



NOSTER

Nederlandse Onderzoekschool voor Theologie en Religiewetenschap
Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion

**Application for Re-Accreditation
Main Document**

Note: a list of terms and abbreviations used in this document can be found in [Appendix 17](#).

Year of submission: 2013

Year/years in which the previous accreditation(s) was/were awarded: 1995, 2000, 2005

Name of research school (Dutch): Nederlandse Onderzoeksschool voor Theologie en Religiewetenschap

Name of research school (English): Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion

Acronym/abbreviation: NOSTER

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Institutes and/or faculties participating in the research school: Evangelical Theological Faculty, Leuven (ETF; since 2009); Protestants Theological University (PThU); Radboud University Nijmegen (RU); University of Groningen (RUG; since 2009); Theological University of Apeldoorn (TUA); Theological University of Kampen (TUK); Tilburg University (TiU); University of Amsterdam (UvA; since 2011); University of Humanistic Studies (UvH; since 2009); University of Leiden (UL); Utrecht University (UU); and VU University Amsterdam (VU).

Institutions with which the research school has a formal partnership: University of Leuven, Belgium; University of Münster, Germany; University of Glasgow, United Kingdom; Tel Aviv University, Israel; Lund University, Sweden.

1. Mission

NOSTER is a collaborative association of twelve university institutions in the Netherlands and Flanders constituting an (inter)national Research School (PhD training programme) in the fields of theology and religious studies.¹ NOSTER's **mission** is to:

- offer PhD candidates and ReMA students a high-quality **study programme** in the field of theology and religious studies (including relevant and adequate professional training), as well as to promote the anchoring of their research in a broad national and international network/research community of researchers and research institutions;
- offer senior/postdoctoral researchers within these disciplines a **forum** for research collaboration, (international) networking and innovative initiatives that simultaneously benefit the training of PhD candidates and ReMA students.

In this context, NOSTER aims to:

- promote the inter-university and international **cooperation** in these fields of study, especially in the form of inter-institutional coordination of research themes (partly to stimulate the acquisition of national and international research funding);
- act as the **point of contact** and exchange for the field for Dutch, Flemish and foreign academic organisations and institutions, especially with regard to the promotion of quality, differentiation and reinforcement of research in the various fields of expertise;
- act as **knowledge broker** for the field by (1) providing an overview of the relevant PhD and ReMA study programmes in the Netherlands, Flanders and abroad, and by (2) promoting the matching of researchers and social partners in order to benefit research cooperation and financing (via website, publicity, and the organisation of matchmaking meetings).

NOSTER aims to realise these goals with the following **priorities**, described in the *Joint Regulations* (JR, see [Appendix 3](#)):

1. providing inter-university courses for PhD candidates and ReMA students, developing a curriculum for PhD candidates and internal quality assurance with regard to the activities of the research school;
2. coordinating the local and national education curricula and disseminating information via website, newsletters, inter-university course catalogue, etc.;
3. facilitating and promoting the mobility of ReMA students and PhD candidates within the graduate schools / research institutes participating in the research school, by means of summer and winter semesters, PhD candidate conferences, Master classes with prominent academics and research training, etc.;
4. promoting and supporting national and international cooperation of researchers within the field, with the goal of creating focus and mass, and increasing publicity for the field;

¹ NOSTER covers a broad multidisciplinary research area. Theology and religious studies are historically and institutionally the two most important fields in this area of research, which is increasingly studied from the perspectives of other disciplines within the Humanities and the Social Sciences. In addition to the various forms of denominational Theology, the study of Christianity in its historical and global context, the study of Judaism and comparative religions have always had a major focus within NOSTER. Scholars in Religious Studies within NOSTER focus primarily on non-western religions and on the changes in religions and philosophy in modern and globalising societies. A small number of Islam studies researchers are also affiliated with NOSTER and practice their specialisms within the fields of theology and religious studies. The NISIS research school is the primary cooperative effort for research study programmes in the multidisciplinary study of Islam, Arabic Languages and Islamic Cultures. NOSTER's field of expertise also has many topics in common with the research schools OIKOS (Greek and Latin Antiquity), Medieval Studies, Huizinga (Cultural History) and Philosophy.

5. acting in conjunction with the graduate schools and research institutes as a point of contact for the field, both internally and externally;
6. facilitating and promoting interdisciplinary cooperation with other fields when possible.

This mission statement describes NOSTER's current goals and priorities. Although NOSTER's core goals (inter-university research study programme and specialism-specific platform function) are still identical to the original goals at the foundation and previous accreditation of NOSTER as a national research school, significant fine-tuning and focus has taken place with regard to the organisation, financing and tasks performed by NOSTER due to the major academic, institutional, political and specialist changes that have occurred since the last re-accreditation. These changes include:

- The major institutional restructuring of theology and religious studies in the Netherlands: shrinkage and consolidation of theological study programmes and repositioning of religious studies, along with university reorganisation processes that took place in the period 2005-2012;
- The introduction of the Bachelor-Master system, ReMA study programmes and the foundation of local Graduate Schools (starting in 2005), which required significant adjustments and new coordination within the nationally concentrated PhD study programmes;
- The new focus and financing of Humanities within Dutch universities (cf. the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science report *Duurzame Geesteswetenschappen* [Sustainable Humanities], 2008), which resulted in the withdrawal of funding for the national Humanities research schools via secretary funding and the introduction of centrally regulated office expense compensation and individual student budget funding;
- The necessity of repositioning and reorganising the national research schools in relation to the local Graduate Schools (cf. *Further Agreements DCH-LOGOS*, 2010-2011, see [Appendix 4](#));
- The general university budget cuts and the national science policy for socially valuable and externally financed research, which make it necessary for both young researchers and established academics to focus on external and usually very competitively organised research funding.

