capitalism' or the 'long-term changes in social equality/inequality'. We understand that such a large body of scholars needs internal structures to remain manageable and to strengthen the integration of individual scholars. These structures, however, seem to be more important for the general management and for the fellows of Posthumus, than for the students, who seem to have a much stronger sense of belonging to the Posthumus network, in general, than to any of the individual research programs.

Each cluster appears to be strongly connected to specific international networks (and sometimes in fact to be the driving force behind them). This is an important asset, since it allows Ph.D. students to take part early in their careers, in international events and to present their work. It also demonstrates the international recognition for the research taking place within each cluster. This achievement should appear more clearly in the Self-Evaluation report. It would also be a way of showing that each cluster is linked to a distinct historiographical tradition, making it more obvious that connections between them are not always overlaps. The Committee's meetings with the areas revealed that there is a significant level of interactions between clusters, even if they come from different traditions. This is a strongly positive point in favour of the system of Thematic Areas, which we think also deserves to be stressed.

The Committee noted that despite the strong integration of Ph.D. students in these research clusters, there was no evidence in the Self-Evaluation report of joint authorships bringing together NWP fellows and students in the same publications. This is a practice commonly found nowadays in many places and fields of research and is often considered very positively. The reason given to us for its absence is that it is not in the tradition of History. Given the many advantages that this practice has to offer, the Committee would urge NWP to reflect on this matter, particularly as examples of it are already known in the Netherlands, some of them even involving students and fellows of this program, without any apparent harm arising.

The reports of the different Areas were presented exclusively in a narrative form. The Committee would have found it useful if, as well, there could have been a more significant quantitative dimension, focusing, for example, on the number of students in each area, the total volume of funds at the disposal of each area, the total number of projects and their sources of finance, the number of post-docs and fellows working in each one, and so on.

4.1 Economy and Society of the Pre-industrial Low Countries in a Comparative Perspective

This is obviously the most 'traditional' of the five research areas in the program and probably historically the largest. It includes an exceptionally strong group of senior scholars and an impressively large number of major book publications, just in the last five or six years (as well as many articles in top journals). They continue to generate large research grants that can support many students, innovative research into new or old questions and the mining of plenty of new data. Indeed, for anyone following the long-run economic growth literature it will be clear that a good deal of the scholarship is coming out of this particular research collective, or is linked to it. British universities may still have the edge on the industrial revolution and more contemporary scholarship, but the early modern period is dominated by the Posthumus group. And for the Middle Ages proper they are almost the only show in town.

The big change for this group from the moment of the 2008 review is the addition of the phrase 'Comparative Perspective' to their title. This is a very significant move for a group that began with an exclusive focus on the economic history of the Low Countries, much of which was published in Dutch. The group is noticeably more comparative now in its research vision and much more of their work is being published in English. Its members are everywhere at international conferences. They basically started (along with the demography and migration groups of the Posthumus Institute) the ESSHC which is now one of the largest academic conferences in the historical social sciences. It would be interesting to quantify some of this change, even with simple metrics like the location of pre-modern dissertation topics and the national origin of group members -- either students or senior scholars.

In short, this is an outstanding group. It has great archives and from them are generated wonderful data series, stimulating questions, important and cogent books, and a vision that increasingly extends beyond the Low Countries themselves. The Low Countries were very important in the pre-modern period and we should not discount too much the value of getting that story focused straight. This group has made a strong case for why the rest of the world should understand what happened on their small patch of low-lying land.

4.2 Drivers and Carriers of Globalization: Technology, Economics and Business in Transnational and Comparative Perspective

One of the most stimulating themes in this Thematic Area concerns the definition, measurement and empirical analysis of "quality of life" and particularly its relation to economic growth. This topic is receiving increasing attention in political discourses across Europe and perhaps world-wide and it seems that it will remain on the political agenda. As there is an enormous lag in theoretical and methodological reflections, and even more so in empirical research, the promotion of this theme would be highly appreciated. Another equally topical line of research is that which carries on the rich seam of Maddisonian studies of very long term economic growth. A third places this Thematic Area at the heart of one of the most vigorous economic debates of recent years, namely the problem of secular shifts in income

distribution. The second major research question with which this cluster engages redirects attention towards movements, connections and flows across borders, and to how these borders come to exist and shift.

