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Dear Executive Board,

Recently, Tilburg Law School (TLS) received the research assessment report of the research assessment covering the period 2016-2022. The research assessment committee, chaired by Professor Judith van Erp, proceeded according to the Strategy Evaluation Protocol (SEP) 2021-2027. The committee also paid special attention to the areas of internationalization, multi-disciplinarity, and team science. The assessment was based on the documentation provided by TLS, including the self-evaluation report, and on interviews with the Faculty Board, support staff, senior and junior researchers, and PhD researchers. The interviews took place on October 5-6, 2022.

TLS is pleased with the assessment of the committee that the research at TLS is very good, in some cases, even excellent. The committee states that both the multidisciplinary research and the doctrinal research are of high quality and innovative. According to the committee, it is commendable how much TLS has achieved in terms of quality of output as well as the development of a new strategy and institutional structure, during a pandemic. The redesign of the research into four Signature Plans has certainly brought coherence and appears to have inspired collaboration and team science. The leadership at TLS has adopted an open, invitational approach to making these plans into spaces where team science can happen. The committee reported seeing an institution that thrives and has ambition.

TLS also welcomes the findings of the committee that the research is societally relevant in many ways: through building networks for collaboration with practitioners; answering societally relevant questions; disseminating research findings and fulfilling important societal roles. Due to the international composition of staff, the societal relevance of the research is visible both on the national and international level and thus demonstrates that societal relevance and internationalization go hand in hand.

Finally, TLS would like to express its sincere gratitude to the committee for their inspiring and constructive work, insights, and recommendations. TLS is grateful for the committee's confidence that TLS will continue to develop, innovate, and realize its ambitions.

TLS is more than happy to make the most of the committee's recommendations to continue working on high-quality and impactful research within the Signature Plans with a focus on team science and multi-disciplinarity, with a stable balance between national and international research, and in an engaging and inspiring work environment with room for a diversity of talents and special attention to and care for our PhD community. The recommendations are clustered according to the self-assessment criteria. For each cluster, it shows how TLS intends to work on this in the coming years.

### *Team Science*

- [Take the Signature Plans a step further by establishing more specifically what they want to achieve – what contribution they want to make- beyond general terms. \(p15\)](#)
- [Formulate a clear vision of the goals of team science and what is needed in terms of institutional support. \(p16\)](#)
- [Further consider the balance in funding streams between the Departments. \(p15\)](#)

The Signature Plans were launched shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic, which hindered the execution of many activities to promote the Signature Plans, team science, and to generate new collaborations throughout TLS. TLS will boost research initiatives and create new connections and collaboration within and also between the Signature Plans. TLS aims to further develop team science in the Signature Plans in various ways.

In order to enhance the Signature Plans, a TLS framework for high-quality and impactful research within the Signature Plans will be formulated. This will serve as a starting point for interactive sessions with researchers within the Signature Plans to formulate team goals in a bottom-up manner. These team goals will be linked to the substantive and strategic aims (including multi-disciplinarity, societal relevance, and a balanced national-international focus) of TLS. In addition, the evaluation process of the Signature Plans will be aligned with the SEP and TLS's research strategy, using a narrative format, underpinned by selective, quantitative evidence. The Signature Plans and implementation of Recognition and Rewards entail a substantial cultural change that takes time. TLS is fully committed to continuing to invest in stimulating and facilitating an inspiring research environment.

TLS places a high priority on maintaining financial stability and control in the present and in the foreseeable future. To this end, the school will continue to closely collaborate with the Finance and Control division to carefully monitor and analyze the development of funding streams and the impact they have on the various departments within the school. This is especially important in light of new national initiatives, such as the Starters and Stimulation grants, as it is crucial to consider the short-term and long-term ramifications for the viability of TLS. By staying attuned to the flow of funding and its effects on the school, TLS aims to ensure that its operations and departments remain financially secure and stable.

### *Research quality and societal relevance*

- [Include a wider range of indicators to demonstrate the research quality. \(p16\)](#)
- [Develop a coherent strategy on societal impact, by defining more clearly the societal impact TLS aspires and by setting clear goals. \(p14\)](#)

In line with the SEP, TLS has selected seven indicators to demonstrate research quality and societal relevance. TLS agrees with the committee that a wider range of indicators does more justice to the variety in the high-quality output of TLS's research community. TLS fully recognizes that there are different types of research contributions and is therefore committed to rewarding a broad spectrum of research activities. When further developing the Signature Plans and replacing the current COF system, a wider spectrum of research activities will therefore be taken into account. From publications in highly regarded scientific journals and research ideas resulting in prestigious grants to references to TLS research in judgments and legislative proceedings, TLS aims to value not only these tangible scientific and societal outputs, but also the -often more invisible- preliminary work that leads to these outputs. Special attention will also be paid to collaborative research, multi-disciplinary orientation, and research with a focus on Dutch law. TLS will facilitate dialogue on research methods and learning from ongoing collaborative and multidisciplinary projects as a way to boost research innovation throughout the School. Notwithstanding, the dominance of traditional quality indicators in academia, TLS is committed to incorporating these aspects as it will further stimulate the School's versatile research profile, while simultaneously representing the diversity of talents at TLS.

