

Reaction to the comments/advice of the PRC by the Brain & Cognition research institute (Prof I.E.C. Sommer, Biomedical Sciences of Cells & Systems, UMCG)

General remarks

The B&C management team is highly appreciative of the efforts that the assessment committee has put into evaluating our research institute. The result is a document that points out some areas for improvement and suggests future actions. The recommendations are well-considered; they will certainly help guide B&C through the coming years.

Research Quality

1. *Continue to develop and create optimal opportunities for new innovative projects.*

B&C will organize so-called “faculty club meetings” between clinical and preclinical researchers 3-4 times per year for exchange of ideas and collaboration and provide an annual seeding grant for new and potentially fruitful new collaborations

2. *Make the most of the prestigious funding opportunities available, using the cohort data to ‘harvest’ on.*

B&C will provide a directory of all UMCG cohorts for its researchers, so that the data will be available to researchers.

B&C will proactively stimulate its researchers to use the resources and support within the UMCG for grant acquisition (e.g. the Grant Support Hub and the Research BV), for instance by making researchers aware of the available support

Societal relevance

3. *Develop a clear vision for societal impact, with clear goals and expectations.*

The B&C MT, with its program leaders, will prepare such a vision in collaboration with the UMCG impact team.

4. *Put in place pathways and support towards societal impact and support in order to proactively manage the impact pipeline.*

Together with the impact team B&C will prepare a protocol for information evenings/ afternoons for patients and make a social media strategy to improve the outreach via social media.

Proposal: B&C will set up patient participation groups for advice/collaboration on their research projects on psychiatric and neurological diseases. In addition, B&C will pay attention to the possibilities for patent filing of their discoveries.

5. *Further enhance participation of patients and families.*

B&C plans to invite a patient-researcher into the management team on several occasions. Examples are Bram-Sieben Rosema and Rob Hagen, who are both active in research and also have a (severe) brain disorder. Additionally, B&C will, together with Research BV, make a standard operating procedure for patient information evenings available for all researchers to allow them to organize patient involvement groups for various diseases.

Viability

6. *Work around thematic transdiagnostic topics to further tie up clinical-preclinical interaction and collaboration.*

B&C would like to stimulate transdiagnostic collaboration by restarting faculty club meetings between lab- researchers and clinicians, with a frequency of four meetings per year. In addition to the regular program meetings, at the faculty club ongoing collaborations will be evaluated and new ideas and possibilities for grant acquisition will be discussed.

7. *Make seed funding available to spark new areas of research and new collaborations, particularly in areas involving clinical staff.*

Adding to the organization of faculty clubs, a B&C yearly seed grant can be provided for a collaborative project between the lab and clinic that results from faculty clubs.

8. *Support existing informal and formal opportunities that foster individual and group interactions in order to further enhance collaborative activities.*

B&C organizes a yearly symposium (this year on 1 July 2022, co-organized with the *Hersenstichting*) for its researchers, PhD students, and members of the public. Additionally, 2nd year medical students are invited to attend this symposium to explore the opportunities of an MD/PhD program. B&C also strongly contributes to the scientific events and activities of the interfaculty neuroscience school, BCN and inter-university network U4s/ENLIGHT.

9. *Improve the network function of B&C for researchers at postdoc and assistant-professor level.*

Postdocs and UDs (associate professors) will be invited to faculty club meetings. Furthermore, postdocs will take part in the activities of the Postdoc Council.

10. *Improve approaches to diversity, so as to include neurodiversity and ethnic diversity.*

B&C plans to organize research lunches with the MT for PhD students from outside the Netherlands. Highlight a supervisor course for supervision of Chinese PhD students. An assessment will be made to determine whether action is needed for the LHBTI community.

11. *Improve clarity and transparency of different career tracks.*

B&C will support awareness of the UMCG's talent development team. Supervisors will stimulate their PhD candidates and postdocs to attend the UG/UMCG organized Grants Week, which provides excellent information on applying for early-career grants. Also at a corporate level, efforts are undertaken to inform the scientific community about the various career possibilities.

12. *Continue to work on improving the duration of the PhD.*

The GSMS plans to implement an external mentor (from outside of the PhD candidate's promotion team), to provide non-partial advice for the PhD trajectory. This could help focus the candidate's work on trajectory-specific tasks, which may result in more timely completion of the PhD thesis.

There are PhD candidates within B&C who have clinical responsibilities (e.g. in specialty training), or are external, non-funded candidates. B&C will more clearly identify these candidates, and identify ways to better support them to complete their PhD in time.

Most of B&C's PhD candidates participate in the BCN Research School, which offers extensive support and courses on project management.

Conclusion

The committee's recommendations complement the aims and goals B&C has defined for the coming years. Recent changes within the B&C Management Team provide the opportunity to strengthen and define its aims. Aligning B&C's goals with important societal issues will help to better position the institute for new funding opportunities.