The results of this necessary adjustment of NOSTER's activities have been described in the mission statement above. The reforms and refocusing were not entirely disadvantageous for NOSTER, because while major internal budget cuts and substantial reorganisations were implemented, the number of partner institutions increased by 33%, the study programme has been significantly improved, the national profile of the school has become reinforced and its visibility has increased, cooperation with other research networks and organisations has been expanded, support for financing and publication of research has increased, dissemination of information and communication with other organisations has been significantly improved. Although the total number of NOSTER members has shrunk dramatically – in conjunction with the general diminishing of theology as an autonomous academic discipline – and although as a consequence the number of PhD students has gradually decreased, in absolute numbers the participation in the study programme and the research cooperation has increased, the number of NOSTER members that act as lecturers within the programme has augmented and the number of PhD degrees acquired by junior NOSTER members has generally remained stable.

Below you can find a brief summary of the policy items that NOSTER has implemented since 2005 in order to realise its own core goals. We differentiate the following phases:

- a) **2005-2009: implementation of re-accreditation recommendations** (introduction of interdisciplinary research cooperation; education reform with regard to the Bachelor-Master structure and Graduate Schools; reinforcement of international cooperation);
- b) **2010-2012: implementation of DCH-LOGOS agreements** (budget cuts and reorganisation due to cancellation of compensation for facilitating institution (*Duurzame Geesteswetenschappen*); renewal of agreements with participants and renewal of the *Joint Regulations*; 'Professionalisation of Research Grant Applications' project);
- c) **2013-2016: implementation of new Joint Regulations** (refinement and consolidation of new financing and organisation; reinforcement of national and international cooperation; promotion of knowledge broker activities; more attention for professional prospects for PhD candidates and ReMA students).

The policy issues that belong to each phase are briefly explained below; they are explained in more detail in other parts of this report.

Ad a) 2005-2009: implementation of re-accreditation recommendations 2005

- introduction of a new configuration for the platform function and research cooperation among senior researchers within NOSTER: division into disciplinary sectors has been replaced by cooperation in Research Collaboration Groups (RCGs) and in national and international professional organisations;
- innovation and quality improvement of the PhD education programme as part of the introduction of the Bachelor-Master structure and Graduate Schools: 'bottom up' programming to meet the research needs of PhD candidates and ReMA students;

- consolidation of national cooperation in the field of theology and religious studies through the expansion of NOSTER with three new participating institutions from the full breadth of the field (ETF, Leuven; UvH, Utrecht; RUG, Groningen);
- reinforcement of the cooperation with national umbrella organisations (e.g., DDC) and national and international professional organisations in the field of theology and religious studies;
- reinforcement of international cooperation within the NOSTER core tasks: execution of NWO internationalisation projects; joint PhD conference with KU Leuven (2009); and increasing the proportion of international guest speakers in the curriculum, the quadrennial NOSTER conference (2007) and the RCGs;
- cooperation with other national research schools with regard to policy, differentiation and internal organisation, especially within the Humanities (LOGOS).

Ad b) 2010-2012: implementation of DCH-LOGOS agreements

- expansion of NOSTER with a new participating institution (UvA, 2011), renewal of the organisational and financial agreements with all participating institutions (2010 and 2012), and renewal of the *Joint Regulations* (2012);
- implementation of national agreements (DCH-LOGOS) regarding the position of Humanities research schools; introduction of new funding and contribution system due to cancellation of Secretariat funding; budget cuts (35% reduction in budget); reorganisation of the Executive Board; reduction by 30% of the NOSTER office staff (2010-2012); simplification of the admission procedures; introduction of individual student budgets and tuition for non-NOSTER members / external PhD candidates;
- innovation, quality improvement and streamlining of the NOSTER curriculum with 'benchmarked' education norms, such as PhD conferences, PhD seminars and advanced courses;
- introduction of the knowledge broker function with an overview of relevant PhD and ReMA education in the Netherlands, Flanders and abroad (via website and curriculum information);
- stimulation of innovative and interdisciplinary research cooperation by subsidising RCGs and thematic meetings organised by NOSTER members;
- initiation and implementation of the 'Professionalisation of Research Grant Applications' project in order to promote successful research applications in the field of theology and religious studies (including the appointment of a project assistant for 18 months, 2010-2011);
- improvement of information provision, educational exchanges and communications via the new NOSTER website (www.noster.org) and the monthly digital newsletter;
- reinforcement of the cooperation with national research schools, especially in the field of Humanities (LOGOS), due to the repositioning and division of tasks between the university Graduate Schools and research institutes.

