



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

LOT

NETHERLANDS  
GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF  
LINGUISTICS

EVALUATION 2018-2023

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# Preface

The committee felt honoured to be invited to evaluate five different research schools (ACLS, ASH, AHM, ASCA, ARTES) that operate under the umbrella organization AIHR and to assess the two national research schools (LOT and OSK) that are currently governed by AIHR. The committee, which consisted of many international experts across the full spectrum of the humanities, worked with great synergy and commitment. Though the complexity and scale of the task were slightly daunting, we were also very excited to have this chance to see the variety, quality, and innovative aspects of such an amazing faculty of humanities, which presented its cutting-edge research, forms of societal engagement, and interdisciplinary breadth in an atmosphere of great collaboration and openness.

The committee operated as a critical friend, in a spirit of collegiality and solidarity, showing support especially in these austere times of governmental budget cuts, reiterating the importance of defending the value of the humanities and the need to protect research time.

The site visit, which lasted five full days, with over 35 panels and meetings with more than 200 researchers and staff, proved to be very intense, as well as very productive. We carried out frank and challenging conversations, discussing issues including polarization in our academic culture, safety, both at home and in conflict-zone locations, and the rise of hate speech and harassment of academics and researchers online.

We encountered a vibrant, dynamic, and resilient faculty open to new fields of research, such as new humanities (digital, environmental, medical), and to alternative forms of engagement with societal stakeholders, civic partners, and the cultural sector. The city of Amsterdam proved not only to provide a beautiful setting but also to be an endless source of inspiration and collaboration thanks to its rich cultural sector, heritage, and sociopolitical fabric.

We received wonderful hospitality, and we want to thank the faculty's policy officer for all the care and attention, and the AIHR director and the dean of humanities for their exhaustive and crystal-clear clarifications and explanations, for making us feel at home, and for fostering an atmosphere of conviviality and critical engagement. We were very impressed with the site visit to the new *National Holocaust Museum* and the guided visit to the five Humanities Labs.

Last but not least, it is very important to mention that we were shepherded with great professionalism, rigour, and kindness by our two secretaries. They taught us to attend carefully to the SEP protocol criteria and helped us through the different stages of preparation, reviewing, and reporting with great competence, much-needed efficiency, and considerable patience.

Finally, I would like to warmly thank my colleagues in the committee for their commitment, cordiality, and constructive cooperation throughout the whole process. We have all felt enriched by each other's expertise and approach, and we feel emboldened by seeing the humanities thriving so much.

Prof. Sandra Ponzanesi  
*Committee chair*

# 1. Evaluation method and procedures

In 2024, the Executive Board of the University of Amsterdam (UvA) commissioned an evaluation of the Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics (LOT). This evaluation was part of an overall research evaluation of the university's Faculty of Humanities, comprising the overarching Amsterdam Institute for Humanities Research (AIHR), five underlying research schools (ACLC, AHM, ARTES, ASCA, and ASH), and two national research schools that are currently coordinated by the faculty (OSK and LOT). To carry out the evaluation, the Executive Board appointed a committee composed of seven (inter)national experts in the relevant fields of study.

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## 1.1 Composition of the assessment committee

The evaluation committee (hereafter: 'the committee') comprised the following external experts:

- **Prof. Sandra Ponzanesi** (chair), Professor of Media, Gender and Postcolonial Studies at Utrecht University, the Netherlands;
- **Prof. Johan van der Auwera**, Professor Emeritus of General and English Linguistics at the University of Antwerp, Belgium;
- **Prof. Stef Craps**, Professor of English Literature at Ghent University, Belgium;
- **Luca Forgiarini MSc**, PhD candidate at Utrecht University, the Netherlands;
- **Prof. Anne Goldgar**, Garrett and Anne Van Hunnink Professor of European History at the University of Southern California, USA;
- **Dr Francesco Mazzucchelli**, Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy of the University of Bologna, Italy;
- **Prof. Reetta Toivanen**, Professor of Sustainability Science at the University of Helsinki, Finland.

To do justice to the specificity of the various subject areas represented by the two national research schools included in the evaluation, three external experts were appointed as referees for

each school. For LOT, the following referees provided written input on the documentation:

- **Dr Khiet Truong**, Associate Professor of Automatic Speech Recognition at the University of Twente, the Netherlands;
- **Prof. Jörg Peters**, Professor of Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics /Niederdeutsch at Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg, Germany;
- **Prof. Koen Bostoen**, Professor in African Linguistics and Swahili at, a, Ghent University, Belgium.

