

RESEARCH ASSESSMENT REPORT
TILBURG LAW SCHOOL
2016-2021

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Preface

This review has examined the quality, societal relevance, and viability of research at Tilburg Law School in the period 2016-2021. On request of the institute, the reviewing committee has paid special attention to internationalization; multidisciplinary; and team science. The assessment committee consisted of 5 academics with a variety of backgrounds. Drawing on these different backgrounds and areas of expertise, we have engaged in an open examination of the developments, choices and dilemmas in TLS research and research policy. The committee has experienced this as an intellectually stimulating and inspiring process. We feel privileged to have gotten such an interesting inside account of an institute committed to developing itself. We have approached our role as ‘critical friends’, to appreciate what goes well and help the school in reflecting on how to further develop the realization of their ambition.

We want to express our appreciation to all who contributed to this assessment. First, to the team who diligently prepared the self-assessment. We highly appreciate the extensive work that resulted in a clear and accessible report. We also thank the staff who organized and assisted in the site visit for a very smooth process. Second, to all the panel members and case study presenters, for sharing their insights with us during the site visit. Third, to Esther Poort of De Onderzoekerij, who provided excellent secretarial support to the committee and produced a developed draft report in a very short time. Thanks to all of them, conducting this review was rewarding and a pleasant experience.

The goals of the review are to contribute to the improvement of the quality of research and to provide accountability for the use of public money.

We have assessed the research at Tilburg Law School as very good, in some cases, even excellent. Both the multidisciplinary research and the doctrinal research are of high quality and innovative. It is commendable how much TLS has achieved in terms of quality of output as well as development of a new strategy and institutional structure, during a pandemic.

The redesign of the research into Signature Plans has certainly brought coherence and appears to have inspired collaboration and team science. This has not been an easy process, especially in corona times. The leadership at TLS has adopted an open, invitational approach to making these plans into spaces where team science can happen. During the site visit, we’ve seen energy and inspiration and a sense of community among our conversation partners. Despite the mental toll that the Covid-19 pandemic and high work load in academia take, especially on PhDs and junior faculty, we saw an institution that thrives and has ambition. We are confident that TLS will continue to develop and innovate and realize its ambitions.

The research at TLS is societally relevant in many different 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 plane and thus demonstrates that societal relevance and internationalization can go hand in hand.

This review followed the new Strategy Evaluation Protocol (SEP) of 2021. This was the committee’s first experience with the new SEP, which places less emphasis on quantitative measures and more on the institution’s own strategic goals. We found a good balance between quantitative output indicators and narratives of quality in the self-assessment report and in the site visit. It is clear that TLS is very productive in a number of ways, but the SEP allowed us to look beyond this, and focus on the impact realized through the output, and on the realization of the mission aimed for through the performance.



The mission and strategy were clearly visible and aligned in TLS output indicators, strategy document, self-evaluation and presentations and discussions. There is a fertile ground to further build on and reap benefits from in future evaluations. In the spirit of the SEP which allows institutes to develop their own strategic goals, we have made a number of recommendations to further develop TLS strategy. We hope this will be helpful in bringing further focus and in realizing goals.

On behalf of the committee

Prof. Judith van Erp

Chair



1. Executive summary

Tilburg Law School (TLS) provides research and education in the field of law and public administration, with a special focus on the impact of societal challenges including globalization, digitalization, and sustainability. TLS has a research tradition that is nourished by monodisciplinary and multidisciplinary research. Since 2019, research within TLS is structured around the four so-called Signature Plans. These Signature Plans are state-of-the-art research lines, connecting the key areas of TLS's expertise: private, business and labour law, criminal law, tax law, (international) public law, public administration, and technology regulation.

The committee established that the overall quality of TLS research is very good and, in some cases, even excellent. The committee appreciates the innovative character of TLS research, often through combinations of disciplines. The research is disseminated through academic publications, published in reputable venues. The self-evaluation report provides some appealing examples of national and international publications that are highly visible and have academic impact. The research of TLS aims, and often succeeds in contributing to the wider society through the research projects and output, as well as through individual activities of its researchers.

The four Signature Plans were developed through a bottom-up process and most of the research projects seem to be solidly integrated into the Signature Plans. Although the (full) implementation of the Signature Plans had to deal with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, this strategy has already led to several promising research collaborations within TLS as well as with external partners. It is impressive that a quite fundamental redesign of the research structure has been realized during a pandemic and seems to have taken off well.

Although the committee appreciates the commitment of TLS to well-being of the staff, it also sensed that the workload, as in most academic institutions, is generally perceived as high, despite some promising measures to reduce the workload.