Ad c) 2013-2016: implementation of the new Joint Regulations

- refocus and consolidation of NOSTER (both organisationally and financially) as a national and international collaborative association (researcher training, platform function and point of contact for the field), and intensification of internationalisation within all of the NOSTER core tasks;
- reinforcement of the focus on career development and professional perspectives for the PhD candidates and ReMA students in the NOSTER curriculum and activities;
- new priorities in the study programme: professional preparation, research financing, valorisation and profession-related research;
- increase and reinforcement of the international share and orientation of the NOSTER curriculum (more international guest lecturers, PhD and ReMA education modules in cooperation with excellent research groups abroad);
- cooperation with related research schools (NISIS, OIKOS, Medieval Studies, Huizinga) in the areas of course offerings and professional preparation;
- extra stimulation of innovative and interdisciplinary research cooperation by subsidising RCGs and thematic meetings that are organised by NOSTER members themselves;
- increasing the number and quality of research grant applications of scholars in the field of theology and religious studies by organizing training and internal/mutual peer review;
- intensification of the knowledge broker function by promoting the matching of researchers with social partners in order to facilitate new forms of research cooperation and research financing;
- stimulating debate over the (re)positioning of theology and religious studies in the current fast-changing institutional academic context.

2. Research context

a) Research programme and scientific output

Researchers who participate in NOSTER all primarily partake in the local research programmes of the NOSTER member institutions, and their output is assessed within these programmes. The results of the most recent assessments of these local research programmes will be appended to the final version of this application.

b) Cohesion (not applicable, see c)

c) Composition of research groups, scale of involvement of senior researchers in the research school

Due in part to the peer review recommendations from the most recent re-accreditation (2005), significant changes have been made to the configuration of NOSTER's research context. The research cooperation within NOSTER is no longer based on a single common research programme and is not divided any more into historic, literary, systematic and empirical disciplinary sectors. Instead, it now takes place within RCGs and thematic meetings initiated by NOSTER members themselves. By financing multi-year RCGs and one-time thematic meetings, the Executive Board hopes to promote innovative, interdisciplinary and thematic research cooperation between NOSTER members. This research cooperation, which consists of research networks that work on various products (conferences, anthologies, periodicals, textbooks, etc.) and the preparation of research grant applications, contributes to the development and differentiation of NOSTER's disciplinary fields in the Netherlands and Flanders. This in turn provides the context for NOSTER's PhD education. Between 2005 and 2013, NOSTER has continuously made a substantial amount available for the funding of thematic meetings and RCGs, both from its regular budget and from its reserve funds. Between 2005 and 2011, NOSTER has also provided subsidies in order to support the publication of the results of these meetings and groups (in the NOSTER/Brill STAR Series, see also section 2.d).

Results:

- *Research Collaboration Groups (RCGs)*: Within NOSTER more than 130 senior researchers were active within 21 RCGs between 2005 and 2012. Each senior member received a personal subsidy to spend on these activities each year. For an overview of the RCGs and their activities, see [Appendix 5](#).
- *Thematic meetings*: Since 2008, 15 thematic meetings, dealing with subjects that cover the entire spectrum of the field of study, have been held that have been fully or partly financed by NOSTER. Thematic meetings are organised by NOSTER members who are affiliated with the various institutions and may take the form of an expert meeting up to major international conferences. NOSTER members have free admission to these meetings, and make intensive use of this benefit. For an overview of the thematic meetings, see [Appendix 6](#).

d) Positioning in the national and international field and cooperation with research groups in the Netherlands and abroad

In 2005-2012, NOSTER has taken the following initiatives in order to promote exchanges between our specific field of study and the **national research community**:

- *NOSTER study sessions 2005-2010*: In addition to the RCGs and meetings organised by NOSTER members, the NOSTER Executive Board has also organised study sessions and conferences dealing with subjects of general interest, often in cooperation with other research organisations and research schools. These include topics such as research financing, the peer review system, and the position and development of theology and religious studies in the current academic context. For an overview of these meetings, see [Appendix 7](#).
- *Cooperation with professional associations*: NOSTER positions itself in the broader national field through cooperation with a number of professional associations in the Netherlands in the fields of research and educational activities by organising RCGs, thematic meetings, study sessions and PhD courses. Professional associations with which NOSTER maintains contact include: the Dutch Association for the Study of Religions (NGG), the Flemish-Dutch collaboration group for Sociology of Religion, the Association for Classic Reformed Theology and the Network Gender and Religion (previously called IWFT).
- *Professionalisation of research grant applications*: In 2010 and 2011, the NOSTER Executive Board conducted the 'Professionalisation of Research Grant Applications' project, with a coordinator appointed especially for this purpose. The goal was to obtain more successful subsidy applications in the field of theology and religious studies by providing support (information, advice and feedback) to individual and collaborative applications. After the departure of the coordinator in June 2011, NOSTER continued this support as a knowledge broker. By organizing workshops, advisory meetings and intervision sessions, the NOSTER bureau intercedes and initiates contact between applicants and scholars experienced in acquiring and/or assessing research grants. NOSTER has put together a pool of consultants recruited from among its own members. The fact that over the past two years, an increase can be noted of applications from theology and religious studies submitted to funding instances and that several of them have been honoured is a result that we at NOSTER are proud to mention. For the approach and results of the 'Professionalisation of Research Grant Applications' project, see [Appendix 8](#).

