

Research review Nieuwenhuis Institute 2012-2017

Reaction to the assessment report

Introduction

On January 15, 2019, the committee reviewing the research programmes of Pedagogical and Educational Sciences in the Netherlands (2012-2017) has discussed the research programme of the Nieuwenhuis Institute in Groningen with management and representatives of staff and PhD students. The committee has written a report, following the criteria and categories of the current SEP protocol and assessing research quality, relevance to society, viability, PhD training, research integrity policy, and diversity. The report consists of an overall assessment of the research programmes of Pedagogical and Educational Sciences in the Netherlands and the specific assessment of seven research institutes, including the Nieuwenhuis Institute in Groningen.

Overall assessment of the Nieuwenhuis Institute

The review committee assessed the quality of the Nieuwenhuis Institute research programme as 'very good', the relevance to society of the programme as 'excellent' and the viability as 'very good'. The management of the Institute are very satisfied with these results and highly appreciate the work of the review committee.

Reactions to the recommendations and suggestions of the committee

The review committee made several suggestions to further improve the quality of the Nieuwenhuis Institute research programme, in particular with regard to research quality and viability. In answer to these, the management of the Institute have developed a plan. The key components of this plan are presented below.

Research quality

First, the committee suggested that the quality of the research by the Nieuwenhuis Institute can be increased by bringing a more programmatic approach in the Institute with common research priorities. In order to build a more coherent research programme and intensify the collaboration between partners within the Institute, all project leaders of the Nieuwenhuis Institute have recently been asked by the director to define for their expertise group what are the most prolific research lines for the coming five years in terms of strategic importance, scientific and societal impact in the national and international context, and funding possibilities. In addition, project leaders were asked to link these research lines to the overarching Faculty and University key areas and to form strategic consortia with colleagues in the Faculty, the University and the international research community, with the aim to apply for major grants (e.g., National Research Agenda, ZonMw, EU programmes). In the next step, the proposed research lines will be grouped into higher-order programme lines. Linking these lines with the expertise groups within a matrix

will allow us to identify key research areas for the Nieuwenhuis Institute. The director¹, together with the Faculty funding officer, will discuss with all teams the strategies for obtaining sustainable funding.

Second, the committee suggested conducting more curiosity-driven research in addition to contract research. We are aware of the current imbalance between the two types of research. There has been in recent years a strong focus on contract research in the Institute, due to a large grant that was obtained by the Department of Teacher Education. Although our contract research is prolific, we are convinced that a stronger focus on curiosity-driven research would further increase the research quality. Therefore, we asked project leaders to specify the contribution to theory of the research lines they select for the future Nieuwenhuis research programme and to concretize funding options for curiosity-driven research related to these lines.

Relevance to society

The relevance to society of the research in the Nieuwenhuis Institute was assessed as excellent due to our strong commitment to conduct projects that significantly add to an evidence-based policy and practice. In the coming years, we want to continue making a difference with our research in the regional, national and international context. This implies that we stimulate our staff to keep being involved in national and international networks and consortia with strategically important partners, among other in the 'Academische Werkplaatsen'. We will also keep investing in our four chairs for endowed professors.

Viability

First, as said (see 'Research quality'), we will build a coherent programme that is connected to the strategic key research areas as defined by our Faculty and the University, as well as to international research trends. This will make the programme viable in terms of content.

Second, the review committee advised to monitor well the research time of the staff, as high teaching loads and continued work pressure may jeopardize the quality and impact of our research. We are aware of this risk. Our aim is to ensure that each full-time staff member has two days for research tasks. This guarantees that our staff have sufficient time to design and conduct high-impact research and publish in high-impact factor journals. Creating these conditions will help staff to get tenure and allow us to build stable research teams.

PhD training

The review committee noticed the concerns regarding the delay of PhD students that we mentioned in our self-evaluation report, as well as the actions that were already undertaken by

¹ The current research director will leave the University of Groningen on October 1, 2019. Before that date, a new research director will be appointed from the group of project leaders. The new research director will be familiar with the current policy and continue the reform of the research programme.

our Institute to intensify the monitoring of PhD trajectories and prevent new delays. We will continue, in close collaboration with the Graduate School of our Faculty, to develop actions in order to increase the supervision of PhD students and the monitoring of their trajectories. Among other, we started to carefully check the feasibility of new PhD proposals and made the course on 'Supervising PhD students' obligatory to all supervisors in the Nieuwenhuis Institute. Further, we made more transparent through discussions with the project leaders and their teams what we expect from PhD students and what we consider a 'prototypical' and high-quality dissertation. We will continue these discussions at regular times and evaluate our actions, consulting the head of the Graduate School and the PhD candidates.

For the PhD candidates, we started to organize joint sessions (for instance, on ethical and methodological issues) and joint informal meetings, both at the level of the Nieuwenhuis Institute and the Faculty level, in order to build and maintain community.

We intensified the role of the PhD students' coaches, in consultation with the head of the Graduate School.

Diversity

Looking at the current list of staff in the tenure track system, we expect a more equal composition of male versus female full professors within five years. The same holds true for age, as a substantial number of recently tenured staff is between age 45 and 50.

One way to attract more international PhD candidates in the short term comes with the installation of structural collaborations between the University of Groningen and strategic partner universities within Europe and abroad (e.g., Latin America). With the installation of these collaborations come possibilities for double/'sandwich' doctorates in different fields of education. We are convinced that our Institute can benefit from these developments, as several staff members have close collaborations with strategic partner universities.