Two further points can be made concerning this research cluster. One is that in both of the last two periods it has changed quite noticeably, driven, it seems, mostly by shifting currents of international intellectual concern. There are many different strands of thought coming together in this group and a concern may arise as to the overall long-run stability of the whole. The other is the resilience displayed by the sub-area entitled “Evolution of National Business Systems”, which has had a long and considerable success in publications and is associated with a major research project. This is a very important activity but its links to the rest of this Thematic Area are not entirely evident and it may be questioned whether it would not make more sense to hive it off from “Drivers and Carriers”, to constitute a new, separate and more cohesive unit.

4.3 People, Space and Places in History

The focus of this program is on regional history, adding a strong spatial perspective to the social and economic developments of the past millennium. While its original title in 2004 was “regions in space”, “region” has been deleted in its current denomination, a surprising and not absolutely convincing decision. Regional history, if it is not reduced to the history of *one* isolated region, but used as an approach or a methodological tool, is still valuable. The program is highly productive, and a considerable number of fellows share high international reputation.

However, this is perhaps not the most homogeneous of the research programs. PhD-projects cover a very wide range of themes. What are the specific overarching questions? We think that the long-term historical changes of town-countryside relations are particularly interesting. The systematic integration of environmental history is certainly one of the most promising perspectives of this program. Methodological reflections about and practical application of GIS are highly innovative. As many of the running projects focus on single Dutch or Flemish regions, we appreciate the emphasis on comparisons on a national and international level.

The international impact of this program is particularly expressed by ‘CORN – Comparative Rural History in the North Sea Area. A research network for rural history in Europe (c. 1000-c. 2000).’, CORN has been founded by Flemish (particularly from Ghent and Leuven) and Dutch scholars in 1995 and became over the past 20 years the most dynamic network for various questions of rural history in North-Western Europe. It stimulated the foundation of co-operating research units in several other countries and its two publication series are highly influential. Particularly impressive is - as in other Posthumus programs – the long-term perspective over the whole last millennium and the multidimensional approach, integrating questions of demographic and political history. The CORN-group is certainly one of the leading European groups in rural social and economic history.

We encourage this cluster, which is deeply rooted in regional histories, to continue its efforts in comparative and international projects. Given the development of scholarly concerns with such issues and the expertise of its members, it may be worth consideration to add “environment” to the cluster title.

4.4 Life Courses, Family and Labour

This program includes several most interesting themes. We particularly liked the emphasis given to longitudinal studies on demographic behaviour and its transmission between generations. Methodologically promising also is the expansion of the life-course paradigm by the concept of “life-scripts”, and the integration of human biology into social historical demographic research. In both these respects, Posthumus fellows are on the forefront in Europe and perhaps beyond. Their research benefits from the excellent sources available in the Netherlands. Consequently, the creation of large historical databases with longitudinal micro-data based on these sources is a further achievement promoted by members of this program.

This cluster has developed, over a long period, a strong expertise in information gathering, and data base management. It is very active in developing tools and methodology for the treatment of digital information, making it one of the leaders in that field in the European context. It has an especially bright future for its attention to transnational projects. This strength however in today's context should be more clearly stated in the report. We also consider that connections with developments in the digital humanities scene could be explored more.

The vitality of this Thematic Area is comes out clearly in its links to a number of important international networks. This is compounded by the impressive publications list in all three of its principal areas of research.

4.5 Social History of Communities

This cluster connects researchers engaged in the very wide field of Social History. Some of them are very active and with a very distinguished record. Given the wide diversity of the field today, and not only in the Netherlands, self-presentation of such a cluster is a hard task. The cluster does this by defining some key themes which in fact is being an efficient way of doing this, given the context. One may wonder however why gender is not listed in the key issues when it obviously is a shared concern and one of the strong points of the cluster.

The one thing which may appear missing from the report is a sense of direction. Obviously research today depends on secure funding and mobility of researchers, making it difficult to plan ahead in any precise way. However the presentation of the cluster is somewhat static, not giving a sense of the general direction the cluster would like to take or is planning to take.

There are many excellent and highly distinguished migration historians in this program. We would appreciate a stronger interaction of research on geographical and on social mobility, and we would recommend not to leave the life-course-approach to research program four (life courses).