In 2005-2012, NOSTER took the following initiatives in order to promote exchanges between our own field of expertise and the **international research community**:

- *Elaboration of NWO internationalisation projects*: 1) NWO internationalisation project NOSTER-Munster/Louvain/Lund (2001-2003): the main activities of this project were completed in 2005; the last publication for the project appeared in 2009; 2) NWO internationalisation project NOSTER-Glasgow (2002-2004): this project continued after 2005 as a cooperative effort between NOSTER and the University of Tel Aviv. In 2007, NWO approved the content and funding of the project and closed it out. The last edited volume for this project was published in 2009; 3) NWO

internationalisation project NOSTER-Louvain (2005-2007): the final report for this project was academically and financially approved by NWO in 2008; four edited volumes have been published as a result of this project. In 2013, another two edited volumes will be published as part of this project. For an overview of publications produced as a result of these three internationalisation projects between 2005 and 2012, see [Appendix 9](#).

- *Organisation of the third international NOSTER conference Icons of Sainthood and Sin* (24-25 April 2007), featuring keynote speakers from the USA, the UK and Egypt (see [Appendix 10](#)). NOSTER then concluded this type of international cooperation in order to finance more thematic meetings and Master classes.
- The *Studies in Theology and Religion (STAR) Series*, currently published by Brill in Leiden, is an initiative of the NOSTER Executive Board to improve access to the results of academic conferences, thematic meetings and RCGs, and to facilitate the publication of high quality monographs and excellent dissertations in NOSTER's field of study by a publisher with an excellent international reputation. Although NOSTER concluded the publication subsidies for this series in 2012 due to internal budget cuts, Brill has agreed to continue the publication of the series and the affiliation with NOSTER at present is maintained through the appointment of NOSTER members as executive editors and as members of the advisory council. Between 2005 and 2012, seven volumes have been published, two are in press and another two are in preparation. For an overview of published and forthcoming volumes, see [Appendix 11](#).

3. Educational context

3.1. Training and supervision programme

a) Structure of the training and supervision programme

Between 2005 and 2012, NOSTER has taken several steps to complete a major restructuring and improvement in the quality of the study programme based on the recommendations of the 2005 re-accreditation procedure. These include the abolition of the division of the study programme into disciplinary sectors, implementing changes to adapt to the Bachelor-Master system (and the incorporation of ReMA students), the positioning with regard to the local Graduate Schools (concentration and complementation), and the necessity of organising education more efficiently as a result of the internal budget cuts implemented in the period 2011-2012. At the same time, the School's education process has been improved by the introduction of a study programme dossier for each PhD candidate, course certificates and the NOSTER testimonium (see section 3.1.d). We have also formalised and focused our quality assurance activities for education.

The innovations for the renewal of the study programme include:

- more 'bottom-up' programming (in accordance with the research topics of the PhD candidates and ReMA students, including 'advanced courses');
- giving successful and inspiring PhD supervisors a central role in education (in the (bi)monthly PhD seminars);
- increasing the international orientation of our education (by regularly organising Master classes with leading international scholars);
- involving the PhD students' own research projects more in education (in the annual Autumn and Spring PhD Conferences and in the (bi)monthly PhD seminars);
- including a specialism-wide introduction course for beginning researchers in the curriculum (*Grand Course Theology and Religious Studies*);
- placing more emphasis on research skills and professional perspectives in the programme.

In response to the recommendations in the re-accreditation procedure, NOSTER has taken various initiatives to strengthen the international aspects of the PhD training programme. In 2009, the Spring PhD Conference was organised in conjunction with the University of Leuven (KUL) and the Evangelical Theological University of Leuven (ETF) to further international collaboration and exchange in the PhD education. Secondly, a series of Master classes with international guests has been included in various advanced PhD courses. For an overview of NOSTER courses and Master classes, see [Appendix 12](#).

In 2010, a new NOSTER curriculum format has been introduced, consisting of tried and tested educational methods: annual Autumn and Spring PhD conferences, (bi)monthly PhD seminars, a varied selection of advanced courses, the biennial broad instruction course and regular Master classes with national and international guest lecturers. For the curriculum format and an overview of the curriculum elements in the period 2005 to 2012 (including numbers of participants), see [Appendix 12](#).

b) Final attainment aims of the programme

The primary goal of NOSTER's study programme is to train PhD candidates and ReMA students to become independent researchers. To this end, the school offers high-quality academic education that can draw on NOSTER's entire multidisciplinary research field. The goal is to attune the school's curriculum to the educational programmes provided in the local Graduate Schools of the participating universities: the education provided by NOSTER is supplemental (i.e., not in competition with the local schools) and it differentiates itself by offering mass and focus (especially in areas where this is not possible locally) and by securing the participation of excellent national and international lecturers.

c) Description of the objective of the programme in terms of professional fields

The NOSTER study programme includes information and training geared towards preparing PhD candidates for a career in academic research or in non-academic research-related professions. These activities include: skills training courses ('The Job Market and Network Training for PhD Candidates', 'Subsidy Application Orientation and Training', and 'Writing Research Grant Applications'); providing information with the study event 'Humoneyties: Money and the Humanities: national and European subsidy programmes for anyone with research ambitions', and with lectures on valorisation and socially relevant research; workshops as part of the 'Professionalisation of Research Grant Applications' project (such as study sessions on peer review and proposal training seminars with feedback on research proposals).