As far as PhD research more specifically is concerned, 136 PhD researchers obtained a PhD degree in the assessment period (2016–2021). Employed PhD researchers are immersed in a continuous programme of learning and developing, organized by the Tilburg Graduate Law School (TGLS). Overall, PhD researchers seemed satisfied with their supervision, however, the committee observed that quality of supervision to a large extent seems to depend on the supervisor.

In that respect, the committee is pleased that TLS, in close collaboration with the TLS PhD Council, has taken steps in the past years to improve the quality of the PhD programme and the well-being of its PhD researchers. Despite these measures, the PhD survey showed that many PhD researchers struggle with mental health issues and uncertainties. The committee is of the opinion that PhD wellbeing currently lacks strong institutional protections, and that the PhD programme could benefit from further formalising structures and safeguards.



Based on its overall assessment, the committee made several recommendations for further improvements in the future:

- 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.
- Include a wider range of indicators to demonstrate the research quality.
- 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.
- Develop a coherent strategy on societal impact, by defining more clearly the societal impact TLS aspires and by setting clear goals.
- Further improve the proportion of open access publications by also involving researchers who do not yet have open access publishing high on their agenda.
- Further develop the strategy with respect to open science to include multiple aspects of open science.
- Further consider the balance in funding streams between the Departments.
- 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.
- Formulate a clear vision on the goals of team science and what is needed in terms of institutional support.
- Respond to the tight labour market by ensuring proactive scouting and talent retention.
- Continue taking signals of high workload seriously and continue supporting staff members in having a healthy work-life balance.
- Continue the proactive policy regarding the ancillary activities and other employments of staff members.
- 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.
- Inform PhD students in a more structured way about, amongst others, the regulations and expectations regarding supervision.
- Establish a robust quality policy for PhDs at the institutional level, especially regarding external PhDs.
- Monitor the balance between teaching and research in practice to ensure that PhD researchers do not become overburdened and that PhD trajectories remain feasible.
- Ensure more structural outreach by the PhD officers.
- 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.



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). This protocol describes the aims and methods used to assess publicly funded research in the Netherlands. It was drawn up and adopted by the Universities of the Netherlands (UNL), the Netherlands Organization 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 peer review committee is requested to assess the quality of research conducted by Tilburg Law School (TLS) of Tilburg University on the main assessment criteria specified in the SEP: (1) Research Quality, (2) Societal Relevance and (3) Viability. Furthermore, SEP asks committees to take four specific aspects into account when assessing the three central criteria. These are: (1) Open Science, (2) PhD Policy and Training, (3) Academic Culture and (4) Human Resources Policy.

In addition to these criteria specified in the SEP, the Executive Board of Tilburg University requested the committee to pay attention to several additional questions regarding internationalization, multidisciplinary, and team science (see appendix A).

This report describes findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this external assessment of the research of TLS.

2.2 The committee

The Executive Board of Tilburg University appointed the following members of the committee:

- Prof. Dr. Judith van Erp (UU – chair);
- Prof. Dr. Willem van Boom (RU);
- Prof. Dr. Eric De Brabandere (UL);
- Dr. Erik Ros (EUR);
- Naomi Appelman, MA, LLM (UvA- PhD member).

The Executive Board of Tilburg University appointed Esther Poort of De Onderzoekerij as the committee secretary. All members of the committee signed a declaration form stating no conflict of interest and ensuring impartiality and confidentiality.

2.3 Procedures followed by the committee

Prior to 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 TLS and the interviews with their



Faculty Board, support staff, selections of senior and junior researchers, and PhD researchers representatives. The interviews took place on October 6-7, 2022 (see Appendix B).

During the site visit, the committee discussed its assessment and deliberated on the conclusions and recommendations. Based on these discussions and written input of committee members the secretary wrote a first draft of the report. This draft report was circulated to the committee for all members to comment on. Subsequently, the draft report was presented to TLS for factual corrections and comments. After considering this feedback in close consultation with the chair and other committee members, the secretary finalized the report. Subsequently, the text was finalized and presented to the Executive Board of Tilburg University.



3. Assessment of the research of TLS

3.1 Organization, Management and Governance

TLS is one of the five Schools of Tilburg University. TLS provides research and education in the field of law and public administration, with a special focus on the impact of societal challenges including globalization, digitalization, and sustainable development on social and institutional relationships and the law.

Since the previous assessment, the number of Departments has been reduced from twelve to five Departments:

- Department of Criminal Law (CL);
- Fiscal Institute Tilburg (FIT);
- Department of Private, Business, and Labour Law (PBLL);
- Department of Public Law and Governance (PLG);
- Tilburg Institute for Law, Technology and Society (TILT).