Keeping in mind that creating societal impact and doing multidisciplinary team science requires additional effort, TLS will help its researchers find ways in which these dimensions of research can start to align, strengthen, and not compete. Within the Signature Plans as well as in the newly founded Academic Collaborative Centers, TLS keeps monitoring upcoming societal challenges in the domain of law and governance proactively. Globalization, digitalization, and the energy transition provide ample opportunities to further advance TLS's research profile and pioneer in these topics. Societal impact will be included when formulating team goals within the Signature Plans and setting targets for the Academic Collaborative Centers. Obviously, TLS will closely follow the (inter)national developments in measuring and registering societal impact.

## *Multidisciplinary research*

- [Extend the multidisciplinary approach by focusing more on collaborations beyond the boundaries of the Departments and even beyond the boundaries of TLS. In addition, further align institutional reward structures to enable researchers to participate in multidisciplinary research. \(p13\)](#)

TLS endeavors to cultivate a multidisciplinary approach to research within its institution by investing in scholars who wish to pursue novel avenues of inquiry, learn new skills, and form new research collaborations. This does not suggest that monodisciplinary research focused on the interpretation, development, and methodology of law and public governance will become obsolete. Such research forms the foundation of TLS's research and is integral to the expertise that the institution brings to multidisciplinary collaborations. In line with its strongly developed research integrity, TLS will explore how to further engage in open data activities while always honoring the need to protect the interests of research participants. In this vein, TLS wholeheartedly embraces the committee's suggestion to strengthen its multidisciplinary approach by investing in collaborations within and between Signature Plans and beyond the boundaries of TLS. To actively stimulate these collaborations, TLS will allocate funds to expand its incentive policy for researchers seeking to develop multidisciplinary research activities in and between the Signature Plans, also supporting team science.

## *Open science*

- [Further develop the strategy with respect to open science to include multiple aspects of open science. \(p15\)](#)
- [Further improve the proportion of open access publications by also involving researchers who do not yet have open access publishing high on their agenda. \(p15\)](#)

Open science has four main pillars, namely: open scientific knowledge (1) (e.g. open access publication, FAIR data), open science infrastructure (2) (e.g. publishing platforms, repositories, computational services), open engagement of societal actors (3) (e.g. citizen science, crowdsourcing), and science communication (4) (e.g. public lectures, social media). For TLS, pillars one, three, and four are most relevant and therefore take priority. An open science policy is currently being formulated within Tilburg University. Naturally, TLS will contribute to the development of this policy and align its activities with those central initiatives. This way, TLS can make the best use of existing best practices and pursue synergy.

In addition, TLS will initiate the following actions to stimulate open scientific knowledge: collecting data on open access and best practices from other Dutch law schools, inquiring from TLS researchers about what hinders them from open-access publishing, analysing and updating TLS's incentive policy on open access, and stimulating and facilitating researchers to actively make use of the Taverne provision. Open engagement of societal actors (3) is an aspect of open science that is already strongly ingrained in the School's research culture. Research with a focus on societal impact through partnering up with societal actors in collaborative research projects and citizens' engagement are just two ways that this aspect of open science is operationalized. TLS will further stimulate this pillar of open science by recognizing and rewarding this type of research in both its individual and team evaluation. In addition, TLS is committed to investing in the Academic Collaborative Centers, where instigating collaboration with societal actors is one of the main goals. Concerning science communication (4), TLS will continue to work closely together with the communication department of the University and invest in a science communication expert dedicated to the communication of TLS's activities, including putting the Signature Plans into the spotlight.

### *Internationalization*

- [Formulate a well-founded vision of what can be considered a stable balance between national and international research given both the educational needs and the research ambitions within TLS. \(p16\)](#)

It is the ambition of TLS to formulate a clear vision on the relation of national and international research within its research profile. This will be operationalized by, on the one hand, continuing to encourage TLS researchers to include an international outlook in their work, ensuring that research in Dutch law and public administration is connected to global issues. On the other hand, TLS further stimulates international staff to connect with local stakeholders. The latter can take place within the Signature Plans and the Academic Collaborative Centers. TLS is committed to provide a unique research environment for top-notch researchers working on national-orientated legal and public administration topics while being embedded in a stimulating international research context.