As the majority of NOSTER PhD candidates will not have a purely academic professional career (see also section 5, *Career prospects for alumni*), the NOSTER curriculum increasingly comprises preparation and training for a broad spectrum of careers. Important issues in the PhD training in this regard are: track record building; knowledge of research financing (including public-private cooperation); insight into valorisation issues and the relationship between research and societal developments and demands; and the development of profession-related research (especially with regard to the large group of non-affiliated PhD candidates (i.e., PhD candidates who are not a member of NOSTER) who participate in NOSTER activities).

d) Rights and duties of the instructors and the trainee researchers

In all cases when senior NOSTER members are invited to act as teachers or trainers in the curriculum, the NOSTER bureau requests formal permission from the relevant institution. According to the agreement with the institutions participating in NOSTER, the lecturer's work load is compensated according to the institution's own internal norms. Generally NOSTER now follows the LOGOS-DCH agreements (2011) regarding the assignment of lecturers. For a description of these agreements, see [Appendix 4](#).

The recommendations of the Peer Review Committee 2004 have resulted in the composition of study programme dossiers for junior NOSTER members. PhD candidates who have successfully completed a course receive a course certificate. Upon successful completion of the entire study programme that the NOSTER curriculum offers (15 EC), they receive a NOSTER testimonium as proof of completion. ReMA students also receive a course certificate upon completion of a NOSTER course that they can submit to their own institution for course credit.

e) Procedure for selecting, prioritising and approving research projects for PhD students (not applicable)

f) Policy on male/female ratio among PhD students (not applicable)

3.2. Quality Assurance in Education and Supervision Programmes

a. Criteria for senior researchers responsible for training and supervision

The courses and other curricular training events that NOSTER offers are provided by eminent researchers from among the school's members. We strive to bring together lecturers from different institutions participating in NOSTER as course lecturers or leaders, or to assign a lecturer who works together with international guest lecturers. This means:

- that two professors, or a combination of a professor and a university lecturer, who have proven to be successful in PhD supervision, are recruited to teach PhD seminars;
- that respected academics with an international reputation or highly specialised expertise are recruited to teach the relevant advanced courses;
- that successful applicants or experienced application evaluators are recruited to lead workshops on writing research grant applications;
- that excellent national and international researchers are invited to teach the Master classes.

b. The male/female ratio among research school's senior researchers

The average male/female ratio among the lecturers within NOSTER during the period 2006-2012 is: 67.4% male & 32.6% female.

c. Appointment of and budget for guest researchers and guest lecturers (not applicable)

d. System of internal quality assurance for training and supervision

Within NOSTER the SCER, the Executive Board, the PhD Candidate Council and the Bureau are all involved in quality assurance for the study programme. In late 2012, the SCER was dissolved as a separate organ and absorbed into the Executive Board, which includes two education portfolio holders (one portfolio holder for the PhD conferences and one for the advanced courses, seminars and Master classes). Both portfolio holders are in close contact with the PhD Candidate Council. Besides, they are responsible for quality assurance, which includes the following elements: (a) curriculum design and implementation by the curriculum coordinator in close collaboration with the portfolio holders from the Executive Board and the PhD candidate council; (b) properly informing and facilitating lecturers; (c) maintaining contact with course participants, and assuring their rights and guarding their duties with regard to course aims and requirements; (d) evaluating courses and taking criticism from evaluations into consideration in the organisation of new courses; and (e) providing

feedback to lecturers based on the evaluations. The general tendency of the course evaluations between 2006 and 2012 was very satisfactory to excellent.

4. Education in Bachelor's and Master's phase

NOSTER is not directly involved in the Bachelor's and Master's education at the institutions participating in NOSTER. However, ReMA students (and excellent Master's students, such as honours students, at institutions that do not offer a ReMA programme) may participate in NOSTER courses. PhD seminars are only available to second-year ReMA students. The same applies to workshops geared towards writing research grant applications (including those as part of the 'Professionalisation of Research Grant Application' project). As a knowledge broker, NOSTER also offers a display page with an overview of all ReMA study programmes offered by participating institutions.