An important aim of this transformation was to remove administrative barriers for collaboration, to strengthen the bond between the Departments, and to further improve the cohesion of TLS and its connection with the university.

TLS is headed by the Faculty Board, composed of a Dean, a Vice-Dean for Research and Vice-Dean for Education. The Faculty Board is advised by the Advisory Committee for Research (ACR), which is composed of the leaders of the four Signature Plans (generally the Research Directors), and one other member of the academic staff charged with research management tasks. In addition, the Faculty Board is advised by the director and the student assessor.

TLS research policy is supported by the Research Support Team (RST), which has also undergone several compositional changes over the last three years. The RST is tasked with initiating new research policies, organising the implementation of policy initiatives, and coordinating Tilburg Graduate Law School (TGLS). The Head of the RST and the policy officer of the Graduate School join the Vice-Dean for Research in the Executive Committee for Research (ECR).

3.2 Mission and Strategy

As described in the self-evaluation report, TLS considers 'legal science and public administration as dynamic disciplines that are in a continuous adaptive, responsive, and proactive interaction with society. TLS investigates law and governance within this context, with a broad attention to local, national, international, and technological evolutions. TLS recognizes the complexity of modern society and aims to incorporate this in a multidisciplinary and engaged approach to the study of law and governance. To this end, the School actively pursues collaborations with other disciplines, such as economics, social and behavioural sciences, philosophy, history, and digital sciences. It realizes that this multidisciplinary



approach can only thrive when it can rely and build on solid monodisciplinary research. Therefore, TLS cherishes core legal areas and dogmatic competences’.

The research strategy of TLS, which is fully described in the TLS Strategic Plan 2022-2027, is summarized by the following five strategic research aims:

- Performing high-quality and impactful research;
- Investing in multidisciplinary research;
- Developing the four Signature Plans through team science;
- Fostering a stable balance between national and international research;
- Offering an engaging and inspiring work environment with room for a diversity of talents.

TLS has chosen these five strategic aims to evaluate the research quality and societal relevance for the last six years.

Since 2019, research within TLS is increasingly structured around four so-called Signature Plans: state-of-the-art research lines, connecting the key areas of TLS’s expertise: private, business and labour law, criminal law, tax law, (international) public law, public administration, and technology regulation. The five Departments have a coordinating role in one of the Signature Plans, with one plan being coordinated by two departments:

- The Signature Plan *Crime and Criminal Justice in the Age of Globalization and Digitalization* is spearheaded by Criminal Law (CL);
- The Signature Plan *Connecting Organizations: Private, Tax and Technology-Driven Legal Relations in a Sustainable Society* is spearheaded by Private, Business & Labour Law (PBLL) and the Fiscal Institute Tilburg (FIT);
- The Signature Plan *Global Law and Governance* is spearheaded by Public Law and Governance (PLG);
- The Signature Plan *Regulating Socio-Technical Change* is spearheaded by the Tilburg Institute for Law, Technology and Society (TILT).

As indicated in the self-evaluation report, the Signature Plans underpin the research strategy of the new Departments while also offering links to the research conducted in other Departments.

It is apparent from the self-evaluation report that TLS has taken the general recommendation of the previous assessment committee by heart by restricting the number of themes in order to create a sharper research profile. The current committee established that the Signature Plans align well with contemporary societal challenges, and hence ensure, aside from the scientific research quality, also societal relevance. The four Signature Plans were developed through a bottom-up process and most of the research projects seem to be integrated into the Signature Plans. The committee appreciates that researchers still have sufficient freedom for individual agendas. Based on the self-evaluation report and the interviews, it became clear that the organization of the research into four Signature Plans provides an effective means to collaborate, jointly develop research ideas, and reach out to societal partners. Although the Signature Plans have been introduced only recently and their development and implementation were influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, they have already led to several



promising research collaborations within TLS as well as with external partners. It is commendable how well the new structure has taken of given the difficult circumstances in which it was developed, in which the types of communication and contact necessary for embarking in collaborative research were often not possible.

3.3 Research quality

TLS has a research tradition that combines disciplinary and multidisciplinary research. Complex and contemporary issues are at the forefront of its research themes. By focusing on society, the School studies the development of law and governance and questions how it should develop in the context of, amongst others, digitalization, globalization, and sustainability.

The committee established that the overall quality of TLS research is very good and, in some cases, even excellent. During the assessment period, TLS researchers produced high quality scientific output on a wide range of relevant research topics. The committee highly appreciates the innovative character of TLS research, often through combinations of disciplines.