Conclusions and Additional Recommendations

The visit to NWP by the Committee was an extremely pleasant and instructive occasion. All members were enormously impressed by what they saw. They enjoyed very much their interaction with all the stake holders and they came away feeling that they had learned much about institutional dynamics, organizing science and, in particular, motivating effectively a

community of young, promising scholars in the field of Social and Economic History. It was clear to them that NWP is a forward-looking establishment and that it has evolved substantially and clearly for the better since the last Self-Evaluation in 2003-2008. In strategic terms, it is evident that NWP is attaining its two chief aims (see p. 9 of the Self-Evaluation Report, 2009-2015). It has managed extremely well to establish the connection between international scientific research and the organization of successful Ph.D. and ResMA training. And it has succeeded to bring researchers into contact with each other and with Ph.D. students through the development of cooperative research projects. Altogether 'it is raising and training a new generation of skilled economic and social historians.' From the point of view of the Logos objectives established earlier this year, it is unquestionably also meeting all six of them at the expected level of exigency. The latter comprises the following criteria 1) that there should be a high degree of complementarity between inter-university research and the education of Ph.D. students; 2) that it should display a national profile 'through the participation of at least three universities' and 3) that the research output should show adequate quality as revealed through mechanisms of peer review. To summarize, NWP is a highly efficient network which provides, at a very reasonable cost, excellent training for Ph.D. students, and articulates an admirably run joint basic training scheme with the activities of a group of outstanding research clusters, in which there is an important role for the Ph.Ds to play.

To finalize, the Committee wishes to draw attention to a number of miscellaneous issues regarding which it feels there might be still some room for improvement. In doing so, it is recognized that taking action on these matters might not be easy or even possible, given the contextual conditions in which NWP has to operate.

One of the foundations of the academic success of the Posthumus institute is certainly the fact, that almost all (of the Dutch) students receive a grant or full time salary and that they are, in addition, integrated into their universities by a small teaching obligation. **One would wish that the Flemish universities could offer similar conditions.** An further interesting point is the very small group of four 'specific Posthumus PhD students', who are not granted a position at one of the Dutch or Flemish universities, but affiliated directly to the Posthumus institute. One would hope that this group of students could be enlarged, including **by widening access to gifted students from abroad.**

One problem of graduate schools world-wide is completion rate and duration of Ph.D. studies. Quite often it is particularly high academic standards and demands which prolong the duration and raise hurdles to success. The Committee appreciates the goal of Posthumus to improve completion rates and to shorten the duration. **We think, however, that the development of effective strategies is not that easy.** It requires an intensive process of investigation and reflection, including by experts in the field, and exchanges of ideas with comparable schools on an international level.

Placement has not been high on the list of problems at NWP so far, which is fortunate, but will undoubtedly become less so soon. At present, academic employment of graduates is high. It is also the outlet for which the program prepares its students. The Committee echoes the worries it heard during the visit and **underlines the need to refocus to some extent the laudable efforts made already by NWP to prepare students for their post-Ph.D. professional life.** It considers that in this connection (though not only), it would be valuable to **develop stronger ties with NWP's more than 300 alumni.** This should involve, of course, tracking them down, in order to create a data base, but also drawing them back into the community, not only for festive occasions, but as stake-holders, to be consulted, in particular on the question of placement.

The Committee was impressed by the volume, quality and variety of data collection which goes on at NWP and thinks that more might be done to transform these results into a collective asset. Without going in to details about how this should be done, **the idea would be to join the many data bases produced in the ambit of the five great research areas into one single access facility**, where interested scholars, from within or from outside, might consult them in accordance with the rules established by each project. This plan, possibly entitled **PosthumusData**, would have three benefits: 1) raise the public profile of NWP as the place to go and look for historical data of all kinds 2) reap economies of scale in organizing such facilities 3) develop links with institutions, in the Netherlands and Belgium or even internationally, with similar activities, possibly creating further opportunities for joint research.

The Committee has the feeling that although it is very well-known, NWP might have an even stronger and clearer external image. **One area which it might be useful to consider is the website**. Although it is already very informative and useful, we think that some sections should be updated (Missions and Goals, last updated 2010) and made to carry relevant data regarding recent trends at NWP of interest to potential students, e.g. geographic origins of student body, gender, language of theses, placements, etc. Blurbs on the five Thematic Areas, for example, could also be introduced for quick consultation, to give to the public a clearer picture of the vast and fascinating research going on at NWP. There might be links to lists of conferences, where students presented papers recently or on their publication efforts. On the subject of more and better information more generally, the Committee would welcome a clarification of the quality-quantity dichotomy in the enormous scientific output of NWP. At present (see p. 25 of the Self-Evaluation report) this is somewhat opaque. We recommend that a breakdown be created which would distinguish ranked publications (e.g. ISI or Scopus) from the rest.

Completed on 22nd June 2015.