5. Career prospects for alumni

A recent survey of NOSTER alumni who acquired a PhD between 2005 and 2012 (with a 50% response rate = 30 PhDs) shows that they generally end up with a satisfying career. From this survey, we can conclude that 50% of the respondents found work immediately after acquiring their PhD, and that 20% were unemployed for less than six months; that 87% of the respondents were employed; that 60% of the respondents had a permanent contract; and that 93% of the respondents had a job for at least 20 per week. The survey indicates that many alumni have let go of the idea of having a career as a researcher in their own field or have never had that ambition. 13% of the respondents are employed as researchers in an academic setting and 8% provide academic education. 33% of the respondents practice a classic profession in the field (minister, church worker, pastoral caretaker or teacher in religion/philosophy/languages). Although most alumni have not pursued an academic career, 63% of them say that their work is related to their academic education, and 70% of the respondents are (very) satisfied with their own career. 60% of the alumni feel that they were well prepared for the job market. For more details, see [Appendix 13](#).

NOSTER considers the result of this survey to be positive due to the relatively large number of PhDs who have found work upon completing their studies and who are satisfied with their careers. It is remarkable that 90% of the PhDs have not found a new position in academic research. For NOSTER this explains the long delays that many of the PhDs had in completing their dissertations (see section 6): many PhD candidates quickly find new jobs that do not require a PhD, which is of course not the case for careers in academic education and research.

For NOSTER, the result of this survey is another reason to pay attention to career development and the various career perspectives for PhDs and ReMA students in the NOSTER curriculum and activities (see section 3.1.b). In the broader field of professions related to theology and religious studies, it is vital that enough people with a PhD are available in the market. They provide a quality impulse to the professional group due to their capacity for academic reflection, and because of their academic skills and title they play an important role in their professional contexts. Therefore, NOSTER will focus on the question of how the different professions exercised by the alumni can be reinforced academically and how the cooperation between academic researchers and alumni working outside of academia can be intensified.

6. Graduation rate

Enrolment			Success rates - graduated within ... years					Total		
Start	m:f ²	Total (m+f)	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-more	Finished	Not yet finished	Discontinued
2004	4:6	10	1 (10%)		1 (10%)	3 (30%)	1 (10%)	6 (60%)	4 (40%)	
2005	3:4	7	1 (14%)	1 (14%)	1 (14%)		2 (29%)	5 (71%)	2 (29%)	
2006	5:5	10			2 (20%)	1 (10%)		3 (30%)	7 (70%)	
2007	5:5	10	1 (10%)		1 (10%)			2 (20%)	8 (80%)	
2008	4:6	10	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)			3 (30%)	7 (70%)	

Note: in July 2013, there are at least 1 PhD candidate from 2004, 1 from 2005, 5 from 2007 and 1 from 2008 who will acquire their PhD or have already done so.

In order to evaluate the PhD graduation rates mentioned in the table above, especially for the period between 2005-2008, it needs to be added that it does not show that many PhD candidates have one or more part-time appointments, have gone on maternity leave or participate as non-affiliated PhD candidates. Another reason why there is often a long period between the end of one's appointment as PhD researcher and submitting one's PhD Thesis has been described in section 5 above: NOSTER PhD students generally find a new position relatively quickly, and a dissertation is not always a necessity for their new job. Almost 90% of the NOSTER alumni do not work in academic education or research. For an overview of the NOSTER PhD dissertations between 2005 and 2012, see [Appendix 14](#).

² Male/female ratio.

7. The measures taken in response to criticisms made at the time of the previous accreditation or re-accreditation

The report of the Peer Review Committee for the 2005 re-accreditation contained a number of comments and recommendations that have been included in the reorganisation of NOSTER, the thorough renewal of the study programme and the design of the research context and research cooperation. Most of the measures taken in reaction to the Committee's most essential recommendations have been described in several sections of this application; the remaining measures are described below. For a complete overview of the Committee's recommendations, with references to the measures implemented by NOSTER, see [Appendix 16](#).

1. *Committee recommendation: cooperation between promotor and curriculum coordinator with regard to junior education plan:* After several years of having the study programme coordinator and the promotor drawing up an Education and Supervision Plan (ESP) for all PhD candidates within NOSTER, in 2012, because of the development of the local Graduate Schools, the NOSTER Executive Board decided to make the Graduate Schools and research institutes responsible for drawing up the ESPs.
2. *Committee recommendation: new website and introduction newsletter:* NOSTER now has a completely new website that meets the current requirements as well as a monthly digital newsletter with more attention for education and research activities, doctoral dissertations and subsidy grants.

8. The measures proposed in response to the most recent external peer review

NOSTER appreciates the international peer review committee's assessment and comments, and finds it a very positive stimulus to continue the policy as outlined in this document. The committee has ascertained that NOSTER has adequately elaborated the recommendations from the previous reaccreditation procedure, is – or has been – efficiently (re)organised, and has introduced adequate innovations into the education program and the research collaboration. The committee considers NOSTER well equipped to continue its core tasks in the current academic context. NOSTER seriously takes to heart the committee's recommendations to strengthen international collaboration in the areas of education and research, to expand the professional elements of the training of researchers, and to look for a good balance between strengthening of both theology and religious studies on the one hand, and investing in their mutual and actual connection. Besides, NOSTER highly values the recommendation to orient its education also on a wide range of ReMa and PhD students from other academic disciplines who are interested in courses in religious studies and theology, as well as the recommendation to look for opportunities of collaboration with other national research schools in related academic fields. With respect to the recommendation to highlight interdisciplinarity more strongly, NOSTER intends to continue its strategy of organising discipline-based ReMa and PhD education (through PhD Seminars, Text Reading Seminars and Advanced Courses that are suitable for being organised on a national level) as well as its strategy to stimulate interdisciplinary research collaboration between senior researchers (through funding Research Collaboration Groups and thematic seminars).