Drs Leonie van Drooge and Dr Floor Meijer served as the committee's independent secretaries.

## 1.2 Terms of Reference

The committee conducted its evaluation in accordance with the Terms of Reference provided by UvA's Executive Board. These terms were based on the evaluation criteria established by the deans of the Dutch humanities faculties (*Decanenoverleg Letteren Geesteswetenschappen*, DLG) for assessing national research schools in the humanities (version: 23 November 2023).

Under the Terms of Reference, the committee was tasked with evaluating both the quality of PhD education provided by LOT and its added value as a national forum for the discipline during the period 2018–2023. Additionally, at UvA's specific request and separate from the DLG evaluation

criteria, the committee also assessed the research school's viability.

The evaluation focused on the performance of LOT relative to its mission statement and stated goals. The committee was asked to reflect on the past achievements of LOT and offer recommendations to enhance its effectiveness in PhD education and its role as a national platform for the discipline going forward. In alignment with the Terms of Reference, the LOT evaluation was integrated into the committee's site visit to UvA's Faculty of Humanities.

### 1.3 Documentation

Prior to the site visit, the committee received the following documents:

- Terms of Reference for the evaluation (UvA, 2024);
- *Terms of Reference visitatie landelijke onderzoeksscholen* (DLG, 2023);
- Self-evaluation report of LOT;
- Report of the previous evaluation committee (2018).

### 1.4 Working method

On 7 October 2024, the committee convened for an online kick-off meeting to discuss the evaluation protocol and procedures, and to establish a clear division of tasks and the working method. In the following weeks, the committee members individually studied the documentation and formulated preliminary findings and

questions. The committee also benefitted from input provided by external reviewers, who conducted desk research and submitted their written assessments in the form of referee reports. The committee's secretaries compiled the members' preliminary findings into a collective document. During a follow-up online meeting on 14 November 2024, the committee discussed these initial impressions and further refined its approach.

The site visit took place from 24 to 29 November 2024. It started with an internal committee meeting and dinner on the evening of 24 November. Over the following five days, the committee spoke with representatives and stakeholders of the Faculty of Humanities. These interviews included meetings with LOT PhD candidates and management. The visit concluded with a plenary presentation of the committee's findings by the committee chair on 29 November. The schedule of the site visit is included in appendix 1.

Following the site visit, committee members submitted their written contributions for the evaluation report. The secretaries compiled these inputs and drafted the initial report, which was circulated among all committee members for review. The revised report was then sent to LOT for factual corrections on 7 February 2025. In close consultation with the chair and the committee, the secretaries incorporated the feedback of LOT and finalized the report, which was subsequently presented to the Executive Board of the University of Amsterdam on 7 March 2025.

## 2. Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics

LOT is the acronym of *Landelijke Onderzoekschool Taalwetenschap* or the Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics. LOT was officially established by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) in June 1994. As of 2023, it has eight constituting member institutes and five associated institutes, three of which are in Flanders/Belgium. It unites about 400 faculty members and postdoctoral researchers, 150 PhD candidates, and 150 Research Master students. LOT functions both as a forum for collaboration between the researchers at the 13 institutes, and as a national school for advanced courses in linguistics for their graduate students (i.e., PhD candidates and Research Master students).

LOT is committed to fostering a scientific community in which linguistics research can be optimally pursued, and to educating the next generation of researchers with an open mind towards new disciplinary and interdisciplinary developments, theoretical and methodological alternatives, and possible applications.

Research by the LOT institutes covers major areas of linguistics and employs a wide range of methodological tools and theoretical frameworks. Within LOT, researchers share knowledge, work together on theoretical and methodological matters, and discuss their data and research in seminars and lecture series and in collaborations of various other kinds. The institutes collaborate within LOT by applying for joint national research grants. As part of its function as a forum for inter-institutional research, LOT communicates and shares information about research activities and results with the linguistic community, which strengthens the cohesion within LOT.

Regarding the education of the next generation of researchers, LOT organizes the nationwide education of graduate students in linguistics. Every year, a LOT Winter School is held in January and a LOT Summer School in June/July. The LOT school series enjoys a long-standing international reputation, in part as a result of inviting well-known linguists to teach at the schools. Moreover, LOT publishes a dissertation series in which all LOT PhD candidates can publish their theses. To maximize visibility, the dissertations are made available in open access (though they can also be printed on demand) and advertised via international channels like LinguistList.