### *Internal culture and context*

- [Respond to the tight labour market by ensuring proactive scouting and talent retention. \(p16\)](#)
- [Develop a more concrete and proactive plan to improve the gender balance at all different levels and to proactively improve the diversity of the research staff in all its dimensions. \(p17\)](#)
- [Continue taking signals of high workload seriously and continue supporting staff members in having a healthy work-life balance. \(p17\)](#)
- [Continue the proactive policy regarding the ancillary activities and other employments of staff members. \(p17\)](#)

TLS aims to continue its efforts to offer an engaging and inspiring work environment. This includes working on reducing the workload for its staff members, improving the student-staff ratio, lowering administrative burdens, further professionalizing research support, including supervision and extending the support structure for PhD researchers, and actively providing support for funding acquisition. Regarding the perceived problems in the labor market, different actions will be explored with a focus on vacancies that are difficult to fulfill. Within Tilburg University, it will be investigated whether recruitment capacity for the faculties can contribute to solving these problems, as well as whether scouting could help in this regard. Furthermore, Tilburg has a tradition of investing in PhD researchers. Regarding talent retention, also in the context of Recognition & Rewards, steps will be taken to formulate career paths for talented researchers and what they need to be able to develop further.

A second point of attention is diversity and inclusion (including social safety) within TLS. The focus will be broadened from only gender to and focus on diversity as well as the inclusion of the entire TLS population. With regard to the number of female full professors, TLS is pleased to see that in 2022 growth is noticeable. TLS plans to consolidate this upward trend in the coming years. The results from the employee survey are an important input for this.

Work pressure is and will remain a major concern within TLS. Initiatives are developed at different levels: university (adjusting the academic year), faculty (improving staff/student ratio, supporting researchers with large administrative functions, and further reducing the administrative burden), departments (targeted actions based on the results of employee surveys) and employees (vitality training programs). Regarding ancillary activities, TLS operates in line with Tilburg University's initiatives to guarantee independent research and to have and keep the administration of ancillary activities up to date. TLS has a proactive attitude in this regard with active and targeted outreach to specific groups.

### *PhD education and training*

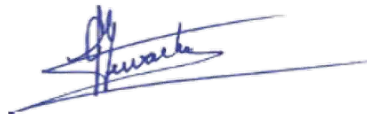
- Establish a robust quality policy for PhDs at the institutional level, especially regarding external PhDs. (p18)
- Inform PhDs in a more structured way about, amongst others, the regulations and expectations regarding supervision. (p18)
- Monitor the balance between teaching and research in practice to ensure that PhD researchers do not become overburdened and that PhD trajectories remain feasible. (p19)
- Ensure more structural outreach by the PhD officers. (p19)
- Develop a proactive policy to promote the well-being of PhD researchers, including stronger institutional safeguards, clearer outreach, and following up the PhD survey with measures that are visible and monitored. (p19)

TLS considers young researchers as the foundation for the future of research; taking care of its PhD researchers is a priority. Therefore, TLS wants to provide all PhD researchers a safe and inspiring work environment, where PhD researchers know where they stand, what opportunities are available, and where they can go if they have any questions or are in need of specific support. In addition, TLS finds it of utmost importance that PhD researchers are supervised by dedicated supervisors. To further encourage this, TLS will strengthen the current PhD policy where necessary. Several issues have already been addressed, such as broadening the focus of the PhD council to include both internal and external PhD researchers, streamlining the provision of information for PhD researchers, and improving the Graduate School's collaboration with HR regarding PhD related issues. TLS will also look into the possibility to extend its training program to support PhD researchers in their research efforts.

For further strengthening the PhD policy, the results of the monitoring interviews that will be held with all PhD researchers by the Graduate School starting in 2023 and satisfaction surveys that have been and are being conducted will also be considered. Obviously, TLS also actively joins Tilburg University-wide initiatives regarding PhD researchers, for example in the area of education for PhD researchers (development of a Tilburg University PhD Education Framework) and the initiatives in the area of stimulating well-being and social safety (implementation of the so-called implementation memos on social safety and well-being).

We look forward to discussing the outcomes of the TLS research assessment and related policy implications with the Executive Board. Hopefully resulting in a shared vision towards strengthening TLS's research and the profile of TLS and Tilburg University.

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Dean TLS



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