9. Male/female ratio among the members of the permanent staff, the post-docs and the PhD students in the research school

Category	Number	Men	Women
Seniors (permanent staff & post-docs)	135	99 (73%)	36 (27%)
Juniors (PhD candidates)	36	18 (50%)	18 (50%)
Total	171	117 (68%)	54 (32%)

Benchmark date: 1 January 2013; percentages rounded off to whole numbers.

10. Changes in management and organisation compared with the situation at the time of the last application for re-accreditation

In the period 2005-2012, a number of organisational and management changes were implemented:

a) *Bureau personnel cuts and stopping support to Executive Board Chairperson and financial support for STAR series*

Due to the 35% budget cuts, in late 2010 the Executive Board and the School Board decided to cut the bureau personnel from 1.5 FTE (0.4 FTE Academic Director, 0.6 FTE Executive Secretary, 0.5 FTE office staff) to 1.1 FTE (0.2 FTE Academic Director, 0.4 FTE Executive Secretary, 0.5 FTE office staff). Although the income had decreased by 35% by the start of 2011, in late 2010 the organisation decided to leave the size of Academic Director and Executive Secretary unchanged through 2011 by using the reserve in order to have a year to prepare for the consequences of the budget cuts. Starting in January 2012, the function of the Academic Director was reduced from 0.4 to 0.2 FTE, but the Executive Secretary remained at 0.6 FTE for another year: 0.4 + 0.2 FTE from the reserve, posted to the reaccreditation and the Professionalisation of Research Grant Applications project. This will also be the case in 2013. Starting in 2014, the function of the Executive Secretary will be reduced from 0.6 to 0.4 FTE.

In late 2010, we decided to stop supporting the Executive Board Chairperson and the editor-in-chief of the STAR series (for both of which €2500 had been reserved) and to discontinue compensation of an editing assistant for the STAR Series (for which an annual amount of €7,500 had been reserved).

b) Professionalisation of Research Grant Applications Coordinator (PAC)

In 2008, the Executive Board decided to appoint a 'Professionalisation of Research Grant Applications Coordinator' (PAC) on a part-time basis for the period of one year. The costs for this appointment were to be covered by the NOSTER reserve. During the budget discussions in 2009, the Executive Board decided to set aside funds to extend the position of the PAC for a second year through 2010. In 2009, applicants were interviewed for the position and on 1 January 2010 the PAC was appointed for 0.4 FTE. The PAC resigned from her position at NOSTER as of 1 June 2011 to begin another job. From that moment, the PAC project duties were taken over by the bureau in a slightly amended form.

c) Introduction of the PhD Candidate Council

In 2005-2012, the junior members who sat in the SCER and the Executive Board joined together to form a PhD Candidate Council. This council has since gained form as an advisory organ and is included in NOSTER's *Joint Regulations* as an integral element of the organisation. The Council focuses primarily on the design, content and quality assurance of the NOSTER curriculum.

d) Integration of the SCER in the Executive Board

The budget cuts faced by NOSTER have resulted in several simplifications being implemented in NOSTER's organisation and working methods. The first involved a reduction in the number of meetings scheduled for the various organs within NOSTER. The second was the decision in 2012 to immediately dissolve the permanent Supervisory Committee for Education and Research (SCER), which had advised the Executive Board, and to integrate it into the Board. We now have two portfolio holders in the field of the SCER that both closely collaborate with the PhD Candidate Council.

e) Reinforcing the administrative cooperation at the national level

In 2009-2012, NOSTER has sought to cooperate at an administrative level with the following organisations:

- *Divinity Discipline Consultation (DDC)*: This organ is composed of all deans, heads and directors of the faculties, institutes, departments and universities for theology and/or religious studies. With the exception of the Flemish participant, all of the institutions participating in NOSTER are represented in DDC. NOSTER maintains close contacts with this organ and there are regular meetings between NOSTER and DDC.
- *Disciplinary Consultation in the Humanities (DCH) & Council of the national Dutch research schools in the Humanities (LOGOS)*: NOSTER is an active participant in LOGOS and maintains close contact with DCH. Over the past few years, NOSTER has actively contributed to reaching the agreement between DCH and LOGOS (October 2010), the formulation of the *Joint Regulations* (JR) for all research schools and the application procedure for ReMA students and PhD candidates from the Graduate Schools. For the NOSTER JR and the agreements between DCH and LOGOS, see [Appendices 3 and 4](#) respectively.