The annual budget of LOT was €192K in 2023. This consists primarily of contributions from the DLG and the *Regieorgaan Geesteswetenschappen* (coordinating body humanities), which cover office costs and the salaries for the director, coordinator, office manager, and student assistant. Additionally, funding is provided by the institutes for each participating PhD candidate, by the DLG for participating master students, and by external candidates for the training programme. The current governance comprises a board that decides on finances, planning, form, and content of the Summer and Winter Schools, a management committee that advises the board and an education committee that determines the content of the schools and evaluates their quality. The director (0.2 FTE), coordinator (0.2 FTE), office manager (0.7 FTE since 2020), and student assistant (0.1) handle programming and administration. The LOT office has been based at the University of Amsterdam since February 2019, after having been based in Utrecht for 25 years.

## 2.1 Quality of the PhD education

LOT is one of the pillars that holds up the house of linguistics in the Netherlands and progressively also in what used to be called the 'Southern Netherlands'. As the name suggests, LOT is first and foremost a school, and an excellent one for that matter, exposing the students to high-level course offers and interaction with like-minded junior scholars. This happens primarily in its two annual 'schools', the Summer and Winter Schools, both of which last for two weeks. The Summer School offers 18 regular courses for doctoral candidates and for Research Master students who have followed at least 2 semesters of Research Master training ('RMA2 students'). The Winter School mostly has 12 regular courses for doctoral candidates and RMA2 students (next to 6 courses for beginning Research Master students). Both schools further organize up to 4 research discussion groups, open only to doctoral candidates. Both schools also have an international keynote speaker, as well as a 'Career Event' and a Social Event.

The LOT courses are not obligatory for doctoral candidates, and the credits they may earn are not always registered locally. Even so, many doctoral candidates attend more than one school, which goes to show that the schools are very much appreciated by the doctoral candidates – something that the committee was also able to ascertain from interviews with doctoral candidates. This high satisfaction is also reflected in the evaluation surveys filled in by doctoral candidates and teachers.

One of the issues inherent to this kind of operation is that not all courses fit the educational needs of the doctoral candidates equally well. This applies especially to doctoral candidates who are more advanced and have thus pinned down research topics that are quite specific. It also applies when PhD candidates take courses with RMA2 students, who will typically have a weaker general background. However, the committee understands that the PhD candidates do not perceive this as a problem.

The variety and diversity of topics and courses is a point of concern that has been addressed throughout the evaluation. This includes the concern whether topics and aspects like linguistic diversity within or outside of the Netherlands, the properties of written languages, speech technology, or applied linguistics are covered at all. In 2022 the board commissioned three of its members to produce a 'Diversity Report', which addressed the issue of course selection as a 'domain diversity' problem. One solution proposed was to develop and use a diversity matrix and score each course on specific aspects. This resulted in concrete proposals, even requirements, in 2022 and again in 2024. When prompted by the committee, the PhD candidates still felt that non-Indo-European languages could be covered better, though they agreed that the typology courses do address them somewhat indirectly. It was clear that the board is open to suggestions. The idea to enrich the matrix that steers the selection of the courses with an 'applied or not applied' parameter was well received.

The diversity report also addressed the gender diversity of the teachers. In recent years, the male-to-female ratio has roughly stabilized around a 50-50 distribution. The board is aware, however, that there are more female doctoral candidates than male ones and is currently considering different options: the choice is either to advise the Education board to aim for 50-50 (i.e., 9 male teachers and 9 female ones) or to increase the number of female teachers to 11 or 12. The board is also aware of the fact that the male-female division should allow for more than two categories and that there is also ethnic diversity. These dimensions are relevant for the doctoral candidates too. As a measure towards fostering a more inclusive atmosphere, the registration forms have been featuring a question about doctoral candidates' preferred pronouns since 2023.

In practice, however, efforts to target domain diversity and gender diversity can be hampered by the fact that invited teachers may decline an invitation. This is particularly problematic in the local Dutch context as the teaching commitments for the schools are often, if not always,

unrecognized by the teachers' home universities. It is recommended that the universities be more flexible in this respect. Of course, teachers also come from abroad, but here financial restrictions limit the choice.