The research is disseminated through academic publications, published in reputable venues. The fact that a large number of publications appear in peer-reviewed journals and leading presses indicates the originality, significance, and international reputation of TLS researchers. The self-evaluation report provides some appealing examples of national and international publications that are highly visible and have academic impact.

The academic reputation of TLS is also evidenced by the awards and prizes various academic staff members have received for their research achievements, and by the success of staff members in obtaining competitive grants. A clear sign of the high quality of the research at TLS is that between 2016 and 2021, TLS has secured, among other grants, one ERC Starting grant, one ERC Consolidator grant, one ERC Advanced grant, one ERC Proof of concept grant and four NWO-Veni grants.

The staff include a significant number of well-known researchers with an outstanding academic reputation, at both the national and international level. Several TLS scholars are recognized as pioneering scholars in their fields. Some staff members are part of prestigious scientific councils or committees such as the Young Academy of KNAW, KNAW, the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR), the Dutch Association of Tax Science (VBW), and the Max Planck Institute for Tax Law and Public Finance.

Overall, the committee is impressed by the research quality of TLS. The committee noted that the way in which TLS demonstrates research quality in the self-evaluation report does not fully reflect the full range of aspects of research quality. The self-evaluation report highlighted several influential scientific papers; books; individual grants; and academic recognitions and positions of TLS researchers. These are all examples of high-quality outputs, but the committee has recognized several instances of quality beyond these outputs, such as the development of innovative methodologies, the quality of data collection in collaboration with societal actors, and the theoretical contribution of jurisprudence analysis. The committee considered that these aspects are strongly present within TLS and recommends taking these



into account as quality indicators. The committee also recommends enabling the recognition of 'team science' whereas the indicators mentioned in the self-evaluation report predominantly reflect individual quality. The committee encourages TLS to develop indicators for quality at the level of teams, for example within the Signature Plans.

The committee appreciates the increasing focus on multidisciplinary research, also in light of the strong focus in funding schemes on multidisciplinary research. The overview of academic publications clearly demonstrates the multidisciplinary approaches in various ways. Also, the different case studies presented are appealing examples of the multidisciplinary nature of the TLS research.

The multidisciplinary focus is also evidenced by the pluriformity of disciplinary backgrounds of TLS researchers and the presence of, among others, public administration scholars, philosophers, economists, and historians within the TLS research community. The committee noted that TLS integrates these disciplines in a natural way and that scholars of various backgrounds appear to feel at home in TLS. The combination of disciplines allows TLS scholars to share knowledge, expertise, and access to relevant research networks. The committee sensed a genuine spirit of curiosity and openness towards the concepts, methods and theories of other disciplines and researchers appear to inspire each other. For example, the collaboration between scholars with backgrounds in law, criminology, and public administration, results in impactful research. 'Tilburg Law School' has developed into a strong brand for quality research with a broad perspective.

Furthermore, the multidisciplinary approach is reflected by the grouping of more than one single legal discipline within the new departments and in the Signature plans. However, the committee noted a difference in the extent to which the different disciplines within one Department collaborate on multidisciplinary themes. For instance, it is clear to the committee that FIT needs more time to engage in the collaborative and multidisciplinary approach of the Signature Plan it contributes to.

The committee has two suggestions to further strengthen the multidisciplinary focus. The Signature Plans are mostly aligned with the (new) Department structure, which might seem to go against the idea of multidisciplinary (although the Departments themselves are already to a certain extent multidisciplinary within as well as outside legal disciplines). Now that the Signature Plans have taken off, the committee would like to give TLS as a consideration to extend the multidisciplinary approach by focusing more on collaborations beyond the boundaries of the Departments and even beyond the boundaries of TLS. Cross-fertilization between signature plans, for example methodologically, could also be explored. Second, the committee recommends exploring further institutional reward structures to enable researchers to participate in multidisciplinary research. It requires time to bridge the gaps between the knowledge and fields from people from different fields, and there can be difficulties in finding suitable venues for publication.



3.4 Societal relevance

The societal relevance of research is at the core of the mission of Tilburg University and an important driver for TLS's research activities. The committee observed that TLS places great value on societal relevance and is committed to further strengthening this aspect of their research. The research of TLS clearly succeeds in contributing to wider society, through the research projects and output, as well as through individual activities of its researchers.

The self-evaluation report describes convincingly how TLS's researchers conduct impactful research. This is illustrated by various examples of interesting collaborations with societal partners in both the national and regional context. For instance, TLS works on several research grants of the Network for Studies on Pensions, Aging & Retirement (Netspar). The project 'Bindend besturen' is an interesting example of a collaboration with regional institutions. In this project TLS collaborated with the province of North Brabant on the juridification of spatial planning.