11. Financial resources

a) Expectations for coming period

Anticipated number of PhD students in the coming years

During the period 2005-2012, the number of PhD candidates within NOSTER slightly declined. This is primarily due to the fact that there are increasingly fewer Trainee Research Assistant positions available at the institutions participating in NOSTER. Over the past few years, the number of PhD candidates who are a member of NOSTER has remained stable at around 35. We expect this number to remain stable in the near future. However, in the same period more and more non-affiliated PhD candidates have participated in NOSTER's educational activities. Another 4-8 ReMA students participate in NOSTER courses and conferences each year. For an overview of the number of participants in NOSTER courses and conferences, see [Appendix 12](#).

Available capacity for training and supervision, including an explanation of how financing is secured in the next four years

The education provided by NOSTER is given by senior researchers affiliated with the school. Their work load has remained stable, because the institutions participating in NOSTER have agreed to make their lecturers available to NOSTER at no charge, and that their work load will be compensated internally according to the lecturer's own contractual obligations.

b) Agreements made on educational and administrative costs, divided among the participating institutions for the next four years

Between 2005 and 2012, the funding base for NOSTER underwent major changes. From 2005 to 2010, NOSTER's fixed incomes consisted of a compensation provided by the facilitating university, Utrecht University (€67,000.-), and a fixed amount per each NOSTER member paid by the institutions to which they were affiliated. As of 1 January 2011, the system of compensation for facilitating universities was cancelled, and from then NOSTER received compensation for its bureau

expenses directly from the Sustainable Humanities Directorate (€15,000 per year), plus the individual funding for the participation of ReMA students (€500.- for two years). In addition, the institutions participating in NOSTER provide contributions for the basic funding needs. Until 2011, the institutions paid a fixed amount for each NOSTER member, but starting in January 2011 a layered contribution system was introduced in which the institutions pay a fixed amount each year based on the number of NOSTER members affiliated with the institution. The agreements regarding the new layered contribution system extend to 31 December 2016. In the meantime, NOSTER will examine whether the amounts still correspond to the size of the institution at that moment and annual corrections for inflation will be applied. The funds provided by SHD have been allocated until 2015.

With the loss of the compensation for facilitating universities, the basic funding for NOSTER has been significantly reduced. This has led, among other things, to cuts in the compensation for the Academic Director and the Executive Secretary (see section 10). However, NOSTER has enough of a reserve to allow for the budget cuts to be introduced in phases. These budget cuts have resulted in NOSTER introducing a tuition system for non-affiliated students as of 1 January 2011. Previously, non-affiliated PhD candidates (and a few ReMa students) who were registered at a NOSTER member institution could usually participate in courses and conferences at no costs. Starting in 2011, this group was required to pay for participation (€50/EC, plus any additional costs). For ReMA students who apply their individual funding to NOSTER, there are no extra costs involved for participation in NOSTER activities. For budgets, results and an explanation of the reserve, see [Appendix 15](#).

c) Financial track record³

Item	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Direct Funding	€156,470	€145,650	€145,648	€133,540	€133,430	€67,000	€74,940	€110,500
Research Grants	€10,000	€10,000	€10,000	0	0	0	0	0
Other	€353	0	0	0	0	€69.700 ⁴	€1.312	€7.105
Total funding	€166,823	€155,650	€155,648	€133,540	€133,430	€136,700	€76,252⁵	€117,605

Explanation:

- *Direct Funding*: from 2005 to 2010: secretary contribution & contribution from each NOSTER member; starting in 2011: bureau expenses covered by SHD, individual budgets for participating ReMA students, contributions from institutions participating in NOSTER.
- *Research Grants*: from 2005-2007 NOSTER received €30,000.- for an NWO internationalisation project with Leuven, spread over the course of three years.
- *Other*: primarily course tuition (largely for the participation of non-affiliated PhD candidates in NOSTER courses).

12. Organisation and management

Category	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Seniors (permanent staff & post-docs)	179	172	151	150	155	162	164	135
Juniors (PhD candidates who are NOSTER member)	54	50	34	33	35	37	43	36
Total	233	222	185	183	190	199	207	171

The decrease in membership numbers is primarily the result of mergers and reorganisations in a number of institutions participating in NOSTER – the same trend can be observed in other national research schools. Moreover, this table does not include the significant group of other PhD candidates participating in NOSTER education. This primarily involves non-affiliated PhD candidates enrolled in institutions participating in NOSTER and a number of regular PhD candidates who cannot yet become NOSTER members. The size of this group increased significantly in the period between 2005 and 2012, from approximately 5 in 2005 to around 45 in 2012. For an overview of the participating PhD students for each NOSTER education activity, see [Appendix 12](#).

³ Figures provided by Finance & Control Department, Faculty of Humanities, Utrecht University.

⁴ In 2010, Utrecht University included the contribution for NOSTER members in the post for funds obtained through contract research, here listed under the category 'other'.

⁵ In 2011, NOSTER did not receive a number of payments, including the bureau compensation from SHD, individual funding for participating ReMA students and the contribution from one of the participating institutions. The replacement costs for the Academic Director for FY 2010 were only booked in 2011. This is why the amount under 'direct funding' is lower. NOSTER eventually received these payments in FY 2012.