Josef Ehmer	Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte, Universität Wien
Anne McCants	MIT School of Humanities, Cambridge (Massachusetts)
Leslie Page Moch	Comparative and Contemporary History of European Migration, Michigan State University, East Lansing (Michigan)
Jaime Reis (chairman)	Instituto de Ciências Sociais, University of Lisbon
Phillip Rygiel	Centre d'Histoire Sociale du XXe siècle, Université Paris 10

NWP SITE VISIT / PEER REVIEW 20-21 APRIL 2015, LEIDEN

PROGRAMME

Sunday 19 April 2015: Arrival - Golden Tulip Hotel, Leiden

19.00 Welcome dinner – ‘Verboden Toegang’

Monday 20 April - Academy Building Leiden University, Faculty Room Humanities

09.00 – 9.45 **Closed meeting** of the assessment committee

09.45 – 10.00 Break

10.00 – 11.30 **General presentation by scientific director** dr. Jeroen Touwen;
Interview with representatives of the General Board of NWP, scientific director.

11.30 – 11.45 Break

11.45 – 13.15 **General presentation by director of studies** dr. Jaco Zuijderduijn;
Interview with education committee of NWP and representatives of the General Board of NWP about education policy.

13.15 – 14.00 Lunch

14.00 – 15.00 **Interviews with**

- PhD students
- Res MA students
- PhD representatives

15.00 – 15.30 Break

15.30 – 16.45 Research Themes

- **Economy and Society of the Pre-industrial Low Countries in a Comparative Perspective**

Interview with dr. Jessica Dijkman (UU), dr. Wouter Rijkbosch (UGent/VUB), and research fellows

- **Drivers and Carriers of Globalisation: Technology, Economics and Business in Transnational and Comparative Perspective**

Interview with dr. Torsten Feys (UGent), dr. Erik van der Vleuten (TUE), Jutta Bolt (RUG), and research fellows

17.00 Drinks

18.00 Dinner in ‘Het Prentenkabinet’

Tuesday 21 April - Academy Building Leiden University, Faculty Room Humanities

9.30 – 10.00 **Closed meeting** of the assessment committee

10.00 – 11.45 Research Themes

- **People, Space, and Places in History**

Interview with dr. Paul Brusse (UU), dr. Tim Soens (UA), and research fellows

- **Life-courses, Family, and Labour**

Interview with dr. Richard Zijdeman (IISG), prof.dr. Isabelle Devos (UGent), and research fellows

- **Social History of Communities**

Interview with prof.dr. Marlou Schrover (UL), prof.dr. Griet Vermeesch (VUB), and research fellows

11.45 – 12.30 **Closed meeting** of the assessment committee (formulation of draft report)

12.30 – 13.30 Lunch

13.30 – 14.00 **First Briefing & Closing Session**

Meeting of the assessment committee with the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities of Leiden University, prof.dr. H.W. van den Doel
Representatives of the General Board,
Research Fellows, Scientific Director, Director of Studies.

Members of the Committee

- Prof. dr. Jaime Reis (chair); Portugal; University of Lisbon; Instituto de Ciências Sociais
- Prof. dr. Joseph Ehmer; Oostenrijk; Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte, Universität Wien
- Prof. dr. Anne McCants; USA; MIT School of Humanities, Michigan
- Prof. dr. Leslie Page Moch; USA; Comparative and Contemporary History of European Migration, Michigan State University
- Prof. dr. Philippe Rygiel; Frankrijk; Centre d'Histoire Sociale du XXe siècle, Université Paris 10

Members of the Board of the Research School:

Prof.dr. B. Blondé (UA); Prof.dr. U. Bosma (IISG); Prof.dr. C.A. Davids (VU); dr. M. Davids (TUE); Prof.dr. M.G.J. Duijvendak (RUG); Prof.dr. H.J. de Jong (RUG); Prof.dr. J. Jonker (UvA); Prof.dr. H.A.M. Klemann (EUR); Prof.dr. A. Knotter (SHCL); Prof.dr. J. Kok (chair) (RU); Prof.dr. M.L.J.C. Schrover (UL); Prof.dr. E. Frankema (WU); Dr. L.J. Touwen (advisor) (UL); Prof.dr. E. Vanhaute (UGent); Prof.dr. L. Van Molle (KULeuven – this university is a candidate member); Prof.dr. A. Winter (VUB); Prof.dr. J.L. van Zanden (UU)

PhD Representatives:

Alberto Feenstra (UvA), Stephanie Kerckhofs (ULeuven), Boris Horemans (VUB) en Sandra de Pleijt (UU).