Finally, LOT organizes two exchange programmes, viz. a 'Lab Rotation' programme, allowing students to gain experience in an institute other than their own, and a 'Mobility Programme', allowing students to take courses in an institute other than their own. These programmes only exist for Research Master students (and seem to be underused). When presented with the possibility of opening both programmes to doctoral candidates as well, the latter nodded in approval.

## 2.2 Added value as a national forum for the discipline

Overall, LOT plays an active role as a platform for linguistics in the Netherlands through its activities dedicated to the next generation of researchers, through newsletters and other communication activities, by supporting conferences, workshops and other events, as well as by supporting large grant applications.

One possible area for improvement is the lack of structures to facilitate the creation of a national PhD community beyond the Winter and Summer Schools. Unlike other national research schools, LOT does not currently have a PhD Council. This could be useful to facilitate the organization of more regular events, at which PhD candidates can socialize and learn about each other's research. Additionally, there seems to be a lack of transparency regarding the role that PhD candidates can play in the organization of LOT. For example, the committee found that most of the PhD candidates are unaware of the role of PhD candidates in the Education.

A major strength of LOT is that it offers a publication channel for dissertations in linguistics defended in the Netherlands (and some in

Flanders). Just over half of the Dutch doctoral candidates make use of this opportunity. This publication initiative is financed as a break-even operation. There are several significant advantages for doctoral students in having their dissertations published by LOT. First, not much time passes between handing over the manuscript and the publication. Second, the dissertation series is published as gold open access, which makes the dissertations easily available – and it is noted that older dissertations are now also freely accessible. Third, LOT advertises the dissertation through its channels, thus offering better visibility than local repositories. Fourth, the doctoral candidate retains the copyright and thus the option of publishing the (revised) dissertation elsewhere.

A suggestion made by the students is to expand this kind of activity in another direction, viz. that of setting up a platform for the dissemination of scholarly work other than dissertations. It is thus recommended that LOT, in consultation with the doctoral students, consider extending its open science ambition to not only publish dissertations, but also publish (or make available) working papers (like in a repository or preprint archive).

LOT's added value does not stop with activities dedicated to PhD candidates and Research Master students. Part of LOT's mission is to function as 'a national forum to further communication between the participating institutes with a view to short- and long-term collaboration'. However, this part of the mission is not commented on in the SWOT analysis of the self-evaluation. Yet, the committee does consider this mission to be accomplished and thus regards it as a further strength. The mission is achieved through the LOT newsletter, the content that LOT provides for the KENNISLINK webpages, and the support that LOT provides for national workshops and conferences. There have also been attempts to stimulate linguists from different institutions to collaborate on NWO grant applications. These proved successful in the sense that these linguists did write collaborative project proposals, even if they eventually remained unfunded – in the 2018-2023 period.

Just as the Summer and Winter Schools contribute to cohesion and cross-fertilization, so too does the LOT Newsletter. The benefit of the latter is that it comes at a low cost. Providing linguistic content on KENNISLINK is more expensive (but it is also operated as a break-even operation), and it is fully justified that this task is allotted to LOT, the one central hub of the linguistic sciences in the Netherlands. The co-financing of workshops and conferences taking place in the Netherlands is valuable, too, but it is not central to LOT's mission. These workshops and conferences will take place, one would hope, also without LOT's financial support. Stimulating Dutch linguists from the collaborating institutes to write project proposals is no less valuable, and was applauded in the previous review, but this is again not a central activity. These linguists will write proposals also without the stimulus of LOT. In case Dutch science is to enter a period of financial austerity, it is recommended that LOT prepares for this with a resilience plan that prioritizes its major activities.

### 2.3 Viability

LOT is now in its thirtieth year of operation, its structures are robust, the attachment of the Dutch linguistic community to LOT is strong, the financial management has been professional, and there is no doubt that it will continue to be successful. The potential further integration of the Flemish (or Belgian) institutes as affiliated members will strengthen LOT even more. A concern voiced during the site visit was the difficulty of enlisting Dutch teachers for the Winter and Summer Schools because of their relatively large teaching commitments and the fact that teaching activities for LOT are sometimes not compensated for at the local level. Expanding LOT's activities to Flanders or even Belgium could increase the pool of available teaching capacity. Given the current situation of higher education in the Netherlands, this could be a strategic option to pursue in the near future.