The self-evaluation report also describes how TLS researchers have made significant contributions to society. These contributions cover a broad range of topics such as the energy transition and climate change, subversive crime, the labour market, and technology and society. These contributions are local and national but also international. Furthermore, TLS researchers participate actively in public discussions on local and national democracy, for instance, concerning integrity of politicians, participation of citizens, freedom of speech, and the rule of law.

The societal impact of the research also is evidenced by the societal positions TLS scholars fulfil in addition to their work at TLS. TLS researchers are affiliated with important societal institutes and organizations, such as the Council for Government Policy, Dutch National Human Rights Institute (*College voor de Rechten van de Mens*) and the Dutch Safety Board (*Onderzoeksraad voor de Veiligheid*). TLS's strong connection with the legal domain is reflected in the many researchers who act as deputy judges.

While the committee appreciates the department's emphasis on generating societal impact, there is no evidence in the documentation of an explicit strategy for ensuring that the research conducted has sufficient pathways to generate impact. The committee is of the opinion that TLS would benefit from a coherent strategy by defining more clearly the societal impact it aspires and by setting clear goals. This will help its researchers to think of impact in the various aspects of their research agendas and would also enable researchers to prioritise their societal interactions.

While societal engagement is one of the criteria along which researchers at TLS are being evaluated, it was not clear to the committee how and to what extent this aspect plays a role in assessments. From the interviews, it appears that TLS has not (yet) found a way to assess the quality of, and reward and recognize societal relevance. Similar to nearly all universities in the Netherlands, this is work in progress and takes place in the context of the movement towards a new balance in the Recognition and Rewards of academics (see also paragraph 3.6.2). From the interview with management, the committee gathers that this discussion is taking place and is fully confident that it will lead to adequate requirements for promotion and tenure.



Open Science

The committee is pleased that the School is increasingly involved in open access publishing. This open access policy resulted in 20% increase in open access publishing during the assessment period (from 28% in 2016 to 47% in 2021). TLS has its own open access fund that can cover the costs associated with open access publishing (gold). One of the Departments (TILT) has initiated its own open access journal 'Technology and Regulation,' a journal for interdisciplinary research on regulatory related to emerging technologies. The growing attention to open access publications and the progress achieved in this area are commendable. The committee encourages TLS to further improve this by also involving researchers who do not yet have open access publishing high on their agenda.

As described in the self-evaluation report, open science is a matter of great importance to the School. TLS embraces the principles of open science, to be achieved, among other ways, by sharing research data, publications, tools, and results as early and openly as possible if this meets disciplinary and ethical ways of working. In addition, the self-evaluation report indicates that open science contributes to collaboration and transparency in all research phases. The committee fully endorses this broad vision on open science and recommends developing a broad-ranging strategy in accordance with this vision. This strategy should not only focus on open access publications but should also include other aspects such as the involvement of stakeholders, public engagement, and the reuse of data according to the FAIR principles – thus reflecting that open science is closely linked with societal impact.

3.5 Viability

The organizational transition towards a more 'compact' structure has had a significant impact on the way research is organized and structured in the School. This has not been an easy process, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The heads of the Departments and Signature Plan leaders have played an important role in making these plans into inviting, open spaces where team science can flourish. The Signature Plans are inherently multidisciplinary, timely and relevant for society. According to the committee, the Signature Plans contribute to the viability of the School and its future research plans. The committee noted that the Signature Plans function more as adaptive and flexible networks for collegial dialogue and joint research, than as genuine 'plans' with a clear goal and targets. Therefore, the term 'programme' might be more appropriate at this stage. The committee encourages TLS to take a next step by establishing more specifically what the Signature Plans want to achieve – what contribution they want to make- beyond general terms.

As described in the self-evaluation report, TLS is financially in control and has enough room for strategic investments in research and education in the coming years. Yet, the committee would advise TLS to guard the balance in funding streams at the School level. Some Departments are internationally less visible because of their focus on doctrinal research of Dutch law. This inherent trait may entail greater reliance on direct (first tier) government funding. By contrast, some other Departments seem to strongly depend on grants and contract research (second and third tier). This reliance of external funding may create risks in



the long run, both in terms of academic independence and freedom, the quality of contract research and in terms of financial viability. The committee recommends to further consider the balance in funding streams between the Departments.

TLS has a strong international orientation and about one third of the staff is non-native Dutch. One specific aim of TLS is to achieve a stable balance between national and international research. It was not clear to the committee what ‘a stable balance’ entails and whether this should be seen as a quantitative or a qualitative balance. During the interviews, the committee learned that TLS asks all national staff to include an international outlook in their research and all international staff to connect with local stakeholders. Research into Dutch law is thus connected to global issues. The committee is of the opinion that this approach may indeed stimulate innovative and relevant research and is attractive for research-driven education programmes. At the same time, given the need for Dutch-language faculty to teach courses in the bachelor programme in Dutch law, this approach may increase the risk that TLS will become less attractive for scholars with a national orientation. The committee recommends developing a well-founded vision of what can be considered a stable balance given both educational needs, standing and reputation in the family of Dutch law schools and the increasingly international and multidisciplinary research ambitions within TLS.

One of the challenges reported in the SWOT analysis is to find sufficient staff with expertise in Dutch law. The committee understands that TLS considers abandoning its general policy of not hiring their own PhD researchers after graduation. In light of this challenge and the general tight labour market, the committee could well imagine a reasoned recalibration of this policy.

The self-evaluation report emphasizes the importance TLS attaches to team science. The committee wonders if team science goes beyond project collaboration between different researchers or groups, and what the implications are for rewards, promotion and even budget allocation. The committee recommends to further develop indicators for team science that may be of assistance in hiring and promotion policies and research policy.

The committee noted that the staff composition is rather top-heavy, with 18.8 research fte for full professors, 9.2 research fte for associate professors, 12.4 research fte for assistant professors, and 16.1 fte for post doc researchers. In a tight labour market, proactive scouting and a talent retention policy for junior scholars is necessary, and career and development perspectives should be clear and transparent.

3.6 Internal culture and context

3.6.1 Academic culture

TLS recognizes that, in addition to the expertise of its staff, its success depends on their well-being. The School has implemented several measures to address workload, such as the TLS incentive grant to be used to free up time to write a research grant. Another laudable measure, that currently is being explored, is the university-wide system to award a research grant of €50,000 to young researchers whose application received top reviews but were



ultimately not awarded. The committee sensed from its conversations with TLS management that it is committed to taking signals of high workload seriously and to supporting staff members as much as possible in having a healthy work-life balance. Although the committee appreciates the commitment of TLS to well-being of the staff, it also sensed that the workload, as in most academic institutions, is generally perceived as high, despite some promising measures to reduce the workload. The committee advises to take signals of high workload seriously and continue supporting staff members in having a healthy work-life balance.

The committee learned that promoting research integrity is high on the agenda of TLS. TLS adheres to the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, the Code of Ethics for Research in the Social and Behavioural Sciences involving Human Participants, and the University's code of conduct. The Faculty Board is advised by the TLS Ethics Review Board (ERB). The ERB assesses and evaluates research proposals on compliance with ethics and gives ethical clearance if requirements are met. Furthermore, the ERB assesses and evaluates research proposals on compliance with data protection and data management. All PhD researchers follow mandatory training in research ethics.

The close relationships with legal practice and other societal partners offers great benefits, but also requires constant vigilance and attention to academic independence. The committee found that TLS takes its responsibility regarding the ancillary activities and other employments of their staff members seriously. Staff members are obliged to notify Tilburg University of ancillary activities and other employments. These activities must be approved by TLS. Each year, full professors must declare that the information regarding their ancillary activities is complete and correct. The committee encourages TLS to continue this proactive policy and to ensure that the independence of its research is maintained at all times.

As described in the self-evaluation report, TLS works to safeguard and further improve diversity and inclusion and the social safety within the TLS community. The School strives to a balanced composition of Departments with regard to gender, age, disciplinary background, nationality, socio-economic background. The self-evaluation report data show a slight increase in the number of female assistant professors in the past period (from 54% in 2016 to 62% in 2022). Also, the management team has a good gender balance: four out of the eight leadership positions at TLS are taken up by women. The number of female associate professors (44% in 2022) and especially female full professors is lagging behind (29% in 2022). The committee encourages the management to proactively improve the gender balance at all different levels and to proactively improve the diversity of the research staff in all its dimensions.

3.6.2 Talent management

TLS aims to embrace and mobilize the diversity of talents within TLS. This is important to support the intrinsic motivation and development of individual staff members. The self-evaluation report indicates that the Appointment and Promotion Committee (APC) is TLS's standing appointment and promotion committee, which assesses staff members applying for an appointment or promotion and advises the Dean in these procedures. As explained in the



self-evaluation report, this APC is trained to avoid biases and to be able to assess the interviewees on the determined criteria and the five domains of Recognition and Rewards.