The funding of the current activities can to some extent profit from a surplus built up during the COVID-19 period. This fund has now even allowed some additional activities, viz. ad hoc events, local

activities, and a larger reimbursement of costs incurred during the schools. But the future also brings some financial risks and challenges. First, the surplus fund will disappear. Second, inflation will negatively impact all of LOT's financial operations.

On top of that, LOT faces significant challenges regarding its main financial contribution from the DLG. Owing to the existence of the budget surplus, this contribution has stayed constant since 2020, not taking into account indexation or the rise of academic salaries in the summer of 2023. This is problematic for covering the increasing salary costs of the school staff. Additionally, because the contribution by the DLG is linked to the number of credits acquired by RMA students during the Winter and Summer Schools, and because many students have been taking fewer than the required 10EC, there is a risk of the DLG contribution being lowered. This would significantly impact LOT's financial resources.

The committee was glad to hear about the options to alleviate the issue currently being explored. It is now allowed to take credits into account of courses done by RMA in both year 1 and 2. This was previously not possible.

A final challenge is the current political climate in the Netherlands, which comes with threats of budget cuts for the universities. LOT is very aware of these threats, and, judging from the solid structures that guarantee its smooth functioning, LOT may be relied on to prepare for braving the storms.

An interesting development is LOT's expansion to Flanders, in the form of accepting the linguistics institutes of the Flemish universities as affiliated members of the LOT network. After four schools organised by KU Leuven, who have been a LOT member already for some years, the University of Antwerp will organize its first school in 2025. The Free University of Brussels (VUB) has also joined the network, and it is only a matter of time before Ghent University (UGent) will ask to join (or rather, join again, for it was apparently involved earlier). It is also not excluded that the francophone universities will request to be admitted as

affiliated members. The board assured the committee that this expansion of LOT into Flanders or even Belgium will only be beneficial and will not result in an increased administrative or financial burden. It will increase both the diversity of the doctoral candidate community and, especially when a LOT school is organized on a Flemish (or Belgian) campus, a larger participation of Flemish (or Belgian) teachers may be anticipated. This increases the chances of reaching better domain and gender diversity ratios.

## 2.4 Conclusion and recommendations

LOT has become an essential and highly treasured feature of the making of professional linguists in the Netherlands, at both the doctoral and the Research Master level. The self-evaluation report singles out the Summer and Winter Schools as the major strength of the LOT operation. The committee fully subscribes to this assessment. Next to its educational activities, LOT plays an active role as a platform for linguistics in the Netherlands through its communication activities, by supporting events, and by stimulating large grant applications. Although the school is robust and strong, there are challenges for the future. The further expansion to Belgium is applauded.

The committee makes the following recommendations:

1. The diversity of topics, courses, and staff needs to remain a crucial point of attention for the board, management committee, education committee, and office when developing the programmes for the Summer and Winter Schools. It is recommended that
2. LOT remain open toward new disciplinary and interdisciplinary developments, theoretical and methodological alternatives, and possible applications. The diversity matrix is of great help, yet needs to be revised regularly.
2. LOT currently lacks a PhD council; it is recommended that it introduce one. A PhD council can be useful to facilitate the organization of more regular events at which PhD candidates can socialize and learn about each other's research. Moreover, this can add to the representation of PhD candidates in the organization of LOT.
3. The 'Lab Rotation' and 'Mobility' programmes are appreciated by Research Master students. It is recommended that LOT consider extending these programmes to PhD candidates.
4. The LOT Dissertation Series is highly valued and should be maintained. It is recommended that LOT consider extending its open science ambition to working papers.
5. In view of a potentially austere financial future, LOT should develop a resilience plan that prioritizes its core activities, with a particular focus on PhD and RMA training.
6. The expansion to Belgian institutes is a positive development that creates new opportunities. It is recommended that LOT further explore collaboration with institutes abroad.

# Appendices

## Programme site visit LOT

<b>Friday 29 November 2024</b>	
9.30-10.00	LOT, panel 1 – Office
10.00-10.30	LOT, panel 2 – Education committee
10.30-11.00	LOT, panel 3 – Board
11.00-11.30	LOT, panel 4 – PhD candidates

# COLOPHON

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the committee tasked with evaluating the **Netherlands Graduate School for Linguistics (LOT)** for the period 2018–2023.

It was commissioned by the Executive Board of the University of Amsterdam.

The report was written by the evaluation committee members, with editorial support from the secretaries.

**AMSTERDAM, MARCH 2025**