Tilburg University's Recognition and Rewards programme is part of the broader national initiative to revise the system of recognising and rewarding academic staff. At the university level, it is imbedded in the programme Use (y)our Talents. The aim is to do justice to all the various domains of academic work, including, research and education, societal impact, (personal) leadership, and team spirit. The committee appreciates the leading role some of the faculty take in developing and implementing the new recognition and reward policy within the university. As pointed out before, the committee noted that the new promotion system is not fully implemented (yet) and that it will take some time to clarify the criteria being used.

3.6.3 PhD education and training

TLS is very productive in terms of PhDs. In the assessment period (2016–2021), 136 PhD researchers obtained a PhD degree. The grant of several 'internally funded' PhD positions (TIRO) is commendable, as is the extension of the number of such positions granted in the past year (8 in 2022).

Employed PhD researchers are immersed in a continuous programme of learning and developing, organized by the Tilburg Graduate Law School (TGLS). The mandatory training programme for every employed PhD researcher consists of courses on Building Your Methodology, Qualitative Methods, Principles of Law, Comparative Law, Research Integrity, and an Impact Workshop. At the start of the PhD project, PhD researchers compose a Training and Supervision plan (mandatory since 2018) together with their supervisors. This includes a plan for educational and training activities, a planning for the PhD programme, and scheduling of multiple formal conversations (at least once per year) with the supervisors during which feedback is provided and progression is monitored. One year after the PhD has started, the PhD has a 'go/no go' evaluation with the supervisors. The committee suggests that TLS should consider involving an external advisor from outside the own Department in this go/no go evaluation.

Overall, the PhD programme is adequate though mainly informally structured. The committee observed that quality of supervision to a large extent seems to depend on the supervisor. It recommends taking measures to inform PhD students in a more structured way about the regulations and expectations. Moreover, a good PhD policy is not only directed at PhD researchers but also to their supervisors and contains institutional mechanisms for quality assurance. The committee has the impression that TLS could do more to establish a robust quality policy at the institutional level, especially when it comes to the large number of external PhDs. The School is well advised to implement safeguards to avoid the recent incident in which a PhD degree was not awarded following the defense, from happening again. These safeguards should not only – or primarily – exist at the level of doctoral regulations, but also in quality assurance at the level of the graduate programme. This incident was most unfortunate, and the committee learned that the subsequent communication and outreach to other PhD researchers could have been better.



According to TLS policy, internal PhD researchers have an average teaching load of 0.2 fte. PhD researchers are released of educational tasks in the final year of their programmes, so they can fully focus on completing their theses. The committee noted that, apart from deviations from the 0.2 fte standard in the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, in practice this teaching load may be variable and indeed higher than TLS policy suggests. Hence, the committee advises to firmly monitor the balance between teaching and research in practice to ensure that PhD researchers do not become overburdened and that PhD trajectories remain feasible. To this end, the committee suggests including the (spread of) the teaching load in the Training and Supervision Plan.

In close interaction with the TLS PhD Council, TLS has taken steps in the past years to improve the quality of PhD programme and the well-being of its PhD researchers. The School has invested in support for PhD researchers. This support consists of, among other things, confidential advisors, a PhD psychologist, and the appointment of a PhD officer for every Department. This PhD officer is a staff member that has a mentoring role for PhD researchers and organizes regular meetings for all PhD researchers and can be approached individually for PhD research related or personal problems. The committee sensed, however, that not all PhD researchers are aware of the existence of or the precise role of the PhD officer. Therefore, more structural outreach by the PhD officers and further improvement of the dissemination of information to PhD staff may be helpful. Also, despite the measures to improve the well-being of the PhD's, the most recent PhD survey showed some worrying findings. Many PhD researchers struggle with mental health issues and uncertainties, and 10% of the PhD researchers has experienced unacceptable behaviour on the work floor. The committee strongly recommends taking these signals seriously. This requires 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.

3.7 Recommendations

Based on its overall assessment, the committee made several recommendations for further improvements in the future:

- 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.
- Include a wider range of indicators to demonstrate the research quality.
- 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.
- Develop a coherent strategy on societal impact, by defining more clearly the societal impact TLS aspires and by setting clear goals.
- Further improve the proportion of open access publications by also involving researchers who do not yet have open access publishing high on their agenda.
- Further develop the strategy with respect to open science to include multiple aspects of open science.



- Further consider the balance in funding streams between the Departments.
- 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.
- Formulate a clear vision on the goals of team science and what is needed in terms of institutional support.
- Respond to the tight labour market by ensuring proactive scouting and talent retention.
- Continue taking signals of high workload seriously and continue supporting staff members in having a healthy work-life balance.
- Continue the proactive policy regarding the ancillary activities and other employments of staff members.
- 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.
- Inform PhD students in a more structured way about, amongst others, the regulations and expectations regarding supervision.
- Establish a robust quality policy for PhDs at the institutional level, especially regarding external PhDs.
- Monitor the balance between teaching and research in practice to ensure that PhD researchers do not become overburdened and that PhD trajectories remain feasible.
- Ensure more structural outreach by the PhD officers.
- 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.



Appendix A – Additional questions to the committee

In addition to the criteria specified in the Strategy Evaluation Protocol, the Executive Board of Tilburg University asked the committee to pay special attention to the following additional questions concerning core themes within the research strategy of Tilburg Law School:

a) internationalization;

Tilburg Law School strives to be a firmly internationally-oriented institution and simultaneously cherishes its ties and services to the local community. To what extent has the School succeeded in its aim to nourish a research profile which balances international inquiry and collaboration with a keen attention to national law and governance? Does the committee see further opportunities for investment here?

b) multidisciplinary;

Tilburg Law School strives to foster the open and innovative methodological outlook that has historically characterized its research. How effective is the School's strategy of investing in multidisciplinary composition and interdisciplinary ambition and of encouraging research that connects doctrinal legal scholarship with further methodologies within as well as outside the legal discipline? How may we further improve this strategy?

c) team science;

Tilburg Law School strives to promote research as a team activity. By bringing together researchers in four signature plans and investing in the collaboration within and between these signature plans, the School is committed to creating a vibrant and dynamic research climate in which complex legal and societal issues can be jointly researched. How promising does the committee judge these steps taken by Tilburg Law School to promote team science, and how may this strategy be further sustained and improved?



Appendix B - Programme of the site visit

Wednesday 5 October 2022

Time	Part
12.30 – 13.30	Arrival, welcome, lunch
13.30 – 15.15	Preparatory meeting committee
15.15 – 16.00	Interview with the Faculty Board TLS
16.05 – 16.50	Interview with the Head of departments (HoD's)
17.00 – 17.30	Case Studies I & II
17.30 – 18.00	Committee meeting
19.00	Dinner

Thursday 6 October 2022

Time	Part
9.00 – 9.30	Preparation meeting committee
9.30 – 10.15	Interview with PhD researchers
10.25 – 11.10	Interview with the Advisory Committee for Research
11.20 – 11.35	Case Study III
11.35 – 12.05	Interview with Research Support and HR
12.05 – 13.05	Lunch
13.05 – 13.35	Case Studies IV and V
13.40 – 14.25	Interview with the Scientific Staff
14.35 – 15.05	Interview with the Faculty Board
15.05 – 16.35	Committee meeting (preparing report and presentation)
16.35 – 17.00	Presentation preliminary findings
17.00	Drinks



Appendix C- Quantitative data**Research staff in FTE¹**

	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	#	FTE ²	#	FTE ²	#	FTE ²	#	FTE ²	#	FTE ²	#	FTE ²
Academic staff												
Full professor	59	24.51	58	19.40	58	19.94	57	18.32	54	18.61	52	18.80
Associate professor	23	9.35	22	8.78	19	7.37	22	7.79	25	8.47	27	9.24
Assistant professor	47	15.89	46	14.10	51	14.93	46	16.13	40	13.52	40	12.35
Post-doctoral researchers	19	14.52	23	18.74	24	19.00	22	21.00	22	15.33	20	16.12
PhD researchers	60	43.60	77	52.08	88	66.33	82	65.95	69	57.52	60	55.98
Total research staff	208	107.88	226	113.09	240	127.58	229	129.19	210	113.45	199	112.49

¹ Contains data on employed staff members

² Research FTE

Funding and expenditure

	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	K€	%	K€	%	K€	%	K€	%	K€	%	K€	%
Funding												
Government funding	5.159	49%	3.941	36%	4.026	34%	3.687	30%	3.730	32%	4.412	37%
Research grants	1.62	15%	1.232	11%	1.600	13%	1.229	10%	739	8%	1.085	9%
Contract research	2.455	23%	3.853	36%	4.272	36%	4.461	36%	3.594	30%	2.538	21%
Other	1.334	13%	1.782	16%	2.074	17%	2.960	24%	3.740	32%	3.783	32%
Total funding	10.568	100%	10.808	100%	11.972	100%	12.337	100%	11.803	100%	11.818	100%
Expenditure												
Personnel costs	8.389	92%	8.815	92%	9.681	92%	10.196	92%	9.980	92%	10.273	92%
Other costs	762	8%	801	8%	880	8%	927	8%	907	8%	934	8%
Total expenditure	9.142	100%	9.616	100%	10.561	100%	11.123	100%	10.887	100%	11.207	100%

